

Letters (1878-1881) of Charles Edward NELSON



Transcribed by Warrick Nelson

Cover: **Charles Edward NELSON 1853 – 1934**

Publishing at [Zenodo](https://zenodo.org/record/3692090) by Warrick R. Nelson 1 Mar 2020.

Acknowledgements

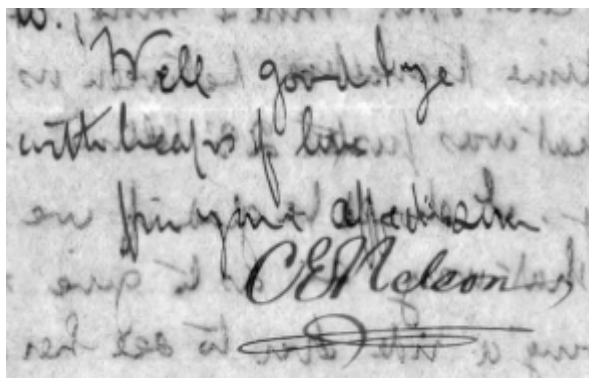
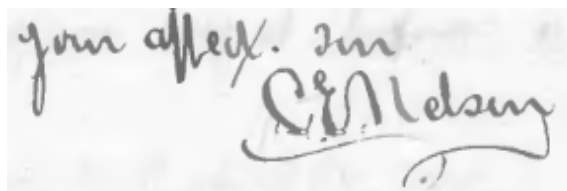
Bev Nelson for advice, checking and resolving illegible sections, and many hours of genealogical sleuthing and advice.

My father who compiled a comprehensive family tree and family history, containing extracts from these letters (Thomas Nelson, A brief history of an 1820 Settler and his descendants, 1991. ISBN 0-620-15715-1). In addition, unknown to me at the time I began transcribing these letters, he had also transcribed them fully in typed format. I have drawn on these transcriptions to resolve some of the less legible sections of the letters.

References

I have used readily accessible current electronic resources as references, especially Wikipedia. These were all accessed during February 2020 and the hyperlinks are in footnotes.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.3692090](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3692090)



Examples of signatures of Charles Edward NELSON

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Figure 1: Eastern Cape Frontier region. Darker areas in Albany are 1820 Settler settlements.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3278426>

Summary

This series of letters is written by a son to his parents. They cover an interesting period during various wars in South Africa (Cape Colony) from 1878-1881. While largely not in a fighting unit, he was nevertheless posted and spent time in a number of remote military camps. We get an idea of development of the Colony with new towns being founded, difficulty for business as a result of wars, but also new opportunities to support the growing economy. The interactions and descriptions give a personal viewpoint of historical events.

At a personal and family level, the letters include many insights into temperance, religious thinking and personal relationships. They also indicate a closeness of contact, if only by letter, between friends and family widely separated both within South Africa and in England.

Geographical and Political Context

Conflict between peoples with competing interests is a common theme throughout human history. Southern Africa has been no exception. European settlement into the Eastern Cape region of southern Africa prompted conflict with Xhosa tribes migrating southward, resulting in a series of nine wars between Boer and/or British forces on one side and Xhosas on the other, between 1779 and 1879¹. These have been variously recorded as Kaffir/Caffre Wars, Frontier Wars, Xhosa Wars or Wars of land dispossession. Even after the 1856/7 cattle killing event² (a prophetic vision by a young girl (Nongqawuse) in which an estimated 40 000 Xhosa tribes people died, clashes continued.

Land between the Bushman's and Great Fish Rivers was found to be highly suited for the type of extensive cattle farming then practised in these frontier regions. Known by the Boer settlers at the time as the Zuurveld (sour grass, which reflects grass good for grazing in summer but unpalatable (sour) to animals in winter). The 4th Frontier War (1811-1812) was the first under British control of the Cape of Good Hope.

The 5th Frontier War, or War of Nxele, of 1818-1819, was instigated by Makhanda Nxele (also Majana, Mahana), a significant spiritual leader attached to the Xhosa tribe of Chief Ndlambe. In the Battle of Grahamstown³ (April 1819) the Xhosa warriors were ultimately repulsed and Makhanda was captured, although some sources suggest he voluntarily surrendered himself "in the interests of promoting peace"⁴ and was imprisoned on Robben Island. He died in an escape attempt later that year.

Lord Charles Somerset⁵, Governor of the Cape Colony, had long sought to reduce the costs of military maintenance of the borders by encouraging British settlement, but to no avail. However, the shock of the near loss of Grahamstown and subsequent military success required urgent attention to resolve establishing a larger population in this border region to save further military expenses. Unusually, and testament to his persuasive powers, the House of Commons approved an appropriation of £50 000 in July 1819. To this end, land was granted under a large settlement scheme, subsequently

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xhosa_Wars
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngqika_people
<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/eastern-cape-wars-dispossession-1779-1878>

² <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/cattle-killing-movement>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Grahamstown

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makhanda_\(prophet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makhanda_(prophet))

⁵ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/lord-charles-henry-somerset-governor-cape-colony-born-badminton-england>

known as the 1820 Settlers, of some 4 000 people into this region, renamed Albany (Figure 1). These people thus served as a buffer between the Colony to the west and the Xhosa tribes to the east. The scheme was not without controversy⁶ particularly relating to the poor value of the land for crop farming⁷.

Grahamstown has had a name change this year to Makhanda⁸. Ironically, while recognising an undoubtedly influential Xhosa leader, it also recognises the person probably most influential in setting in place the political will to establish the large English settlement and setting on track for the little military headquarters of Colonel Graham to become the city of Grahamstown, the main city associated with these 1820 Settlers and many of their descendants.

The 9th Frontier War, or Ngcayechibi's War, began in late 1877. By this time, largely as a result of previous Frontier wars, land under British (Colonial) control had been extended to incorporate much of what subsequently became known as British Kaffraria, hence the first letter of this series was written in King William's Town. The various Xhosa tribes had lost much land through this process and tensions frequently arose between tribes themselves and between tribes and colonial settlers.

At times, British forces were sometimes fighting more than one war at a time (Figure 2). The Basutoland or Gun War of 1880-1881⁹ is the background for most of the later letters.

Places

Adelaide – north of Grahamstown, east of Bedford

Aliwal North, bridge across the Orange River which is the border between the Cape and Orange Free State. Has hot springs.

Barkly (now Barkly East), north east of Queenstown, just south of Lesotho.

Basutoland – now Lesotho, country landlocked within South Africa.

Bedford – north of Grahamstown.

Blaney Junction – Junction on East London/Queenstown railway line to King William's Town.

Chalumna – inland from Kidd's Beach, about 14km west of East London.

Dohne – a railway halt just north of Stutterheim. The Dohne Merino sheep breed was developed near there in 1930s.

East London – port city on the mouth of the Buffalo River. It is now the main city for the region.

Grahamstown – main centre for the Albany region, now Makhanda.

Grey Town – just north of Stutterheim, possibly a railway halt or a military position.

Henderson – due East from Cathcart on Thomas River.

Isidenge – presumably a military camp in the area west of Stutterheim, now forested.

Jagersfontein – small town SSE of Kimberley, where diamonds were discovered in 1870.

Kabousie/Kubusi – southeast of Stutterheim, likely a fortified position where the railway crosses the Kubusie River. Unlikely to be the modern township southwest of Stutterheim.

Kei Road – east from King William's Town towards Kei River. Still a small town.

Kimberley – Northern Cape. Diamonds were discovered there in 1866 on a farm near Hopetown.

⁶ https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=timothy-johns-the-1820-settlement-scheme-to-south-africa

⁷ Hockly, 1957 The story of the British Settlers of 1820 in South Africa 2nd ed.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makhanda,_Eastern_Cape
www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/eastern-cape/heres-why-grahamstown-has-been-renamed-makhanda-17334278

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basuto_Gun_War
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Gun-War>

King William's Town – main centre of British Kaffraria (generally simply Kaffraria now, formerly also Queen Adelaide's Province). East London is now by far the larger city. Sometimes written Kingwilliamstown or other variants.

Stutterheim – town north of King William's Town.

Palmietfontein, near border with Lesotho, north of Barkly East and east of Aliwal North.

Peelton – just north east of King William's Town to Kei Road (Charles spells it Peeltin).

Thomas River – about halfway between Stutterheim and Cathcart (now an historical town tourist attraction).

Thomas Shop Camp, probably near southern border of Basutoland.

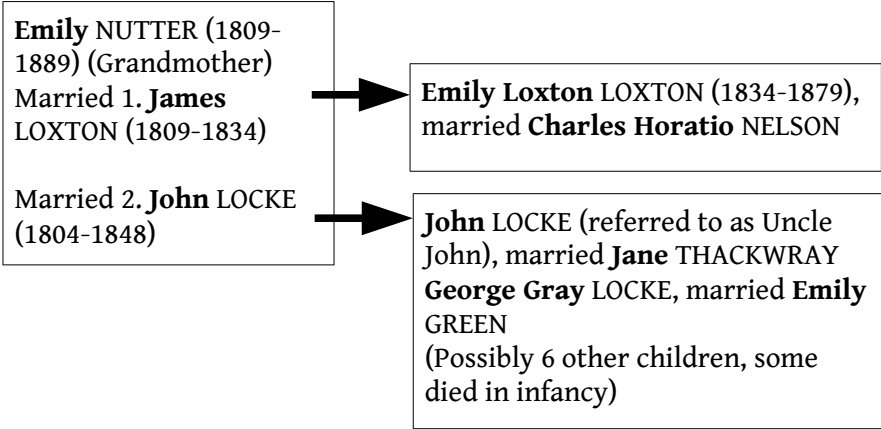
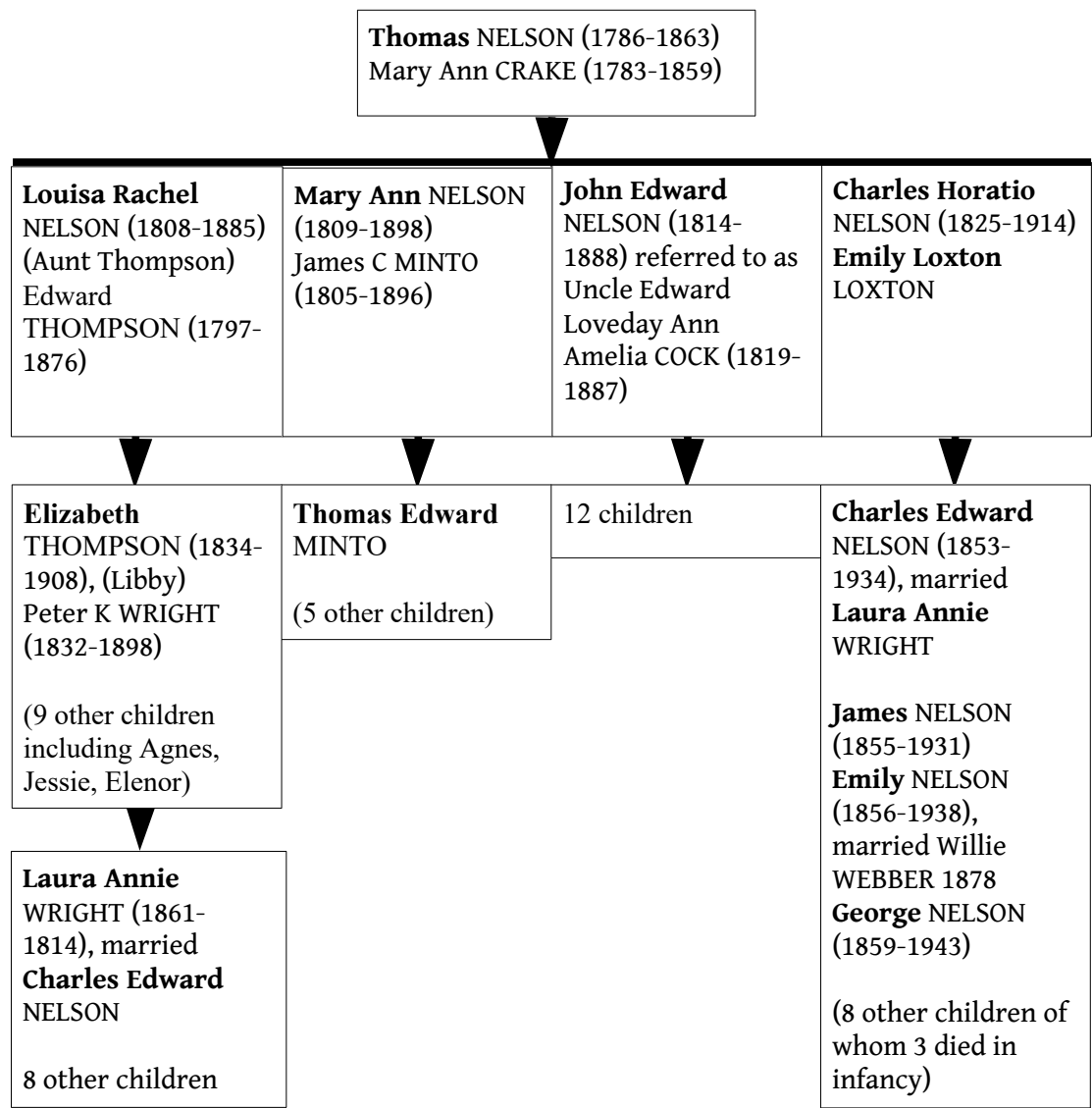
Toise River – north east of Stutterheim. Could be referring to the station or the location of a now abandoned church of the same name.

Tylden, about halfway between Cathcart and Queenstown.

Umgwali – now Mgwali, north east of Stutterheim, due east of Thomas River.

Year	Month	Letters	9 th Frontier War	Northern Border War	Morosi War	Basutholand War	1 st Boer War	Zulu War
1878	Jan	•	█					
	Feb		█					
	Mar	•	█					
	Apr		█					
	May	•	█	█				
	Jun		█	█				
	Jul	•	█	█				
	Aug	•	█	█				
	Sep		█	█				
	Oct	•	█	█				
	Nov		█	█				
	Dec		█	█				
1879	Jan	•	█	█			█	█
	Feb		█	█	█		█	█
	Mar		█	█	█		█	█
	Apr	•	█	█	█		█	█
	May		█	█	█		█	█
	Jun	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Jul	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Aug	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Sep	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Oct	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Nov	•	█	█	█		█	█
	Dec		█	█	█		█	█
1880	Jan	•						
	Feb	•						
	Mar							
	Apr							
	May	•						
	Jun							
	Jul	•						
	Aug	•						
	Sep				█			
	Oct				█			
	Nov				█			
	Dec				█		█	
1881	Jan				█		█	
	Feb				█		█	
	Mar				█		█	
	Apr	•			█		█	
	May				█		█	
	Jun				█		█	
	Jul	•			█		█	
	Aug				█		█	
	Sep				█		█	
	Oct				█		█	
	Nov	•			█		█	

Figure 2: Time line of wars associated with the period of the letters. The letter responding to his mother's death is marked.



Family

Charles Edward Nelson was born in Grahamstown 1853. He was the first child born to Charles Horatio Nelson and his mother Emily, nee LOXTON. His grandparents had emigrated to the Cape Colony in the large settlement scheme of approximately 4000 settlers in 1820, thus known as the 1820 Settlers, who were settled to become farmers on land grants in Albany (Figure 1). Charles Horatio was born in Grahamstown, in 1826. Charles Horatio and his father, Thomas, became traders operating from premises in the centre of Grahamstown.

Charles Horatio was the fourth child of Thomas and Mary Ann Nelson and the only one of their four children born in South Africa (Figure 3). Their oldest child did not emigrate with them, although only 12 years old at the time, but subsequently migrated in about 1850 with her family as Mrs Edward Thompson. The second child, Mary Ann, married Dr James Minto in South Africa, but returned to Great Britain in 1862, although some of the family are mentioned in these letters. The third child, John Edward, is mentioned many times in these letters as Uncle Edward. He had a large family and was active in military, farming and trading affairs.

Charles Horatio suffered near complete loss of sight as the result of an accident and the family moved to England in about 1861, settling in Crediton, Devon. By this time, the first 6 of 13 children had been born. Charles Edward returned to South Africa in 1870 at 17 years old, to Grahamstown. A number of his siblings followed in subsequent years. Clearly opportunities in South Africa suggested better prospects than remaining in England, and also there were other close family in the region.

Presumably these letters were retained because they detail his experiences during the 9th Frontier War and Basutoland War.

Where clear from the context and my current family genealogical record, I've attempted to clarify the people mentioned. A number of cousins are mentioned, primarily the descendants of Louisa Rachel Thompson, née Nelson and relatives from his grandmother's children with her second husband, Rev John Locke.

Charles returned to Barkly (today known as Barkly East) and worked there in various positions, being Town Clerk from 1884 to 1887. He married Laura Annie WRIGHT in 1884, granddaughter of Charles' Aunt Thompson, thus his first cousin once removed. They moved to Johannesburg in 1889. He retired to Umzumbe (south of Durban) in 1927 and was killed in a train accident 1934. He never went farming.

Letters

The letters are sometimes extremely difficult to read. Charles mentions at times the difficult conditions for writing while on military campaigns. However, on the whole his writing is laid out very neatly. Spelling and grammar sometimes slip, possibly reflecting haste.

The paper is very thin, some with faint lines but most clear, some with pale blue colour. He wrote on both sides and the writing sometimes shows through, plus there are occasional large blotches and smears. At least one letter shows signs of having been partially submerged in water and that part is largely illegible, suggesting water-soluble ink. Two letters are in their envelopes, post marked Cape Town. The stamps have been removed, presumably to contribute to a collection! A notable letter is the one dated 17 November 1879 for the distinctive black border on both the envelope and the sheets of writing paper indicating mourning (Figure 3). Conventions changed during the Victorian age, originally just the envelope was marked. This example appears to use printed paper and envelope rather than Charles applying the black border himself.

In transcribing these letters, I have retained the sometimes erratic spelling and lack of punctuation. He sometimes began paragraphs on the right hand side of the page, somewhat indented, or flush to the left. I have used modern indented paragraph marking

throughout. Occasionally words are missing through damaged paper or simply completely illegible. These are marked as (*missing?*) in the text.

An interesting comment on most letters is the date of receipt, allowing us to determine the length of time from writing to delivery. The average across these letters is 44 days, which is not bad considering he was often writing from fairly remote locations and shipping time alone could take 40 days from Cape Town to London.

Most of the letters are to his parents in England. His father, Charles Horatio Nelson (1826–1914), was born and died in Grahamstown, but spent a considerable period of his life at Crediton, England. Presumably he brought these letters with him on his return to South Africa in 1901. They came into my possession via my father who got them from his uncle Frank Wright Nelson, eldest son of Charles Edward, the writer of the letters.

1878, January, King William's Town

Answered Jan 14th

King W^{ms}. Tⁿ.
4th Jany. 1878

My dear Grandmother¹⁰,

I take the opportunity of half an hour to spare to drop you a few lines. You must expect a letter very seldom now for we are so continually on the move.

I am still quite well & strong and in good spirits and do not feel in the least "funky" although things are looking so black; I can say very little as to the actual state of things. It is so difficult to get reliable information. The Gaikas¹¹ are undoubtedly rising and waiting a favourable opportunity to attack; in fact they have already attacked small parties; I think we shall have some very hot work yet.

Since writing last we have just been doing escort duty between this & Cathcart.

I am very comfortable that is for this kind of life. I have got pretty nearly all I want in the way of odds and ends.

There are a great many farmers trekking into King Wms Tⁿ; there are wagons and tents all about the town.

I have met a good many friends this time. Mr. and Mrs. F. Tudhope¹²; Aunt Thompson¹³ who was very pleased indeed to see me; three of their daughters, Arthur Wright¹⁴, Edw Gray & wife etc. etc.

Of course you have heard of Mr Tainton's death, he was very much liked and respected here; the people are indignant about the way Government have behaved.

Please give my very best love to my dear Parents. I shall write to them if I can possibly find the time.

I am looking as rough & burnt as a don't-know-what, and clothes, no collar hair cropped short etc. etc.

I suppose Emmy¹⁵ is still with you. I hope she is enjoying her holidays. I do so wish I could come & see you all.

I have had no letters from you since leaving Qⁿ Town. I suppose they are in some post office or other waiting for me.

You must excuse the haste in which I am writing as Aunt is patiently waiting while I am writing; very rude of me you will think, but I don't think Aunt will think so she is so kind; she has asked me two or three times is there nothing she can do for me before I leave. I took tea with her last evening and dinner today; we are off again in about ½ an hour.

I spent part of last evening at Mrs. Fuller's.

I don't know that I have anything more to write, at least I suppose I could find lots if I was not in such a hurry so,

With fond love,

I am;

Your affectionate Grandson

C.E. Nelson

¹⁰ Emily NUTTER (1809-1889), Mrs LOXTON, Mrs John LOCKE, resident in Grahamstown.

¹¹ Modern spelling Ngqika https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngqika_people

¹² Francis TUDHOPE (1838-1902) and Elizabeth Cron WRIGHT. Francis is the son of Francis TUDHOPE (1803-1870), and Isabella DRYDEN. Francis snr married Margaret NUTTER as his second wife. Margaret is the sister of Emily. Note the Cron WRIGHT family is different to the WRIGHT family of Charles' wife. Her brother is Arthur WRIGHT mentioned here.

¹³ Louisa Rachel NELSON widowed in 1876 now living in King William's Town where she died in 1885.

¹⁴ Arthur Wilmot WRIGHT (1854-1926) and grandson of Louisa.

¹⁵ Emily Locke NELSON, his sister. She was teaching at Egerton House, Bedford at this time.

I have quite forgotten to wish you happy new year. It does not seem like new year at all. I was travelling in the hot sun on the 1st.

Sheets numbered 3-6. Presumably posted together with above as these sheets contain a note from E. Locke.

Recd 30 Mch Ansd thro E Locke¹⁶ 22 ~~May~~ April

Having written to Grandmother, Emmy, James¹⁷, George¹⁸ I will proceed to give you some incidents connected with camp life, trying to anticipate some questions you would probably like to ask.

Camping places are various as they are many. Sometimes we are on top of a hill where water and wood are a long way, so that it becomes quite a labour to fetch them; perhaps there is no wood to be had and cow dung very scarce, it is then quite a job to get my things cooked: perhaps the ground is very hard so that it is with great difficulty we drive tent pegs at all and when they are driven they do not hold well, to add to the inconvenience the ground is covered with a fine dust which in the least wind rises and covers everything, clothes, cooking utensils, water, bread, meat; when you are eating the dust flies on to the food so that you have the pleasure of eating some of it and feeling it grit in your teeth, but soon you get used to it and it does you no harm. When water is scarce it is difficult to get a bathe or even a decent wash especially if you are on duty; though it is not often I miss a wash at all even if it is only by pouring a bucket of water over me; sometimes though I have been for a day or two without better wash than I could manage in a pannikin (pint) of water; at such times one feels miserable until a good hole of water is come to and yet even a pannikin wash or "cat's lick" is very refreshing and better than nothing.

Our last 4 or 5 camps have been a contrast to the above, we have been on a nice grassy veld where there is little dust to bother; wood has been close at hand viz kaffir kraals, water, beautiful clear running streams with decent places to bath in have been within 30 yards of the tents, at such times it is of course very pleasant.

At one camp (only for ½ a day) there was a splendid bathing place, it was at the Kubusi, not far from King Williamstown; there was an old pont there which served splendidly as a place to dress in and to dive from. I took a good dive and reached the bottom, fully twenty feet I think, it was really a splendid swim I had there.

Sometimes we had to sleep in the veld with a blanket only to cover us, waking up in the morning with the blanket quite wet from the dew. One night my mate who seemed to be restless that night woke me up and told me I should be sick in the morning as there was a heavy dew and I was sleeping with my head uncovered and my mouth open; I gave a grunt, pulled the blanket over my head leaving a small breathing hole and was soon fast asleep again.

Sometimes we get the chance of a sleep indoors, that is at some frontier trading station which the kaffirs have left unburnt or have not been near; at those times of course we "jump" all that is worth having from the house; I have secured a couple of boxes which come very handy for packing things in and also as a table; in one of the shops I found some lamp black and boiled oil which I made into a kind of paint and got my bags and boxes marked. In one farmhouse an harmonium had been left, as soon as I heard this I said "that's good I'll go and have a tune bye and bye" but I was disappointed to find the harmonium old, wornout and useless. At one place I got some canvas which made good

¹⁶ Writing smudged, but could be E Locke, Grandmother of Charles, see first letter.

¹⁷ James Loxton NELSON (1855-1931) a brother in London at this time.

¹⁸ George NELSON (1859-1953) a younger brother resident in Grahamstown with Mrs Locke.

bags for drawing the rations from the quarter-master before serving them out. Also some cotton sheeting which made a nice saddle cloth. There is one great objection to sleeping in said deserted houses, which I think will act in the future as a prevention to my leaving the tent for a house, said objection being fleas, fleas, fleas any amount and they almost seem as if they would carry you off bodily.

I don't know whether I have given you our scale of rations before, at any rate here it is - per diem 1 ½ lb meat this is not cut close as we capture lots of cattle 1¼ meal for biscuit the meal makes up fine if we have baking powder; we have none this trip, however my mates mix it with water into a middling stiff dough, make it into flat cakes and cook them in boiling fat, they go very well this way and are nice and light, 4oz sugar at one time cut down to 2oz when I had any amount of grousing at me as Qt.Mst.Sgt. as though it were my fault; 1oz coffee, very necessary for morning use and very pleasant especially if one can get a little milk from captured goats or cows; ½oz tea, very refreshing drink in the middle of the day, especially as one is frightened to drink the water; for salt ½oz a very necessary condiment; ⅛ oz pepper useful for a change; 1oz soap a very small piece but generally sufficient; ½oz rice we don't generally draw for 1 day but let it run for 8 days when each man's share amounts to ½lb-½pint pannikin; on the whole the rations are satisfactory, though a little more variety would be no objection. I had a treat though this morning rice and milk and sugar. We get on first class in our mess as it includes the butcher and his assistant, this gives us lots of fat, kidneys and liver. Myself being in the commissariat I am sometimes able to get a little extra sugar etc. One thing we are not allowed is candles; last trip wanting one very particularly I paid 6d for one, but you don't catch this child at it again, he knows a dodge now and makes his own candle without much trouble, a small tin about the size of a jam tin is filled with fat, a wick is made by twisting a bit of lappy¹⁹ round a thin stick or rush, this forms a splendid lamp, wind does not blow it out and fat does not drop about.

Weather we have all sorts. Sometimes so hot at night that even the tent is too hot and in daytime one is just fit for nothing but lies in the tent trying to breathe without perspiring, at other times the days are nice and bracing and nights bitterly cold then one is glad of a tent; sometimes no rain for weeks together till everything is dry and parched up; at other times rain for days together very wet and uncomfortable, heavy wind storms, heavy thunder storms; I will give you an account of one.

The day had been hot and sultry, tents all hanging more or less loose in consequence of heat causing canvas to stretch. Roll call at 5 o'clock in afternoon, answer your names for guard, "Nelson?" "Here", draw for relief, Nelson first relief, good luck, 6 to 10, good night's rest, get tea ready and swallow it sharp, weather threatening, take macintosh with me to keep guard over ammunition and cattle and horses tied to ammunition wagon and yokes. Wind begins to blow and lightning to flash, thunder to roar, and rain down in torrents, horses jump, kick, very frightened, have to keep talking to them to keep them quiet, pitch dark, danger of falling over tent ropes on one side or among the horses on the other. At last 10 o'clock comes and I get to my tent, just take off macintosh put it in a corner roll myself up in blankets and just get off to sleep, when crash, crash goes the thunder, wind blows harder than ever, I get up and look out of the tent, mate jumps up in fright "Who goes there?" "All right Will, it's only me". We talk a bit wondering when the storm will lessen, and whether the tent will stand the strain of the wind and shrunk canvas; presently one peg draws and then other. "Hold down the tent Will, I'll hold up the pole". So there we are, me at the pole, the other at the side, water meanwhile pouring in on us and tent shaking and trembling, presently another peg goes and then another till all hope is gone and we prepare to skidaddle; each seizes his gun and blanket, makes a jump for the door and is out before the tent comes down. Where my mate goes to I could not see, he was soon lost in the darkness, I made for the wagon hoping to find shelter there but soon found myself among the horses, got from them without being hurt and found the wagon, no shelter the wind blows right under

¹⁹ A small rag or cloth - from Dutch "lapje"

taking the rain with it; make for the first tent get inside roll myself up and in 5 minutes fast asleep.

After sleeping some time am awakened by someone tramping on me, one of the 2nd relief guards just come in; I hope I shall not be in his way, I tell him, as my tent is gone to grief, all right, he says, so down I drop and in three minutes am again in the land of Nod notwithstanding clothes are wet through. At 4 o'clock "reveille" sounds and wakes up, give a grunt and a turn round and go to sleep again, soon "fall in" sounds and I jump, when I remember I am on duty and need not fall in, so I go to sleep again; at 5 I get up and find that I have been sleeping by the door, blanket is wet, carbine is wet, everything is wet, find prostrate tent, get out patrol tin, fill it with water off the tent and put it on a neighbouring fire - just as coffee is ready mate turns up and we drink coffee together; it is then 6 o'clock so I go on guard again walking about in the sun to get dry. Mate brings me breakfast. After that is done I take a piece of rag and clean my carbine and revolver and am relieved at 10 o'clock feeling none the worse for the storm; soon get tent pitched, things dry and am ready for the next move. (Hello, it is 10 o'clock and off to bed, "lights out" has gone some time ago but I am privileged).

For a bed, I lay a soldier's great coat on the ground and a blanket on top of that; rather a hard bed but one does not require feathers to induce sleep, it comes quite readily enough; at one place I got hold of an old stretcher, put some grain bags across and had a pretty soft bed for a few days; for a pillow I used my carpet bag when in camp or saddle bags when on patrol; bye the bye do you remember the old Xmas carpet bag that was brought out now and then by James or myself; it was used to take my things to G'Town, there it came in handy as a receptacle for soiled habiliments²⁰ and now it is at the point with me, it has seen the best of its days through and will be condemned after this trip.

I have the same saddle bags that I had made some years ago for knapsack when on the tramp, I had them made to answer both purposes and "made of the best" so that there is still a good many years' wear in them.

I always keep my bags packed ready for patrol, shirt, pants, socks, sugar, tea, coffee, salt, biscuits, Liebig's meat extract²¹ etc., so that I have not to think what I must take when ordered on patrol. As soon as I come off one patrol I fill bags again and am ready for the next.

The other day a dispatch had to be sent a short distance (so they said) over the country. As I had not been out for some time I volunteered to make one of three. As it was to be only a short ride I thought at first I would ride "strip saddle" but decided not to do so, so put one saddle bag in. We started about 8 am. Road lay over very steep hills with just a bare footpath to show us the way. Many of these crossing one another, some of the places were so steep that it was very difficult even for a man to get up, so that riding was quite out of the question. While going up one hill my horse showed signs of distress, he commenced to blow very much and I had frequently to stop to give him time to get his breath (horses had been fed on mealies). The other two seemed to get on better and I saw them going over the hill while I was but halfway up, I thought they would have waited for me at the top, when I got to the top I could see nothing of them but after looking about the various paths I at last struck fresh spoor. I followed this up for a mile or two and then found it ran into other spoors. It was now about 12 o'clock, my horse was somewhat blown, and I judged that as I had lost so much time they must be far ahead of me, from the position I was in I could see a good way round but could see nothing of the other two, nor of the Fingos²² that were supposed to be not far off, so I fired a shot and waited but could hear no reply, so I decided to make the best of my way back to camp. I thought I could find the way alright and I was well armed having some sixty rounds of ball cartridge besides revolver and twenty rounds, also dagger-knife and tomahawk (a small

²⁰ Habiliments (more common spelling) meaning clothes, from French habillements.

²¹ Liebig's Extract of Meat - a name commonly used by a number of companies is "a molasses-like black spread". Modern brands of similar products are Oxo and Fray Bentos.

²² A Xhosa clan, now Fengu.

hatchet) which I always carry for cutting wood, making tent pegs etc., so that should they try to catch me I could give them a warm reception, accordingly I turned my horse round and rode about a quarter mile to where I had a nice open spot to see from in case of the enemy coming; I here off-saddle for half an hour and eat about half a biscuit just as a "bite on" until I got to water. In the saddle again up and down hill, over rocks and boulders having to dismount the greater part of the way, of course all the time keeping a good look out. On coming to the thick bush I saw something on the move, and felt my revolver when out jumped three or four little kaffir boys that made for some huts, so I unslung my carbine and loaded thinking there might perhaps be some men about and if so to be prepared to give them a pill from that before using the little five shooter. However no one appeared. At half past three I reached a stream of water, so picking on a place with nice grass and bounded on one side of the triangle by the stream on the other by some rocks, I off saddled and turned my horse into the natural enclosure, first giving him a drink. I soon gathered a little dry grass, few pieces of stick and some cow dung and made a fire and had a decent meal from soup of Liebeg's extract and biscuit, as soon as this was over I packed up again, had a wash and found I had been there something less than three quarters of an hour so I waited until an hour had passed, saddle up and off again. I got on all right until within two miles of camp when I got into the valley so much like the one in which the camp was that I went up and down it to find the camp. I had almost made up my mind to camp out when I thought I would try my horses instinct so I turned him round and then urged him on, leaving the reins loose, he turned to the left and uphill so I let him go a bit, then finding he would go over too steep and stony a ridge I took him in hand again and soon had the pleasure of seeing the white tents and camp fires.

Of course those two who left me would be liable to a severe punishment were I to "wheel them" but as I suppose nothing will be gained by it I shall let it rest, though it may perhaps be brought up again when the commandant or patrol return.

It is surprising to see how quickly tents will be struck and the wagons on the road and the veld left pretty much as it was before we camped; on the other hand you might drive past a place and perhaps see a few burnt huts, you pass again in half an hour and a canvas town seems suddenly to have sprung into existence.

There is a troop with us composed principally of Dutch. Now the English have to me always seemed to judge harshly of the Dutch and I have thought that they must be prejudiced against their fellow Colonists, since I have been out I find that the English are right. The Dutch are great cowards, in action they generally keep well to the rear when bullets are flying about, though when they come into camp they do any amount of bragging about the kaffirs they have killed and the narrow escapes they have had. The other day some twenty were out with a couple of wagons across country, to take rations to our and their own men and would you believe they turned back too frightened to proceed. On the least alarm in camp they get quite out of their senses and run here and there not knowing what to do. They are as thoughtless as school boys and dreadfully improvident, they will kill nearly twice as many sheep as they require, wasting half, as well as most of the fat, then when they want fat they will come and borrow from us. It may seem that I am too hard on them but I think not; of course there are some objections²³.

Well, I think I have given you a pretty long letter this time, and rather rambling I'm afraid as it has been written at odd moments, I am afraid too you will have some difficulty in making it out, as it is not very easy to write sitting on the ground with a box for a desk and the wind blowing the papers about. Then people keep on in and out of the tent and one wants something and another something else.

We were at Umgwali and attended service, marching about a mile to the chapel, of course under arms. I saw a tablet to the Reverend J. Soga and found on enquiry that he

²³ Presumably he meant 'exceptions'.

used to labour there, and that at one time Mr Chalmers also used to preach there, of course this was pleasant and gave additional interest to the place.

Emmy has found quite a bosom friend in Mrs Anderson, I am very glad of this because I am sure the dear girl must have felt very lonely sometimes without a companion. She writes me such nice long letters I seem to love her more & more. I am quite looking forward to meeting her after the war is over: I intend going in for a horse and taking a trip to Bedford and Grahamstown. I shall buy a horse as soon as I can for I can then draw 1/- a day more for it, so if I can get a horse for say 9 or 10£ in six months it will be paid for and no expense in keeping it, if the horse gets killed government pays me for him.

It is getting near time to serve out rations so I must bring this to a close.

Give kind regards to all my many friends, love and kisses to children and heaps to yourselves

From your affect son

C. E. Nelson

Additional note from Mrs Locke.

Dear Emily²⁴

I have written you a few lines should the packet be overweight I have told George²⁵ to take my ½ sheets out. He will have it weighed at the post office.

Your loving mother

E. Locke



Figure 4: Emily NUTTER (1809-1889), Grandmother to Charles Horatio.

²⁴ Emily Loxton, Mrs Nelson, wife of Charles Horatio and mother of Charles Edward.

²⁵ His brother George living with their grandmother in Grahamstown.

1878 March, Toise River

Recvd Apl 16 in Eng inclng his 2 sheets of foolscap to us dated 28 March. Ansd 11 June

Toise River
19th March 1878

My very dear Parents,

I suppose it is time I wrote to you again, though I think my last was long enough to last for some time to come.

I yesterday received your letters to Emmy all about the Xmas doings at home; I very much enjoyed reading them; they seemed to carry me far o'er the deep blue sea; and the little incidents connected with the children brought me right into the midst of you all. My thoughts did turn to you all on Xmas Day wondering how you were, what you were doing for Xmas fun, knowing that in it all you would be thinking of me and little dreaming that I was spending my Xmas in the veldt.

Father alludes to your silver wedding day & hopes that when I am spliced I may in due time have a silver wedding as happy as yours: do you know how I often think of this, of how happily you two have lived together for so long, in each other's company day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year and yet never tired one of the other, and I think how well suited to each other you must be, feeling that if ever marriage was made in heaven yours was, and I pray that when my time comes my partner may be thus truly a help meet for me.

You must indeed have had a variety of Xmas Gifts, 71 in number, whatever could they have consisted of; they would form a very interesting list.

James²⁶ would much have enjoyed himself with the children, I think he has grown more fond of children in the last two years.

I had the pleasure the other day of the company of some children: on my way to King W^{ms} Tⁿ I stopped for breakfast at Kei Road, after feeding my horse etc. and while waiting for breakfast I went onto the verandah of the hotel there. There were 3 or 4 children playing. I soon made friends with and quite enjoyed playing with, the eldest a boy about 6 or 8 who was quite taken with my carbine, after opening the breech etc. he must clean it, so he got some rags and fat and cleaned it very well, fancy a youngster so young doing it. After breakfast (children & their mother were at breakfast) the mother kindly played and sang to me a little, this was a great treat.

I hope James enjoyed his visit to Aunt Clemence²⁷, I can't make out the name of the person he was to have visited at Richmond.

It must have been a great disappointment to John²⁸ not to have got the County Prize after trying so hard for it, it certainly was not fair that Greek marks should tell against him.

Many thanks for the a/c of the meeting at Mrs Popes Sandfords. It carried me back to the time when I spoke there, it seems a long time ago and at the same time but as yesterday; I'm glad John was able to say a few words.

I can just fancy poor mother being in a muddle after having given so much time to the Xmas doings, would she like me to come over and give her a hand with the cooking or the washing, or the mending each and all I could assist with, as I have tried my hand at each, I think the most trying is perhaps mending; for instance my shirts are wearing thin, well I mended a place where they had split, next time I wore it there was a split about two inches off the old one, I put a good large patch on the elbow, next week the other elbow is through & so it goes on until one is obliged to wear the shirt torn; I find it wears the shirts out fast this riding & walking & sleeping in them.

Mother seems always to have some doctoring in hand, what with bent shoulder blades, broken needles, scalded shoulders, etc. etc.

²⁶ James Loxton NELSON, his brother.

²⁷ I have been unable to determine who she is. Probably in or near London.

²⁸ John NELSON, his brother.

I had to go in for a fresh supply of medicines when in King W^{ms} Tⁿ for some of mine were getting low. The other day one of the men got a sting of some kind under the eye, it commenced to swell until he could not see out of it, I recommended him to go to the Dr but he would not, he thought the Dr might do something to injure his eyes, but he would be glad to apply anything I might give him, accordingly I gave him Arnica lotion and soon had it all right; I find Podophyllum a very useful medicine for Bilious attacks.

I wish I could find something to keep off these retched flies they swarm over everything; when you are eating you must first take them off the bread, you can't blow them off, and then put it into the potatoe trap before they get the chance to get in again, they crawl up one's sleeves, down one's neck, they won't be frightened away, as I sit here writing I have just got to keep screwing my face into all shapes as they tickle a lot for they just do bite: I have managed to dodge the fleas of a night by rubbing carbolic soap around my ankles, wrists and neck and taking the cake of soap to bed with me.

We have had splendid rains lately so the veldt is splendid.

In a letter long ago Mother asked for me of my photos, the letter I received up in Gcalekaland; I remembered it when in Q'town so now enclose one for you; of course I look stouter than that now; that was taken the day before I left Grahamstown so of course I look down hearted there.

The Gaikas crossed over the other day towards the Amatolas our main body here of course gone down there, and of course I am left behind, it seems always to happen so that I am not to have any fighting, I suppose I ought to be pleased at this, but I want to get into the thick of it. I fancy I hear mother say that she is very glad I am not.

For some 10 days to a fortnight I took the Com. Officers place while he was away on leave. As soon as he returned I handed him over the papers & accounts and applied for leave myself and got it; so on Saturday morning I started on horse with our wagon conductor H. Billet. Before we had our leave we had to take charge of wagons as far as ~~Grey Town~~ Toise River to be there loaded up with stores, and when we got to Grey Town the order was to proceed to Kabousi, accordingly we made for that place, reaching it the next day, then I was able to draw forage for our horses from Government stores, of course being in the commisariat I knew the right way to set to work. We stayed at Kabousi all Sunday intending on Monday morning to leave the wagons and ride to King. In the morning Billet was not well enough to ride so I took the horses on to Kei road finding the way without much trouble; Billet to go down to Kei road by material Engine (the rails are laid up to Kabousi) thence by train to King. I thought I might be able to take train from Kei Road to King but found that allowing for delays I could get to King a long time before train, and my horse in very good condition I decided to ride in. So after breakfast and the music & children already mentioned, I set off. Passing Peeltin on my way I called at Revd & Mrs Birts - had dinner there. Mr and Mrs B. knew grandmother and mother very well and of course were very glad to see me. Reached King in the evening after a pleasant though sometimes a wet ride.

Aunt Thompson²⁹ was very glad to see me and wished me to make her home mine while I was in town. I enjoyed my trip very much, had a good many friends to visit and some purchases in the way of cotton, needles, thread, socks, pants, shirts, medicines, pocket & pen knife (I sold both of my old ones before leaving camp).

Aunt Thompson was very kind to me as were also Jessie Thompson³⁰ & Eliza Wright³¹, they enquired after you all & wished to be remembered to you.

I took a run down by rail to East London, had a dip in the sea and saw my friend the Myles (?) Shepperson & Mrs do. back again in the afternoon. Train seems to travel very slowly of course there are so many turns and some very steep places. Interested myself looking at the gradient marks along the line for the guidance of the driver and

²⁹ Louisa Rachel NELSON (1808-1885), widow of Edward THOMPSON (1797-1876).

³⁰ Daughter of Louisa.

³¹ Elizabeth Mary WRIGHT (1858-?), orphaned granddaughter of Louisa.

breaksman, every change in gradient is marked thus (*sketch*) 1:45, 1:30 which represent about the two extremes.

To draw horse rations I had to see Mr Hockley & thinking he might be the Mr H. known to Grandmother I mentioned having met a young Hockley at Mrs Lockes in G' Town, this of course led to the discovery of the fact that I was the son of Charley Nelson³², he was glad to meet me and invited me to see Mrs H.: accordingly I went up and spent a pleasant hour, it is very nice thus to meet people who have known father & mother years ago, it is also good to hear them always spoken of with respect and to feel that on their account I have attentions showed to me which otherwise I should probably not receive.



I was surprised to find how many acquaintances non-resident that I met in King, of course being the head quarters for military & volunteers it was perhaps to be expected, I met a good many from Albany, among them Cornelius Cock³³.

On our return from King we went round by M^cLean as Mr Billet wished to see his father & mother; there I had some singing with a Mrs Jones & Miss Hobson the school mistress there.

On arriving at Grey Town we heard that camp was likely to be shifting from Bolo as Sandilli³⁴ was driven from Thomas River and had made for Amatolas, so we came up to Toise Camp, could hear nothing definite there, so next morning went back to Grey Town where we met the greater part of our troupe, & received orders to go to Toise to take charge there, accordingly here I am & have been for about a week, the com^d officer will be back this evening I think, I shall then know what my movements are to be. My idea is that the depot camp will not be here any longer but down at Kabousi, that being closer to the seat of hostilities just now, also in communication with King by rail, supposing this to be the case the present Commissariat Offices will go down there, this camp will be still kept on for the purpose of keeping the road open, preventing natives from crossing & doing escort duty and I expect that I shall be raised to Com officer, this will give me 11/s. or 11/6 per diem.

I like King very much & should not mind living there. I think there is more chance of it going ahead than either Queenstown & Grahamstown so who knows but that when the war is over I may go there.

Emmy³⁵ writes such nice long letters to me, & I write pretty fairly in return, I think we love each other more & more; letters take a long time travelling between us, a letter of hers that was posted 23rd Ultimo I only received yesterday. I should be glad if we had to go down that way so as to give me a chance of having a ride over to see her.

I hope you will be able to read this, the flies biting and crawling over me do not conduce to careful writing. Last night as I went to blow out my candle and opening my mouth to take in a good breath down went a fly, I managed to stop him before he got right down and with a little trouble ejected the unwelcome visitor, it is not safe for one to breath with open mouth.

We have comfortable quarters here, wooden house, stretchers to sleep on, river to bathe in.

I quite long to go and hear a sermon again and join in hymns & anthems it seems so long since I had that privilege, this is the greatest objection to this kind of life, and one has no companions here to talk to.

Well goodbye
with heaps of love,
Your affectionate son,
C.E. Nelson

³² Charles Horatio NELSON (1826-1914), his father.

³³ Brother of Loveday Amelia COCK who married John Edward NELSON, uncle of C.E. NELSON.

³⁴ Xhosa chief, buried near King William's Town on road to Stutterheim.

³⁵ Emily is teaching at Bedford at this time.

1878 March, Toise River

Recd 17/5/78

Toise River
21st March 1878

My dear brother James

Yesterday I went for a days patrolling; I will endeavour to give you an account of it with the hope that it may prove interesting.

We were to have been in the saddle at 4.30 AM but as there was an alarm during the night which kept the men out of their blankets for an hour or so, and as the early morning was very foggy we did not start until 6.30. The morning was beautifully fine, the air cool & invigorating making one feel happy & light hearted; I had a good strong horse with plenty of spirit: he was not much account when first I got him, having been previously used as a packhorse, & therefore very rough in his canter, very much inclined to trot, and a very bad walker, but by taking care of him, feeding him, working him carefully and using spur and curb I have got him into good paces. We started as I was saying feeling just as you can imagine I would feel on a good horse and a fresh morning.

After riding or rather marching (for we seldom ride faster than a walk or march) for about 1¹/₂ mile a horrible stench comes upon the morning air; we soon discover the cause, the bodies of two Kaffirs lay rotting in the sun; of course there are too many killed for us to bury them so that they are just left to be dragged about and eaten by dogs & assvogels³⁶; this would not be the case were they near the camp, we (*rest of sentence lost in fold of paper*).

A little further on the river wanders beautifully beside a bushy krantz with good size trees in it and then takes a headlong course over some rocks almost steep enough to be called a waterfall, just above this on the other side of the stream can be seen the earthworks of the East London - Queenstown Railway, curving along the sides of the hills, here & there bridging the intervening valleys by high culverts, though first going far into the beginning of the valley so as to make the culvert as small as possible.

After riding half a mile further the footpath leads stream towards the left, here I turn round to take another look at the water & am rewarded by catching a glimpse of a waterfall lined on both sides by tall trees and beautiful bush and as I turn to reseate myself in my saddle I see on my right front a beautiful little valley, the stream flowing gently through it and backed on one side by a splendidly wooded hill & krantz and on the other by rough rocks, bare & rugged in the morning light.

Settling myself again in the saddle there in front of me stand high hills thickly wooded right down to the valley where they meet the green veldt looking as soft & smooth as a well kept lawn. The wood on the hills is not scrubby bush but large trees with here & there a giant standing proudly above his neighbours, the trees too extend right to the summit of the hills where they stand out in bold relief against the clear blue sky or perhaps half hidden by the mist just rising & rolling itself away. Here is a streak of veldt going right up into the wood dividing into two almost to the top, here is a belt of wood running down into the valley seeming to take the place of the quieter looking grass and encroaching on its domain, there stands a mountain without a bush or tree on it green to it very kop looking "bald headed" compared to its neighbours; there again is a piece of wood surrounded entirely by the veldt and in shape so true a rectangle that one would almost think it were the work of man and yet by its very grandeur checking such a thought e'er it be fully formed.

But look away there to the right, the hills are not so steep, they have an easy gentle slope to that valley lying so peacefully between the hills; here & there is a little patch of bush on the hills and in the easy looking kloofs between, tall trees are growing, and lower down at the foot of these hills are more trees not yet so tall but more leafy

³⁶ Vulture, aasvogel

throwing their inviting shade over the stream which flows almost entirely round the valley. Just peeping over a rise we see some gum trees, which cause us to exclaim; ah there must be a house there; yes, there it is now in sight, nestling beautifully among the trees, and almost surrounded by the "lands"; at a little distance stands the church surrounded by these trees and up and down are to be seen native huts, which at one time no doubt furnished a congregation for the missionary who laboured here but who now doubtless is in some town whither he has fled to be out of reach of the enemies of the white man.

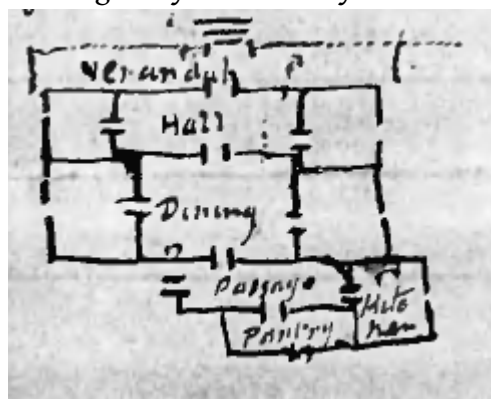
This reminds me that we are on the war track and there away to our right front are to be seen a few mounted men; there going up that hill are some more. Are they whites? Look! No, their riding shows them to be natives, possibly part of the force who last night were reputed to be about to attack Greytown. Let us after them! Forward there at a canter! - steady there now, I keep a tight rein you will find this plowed land rather rough and as we are going down hill you will come a cropper; hello, there you go; no, not quite; well recovered:- now give him a little more rein over this grass;- steady over that stream, yes, walk him down there; don't let him drink for you will have to canter sharp up that hill & the water will spoil his wind, steady up that bank now;- all right? Forward again, doesn't he enjoy the air, but he open his nostrils and snorts again;- there hold in a little, keep steady, he'll wind himself before long at that rate; hullo there they are in sight again, apparantly making for the bush, there is one close on the bush now. Look to your horse man! Look out!! You'll break his leg; you'll find some nasty holes in this grass. Don't you see that you are close to some huts. Yes: Well where there's a hut there's a kraal and most likely the site of an old kraal, with grass partly grown over it. If I had time I could show you something in that kraal that would soon give your horse a broken leg; you would find several holes about the size of a "manhole", you can get into one easily, inside you will find it hollowed out and nicely hardened; this is a mealie cellar; they are always made inside the kraal and covered with a flat stone, the mealies keep good in them for a long time. Were this a new kraal and had we fingoos with us, you would see them probing the dung that lies thickly in the kraal with ram rods, until one feels a stone, then he will begin to scrape the dirt away, two or three helping him, while the rest continue probing, after cleaning off the dirt he will lift the stone and be rewarded perhaps by a lot of mealies or Kaffir corn, perhaps by an old calabash or two.

But let us continue the chase; hullo they seem to have halted up there on that rise; what does it mean? Going to make a stand? Hardly likely - oh there goes a white flag, they must be loyal Gaikas surely; there, they keep on waving their flag doubtful whether we see it; wave your picket handle; there now they see it and are satisfied that we shall not be trying our carbines at them. There's a horseman just to the right, what does he say; here B come + interpret; he says that they are loyal Gaikas³⁷, under their chief Fynn, alright. Forward again. - Now are up to them and there steps forward a fine, strongly built man, with a clear open countenance, he raises his hat and wishes us good morning and extends his hand to shake hands with the Lieutenant; I detect on his (the Lieutenant's) face for just one second a doubt, but that is dispelled and he shakes hands with the black man as I afterwards learn for the first time. It appears that this loyal chief Fynn is out for a patrol having heard that a number of rebels are in the bush close by; it is accordingly arranged that he take his men and work through the bush just opposite, while we work through the bush higher up and meet him on a hillock the other side. So off we start at a steady canter through the grass; now the order is given to dismount & lead the horses up a rather steep hill, there is nothing like saving the horses where we can as we may have to depend on them yet for our lives. Now we mount again and are soon entering the bush;- now keep eyes & ears open, the Kaffirs may be closer upon us than we think; we can only go in single file here so keep close together and get out of the bush sharp - now look out don't get caught fast there with these bushes, so all right;- stoop man stoop or you will loose your hat perhaps your head with that bough if you do

³⁷ Allegiances shifted frequently with tribes or clans joining the colonial forces at times.

not lay your head right onto your chargers neck; now canter a little here it is a bit clearer, keep a tight rein ready to check him or guide him clear of a stone or fallen tree;- no, you can't pass under that bough, jump off and lead him;- well this is delicious the air is filled with fragrance from various wild herbs, this added to the delightful freshness of every thing is indescribable, it beats all we ever smelt before; look at that bush, see that graceful vine climbing that tree & hanging beautifully (*hole in paper*) branches, look at these strong monkey tows hanging from that old tree you could climb to the top of the tree on that; see that monarch of the forest his trunk all covered with moss; look! there is another and the moss there has formed a fern bed so that the trunk is literally covered with ferns, there is another one and another species of fern see how beautifully it rises from it's bed of soft moss and then hangs gracefully down; look at this lovely undergrowth, how fertile the soil must be here, here is a patch of feathery ferns, here one of wild thyme, and there one of peppermint, look at that peculiar tree it looks as if eight or nine small trees had united into one so as to form one fluted pillar standing bolt upright;- carefully over those stones mind his feet;- there now we are in the open again and as we halt a bit the horses are gratefully picking at the new grass growing in such luxuriance all around us; but where's the hillock we were making for? Ah! you thought this side of the bush would be like the other, but see, there are more kloofs here and all bushy, so you must strike through that bush to the left of you; yes, that path will be all right; forward again; well, it is worth the trouble of going through this other bush, you have the same sweet scents and foliage; the bush is thicker so that you must walk nearly all the way and take care that your saddle bags do not get torn;- fast eh! now it is no good pulling and tugging like that, just loosen your jacket carefully, so, take care next time you pass a bush like that. Now we are out again over that little hill and we shall probably find Fynn waiting for us. Yes here he is; has he seen any Kaffirs. Yes two or three. We will wait outside while some of his men go into the bush again; look out if you hear a shot or the bush cracking; nothing all quiet. Well we have waited long enough there does not seem much chance of anything here. We will wish Fynn Good morning as he does not feel inclined to go any further; we will make for the Thomas river near Henderson.

The scenery now is somewhat changed, the mountains are more rugged and steep, here and there in the plane we pass a mealie land, the canes are short & stunted and without any appearance of corn on; there are two or three away there with a little beard on them let us go and see; ah, they are quite young yet, but they are soft & sweet so I take a small piece of biscuit & eat it with a bit of mealie as I feel rather hungry now having eaten nothing since we started & then only a scrap of biscuit without my usual coffee. Now as we near Henderson, the road if road it may be called is very rough & stoney so we must pick our path. Ah, there is Henderson, how nice the house looks surrounded with those tall gum trees, well stocked garden in front and beyond a nice piece of clearing, beautifully green, surrounded by the green *mamosa*³⁸ trees. We shall off saddle here close to the house, knee halter horses, three men told off to look after them, three men for picket to go on top of the hills to give warning if any of the enemy come in sight for they are reputed to be about here; the black boy is cooking the "billey" so we stroll about until tea is made as though you were out for a picnic instead of on patrol with the enemy perhaps within 5 miles, put all your traps together though so that in case of an alarm you can saddle up in about five minutes. Let us go and have a look at the buildings: the stable & outhouses are well & substantially built, very different to what you often see in the country and they have been well kept too; look into that loft, no forage? you would hardly expect it. Now come



³⁸ Mimosa was earlier name, probably common thorn tree (*Vachellia karroo*).

into the house; that is the kitchen a nice large roomy one, here is the pantry very nicely arranged with shelves & safes, here is the dining room what a fine large room; how well planned these three rooms are, pantry opening into a passage communicating with the dining room and kitchen, any one easy of access to the other and yet by shutting the door cut off from any other; what a nice front passage, it is more like a hall in that it runs along the front of the building instead of through it; on each end is a room one the front bed room the other the parlour; exactly opposite the front door which is so to speak in the side of the passage is the dining room door, from the dining room we go into two nice size rooms and into the passage to the outside of kitchen and pantry. The verandah in front is very comfortable and how lovely it would be if this vine was trained in front of it; I have never seen a house better planned. I have made an attempt at a sketch but it is very bad, the two side are larger in the plan than the two rooms from verandah whereas they actually are smaller. Helloa here is bit of some Sunday school hymn tune book in solfa too I will sit here in the cool verandah and look over the tunes until dinner is ready. Ho, here it is bring that table from inside now we can enjoy it. Dinner over and half an hour before we shall saddle up. We will take a stroll in the garden; it was evidently once a very nice garden but now many of the trees are dead, and the vines trailing on the ground or climbing some dead tree. Here is a rosebush with a few roses on. I pluck one and put it in my coat what a treat, it is a long time since I saw a flower, this one won't last long, ere I reach the camp the rose of the garden will have faded away.

Horses are coming in now so saddle up sharp; fall in; number off from the right! number off from the right by pairs & prepare to mount! Mount! Take ground to the right by half sections, walk, march! Here we are off again. In passing the chapel get leave to fall out the ranks and let us have a look at the chapel, it is a nice large place, lofty, comfortable seats and plenty of them, what a shame of the Kaffirs to damage the place so, see here is the sharpened plough coulter that they used to cut open this door with and break these seats, see too here are the remains of the harmonium, all the digitals are gone. I suppose they now hang as ornaments on some savage or savages. Take a canter now & let us catch up to the troop. There is nothing much to remark on our way home; the mists come over us occasionally, but we reach camp at about 5:30 having thoroughly enjoyed our trip though unsuccessful as far as the object of the patrol was, by catching the enemy. Come in side now & let us have dinner. The cook is quite ready for us and we are quite prepared to enjoy a plate of nice soup, followed by meal-bread & potatoes. We turn under the blankets pretty early and wake up in the morning feeling all the better for the change.

Monday 25th. This morning word was sent to the camp informing us that a party of armed natives were hiding in a kloof about 5 miles away. Horses were lead in and a small party of us were soon in the saddle & off. We rode for several hours but could find no trace of the enemy; on returning I went near to the waterfalls previously mentioned and had the pleasure of a close and leisurely view of them, and I quite enjoyed it.

28th. Yesterday morning at 12:30 we started for a patrol accompanied by about 30 men of the F.A.M.P.³⁹ our object was to capture a headman of the rebels who was reported to be in some huts near Henderson. We started thus early to try and take him by surprise at day break. We had with us two guides. We arrived within 2 or 3 miles of the spot about 3:30 and there unbridled our horses and let them feed keeping the halters in our hands. Just at day break we mounted and rode straight for the huts but found the birds had flown. We off saddled and had breakfast, not without reminders that we were where Kaffirs had been but a short time before by the presence of unnumberable flees, a poor half starved dog fastened to one of the huts, we could easily count his ribs and the joints in his backbone, some unfeeling person put the dog in great pain by throwing a large stone at him and knocking him down, I went up and ended his misery with a ball from my

³⁹ Frontier Armed and Mounted Police

revolver, it was amusing to see the fellows sitting on the ground pulling off their shirts & trousers and looking for those ruthless tormentors the flees. Just as we had finished breakfast we saw about two miles off two mounted Kaffirs we soon had the horses in and after them but they got away in the bush, we came upon some women from whom we took, hatchets and reims⁴⁰, which they were no doubt taking for the rebels, we of course could get no information from them, one old woman concocted a story that Gangibella⁴¹ having passed half an hour ago but by cross questioning it was found to be only a fabrication of her own, there was also an absence of all "spoor" at the place where he & a few cattle had according to her account, crossed. We got back about 2 p.m. I was very sleepy & laid down on the blankets and slept soundly until 4.30.

I hope this account will prove interesting to you, I will first send it to Emmy⁴² from there it will go to G'Town, then to Crediton then to you⁴³.

Hoping you are well believe me to be
Your affect brother
C.E.Nelson

⁴⁰ Rawhide strip or belt

⁴¹ Presumably a local chief

⁴² Emily Locke NELSON, 1856-1938. Probably still at Bedford (she taught at Egerton School for girls), having arrived there in 1876 and left in October 1878. (From "Servants and Gentlewomen to the Golden Land" by Cecillie Swaisland, pg 128).

⁴³ His father, Charles Horatio NELSON, 1826-1914 had moved to Crediton after losing most of his sight. James was studying for the ministry and presumably away at college at this time.

1878 May, Toise River

Rec^d 14 June ans^d 19th

Toise River Camp.
7th May, 1878.

My very dear Parents

It seems but a short time ago since I wrote to you, at the same time as writing that long letter to James, but as on the 24th Ultimo I received one from you dated the 26th Febry I will begin a letter to you, whether it will be short or long I cannot say but it will be all to yourselves, I will post it direct and not let it run the gauntlet by going to Bedford & to G'Town. I will follow my usual plan of reading over your letter and replying to, or remarking on, the contents of the same.

You do indeed seem to have heard from me in roundabout ways, for instance through James through Mr Fuller in London through Mr Fuller in King Wms Tn.

Of course when I wrote to Emily or to Grandmother it was with the expectation that they would send on to you, and when writing had to be done in a hurry and sitting on the ground with a box or tin between one's legs for a desk with the chance of being called upon at any moment it was a great object to make one letter answer the purpose of two or three, but lately having been able to write under more favourable circumstances I have been more liberal with my epistles and have been able to extend their length as for instance my last to James which I hope you did not find too long to read. This is a good long sentence let me read it over and see if it is grammatically formed. I think it is all right. You make quite a mistake in supposing I have joined the police, it is a volunteer corps that I belong to, far more respectable than the police as well as more comfortable and better pay.

I feel very grateful that not only do you remember me in your prayers to our Heavenly Father, but that others formerly known to me also offer their prayers on my behalf which prayers are joined in by many of God's people, these prayers too not only for my temporal welfare but for my spiritual that I may be preserved from the shafts of the wicked one; I am thankful that though seeing evil in many shapes and being strongly tempted in some points I have so far been preserved from running into sin. It is difficult to be salt purifying the mass, but I hope that by living so that others see me avoiding evils into which others run to be in no small degree that salt.

I have not met with any one by the name of Hull in the Police, of course not being in that force as you imagined I have met but very few of them occassionally we are on patrol with them but it is only for a short time and there is no opportunity of making the acquaintance of any of them, even if I were so inclined; they are taking them as a whole a very rough lot and I should not care about belonging to them.

There was a major Buller⁴⁴ with us for a few days, I did not see much of him, he must be the one referred to by you.

You mention Frank asking why mother killed the blow flies. Let me say something about blow flies just to show what they are like in the bush; now don't think I am going to exaggerate for what I am going to tell you seems like exaggeration. When camped at Isidenge as my custom is on getting up in the morning I put my blankets out to air in the sun; I saw a lot of blue bottles swarming on the tent ropes but did not take much notice of them. In the afternoon on going to take my blankets in I observed two or three large lumps about the size of hens eggs on them and of a light yellow color; on closer inspection I found, ugh: they were lumps of fly-blows. I shook my blankets but they were still there, I felt them but instead of finding them soft found they were stuck firmly together and I had to cut them off with a knife and then scrape, scrape until I had scraped all the wool off the spots leaving the bare threads of the blankets and even then they were not all off. The next day I put my blankets for but a few moments then folded them

⁴⁴ General Sir Redvers Buller was a Captain during the 9th Frontier War. He was born in Crediton,

up and covered a grain bag or two and an overcoat over them; on taking them up to make my bed in the evening I found the flies had got their way through the grass under the blankets and had again put one or two lumps on them. I was not sorry to leave the place. I am glad to say I had no cooking to do there or I am afraid I should have left meat alone until I could not do without. I had a few green mealies with the leaves off, these I had to throw away on a/c of the flies.

It is very pleasing to me to find that you do not let the children forget me and that even they remember to pray for their brother far away.

I am sorry you cannot get anything for John⁴⁵ to do as you say it would be folly for him to come out here just now that the country is so unsettled; there will be I am afraid very little business and consequently very little chance of a situation until the country has been settled though there would not be so much difficulty in procuring a situation for him as for me. Uncle John⁴⁶ will be able to tell you better how things are looking in G'Town now; there must still be a little business there I should think. Should you decide for him to come out, let me know, I think I shall be able to find the money for the passage, ½ of which he might be able to repay me at some time, though I do not know that I shall require it.

I am glad to hear that my old friend Harry Hambly is getting on so well, though I think he will be quite in giving up work which is killing. I do not believe in a man working so hard even if it be for a good salary. I had the pleasure of reading a letter from Jas⁴⁷ to Grandmother giving an a/c of his visit to Aunt. I am pleased that he is getting on. I often think of him and how our paths which outwardly for some time ran parallel even at times one in the other suddenly diverged and now we are far apart; I think him much higher the work he is engaged in, and yet I am doing what is my legitimate work; it seems as if I must be doing with "goods" for I may be almost be said to have given up the fighting part of volunteering being so much engaged in the commissariat.

Does Mr Le Louif still preach at Crediton give my very very kind regards to him I have never forgotten him and never will, nor one evening I spent at the "Rooms" when he was preaching. Some of the times we used to sing at those meetings are fixed on my mind and whenever I hear them carry me back to him. I have still with me the little red hymn book we used at those meetings.

Try and get Alick⁴⁸ to join with Tay⁴⁹ in some of the rougher sports, it will be better for him I wish I had gone in more for gymnastics when at school it would have given me a better physique.

So Tay has commenced a cigar tell him from me not to learn to smoke. I generally have a pipe after going to bed, occassionally one in the afternoon or evening, very seldom more than two all told. My reason is not so much that I like it as it being the choice of the less of two evils; it would take too long to go into particulars, suffice it to say when I told the Dr that I smoked thus moderately and the reason and the effect of said smoking he replied "Then smoke by all means".

In about one months time my six months term will be up. I have not yet decided what I shall do. I am afraid that there will not be a good situation open for me in business anywhere; should there be I think I should take it even though it would not pay so well as volunteering. But shall I be able to settle down to business while I know there are volunteers in the front? If I stay on in this contingent I think I shall get a step higher and get 11/- or 12/- a day besides board and lodging out of this I could save a good deal. I should like a situation in the commissariat which would necessitate me being most of my time in town.

⁴⁵ John NELSON (1861-1952) - his brother.

⁴⁶ John LOCKE (1838-1904)

⁴⁷ James Loxton NELSON (1855-1931) - his brother.

⁴⁸ Alex Minto NELSON (1865-1900) - his brother.

⁴⁹ Octavius NELSON (1868-1945) - his brother.

Then again the Transvaal wants volunteers⁵⁰. I have long had a desire to see the Transvaal and if I went there I might have a chance of a farm at the end of the war.

Now about "the means of grace". I have thought of that too. There are some temptations in town life which one does not meet in the veldt. The means of grace are not so important as some consider. At any rate I know from experience that through their routine they may be almost useless and a person's spiritual life may be as dead in town as in the veldt. In town ones time is so often fully occupied that there is little opportunity for thought. In the veldt on the contrary, though at times full up with work, one often has time to think and as I do sometimes go for a ride on the hills and enjoy God's earth and feel one's heart lifted up, or as in the case of my ride through the woods as described in Jas letter is not the feeling worth a good many sermons.

I do not now which to do I will leave myself in my Fathers hand, think the matter over but not let it be too anxious thought and when the time comes he will make it plain.

Heaps of love to my dear parents and the little ones some rather big now from your affectionate son

C.E. Nelson

Added as postscript to top of letter

Emmy writes to me often & very lovingly. Emmy & I seem to be growing fonder of each other every time we write. Her letters do me good, I do love her so and she loves me. Emmy thinks of joining the I O G T⁵¹ at one time I would have said no. But having thought the matter over I now say yes.

⁵⁰ Britain had annexed the Transvaal in 1877 in a response to continued warring between Transvaal and Zulu forces. Ultimately leading to both the 1st Boer War and the Zulu War.

⁵¹ International Organisation of Good Templars, a temperance society (www.iogt-international.org)

1878 May, Toise River

Rec 8 July Ansd 31 July 78

Take quantity for quality

Toise River Camp
24th May, 1878

My very dear Parents

Your very welcome letters of 26th March received 22nd inst. Emmy had kept them in her possession for some time on a/c of her not having received answer to her last, she thought it possible I might have moved somewhere and accordingly did not forward them until she heard from me.

Let me at once reply to your letter and then if it is not too late give you any news there may be.

I think in a letter written subsequent to 3rd February you will find a full a/c of my somewhat narrow escape at the time that I was left in the enemys country and had to find my way back to Camp.

I was at Mrs E. Greys when in King and spent an evening and night there. It was late when we had finished chatting and as I did not feel inclined to walk a mile up to camp and had made it all right for myself with the Srgt if I did not report myself that evening, I just turned on the parlour sofa, got up the next morning went to the river for a bath and reported myself at 6.30. I got on first class with Mrs G; she is a very nice little body. You are quite right in supposing that E Grey would not be the one to go to the front. I am thinking he would soon wish himself back again. I am afraid his business is not very good. The stationary part of it seems to have all gone to Tom Hay, and though he does a good trade in smokers necessaries and fancy nicnacs I should think it would hardly pay well.

The fight of the Gongobella Campaign⁵² reported in the G' Town Journal was one in which Mr. Hemming's division of volunteers were engaged; they were raised after our contingent and had this fight within a comparatively short distance of Q Town. You may have seen a report of the fight in the Thomas river by the Queenstown contingent and some P' Elizabeth men; Captain Harvey shot two Kaffirs with his revolver; This battle was fought by our contingent. I was not there, in fact I have not had a shot at a Kaffir since I was in Gcalekaland.

You mention Mr Hambly's farewell sermon at Sandford. Where is he going to?

I have been thinking what I shall do after my time is up and have come to the same conclusion that you have. If I can continue as Qtr Mst Srgt or get promoted to Qtr Master, & if business is not very bright, then it may be advisable to continue, but lay all before my heavenly Father. I have done so and feel that I shall be guided. If it is His will that I should leave this and take again to town life he will assuredly show me some business opening or some situation, it is His will that I should continue in camp life then I shall feel that it His will. This deciding will not of course prevent my making enquiries for situations; I have already done so but business seems very dull.

Though I was not able to go to G' Town for my Xmas I am hoping before long to get leave to visit both G' Town and Bedford. I shall probably travel by post cart from King to G' Town. Thence to Bedford and back via King; I did at first think of going on horse back but horse feed would be so very expensive now, that cart will come cheaper. I can go to King from here for nothing, part way on horse back part way by train.

Mother again mentions John. I too have been thinking of him since I last wrote you. Perhaps after the war is over I may be so situated as to have him to live with me in my bachelor hall or better still in my own house but as the Frenchman says "we shall

⁵² Or Gungubela, the Thembu (Tambookie) chief, Campaign of early 1878. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thembuland>

see". I think now I have answered your letter so will write a note to John finishing this at some future time.

May 27th. Yesterday was Sunday and as usual a very busy day with me. I was pretty well all day serving rations. In the evening I had a nice quiet time to myself; I took your letters and read them again and was able to note one or two things more particularly than I had previously done. Many thanks for another reference to the XCI Psalm it is very assuring and makes one feel safe and secure "secure" literally "without care" even in the midst of danger. How much better for us if we could trust more to those almighty arms, and make his truth our shield and buckler.

Fathers notice of the waters of life springing up into everlasting life engaged my thoughts until I went to sleep. Let me sketch out my thoughts, Carrying the metaphor of a well of water into a simile. A well may be for a time hidden by being choked with earth and stones causing the water to flow under ground and out of sight though on the removal of the earth it at once springs up again. The supply of water to the well may run short through there not having been rains or heavy dew up in the higher ground, or something may have turned the water in some other direction; so that though the well still contains water it does not spring and bubble as is its wont; But though through such causes the water from the well is for the time being out of sight and not running over yet there is always evidence of the well being in existence from the beautiful freshness of the grass around it, at times too when all the other grass is burnt and dried up.

Just as with the spiritual life. At times it seems as if that life were well nigh dead, the water ceases to spring through the heart being full of evil but directly some affliction or trouble comes and clears away the rubbish the well once more springs up into everlasting life. Or maybe we have been living too low too much on earth so that the rain & dews of the Holy Spirit have passed over us instead of falling upon us, or for a time we have been cut off from our Saviour from whom we derive this life water, so that our life has not shown from whence it is derived. But still during this time the well has been there and its influence has been felt in us; we have known that we should give more evidence of a life hid with Christ in God and this has made up living for a higher life and with the longing has come the blessing so that the well again springs up making music in our hearts; and we have gone on our way thanking our Father for his long suffering and his loving kindness in bearing with us in our wanderings.

28th I again take up my pen to continue this letter. Though I had no rationing to do yesterday I was not idle. I had two wagons to send off for mealies. Then I got my store tent put a bit straight and tidy and some things taken from wagons to replenish some I had issued. After that I had a tedious job at a revolver. Someone had been trying his hand at cleansing and had got all the lock part out but could not get it back so brought it to me. As every other part of it was very rusty I took it thoroughly to pieces, every screw out, cleaned every part and then commenced the job of replacing; the parts I had taken to pieces I soon got together, but the lock which had been taken out by another I found more difficult in managing. However with patience and perseverance I got it all right. This job being done I give my own revolver a cleaning also my carbine, bridles, bit, stirrup irons, etc. This afternoon or tomorrow I must see to the stuffing of my saddle, do a few saddlery repairs, also mend my clothes. Thus every day brings its work.

I was very much surprised to hear from Emmy that she is "promised". I had no idea that I was soon in a sense to lose my sister. True in speaking of Miss Andersons engagement she had said that she would like to have some friend to look to and rely upon but she was quiet content to wait a bit. I am very pleased to hear it. I do not know Mr Webber but have heard of him from more than one and all I have heard has been good, very good; therefore I can feel that my own darling sister is right in the step she has taken. She did not tell me that Mr W. was a Xian but I take that for granted for I know none other could find favour with her. I am sure my dear parents you will feel pleased at this bit of news,

and be glad to know that our dear Emmy has a prospect of a nice comfortable home of her own and a kind loving husband.

This has had more effect upon me than would at first be supposed.

Though we have not seen each other for a year, yet we had not forgotten one the other, but through frequently writing have learnt to love each other more and more, in fact I called Emmy my sweetheart and she certainly had the first place in my affections, so that I felt that having her love I could for some time do without some one else to love. She too had grown very fond of me and seemed to think so much about me that I thought to myself once or twice when I do get a lady love how shall I be able to write to Emmy and tell her that she is not now first in my affections, won't it be cruel to her, how will she bear it; but the case is changed, she writes & tells me that I cannot any longer be first with her; so it is, change and changes ever come. But from what I have first written you may suppose there is a feeling of a great blank in my heart, I feel that Emmy is not mine as she was I want some one to take her place. As long as I am living out here all right, but as soon as I get back to society I shall have to look well to my heart or else I shall be loosing it before I know where I am, and that would never do for me to go and make a mistake after so long thinking about it and studying character and building up for my own a model wife; mother and Emmy being the models on which my wife is built. By the bye in Emmys last photo there is a want of the cheerfulness which she generally shows, the light heartedness and happiness, but this is supplied or rather made up for by a strong likeness to my own dear mother, there is that peculiar sad lovingness which is always noticeable in mothers photos and which to me possessed a great charm.

I had a trip to King W^{ms} Tⁿ about a week ago. I had one or two things I wanted to see about and a friend also wished me to do a little business for him. I could only get two days leave. I left here on horse back at 10.30AM arrived at Kabousi 12.30. Left there by train at 1PM. Blaney Junction 3.20 left there 5.30 arrived in King 6.15. Had tea at Aunt Thompsons. Went about my business, got that done about 8.15 o'clock PM. Saw E. Grey had a long chat with Tom Hay. Back to Aunt's chatting there until 10 then to bed. Up & off by the eight o'clock train. Arrived at Kabousi at 12. Saw to loading wagon for Camp, etc. back to Camp at about 4. This was a flying visit & no mistakes. Some of the chaps would hardly believe that I had actually been to King.

Though not living in a house as I was some time ago I am in very comfortable quarters. I have a nice large bell tent all to myself. Stretcher for sleepy. Soap box upside down on 4 poles in ground for wash stand, cross sticks for putting saddle etc on. Two boxes stood on end forming cupboard, two boards across these forming table, empty cartridge boxes on top forming pigeon holes, water kept cool in ammunition box tin lined.

I have had some thoughts on joining some party of volunteers for the Transvaal⁵³, but I have formed no definite plan. I should very much like to see the country. I believe Uncle Edward⁵⁴ has the contract for supplying forage to the troops up there.

I hope I shall be able to get leave for a visit to G' Town and Bedford, for I should very much like to see Mr Webber in order to form my own opinion of him.

I hope James is quite well, I expect a letter from him soon, give my love to him when you write.

Any particulars of doings at home and all about the children I am always glad to receive.

Kind regards to all friends.

What has become of Louis Dymond? Papers send per Emmy I was very glad to get such as Christian Herald, Night & day etc. Tom Hay has promised to send me a parcel from King, I shall get them circulated among the tents so that when the men have nothing particular to do they may take them up to read.

Write again soon to your affectionate son.

⁵³ Britain had annexed the Transvaal Republic in 1877.

⁵⁴ John Edward NELSON (~1814-1888) and appears to have been known as Edward.

C. E. Nelson

1878 July, Henderson

Rec 31 Aug

Ansd Sept & again 7 Dec

Henderson Camp
16th July, 1878

My dear Parents

Letter from father of 22 April is still unanswered. Uncle John told me when in G'Town that he had drawn the money another 30£ of it from the bank, he managed to get it without my signature, whether he has deposited the balance in my name or his I forgot to ask him.

I have sent £10 to uncle to be forwarded to you, I often wish I was able to do more for you.

I am very sorry to hear that John's hearing does not improve, it must be a great trial for him.

I managed to get my visit to G'Town and will now tell you about it seeing that there is no news to give.

I left our camp at Toise River on the 15th Ultimo, got to Kabousi about 12.30, took the train there for King. Got to King about 6.30; in the train met two or three people that I knew, but whom I had not seen for some time. Of course I went to Aunt Thompson's who, with Jessie and Miss Wright were very glad to see me.

The next day being Sunday I went in the morning to hear Rev. Mr. Don, the sermon was good and I enjoyed the service very much, the singing contributing in no small measure to the enjoyment.

In the afternoon I called at Mr & Mrs Fuller's whose parents James visits, and had tea there, their children were very glad to see and wanted to know why I could not live always in King.

In the evening I went with Jessie to the Wesleyan chapel. I did not care very much for the sermon, it was very narrow; Subject "Yet there is room" but the preacher put so many difficulties and conditions that I am afraid a great many people if judged by his standard would not find any room. The singing I enjoyed so much that it quite made up for the sermon. In the evening I went over to Mrs McDonalds⁵⁵ where we had some more singing.

The next day I was busy about the town getting a few things that I required and seeing some friends. Left at 7 on Tuesday morning by post cart for Fort Bft⁵⁶. Arrived there at 5.30. Had tea and spent the evening at Jas Tudhope's.

Left next morning at 5.30. Got to Adelaide at 9.30. Adelaide is a pokey little place, nothing to see there and nobody that I knew well enough to call and see, and there we had to wait until 2 o'clock. I passed about an hour watching a blacksmith at work. At about 3.30 we got very near Bedford and of course I began wondering whether Emmy would expect me, where I should see her, whether she would be just as loving as ever or whether the new love would not in some degree have lessened the old love for me.

As we drove up to the post office who should I see there but Miss Nelson & Miss Anderson, they were getting stamps and as the cart stopped Emmy shouted, Why there he is. Of course I did not take long in getting down and we were clasped in each other's arms. Emmy was wild with excitement, saying as much as she could in one breath. Where are you going to now, here come in at once to Miss Watsons no you mustnt though you must have a wash, when will you come, oh I cant stay now I have got to go and see some people" and then suddenly remembering that Miss Anderson was standing by she exclaimed Oh this is Miss Anderson you must come over in half an hour. In a little time I got her calmed down and she managed to tell me what she really did want me to do.

⁵⁵ Later referred to as Aunt Agnes, daughter of Louisa Rachel Nelson.

⁵⁶ Fort Beaufort

Mr Solomon afterwards told her of course in fun that it was improper for a young lady to kiss and hug a gentleman in the street. Emmy said she did not intend to kiss me until we got inside the house but that I kissed her first. I won't dispute the statement. I know I did not wait to see whether she was going to kiss me or not and I did not give her much time.

I went to the hotel and was not long having a wash and making myself tidy, in fact the half hour seemed a long time going round.

I went to Miss Watson's and then out with Emmy to see some of her friends, she was not yet quite cool for she did not seem to know whom she had to go and see and when she had made up her mind on that point she did not know where they lived. It did me good and made me feel very happy to see her again and to find her as warm hearted as ever. She could not understand my being cool, she said she was sure I was just excited as she was but kept it in; she was not far out.

We had tea at Miss Watson's. Willie Webber was there too, of course I had been very anxious to see him and had been wondering how I should like him. After tea while Emmy was packing some of her things I had a chat and a smoke with him. As far as I could tell from the little I saw of him I like him very much personally and what is of more consequence I think he will make a very good husband indeed so that I am quite as pleased since seeing as I was from report.

In the evening we had some music at Miss Watson's and I had some of my old favourites.

At 8 o'clock the next morning Emily & I were off again. We had a miserable day for travelling, windy & dusty, poor Emmy did not like it a bit but I took it all in as part of the day's pleasure. We arrived in G'Town about 5.30. Grandmother was delighted to see us. I found her looking thinner and weaker than when I left but as cheerful as ever. George is grown a little, but is not looking so well as I should like a change upcountry would do him good.

As I could only have a few days in G'Town I had to make the most of my time so had to do lots of visiting. I was the whole of Friday and part of Saturday about the town, it seemed as if I could not get through the streets there were so many people to see.

On Saturday about 12 o'clock I knew old Mrs Clack would be at her usual work dusting the chapel, so Emmy & I went down, Emmy stayed in the porch while I went in first. I went up to the platform where Mrs Clack was wished her good morning and asked her if Mr Cross was in all the time looking straight at her; she was not sure but would see, why I said don't you know me Mrs Clack. She looked at me and then exclaimed Goodness me it is never master Charles, just then Emmy walked up and it was almost more than the old lady could stand. We had a nice long chat with her, she of course asked all sorts of questions about mother & father and Johnnie her Johnnie as she calls him.

There were two families of children who were very fond of me and of course I wondered whether they would still care for me, so I lost no time in going to see them and found that I was still fresh in their memories as ever, and I had a very nice time with them.

Uncle Johns children as well as aunt & uncle were glad to see me, the children have grown especially May.

Uncle George & aunt⁵⁷ were out of town. I was very sorry as I should so much like to have seen them. There were of course a great many that I could not have time to call upon; I could easily have spent a week longer in G'Town without being tired. My lady friends I found as sociable as ever and as a memento of them brought away a splendid wool scarf which three of them had kindly made for me. I fancy mother is wondering whether there was one in particular that I went to see. No there was not, for at present my heart is quite free and open, I must look out when I go back to town life again, I was not particularly struck with any one while on my visit, perhaps I am not quite susceptible to the charms of the fair sex as once I was.

⁵⁷ George Grey LOCKE (1840-1908)

My visit to old G'Town made me very much wish to go back there to live and to make my home there. I wonder when & where I shall settle down.

On Sunday I went with Emmy in the morning & took my old seat, how nice it was to feel so at home there to hear the organ again, to hear and join in the same sweet hymns & tunes, to look around and so many faces that I knew, smiling a welcome to me. And then to hear Mr Cross preach & lead us in pray it carried me back to the scene around the camp fire in Galekaland where I so enjoyed his preaching and the hymns, no need to ask whether I enjoyed the service when there were so many happy associations with it. After service when I was about half way down the isle someone caught me on the shoulder in a familiar way and holding out his hand said "Halloa trooper how goes it?" It was of course Mr Cross. It was a pleasure to meet him again.

In the afternoon of course I went to the Sunday School and there met many of the children that I had been so long at work with, some had left, some new ones were there but most of the old faces that had grown so familiar to me were to be seen again some of course grown older, some little wee things when I left had grown to be boys & girls, some elder ones had grown into young ladies and lads, but all had a welcome for me.

In the evening I of course again went to the Baptist chapel Emily accompanying grandmother to Trinity Church. After service I went home with two of my lady friends had a nice talk and some music.

Of course I went to see Mrs Poulton Mrs Wright & Mrs Hay old friends of yours, and - but no, I must not begin giving a list of whom I saw.

I enjoyed my visit to old G'Town very much indeed.

I had thought a good deal of it previously, spent many a pleasant time thinking about it and anticipating great pleasure from it. As a rule pleasures that a looked forward to in this way prove dissapointing, not so this case. I think I enjoyed myself quite as well as I expected. In fact the pleasure has been threefold, anticipating, partaking, and thinking about it after it was over.

I had as fellow passenger from G'Town to King Mr. Fred Holland of the Bay. Of course he knew you and was glad to see me. We did not leave town until 1 o'clock so did not get to King until 3 in the morning. It was a rather cold ride, I was perched on top of the mail bags but was soon shaken down into a position that to me was comparatively comfortable so that I was able to get some sleep. I spend Thursday in King and left by the 8 train on Friday morning. Arrived at Kabousie at 12 waited there for a couple of hours and as no one came with my horse, started to walk. About 2 or 3 miles from the station at an hotel I found that one of our men had been there, he had with him 2 spare horses one for me and one for some one else expected, he had taken one horse with him and left the other at the hotel, he must have taken the wrong road, so I took the one horse and rode on to Grey Town; he arrived there a couple of hours after me. It was bitterly cold from Kabousie to Grey Town, cold wind and sleet, the next morning the hill was white with snow. Arrived in camp about midday on Saturday had to set to work almost immediately and have been kept at it pretty hard ever since.

I shall have it a little easier now as two or three of the troops have left leaving only our own contingent and some Fingos to ration. I have no idea whether we shall be disbanded shortly or whether we shall be kept on for some time longer, I trust I shall get a situation before we are disbanded so as not to be out of employment.

We have had it very dry lately, but a shower or two fell yesterday & last night.

I have not heard from G'Town since I left I suppose they are all well there.

I wish George could get something better to do, he is still only getting 6£, but business seems so quiet all over the country.

I will write a short note to James to fill up the other side of this sheet.

With love & kisses to all the children & yourselves from your affect^e son
C. E. Nelson

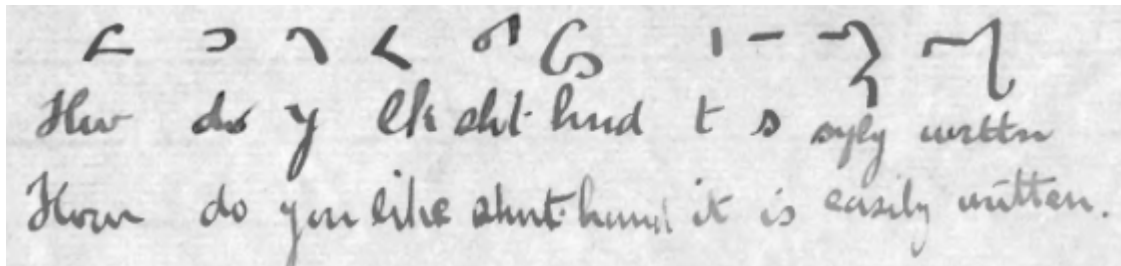
Rec' 31 Aug. Ack. 4/9/78

17 July 1878

My dear James

I have not yet received an answer to my last to you I suppose you have not much time to write.

I have taken a few lessons in short hand. This system is a very good one only some 26 symbols to learn and comparatively easily mastered, if you think that you would like to learn it I will send you the alphabet and a few exercises and correct them for you, I do not suppose that you have seen this system, all words are spelt as pronounced and no vowels are used this of course makes it more difficult to read; you cannot well gain in writing & reading, if you lessen the difficulty of writing I think you increase the difficulty reading. I will give you a line.



How do you like short hand it is easily written.

Yours in haste

C. E. Nelson

1878 August, Henderson

Recd Sept at Beaconsfield ansd Decr 9/78

Henderson
1st August

My very dear Parents

Father's letter of the 17th June as also Temperance Record direct, to hand last night. I was very pleased to get such a nice long letter as it seems a long time since I heard from you. After I turned in last night I wondered whether there were many young men of my age who were in correspondence with their parents as I am; I concluded that there were not; I think it is a great privilege our being able to write thus freely to each other.

I still only the rank of Qtr Mstr Srgt.. The Commanding Officer of the division is Mr Hinds his son is Qtr Mstr of our contingent; his son is not well liked by the corps nor is he considered fit for a higher position, had he been so he would have been made a Lieutenant some time ago, in which case I should be Qtr Mstr, but his not rising prevents me rising; I have no doubt if I tried I might be made a Lieutenant, but knowing that this would be a cause of anxiety to you I do not care about it; not that I think there would be much danger, or would shrink from it if there were, but you would think so, and of course it could make you as anxious as if there really were danger.

I have had the great pleasure of some children to play with for the last few days and am likely to have for a week or so. Mr Hinds has brought his wife & some of his family to stay here for a little while (not much like Kaffir war). Mrs Hinds is sister to Mrs Sam Dicks formerly of G'Town, I used to be very fond of her children, two of them were quite my pets. These children of Mrs Hinds remind me very much of them, they have taken to me at once, so that they are always running to me for something or other, and of course I am quite happy with them.

I hope you will be able to read this, it is so very cold that I can hardly hold my pen.

Now I will go through your letter and remark and answer. The name of our Corps is the "Queenstown Volunteers". Your remarks with reference to smoking are true, were it merely to induce sleep and quiet the nerves I should not consider myself justified in indulging in the pipe, but under the circumstances, I think I am quite right in smoking; I join with you in the wish that we might have a talk over it, and not over that only but several other subjects.

In my remarks on the means of Grace I did not for one moment wish to estimate too lightly the privilege, at the same time I do not think there is too much form in the service as now conducted in most places of worship. I wish they could have an occasional meeting, say twice a month if not oftener, of the same kind as the "brethren". It would draw brothers in Christ much more together and would make a bond of union or rather strengthen that which there is; there would then be more time sympathy and less judging of one another, there would be more of that Charity the chiefest of all the graces.

I am glad Mr Le Louif does not forget me, my thoughts often travel to Crediton and frequently in these travels they turn to him as one of my friends there. I am glad you still find such a congenial friend in Mr Pope; it is hard to go through life without some such friend.

It is a long time since I had a line from James. I suppose he is kept pretty hard at it, so I must not complain.

I shall certainly try to be present at Emily's wedding. As you say though Willie has her heart I have still a warm corner there, I think it is a good big corner too; she is a dear good girl, she still writes to me as lovingly as ever. I hope I shall not move further off before the wedding. I have almost given up the idea of the Transvaal. There is some talk about being ordered across the Kei again. I hope not.

I am about tired of this life now, I want to settle down to some nice quiet business, I don't want to make a fortune but enough to live in comfort and lay by a little.

I believe Emmy has some papers to send me, which are I suppose those that you mention, I shall be very glad to get them, and especially the sermon "Walking with God" which I trust will do me good; I want waking up to a more living communion, a closer walk, a brighter faith; one is so apt to grow forgetful of better things, to forget that there is a prize to be striven for, and that as we live here so we shall live hereafter that we are making our own future. It would indeed be better for us if we had more of that child faith, like that teaching example of Frankie's faith; this was a subject Mr Hart used to be very fond of, he was often putting before us in various ways the necessity of our being child like without being childish. We are not willing to be as little children, we have got past that we think and so we want to take too much on ourselves and walk by ourselves, instead of trusting to our Father & Saviour.

Many thanks for the particulars of the "home" I should like to drop in upon you all.

I hope Mother dear will write to me a letter soon it is such a happiness to me just to see her handwriting. I wish I had my mother's photo here instead of in my boxes at Queenstown. How thankful I am that I had such a mother, the older I get the more I love her, & the more I wish to see her, and have a kiss from her, what a happiness it would be to have her arms once more round my neck and to speak that one word "Mother".

I sent a letter to you last week via G'Town giving an a/c of my visit to my birthplace and for some time my home, I then told you all the news I could think of so have not much more to write; I will keep this open until tomorrow, something may occur to me, meanwhile I must write to G' Mother. I wrote to Emmy a day or two ago.

As you say it is quite true that this child is very apt to buy whatever he wants and to get the best. The latter part of my policy I feel sure of is the cheapest in the long run, but I think I am more careful than I used to be about spending my money. I have saved something since I have been in the corps, I have in cash and cheques £48 and a Pro Note of £19 16-0; of this I am just sending off £5 for 5 months rent of rooms in Q Town, which are now given up, all my things having been packed up into cases. This leaves say £60 clear. Then out of my pay I have spent £12 expenses of trip to G'Town & Bedford and £10 sent to you per Uncle John. So I don't think I have done so bad. If I go to G'Town to Emmy's wedding I think I shall go on horseback, I shall not have to go round by Bedford I shall have time to do it per horse back. Of course on my former visit I could not have got to Bedford & G'Town & back within my time of leave. Beside the above cash I have a horse paid for worth at least 20£.

I have read part of the Temperance Record and am well pleased with it. The speeches are very good, containing some fine suggestions and pithy remarks, I shall keep this number it will come useful to me should I want ideas or foundation for a speech at some future time.

7th August Yesterdays post brought me letter from Emmy enclosing yours of 11th June also some numbers of Xian Herald etc which will I think prove interesting to me, those sent per Uncle John containing articles to which you specially direct my attention have not yet come to hand.

Mrs Hinds of whom I have written was a Miss Turner, she remembers mother quite well.

The first half of your letter is taken up with amusing remarks on the "marriage question" not the question generally but as referring to a particular young lady of whom I am very fond and who is about to take upon herself the marriage state.

You do not seem to have received my letter giving my opinion of the transaction for you enquire concerning my ideas; as in a letter that you ought to have received I give full particulars of thoughts feelings ideas I will not now enter again into them.

I think our plans of the wedding differ somewhat from yours. I do not know what definite arrangements will be made but I am inclined to think that the ceremony will take place in G'Town as Aunt Jane⁵⁸ promised some time ago that in the event of Emmy's getting married she should consider it her privilege to give the breakfast; and I certainly think that it will be quite right & proper to do so. When the idea was mentioned of having it in Bedford I at once disagreed with it.

Aunt Jane said she supposed it would be my place to give the bride away. I do not know I shall leave that to Uncle John to decide. I shall not trouble much about it, all I shall hope for myself is that I may manage to get there to take part and offer my congratulations and best wishes.

Would it not be very nice if you could come out and see your daughter married. Should I not be wild at the idea of seeing my dear parents again.

So much for the wedding.

I am glad you liked my a/c to James of a day patrol. When writing it I seemed just in the humour to put my thoughts on paper so write right off the reel. The more I see of nature the more I admire it.

Rest of letter missing.

⁵⁸ Jane THACKWRAY, wife of John LOCKE

1878 October, Tylden

Recd 16 Nov ansd 10 Dec

Tylden
13th October, 1878

My Dear Parents,

It is a long time since I wrote you a line but I think you will pardon my neglect when I tell you that since I came here I have had my time so fully occupied. Business from 6 to 6.30 or 7 to 7.30, gives little time to one's self; then I have had some of my clothes to mend up to make last a bit longer and to do for out here, for instance a coat to be partly relined, pocket put etc, waistcoat to be made larger, and then again I have had much of my time taken up with doctoring; the weather being so terribly dry there is a good deal of fever about, a kind of scarlet fever, and as there is no doctor here the people soon found I knew a little about it, and used to send for me so that I often spent the whole of my spare time visiting, for the last week I have been suffering a good deal from congestion of the liver consequent in the sudden change in my mode of life; and now Willie Bentley (son of the owner of the business who is away in Natal for a time) has been ill in bed so that not only have I had to look after the serving in the shop but have had to do all the book work for both shops, act poundmaster + postmaster; under these circumstances I think you will admit that I could not well write to you.

I am expecting letters from you soon for it is a long time since I heard from you & though I do not count on receiving a letter from you at any particular date yet when a long interval elapses between the letters I notice it and feel the desire to hear from you.

I suppose Emmy is now Mrs W. Webber (I have had nothing from G'Town this month). I was very sorry that I could not manage to get to G'Town for the occasion but it would have been too great a sacrifice of time & money and perhaps situation, and it was not so very important that I should be there.

Of course I wrote a letter to be given to Emmy immediately after the ceremony. I think our darling will be very happy, she will have a nice comfortable home; and a nice kind husband. When I can manage it I must go to Bedford and see her.

How is it I do not hear from James⁵⁹. I wish he would write to me. I shall write to him a letter telling of my business plans and so on, I dare say it will interest him, I shall send the letter through you so that you may read it.

There is no need for me to tell you about business now but must let you wait until I write to James.

I believe my last letter was dated at Henderson, so I think that I had better go back to there and tell you a little of what I have been doing.

Our corps left Henderson on the 1st Sept proceeding to Q'Town and were there disbanded. As there had been a charge of missappropriating government stores made against Mr Hinds I had to go to King instead of to Queen to give evidence. I spent a few days there very pleasantly. The charge had not much foundation therefore very little of my evidence was required. Aunt Thompson was out of town having gone to live on the farm again. I stayed at Mrs McDonald's (Agnes). Louie and Aggie⁶⁰ Wright were very kind too. Willie McDonald is a nice young fellow. While there I saw something that interested me much. It was the album that belonged to Louisa. Directly I saw the fine penmanship in it I thought of Rob Dymond and when I looked at the initials I saw it was his. It is not often one sees such penmanship now adays. Then there were some pieces by my own dear parents and very pleased I was to read them. I liked them too very much; and in that album I had another proof of how much like my father I am getting; by the kind of pieces written, they are just the kind I would have chosen, in fact I know that more than one of these pieces is already in my scrap book & I think some young ladies have one or two of

⁵⁹ His brother, James Loxton NELSON, presumably studying in London at this time.

⁶⁰ Orphaned grandchildren of Louisa Rachel THOMPSON née NELSON (Aunt Thompson).

the pieces in theirs. These good words though written long are just as appropriate for use and idea and thought now as they were long ago.

I went and saw Mrs Weir (Nancy Stanger) she was very pleased to have seen me and remembered me a little I am certain I remember her for directly I saw her & heard her speak I was carried back many years, to Mr Stanger's house in G'Town, to Miss S. to mothers first attempt at Homeopathic doctoring, the first box having been stained in exchange for a shower bath. When my mind thus travels back to incidents in my boyhood my heart rises in thankfulness to my Heavenly Father for his many mercies to me during the years that have intervened, and a fresh instance of his watchfulness and loving kindness is that I have had nearly 12 months rough camp life and instead of being laid up with and constitution ruined I am stronger; I have been spared and not cut off as some have been and greatest of all, though surrounded by temptations, one or two especially strong I have been enabled, though sometimes almost yielding, to resist. Will you my dear parents join with me in thanking our Father for his goodness.

On my return to Q'Town I spent a few days there and then came out to this place. I should have preferred a sit. in Q'Town but as none was offering I took this. But I must leave all this to Jame's letter.

Kind regards to all friends. Kisses to children heaps of love yourselves from your affect son

C. E. Nelson

1878 October, Tylden

Recd 30 Nov ansd 10 Decr

Tylden
Octr 26th 1878

My dear James,

I daresay you will be glad to hear how I am getting on & what I propose doing in the future. During the twelve months I have been out of business I have been able to decide what I should like to go in for. It is either a good position as managing salesman for some wholesale house or as manager with a store in an ironmongery business.

On the disbanding of our corps I might have got an appointment in the colonial commissariat, the pay would have been good but as I did not see any prospect beyond it I did not trouble about it.

While in King Wms Tn I made enquiries there for a sit. but as most of the firms there go in for liquor I of course could not go with them. By the bye I again met Scillen; he is with Whitcher Dyer & Dyer; I think he is a kind of storeman; he was on his way to Dohne station to see after forwarding goods from there by wagon up country.

I called on Mr. and Mrs. Weir. Had I been thoroughly up in the retail ironmongery he could have given me a good position. He recommended me to get into a good retail ironmongery or Kaffir traders shop, in order to learn the retail of the one or the other. I think his advice was good. I now see that if a person is to get on he must understand some trade thoroughly in a way that cannot be learnt in the wholesale. I am very glad George is learning the retail ironmongery.

Mr Bentley of this place offered me a sit. 7£ per month with board & lodging. General retail business. As I could not immediately procure a sit. in Q Town I accepted it. Mr John Hellier (Peacock Bros. & Co.) would be very glad to have had me and would let me know if he had a vacancy or heard of anything. Tylden is about 24 miles from Q Town on the King road, so I have been close enough to hear if anything turns up. Business hours are very long 6 till 7.30, Monday morning until Saturday night. Chapel here but service very seldom, no Sunday School, IOGT lodge⁶¹ once a week which makes a break, and gives something interesting. Baas wants one to be too much of a machine; though I have shown him that I know a little & have good ways of doing things so he leaves me now more to myself. Of course weighing out ½ lb of sugar etc etc does not suit me.

We are kept pretty busy all day. Some trade done with Kaffirs though most of it in the Kaffir shop next door owned by Mr. Bentley. He is also Post & Poundmaster.

When with Howse Edkins Co. Q' Town, I had some business transactions with J.G. Bremner & Co, then lately opened in ironmongery, he seems to have been struck with the knowledge I had of ironmongery and with my thorough straight forwardness. He was with us in our first two months campaign. Though having the ironmongery business he has still a share in his father's saddlery business, principally with the selling.

He has been trying to look after both, leaving a youngster in the shop while down at the saddler's shop. Of course he has found that this will not do and though the business pays, he does not do as much as he might. I am going to him, I shall have pretty well the management of the business, bookkeeping, ordering, selling etc. Had I wished it I daresay he would have given me a percentage from the first, but I thought it better to take a salary until I see how it goes. I think I shall get on well with Bremner; he is a very nice fellow and thoroughly upright in his doings. Business is very dull now, but I trust by paying attention to it I shall be able to do pretty well, get a good name and of course when the railway is opened to Q' Town we shall be able to have a good business.

This is just about the kind of thing I have been waiting for. Unfortunately Harding has opened in Q' Town since Bremner, has larger premises and a better stock. The store

⁶¹ The Order of the Good Templars.

he occupies he rents from Bremner, rather bad policy I think on B's part to let the better of the two premises.

I am going in thoroughly for this business and trust that it will be a good start for me. I am pretty well known in Q' Town and I think those with whom I have had any doings have faith in me.

My friends there are glad that I am going back to Q' Town, refer to those with whom I have been in contact in the Young Mens Assocⁿ and IOGT. I have not given father my particulars of my plans leaving it for you to send him this letter.

Letters from home about their movements all laying in some post office so I know nothing as to their plans or John's⁶² situation.

Of course Emmy is now Mrs Webber. She writes in good spirits & seems very happy. Excuse haste, this is written at odd times.

Your affect^e brother

C.E. Nelson

P.S Salary at first £12-10-

Your letter of May & Augst duly to hand will answer as soon as possible.

⁶² His brother, John Nelson (1861-1952), never returned to South Africa.

1879 January, Queenstown

Recd 1 Mch Ansd 12th

Queenstown
Jany, 21st 1879.

My Dear Parents,

It is a long time since I wrote to you, I plead as an excuse my being somewhat unsettled, moving from Tylden, in making arrangements for boarding, I do not like writing to my parents when I feel so unsettled.

I have letters from you of 31st July 78 not yet answered, it was sent through Emmy but I did not get it until November, it was laying in the King Post office for a long time. Let me first go through those letters and see what there is in them calling for remark.

"Emmy's engagement" is now consummated in marriage. You of course have heard from her and from Grandmother that I paid her a visit both before & after the marriage. I was very glad to have done so. In my last visit I was able to see dear Emmy in her own home; she was as happy as I could wish, she has a nice comfortable home Willie is nice good fellow very fond of her. I went one afternoon with her over to the shop to see him about something, directly he saw her his eyes sparkled, unknown to himself I suppose, it showed me how he loves her. I hope that when I get married I shall have as happy & comfortable a home. At present I am free, I have found no one to suit me. There was a young lady in Grahamstown that I thought would have suited me well, but some 15 months ago, she broke a blood vessel, she has been ill ever since and is now gradually fading away. I have been trying to smother or kill the love for her I thought I had partially succeeded but on looking at her photo the other day, the old love came back like a flood I could hardly keep the tears from my eyes; it was hard for me to have to give up all idea of ever making her my wife; I am glad to say she is happy in her Saviour and it is a source of pleasure to me to know that I helped her to find Him.

"Rough life" Yes it was rough and I liked it while it lasted but am glad to get back to town again to get amongst my books and tools etc again. I am making myself as comfortable and contented as it is possible for a bachelor to be. One thing I have learnt while at the front that is that it is possible to do without "my things" though it is much more comfortable with them.

I am glad that John has a situation. I hope he will get on and like it. I trust too that he will be preserved in the midst of so many temptations and that they will be the means of strengthening his character and giving him a good firm spotless character. I pray that it may be so. I am glad that he will be near enough to consult dear James in any difficulties.

It grieves me much to hear of your difficulties in money matters. I often think, think, think what can I do for them? It is so little that I can do. I hope the business in which I am now engaged will prove profitable and that I may then be able to take one of the others or in some way do more for my dear parents than I have yet done.

I have received through Grandmother the last photo of my dear mother I like it very much I think it is the best she has had taken, but there is in it the look of weariness and pain showing how much my darling mother has been through. Oh that I might come home and see her and my dear father again and be a comfort to them! But it cannot be. Father alludes to a picnic at Denbury which was a very unhappy one to me. I did not think it was so fresh in Father's memory; it will never fade from mine, there were months of terrible pain & suffering to me, when satan our great arch enemy saw that he was soon to loose his great power over me and that I was to become one of Christ's own.

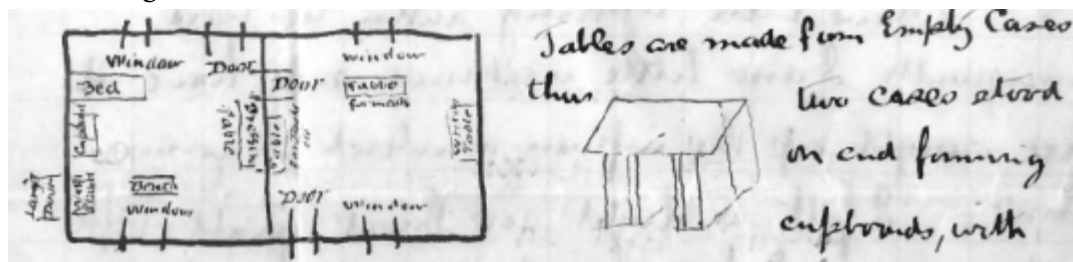
"Old brown Portmanteau which to Eng with him 17 years ago" it has seen good service then. The old carpet bag used at Xmas time went with me to front and was finally discharged May last.

I was very sorry to hear of our dear Jame's illness, I did hope by this time he is well & strong, grandmother sent me the letter to read about it. It must have been very hard for him after planning & working to get you all near him to be dissapointed, Now about my business

I have charge of C.G. Bremner & Co's ironmongery shop. Had the business been looked after from the first we might now be doing a good trade, it has been neglected, stock has been low prices have been high; I have just completed an indent for goods we require & have reduced the prices and hope that I shall by attention be able to work the business up. At present I am receiving £12-10.0 a month, should the business pay as I hope it will I shall of course expect a share in it. I do hope and pray that it may for I am anxious to get on, partly for myself, partly that I may help my parents.

Business at present is fearfully dull, it does not pay.

The first month and a half that is since 1st Dec I have been at a boarding house paying 7£ a month. I tried all over town but could not get two rooms, they are not to be had for love or money. So I have bought an iron house, it will be paid for the middle of next month, principally out of what I have saved while at the front. I shall get my dinner at a boarding house, that with washing will cost 2£ a month; breakfast and tea I shall get myself it will consist of bread cheese or butter & treacle, a little fruit in the fruit season or dates the latter are necessary to prevent the cheese which is a concentrated food from giving constipation, cheese has more nourishment than three times its weight in meat. My drink will be filtered water with sometimes a little oatmeal stirred in of course the latter makes it very refreshing and is nourishing. I hope to be able to save a good deal in this way. At present I am keeping a horse which is rather expensive, I cannot get a purchaser horses are plentiful but I hope soon to be able to sell him the proceeds will enable me to make my house comfortable, to line it with green baize to keep it cool. The house is wood frame covered with corrugated galvanized iron, made in sections so as to be easy of removal, has a pitch roof, size 12 x 22, to be divided into two rooms some day. It is put up just behind the shop. The following is a sketch of the ground plan. The floor is of raw brick smeared with cow dung carpeted with matting. Tables are made from Empty Cases thus two cases stood on end forming cupboards, with plank on top covered with a cloth. The house will be very comfortable when finished, being ceiled with calico and lined with green baize it will be cool.



It is very nice to be back in town again, to attend chapel, singing meetings, IOGT lodge etc, and to have one or two friends to talk to.

It is a long time since I heard from you. I am anxiously awaiting letters to know how James is and how you are all getting on.

A few of the young men of Q' Town have commenced a prayer meeting in the Wesleyan School room, we meet at 9.45 every Sunday morning and close about 10.30. We have very nice meetings it is quite a pleasure as will profit 15 attend them, especially so to me who have been so long away from such priveleges.

23rd I have been working rather too hard consequently I am little weakened and have at once caught up with the influenza which is going about. I felt a slight sore throat night before last and as I had been prescribing for a person with influenza I might have known what was coming but I let it alone, consequently yesterday it was worse & in the afternoon flew to my heart; I was busy carpentering then so I still neglected the medicine

which would have stopped it. In the evening I felt very unwell indeed but stuck to work until 10.30. I then went to the river had a bathe home again sharp & into bed, with a good dose camphor. This morning throat much better also cold in head but have a very bad headache. Hope to be all right tomorrow, if not shall stay in bed for a day and pay attention to myself.

Kind regards to all enquiring friends. Love & Kisses to the Children, love to James and heaps to yourselves

from your own loving son

C. E. Nelson

1879 April, Queenstown

Recd 7 May ansd 28 May

Queenstown
April 1st, 1879

My dear Parents

It seems a long time since I wrote to you I have been head & ears in work since last writing and though I might have found time to have written a few lines yet I have not felt inclined to write a "note" but it is likely if I had had a letter from you to answer I should have done so. I have now a great deal of work before me, but must leave it for the present so as to write to you.

I believe when I last wrote I was contemplating buying an iron house and going in for bachelor's quarters. This I have done and though there is a good deal yet to be done to make it "right" such as lining it, putting up shelves, yet I am very comfortable and prefer it very much to being in a boarding house. I get my own breakfast & tea going out to dinner.

I do not hear very frequently from Emily; of course there is no necessity for it now that I am settled down in town, when I was "wandering" she wrote very very often; in burning last years letters I found there were more from her than all the rest put together; I was quite sorry to destroy what had been such a source of pleasure and comfort to me, but if one keeps all interesting letters there would soon be no place for them.

George is getting on fairly in Grahamstown though he is not at all satisfied with the way his employers are treating him; yet there is no remedy, situations are not plentiful and business is so over done and there is so much competition that unless a person has a large capital and can import direct from the manufacturers there seems no chance of opening for oneself.

The war⁶³. I have sent you from time to time papers giving an account of it. I was almost afraid you would be thinking that I had started off again, I hope no such fears entered into your heads rather shall I say hearts. I could have had a commission in the Natal Native Contingent, but decided, principally on two reasons, not to go; one was I thought I had had quite enough of a roving life, the other was that I knew it would be a source of great anxiety to my beloved father & mother.

This war is something fearful, it seems as if the Zulus were innumerable and have made up their minds not to be beaten; every day we expect news, today's telegram reports 70 more of our men killed. These Zulus are so different to any other of the native tribes; they are trained for hand to hand conflict, are provided with only the short stabbing assegai, to return to their king without this assegai is certain death; to return at all unless victorious is death, so that they fight to the death preferring to fall before the enemy than to be defeated. I think it will cost a great many more lives before they are fairly beaten; for years they have been the ruling tribe, none have been able to stand against them. It is very much to be feared that other tribes will now rise against the English so that there is no knowing where it will end.

I am anxiously waiting to hear how poor James is getting on. There is hardly a day passes but what I think of him. I do hope pray that he may soon regain his wonted health and strength.

How is John getting on? Does he like business? Would he prefer a trade? Tradesmen & Mechanics are I think after all the best off here. They seem always able to get work & good pay. I sometimes wish I had learnt a trade.

The older I get the more difficult life seems to be. Hopes one by one seem to die, prospects seem to fade into thin air, everything seems vanity and vexation of spirit; temptations seem to increase, the difficulties of living an upright life seem to grow

⁶³ Zulu War of 1879

greater & greater, not to mention the still greater difficulties of living a life of faith in the Son of God, of keeping close to Jesus amid the cares & troubles and anxieties that are so apt to turn one on oneside. What with temptations from the evil one, from the world, from one's own heart, temptations, to carelessness, to thoughtlessness, temptations to believe in nothing, to believe everything a myth, temptations to believe in new doctrines & theories to the understanding of faith in an all-wise all-powerful, all-loving God.

My health is very good. Friends I have few, keeping myself pretty much to myself. The other sex do not trouble me much, not having found one who comes up to my standard of what my wife ought to be, the standard being my own dear mother.

In my last I wrote very cheerfully of my business prospects. But these have gone. The business was very small, goods were marked high and though I did my best to push the business by reducing prices and paying attention it did not improve as I had hoped. In March the stock was all moved to the saddler's shop belonging to the same firm and of course I was not required. I think had they kept the ironmongery on for a few months I might have made it pay better, especially as I had ordered some saleable goods from England. There was also a split in the firm which hastened the closing of the one business.

In February the Yeomanry left town & with them the officer who was in charge of the Commissariat here. Thinking this would be a good thing for me and be something to fall back in case of my not staying with Bremner (which I then thought likely) I applied for the appointment and got it. By employing a lad to assist me and working late at night I was able to do both the Comst and the business. When I left Bremner I of course had my whole time to the Comⁿ. There has been a good deal of work in it but I think I shall have a little time after this week to get my rooms finished.

During the first month my pay was 7/6 a day. I gave such satisfaction to C.A. Nesbitt the head of the Dept. by my promptness and carefulness that my pay was raised to 10/-. I like the work very well. I am in sole charge here and of course have a certain amount of independence not to be had when in business under another. There is a good deal of responsibility but this I am quite equal to. I have to supply several stations with rations, Barkley, Kraai River, Aliwal & Palmietfontein. Some of the supplies I have to obtain from King, others I purchase here. Wagons passing here from King to other stations have to be rationed. Of course I do not have to issue in small quantities as I did when in camp as I have a contractor for provisions and have simply to give an order. I send away large quantities of grain. During February nearly two hundred thousand pounds of grain were sent away from here, besides perishable rations.

I saw Cousin Tom⁶⁴ on his way to the front. He was here but a short time and was very busy. I saw him several times but mostly on business with him as "Client", so I could not have a chat with him as "Cousin". He is looking much older & more careworn than when I saw him last.

You must excuse this bad writing, I have so much writing to do now that I cannot spare time to write carefully to you. When writing on business my writing is much better and bolder than it used to be.

We have had splendid rains for the last fortnight. The drought was broken up by a hail storm the like of which I have never seen before, some of the stones weighed six to the pound; they went right through tin roofs and smashed any number of windows, I came off rather fortunate having only six holes in my roof and three whole panes left in my two front windows. The curtain in front of my window was cut through with the hail.

Last Wednesday was the Anniversary picnic of the Sunday School, fortunately we had fine weather. I was able to be with the children nearly the whole day, they all seemed to enjoy themselves very much. It was strange to me to be at an anniversary and not have the management of it.

The services on the Sunday were very good. Mr Philip preached morning and evening; in the afternoon there was a service of song, the songs were good as also the addresses by Mr Philip & Mr J.B. Helner.

⁶⁴ Thomas Edward MINTO 1838-1901, son of Mary Ann NELSON.

Cousin Jessie Thompson⁶⁵ & I occasionally write to each other. They are all living on the farm again. Cousin Ellen⁶⁶ has been down to spend some time with them. I do not know whether she has yet returned home, as soon as she does I hope to pay her a visit. I shall be glad to see her and I am sure she will be to see me. I do not forget what she was to us children while father was in England and also while Father was ill.

I have not heard from Grandmother for some time past. I trust she is quite well. I expect she has been so busy with the bazaar that she has not had time to write to me. I always enjoy her letters, she generally has some good advice for me.

I propose sending for my harmonium. I shall be glad to have it up here I have been so long without an instrument that I expect I have quite gone back in what little I know of music. I wish there were a good Solfa class here.

Geo Tudhope's wife⁶⁷ is staying in town for a short time. She seemed a very nice person. The two elder children are very interesting. When am I to see my own brothers & sisters again?

Kind regards to all friends. Kisses to the Children and best love to yourselves
From your loving & affect son
C. E. Nelson

⁶⁵ Daughter of Edward THOMPSON and Louisa Rachel NELSON.

⁶⁶ Ellen WRIGHT, niece of Jessie.

⁶⁷ Sarah MASKELL, wife of George Nutter TUDHOPE (1848-1905), son of Francis TUDHOPE and Margaret NUTTER. Margaret is sister to Emily NUTTER.

1879 April, Queenstown

Recd 21 May thro Mrs Lock Ansd 28 May

Queenstown
April 13th, 1879

My dear parents

Tho' I wrote to you last week I find I omitted replying to letters of yours received in February & dated Dec.

Thanks for particulars of John⁶⁸ I am glad he is liking London better & that he is going in for French.

Mother wishes for a good Photo of myself. Question can I get a good one, the last certainly looks old but then I am feeling, well not so young as I did some time ago. My ideas about many things are undergoing changes. The ambition that I once had is gone. Place, power & name are nothing to me now, - but then I must not begin to write an essay on this. But about the photo, I have several times thought of having my photo taken, but have thought of the money, but as my dear mother want's one I suppose I must have it taken.

The photo of George⁶⁹ is very good.

I quite endorse fathers opinion that I am fond of children & the hope that someday I may have some of my own. At times I seem quite content with my present state, with my comfortable rooms etc, at others, notably when I have been seeing children, an earnest longing comes over me to have some of my own.

I should like you to come and have a look at my den. Everything is in nice order and a place for itself; for instance in the lower part of one cupboard are boots & blacking & brushes, upper part knife board & brick, rags & oil for cleaning rifle, rag for whipping outside of lamp, stick & old handkerchief for cleaning chimney, tin of whitening with rags for cleaning windows and looking glass & so on ad infinitum.

Last Friday being Good Friday I paid Cousin Ellen a visit. I got up just before daylight, fed and watered my horse, then dressed and washed, of course I did not go for a bathe at the time in the morning though if I had had a bathroom close at hand I should have been glad of a sponge. I started at 6.45 fine clear morning, wind very cold, so cold that as the sun rose over the mountains I was glad to turn my face to the light and warmth, though I had strong gloves on my hands were bitterly cold. My road lay in the valley between high hills, beautifully wooded in many places with thorn trees. The hills were all lovely green after the fine rains that had fallen; the fine fresh air put me in good spirits so that I commenced to whistle but I found this would not do as my horse took it for a signal to drop into a walk: so I changed to singing. Soon I stopped that & commenced to think, and it was not long before my thoughts flew to old England and I need not say that James occupied a considerable part of them. I thought of himself when he was here, how much there was in him that I admired & respected & honoured, how different I was to him, how much better & higher he than myself; then I tried to account for this affliction, tried to see sound reason for it but it was no use I could simply leave it with the knowledge that all was ordered by our Heavenly Father.

In due time I reached the farm after having gone some little distance out of my way through not having taken the turning that I should have done. I was only finding the road by guess work. Cousin Ellen was glad very glad to see me, and as she heard Louie Wright⁷⁰ (who is staying with her) mention my name as she opened their door, Ellen exclaimed is that Edward at last.

Of course we had lots to talk about first of course father & mother & brothers & sisters at home. Then of old times when I was but a child. Then there were the 4 children

⁶⁸ John Nelson, 1861-1952, a younger brother.

⁶⁹ George Nelson, 1859-1943, a younger brother.

⁷⁰ Most likely Louisa Wright, Ellen's cousin.

to see who are nice little things though not so healthy looking as I should have liked. Then I went into the other room and Mr Taylor who is laid up with a sort of quinsy.
..... *page missing*...

and so the morning past.

Cousin is not as comfortable as I should liked to have seen her, they have only three rooms; have talked about building. I do not know what position he holds on the farm, whether in partnership with Mr M^cCoombe or not. Ellen though looking somewhat old & careworn is cheerful & happy, & is much liked by Mr M^cC's mother & sister.

After dinner Louie & I had a long walk round the lands & through the garden. There I stood under a tree and gather figs and remembered father's story of his babyhood laying under the tree (he was unable to walk at that age) eating figs and of course I laughed to myself.

After the children were put to bed we had a little time of chatting and about nine o'clock I went over to Mr M^cCoombs to bed. Had a good night's rest. Up at 5.45 off at 6.30. The ride in was splendid, the sun had not yet risen over the mountains and it was fine to see the tops of the hills just tinged with the rising sun, with here and there and long streak of light shining between the hills. I reached town at 8.30 & was glad to find that during my absence nothing had turned up requiring immediate attention. Part of Saturday was spent in mending and cleaning some clothes & repairing saddle bag etc. I sometimes used to wonder what the women folk used to find to do, But now I know. I find lots to do even in my small place. Books to dust, carpet to sweep, mats to shake, boots to clean, windows to wash, clothes to mend etc etc.

Cousin Jessie & Aggy Wright⁷¹ are expected out to see Cousin Ellen shortly. I shall I hope be able to pay them another visit then.

With heaps of love

From your affect & loving son

Charles E. Nelson

⁷¹ Jessie THOMPSON and Agnes WRIGHT, daughter and granddaughter of Louisa Rachel NELSON.

1879 June, Queenstown

Recd 14 July Ansd 16th thro Emily letter enclosed to her. He left for Aliwal N about 14th

Queenstown
June 14th 1879

My dear Parents

I have letters from 10 March rec^d 18 May through Emmy to answer.

You still keep the old name of Edward, there are one or two of my friends who do also, Tom Hay and Uncle John it takes time when I hear the name, it is also very pleasant to be called Charles. It is Mr from one weeks end to the other, occasionally Charles, which I like much.

I am glad indeed to hear that John is going on well. Thank him for his advice about eating. I do not stint myself and I find my simple fare agrees with me remarkably well. I have been reading some of Dr Nicholls' works and agree with him. From John's remarks I should be inclined to think he had been reading the same. He is right about coffee & tea being unnecessary and enating. I had a cup of tea two days this week after dinner but it was as medicine. I was not feeling exactly the thing through there being no more rain water I think. The illustration of the gate keeper at the bottom of the stomach being put to sleep by alcohol is very good and true, and the same thing may be said about alcohol keeping out the cold, it does no such thing but merely puts the nerves to sleep and so prevents one from feeling cold. It reminds me of what was tried with horses in London some years ago; it was found that by cutting a nerve that though their feet were tender they did not go lame, therefore cut the nerve and so prevent lameness, this was tried but it failed, for the horse being now deprived of feeling in his foot soon knock up the tissue. I am glad John is going in for French, & hope he will be able to master it.

Thanks for particulars of dear James; I do hope & pray that he may soon be quite restored. Poor mother must have faced a heavy time of it.

George is very much like James in his way of thinking and expressing himself, so much so that I on one occasion wrote to him mentioning the name of persons who was a great friend of James but who was quite unknown to George. And the other day I addressed him as J.L.N.

Yes Thomas E. Minto⁷² is married at last, but had to leave home almost immediately. I knew Katie Black a little, I think she was a very nice person. She was a great friend of dear Grandmother's.

I agree with Mother on saying that education ought to be more of the sort that requires for business. I had to teach myself bookkeeping, though thanks to the insight given me by my father during the holidays at home I did not find it such a difficult matter. I am saving a little money now, and making some by doing jobs of carpentry. I have just finished one that will bring me 25/- for 5 days work spare time and evenings, I have a nice lot of tools. Good. If you wish me to send some money you have only to say so. I have not sent any lately for the following reason. I think that money will be very useful to me when the Commissariat is done with, in the way of doing something for myself, for I feel that if I am to be of real use to you it is not by sending home a little at a time but by being able to do something better than even a salary.

I was at work on my room the other day when an old gentleman with helmet looked in at the window. Oh, thought I, here is some burgher captain for rations. He knocked at the door and asked if my name was Nelson "Yes it is" I replied "And what is your Christian name" said he. I looked at him for a minute and then exclaimed "It is never Uncle Edward surely". "Yes it is" he replied. He was very glad to see me, & asked after you all. He was on his way to Cradock, then back to the Transvaal, his sons are doing

⁷² Thomas Edward MINTO, ?-1901, his cousin. Colonel Minto is referenced leading the Cape Mounted Rifles against Morosi of Basutoland.

well up there but whether he has any direct interest in their farms I do not know, he was silent on that point.

You will wonder perhaps how I knew him so quickly seeing I had no idea that he was in town or likely to be. Well I suppose his having but one eye may have had something to do with it, but the principal thing was a peculiar expression about his mouth that reminded me of father.

Mr Hockly passed up on a tour of inspection of the various Commissariat offices & stores. He enquired very kindly after you and offered to do anything that he could for my advancement.

He called again last week on his return and in his report to Mr. Nesbitt would recommend that George be appointed Comsy at Aliwal and that I have my headquarters there and visit the various stores up country at intervals. He said they had difficulty in getting good men up country and he could recommend me. I have not heard anything further yet but hope to do so shortly. Of course I shall be sorry to leave my comfortable house but it will not do to consider that. Should I go I shall pack everything up so that in case of a permanent move I shall have no trouble. My house can easily be taken down, being made in sections and taken on a wagon. When am I to get settled?

June 13th. Received orders this morning to proceed to Aliwal. Hope that I shall get a billet there for George also.

Must close with love to the children and to yourselves

from your affect son

C. E. Nelson

1879 June, Aliwal North

Recvd Via Emmy 9 Augt ansd Via Emmy 13 Augt

Aliwal North
29th June, 1879

My dear Parents

My last letter to you was from Queenstown, written just before leaving there.

I had a pleasant ride up. It was very cold, ground white with frost and all the little pools of water covered with ice $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. It was so cold that hands & feet were quite numbed, consequently after arriving here I was quite lame with chilblains but thanks to cold bath every morning they are all right again.

I passed over some fine ranges of mountains coming up, mountains seemed all round and to be without end. There were a good many dead cattle in the road, but they were being cleared off by those useful scavengers the aasvogel or carrion eagle. It was fine to see these large birds sailing around the mountains, simply opening their wings, no wind and sailing in all directions without any apparent effort on their part, now & then giving a gentle stroke with their huge wings.

On my way up I met part of the Grahamstown Yeomanry⁷³ returning from the mountain that has hitherto resisted all our efforts to take. These fellows seemed right glad at the prospect of getting back, they seemed thoroughly sick of it. I fancy the Yeomanry will not be called out again or if they are that they will resist the call and risk being imprisoned rather than go.

I find Aliwal a much larger place than I had expected and there seems to be a good business done there. The town is nicely situated, close to the Orange River which is a fine broad stream and when full must be really grand. There are a good many trees here which add to the beauty of the place. Two or three miles off are the famous hot mineral springs. The soil all round is of a peculiar spongy substance. It seems very strange to see the water bubbling up from a great depth, and throwing up volumes of steam. I have had one bath in the coolest of the two but did not enjoy it very much, there seems to be something supernatural about it. One is almost inclined to think there is a chance of going down and never coming up again; nor is the bath refreshing it leaves one languid and I might almost say depressed.

From these springs there is led a fine furrow of water which does capitally for watering the gardens and for washing purposes. The water has a peculiar mineral taste.

During the last stage of my journey I had the pleasure of George Van Plaster company, I remember he used to make kites for me when I was a boy. He was in Mrs Greens bakery. He remembers father well, remembers being in his class in Sunday School. He wished me to be sure & give his very kind regards to you. I have met several people here who knew you both in years gone by and who have enquired kindly after you, among them Mr & Mrs John Orsmond he used to live in Market Square, was a waggon maker: Mr Geo Orsmond, Mrs Impey who was I think a niece of a Mr Stretch remembers mother. I have also been to visit at their request Mrs Hamlin & Mrs G. Orsmond both Emily's sisters in law who have been very kind to me. Then there are several friends here whom I knew in Grahamstown so that it is not exactly coming among strangers. They are all quite pressing with their invitations to call & see them; but I do not feel inclined to go out much, I am become quite the old bachelor, and do not seem much inclined for company.

I was very sorry to leave Q'Town. I packed up everything, part of my "traps" will be left in my house there until further orders, part will be sent up here to me. It seemed like leaving home again. I had made several friends there and was very comfortable. Yet it was not altogether like leaving England or Grahamstown. The former was my first great parting latter my second and very sad were these partings but I seem now to have got more used to parting and the ties formed in after life are not so strong as those formed

⁷³ Mount Morosi in Basutoland.

when younger or rather perhaps one is more careful about forming ties and therefore there are not so many to break. I suppose some day I shall form one stronger than any I have got made and then if a parting comes it will indeed be hard. I think I shall be able to make myself very comfortable here. I have two decent rooms besides an outside store.

You know while in Q'town I used to get but one meal away, now I am in entirely for bachelor's meals. There is a small store here and I am allowed fuel and rations so I shall make the best of it. I make myself porridge for breakfast, the first attempt the ingredients were in right proportion and properly cooked but I forgot to add salt while cooking, subsequent cookings have been alright; porridge with bread & butter and perhaps a little cheese & dates forms a very good breakfast. For dinner I have bread & cheese and rice & stewed peaches or apricots. Tea as in Q'town, bread & butter & dates. I find I do very well on this diet, am well & healthy. For the first week I stayed at a private house but I missed the fruit and was not near so well on meat etc., so much so that I was obliged to buy dates and eat after breakfast.

I had a letter from Cousin Jessie, she enquired very kindly after you and especial after James. I am very sorry to hear through Emmy that he does not seem to get permanently better.

George has gone to the Transvaal with Uncle Edward. I quite approve of the move I think are good openings up there for steady young men and I trust he will get on there.

I expect Grandma will be quite lonely without him. I correspond pretty regularly with her.

Mr Nesbitt was here yesterday. We had only a short time together but got through lots of work. Several things that I had done on my own responsibility he quite approved of. I asked him about other things whether I should or should not do them. His reply. "Do whatever you think best, I have perfect confidence in you." This of course is very encouraging. He does not know that there will be any permanent commissariat office here but if there should be he will not forget me.

I leave in a day or two for a tour of inspection to the Mountain & the various camps between there and this place, I suppose I shall be away a week or ten days. I shall be able to see more of the country than I have yet seen and if I have fine weather hope to enjoy the trip.

I had my photo taken on the day I left Queenstown so shall send you one as soon as I receive them.

The two Sundays that I have been here I went to the Methodist Chapel. The sermons by Revd Watson were good. The singing was not first rate. Next Sunday I propose going to hear the Episcopalian Minister.

There is a Good Templar's lodge here so I hope to work with them against the evil of intemperance, which seems to be a greater evil each time I think of it.

I must close now with kind regards to all friends not forgetting Mr Le Louif kisses to the children and love to yourselves from your affect & loving son

C. E. Nelson

1879 July, Thomas Shop

Recd Sept 13 and 23 Sept

Thomas Shop Camp,
BASUTOLAND.
July 27th, 1879

My dear Parents

In my last letter to you I stated that I was on the eve of proceeding to this place. I came here, saw into affairs a bit, returned to Aliwal for three days and then back here again. I have had a great deal of work & responsibility. I have four camps here to look after. The Officers are not up to their work, books and a/cs all in confusion, one officer reported drunk, had to dismiss him, another is often on the "booze", another is sick in Hospital. Have all the a/cs for the last three months to go into and try and work them up into something like form; at the same time there is my charge at Aliwal to be kept square. So you see I have my hands pretty full. I wish we could get Officers that could be depended on. Aliwal is two days from Palmietfontein thence to here is 5 hours on to the mountain is another five or six hours. We always speak of distance here by "hours" on horse back, about 6 miles to the hour. I might write an a/c of my rides, pointing out the features of the country, the cold, the snow, the grand mountains etc. but am very tired having been issuing rations all day and therefore not in a practical mood. So I will at once proceed to answer your letter of 7th May which I received on my return to Aliwal 17th inst.

"Writing" as a rule I write larger and rather more slowly than when writing to you, my thoughts come so rapidly that I am obliged to write very fast to keep up, and I do not write large for fear of using too much paper & so increasing the postage.

"Newspaper" The last papers I sent were addressed on the paper so I trust you got them all right.

In thinking over the difficulties of this life the words of the hymn "I'm a pilgrim & a stranger" often rear to my mind that hymn is a great favourite of mine. I learnt it on the voyage out as also many others from the little red hymn book.

It is a blessing to know that our Jesus was in all points tempted as we are and is therefore able to succour us when tempted. In all the changes of this life we know that there is a loving Father watching over us and guiding us by a way we know not.

Father I know that all my life
Is futued out for me
And the changes that will surely come
I do not fear to see
But I ask Thee for a present mind
Intent in pleasing thee.

This is a beautiful hymn and contains some really beautiful and cheering thoughts, I suppose you have a copy.

"George" I have often tried to get him to write freely to me of his thoughts and feelings but have never been able to draw him out. I think I expressed my opinion of his going to the Transvaal in my last letter.

When I write that ambition for place & power had gone from me, I did not mean that I had lost all desire to do good, to be of some use in the world, but that I had lost the wish to be at the top of the tree, that I had no sympathy with the grasping pushing tendencies of the present age, that climbing up by means of some fallen brother, I had rather go on and get but a little way up helping some other up with me, than climb up and leave him behind. You remember I used to recite Milton one part is where Satan says "Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven". James once remarked that that was almost my feeling, and he was not far wrong; but now I say

I would not have the restless will
That hurries to & fro

Seeking for some great thing to do
Or secret thing to know
I would but treated like a child
And guided where to go.
And be content to fill a little space
If Thou be glorified.

I would wish to leave some footprints on the sands of time. Footprints that some forlorn brother, seeing may take heart again.

It is sometimes a difficulty in knowing the best way to let one's light shine before men. I sometimes think I ought to speak more, ought to rebuke what I see wrong but I am afraid it would perhaps produce more harm than good. Better I think to take the world literally and just let my light shine. I think I may say without egotism that all with whom I come in contact in my duty find me kind and obliging and at the same time just; whereas many of commst Officers in doing their duty, by being too particular and disobliging make themselves disliked. I do not think that there is anyone that I can call my enemy.

I have posted the letter to Aunt Thompson, also the one to Grandmother. I will send your message to Emily.

I am glad that you are both better for your trip to the seaside. I think I could enjoy a dip in the sea. I get a bath as often as I can manage it while knocking about.

I had the pleasure the other day of meeting Revds Giddy & Scott both of whom knew Mother. I am longing to have another letter from my dear mother. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

I am very glad to hear that John is about to join Mr Jones church. I knew both of the Jones'. I think it is Artie who was studying for the ministry, we called on them just before leaving England.

What a great comfort it is that as the children grow up they one by one give themselves to Christ. Is not this in answer to your many prayers, and a reward for your careful training; many and many a time do I look back with pleasure and thankfulness at the way you both so carefully trained me. Especially when I feel how certain temptations would have led me aside were it not that I was so well taught what was right & wrong and were it not that I had Christ to keep me in the way that is strait. Not that I mean to say I do not sin, far from it, but what I specially refer to is open and flagrant sin, such as my fellow Christian to point at, but which alas I see so often being openly indulged in.

Give my kind regards to Mr Le Louef and assure him that I have not yet forgotten him or his work nor am ever likely to. I shall be glad to meet the "brother" that is coming out though I am afraid he will not find me.

I enclose a photo for my dear mother. I hope she will like it. I think it is pretty good, though I do not always look as stern.

"Diet" I continue as far as possible my self-imposed diet. Of course in camp I have not time to see to my meals and have therefore just to eat what I can get, and generally meat forms a large percentage, I go in as much as possible for rice, but am always glad when I can get some dates and make a meal of them and biscuit, it soon puts me all right again.

When travelling I always carry two or three biscuits and a lump of dates with me, and it is surprising how sustaining this diet is. I perhaps start off at 7.30 without anything to eat, off-saddle at 9.30 eat biscuit and dates and nothing then until 5 or 6 at night; and yet feel well and strong and not feel famished. Of course when night comes I feel really hungry but it is a different sort of hunger to what I feel when in the regular way dinner time comes. There is a certain amount of pleasure in the hunger.

Love to all the children. Excuse haste I want to be off to bed.

Your loving son
C. E. Nelson

1879 August, Palmietfontein

Ansd 29 Oct thru Emmy

Palmietfontein

16/8/79

My dear Parents

Just a few lines to tell you that I am still awfully busy and worried.

My most sincere congratulations to you on your attaining the dignity of Grand parents. I am pleased to hear that Emily & her son⁷⁴ are doing well.

How thankful I am to hear that dear James is so very much better, praise be to our Heavenly Father for his mercies. If James makes up his mind to return to the Colony do not let the cost trouble him. I will pay it all if necessary. Let me know as soon as you & Uncle John think it advisable for one of the others to come out.

Heaps of love to yourselves & all the children from your affect son
C. E. Nelson

My dear Parents, ^{Ansd Oct 29 thru Emmy}
Just a few lines
to tell you that I am still awfully
busy and worried. My most sincere
congratulations to you on your
attaining the dignity of Grand parents.
I am pleased to hear that Emily & her
son are doing well.
How thankful
I am to hear that dear James is
so very much better, praise be to
our Heavenly Father for his mercies.
If James makes up his mind to
return to the Colony do not let the
cost trouble him. I will pay it
all if necessary. Let me know as
soon as you & Uncle John think

⁷⁴ Francis King WEBBER (1879-1945).

1879 September, Thomas Shop Camp

Recd 7 Oct (in S.mas?) ansd 10 Dec thru Emmy

Thomas Shop Camp,
BASUTOLAND.
6th September, 1879.

My dear parents

Having been very busy all day I feel more inclined to turn in than to write you a letter but as I do not know what may turn up tomorrow I think I had better write now if it be only a short one in reply to yours of 16th July received 23 Ultimo. I think I have written pretty frequently lately better this I suppose than putting it off until you wonder what has become of me, sometimes I am so situated that I cannot well manage to write but whenever I have the opportunity I have much pleasure in writing to my parents and when I cannot write they are nevertheless often in my thoughts. I have just received a long letter from George he has not yet obtained a situation but hopes soon to do so. He writes in excellent spirits for which I am very glad. The Transvaal is a long way from here so that there is not much chance of our seeing each other for a long time, but I hope we shall become regular correspondents and so make up in some measure our not being able to see each other. The latest news from Emily is good. She and the baby are doing well. Grandmother is about to pay them a visit. Won't she be pleased to see her great-grand-child. I have been thinking a good deal of James lately and wondering what will be best to be done for him. I have written to Uncle John on the subject asking him if he thinks it advisable for James to return to the Colony and if so offering to meet his expenses in coming out. Of course at this distance I do not know what will be best; let me know what you decide upon and do not let the lack of funds stand in the way. I am sorry to hear that the children are giving you so much trouble. I wish I could be with you to assist you, but that is out of the question, but I do not forget you all at the mercy seat.

Mr. Hockley is Quartermaster at King W^m Town. He is of course senior to me though we have not much to do with each other. Mr. Nesbitt and I are together that is I take all my orders and instructions from him. My removal to Aliwal gave me 11/- per diem, I am still further promoted, or rather have more responsibility now that I have the charge over all the stations here in Basutoland, but as yet I have no increase of pay though I have hopes soon to have. I do not know that I should prefer plain work such as carpentry, to penwork as a regular thing it is very well as a recreation and is a change. I cannot give you my address here as I am always on the move but letters addressed to Aliwal North always find me. They are sent on to me if I am not there.

It is a very great pleasure to me to receive a letter though but a short one from my beloved mother. I do not agree with Mother in supposing that the children are more than we elder ones used to be. I expect mother notices it more.

Now for a little about myself. I have had lots of knocking about lately; though I came up here merely on a tour of inspection I found things so muddled that I have been obliged to stay here. Latterly too the meat contractor has failed to supply meat so that I have had the additional responsibility of buying slaughter stock. I have got things in better working order now, though not in time to prevent great complaints against our Department from Col. Brabant commanding the forces here reaching the Commandant General and the Colonial Secretary. I have been called upon for all sorts of reports & explanations of things that occurred before I was sent up. I am happy to say that no complaint can be made against me. I have dismissed several of the old hands and got others in their place who do not drink. Mr Nesbitt gave me carte blanche to do what I thought best, if he had hampered me at all I could not have got on. The Comdt General & Mr. Nesbitt will be up here next week. They might almost as well stay away now that everything is all right, had they come up while things were in a muddle I should have been glad as they would then have seen what difficulties I had to contend with and might have given me a rise in pay as well as position, however I shall have a good talk to them

and see what I can do. This is a grand old country. Sometimes the path lays on the top of the flat hills and as far as the eye can read you see mountains on top of mountains, you can also see that the rocky krantzies⁷⁵ are all of the same level looking as though at some time there was a large inland sea here⁷⁶, the flat tops of these hills being islands and then lower down is a small range of krantzies as though the sea had sank to that level and there remained for some time. In some places are huge boulders as large as a decent sized cottage, which have become detached from the mountains above. Sometimes the path runs along the side of the mountain so that from above is the top of the mountain and almost perpendicularly far below flows the Orange River looking beautiful and clear with its banks lined with willow trees. At times we go through great "poorts" or openings in the hills and over beautifully clear streams from the bottom of which the pebbles shine brightly. I do not know what I should do if I could not admire nature, for here one has no one to talk to, but from nature I can look to nature's God and feel that grand and majestic and beautiful as it all is my Father made them all. The rocks and the mountains talk to me, and the rivers as they pass along with a murmuring sound sing of peace and quiet and happiness, making me long for the time when war shall cease and men shall dwell together as one great family, and for the time when free from sin I shall be able to contemplate with more pleasure the works of the great architect. Good night I am tired.

Love to all from your ever affectionate son.

C. E. Nelson

⁷⁵ Cliff or precipice, from Dutch

⁷⁶ Charles is extraordinarily observant. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karoo_Supergroup

1879 October, Aliwal North

Recd 7 Nov Ansd 10 Dec thru Emmy

Aliwal North
4th October, 1879

My dear Parents

Your welcome letter of 9 August to hand. I am very busy but do not wish to put off answering it, so will do so hurriedly.

I give your message to George Van Plaster, he was pleased to receive it and thanks you very much for your wishes on his behalf.

George Orsmond is a son of Charles whom I remember well as market master of old Grahamstown. Walter & Eddie are two other sons both of whom I have seen.

John Orsmond brother to Charles is also living here. They all wish to be kindly remembered to you. Mrs John wished me to tell mother that she has 6 grandchildren. It is very nice to meet old friend who have known my parents and always speak with such respect for them.

Many thanks for the graphic account of the Band of Hope affair. I read the a/c in the paper you kindly sent.

I am in Aliwal for a few days for the purpose of closing the a/cs here after which I shall have to return to camp to stay there as long as the war lasts. I had much rather have remained in Aliwal where I can go to chapel and also have the pleasure of a little society, but my course seems plainly marked out for me. Perhaps I do not (as you say) push myself sufficiently forward to get full recompense for the work I have to do. I am more inclined to let my work speak and expect my services to give me better pay. But I find I carry this too far so have applied for an increase in pay and a commission. I expect I shall get 15/- per day shortly.

I have received a letter from James in which he states that he is coming out shortly via East London. I have written to him advising him to wire me as soon as he arrives and meanwhile to stay with Aunt Thompson. I propose having him up at the camps with me until he is quite well and strong. I shall try and get him a nice easy billet in the Com^t. I feel very sorry that he has had to give up studying, though I feel that it is all ordered by one wiser than we.

You may remember that some time ago I wrote about a certain young lady in G'Town who I thought would suit me for a partner. She was taken very ill about two years ago and has at last gone home to Heaven. She is happy now, but still I feel a sort of blank with knowing that she is no longer in this world. I have never seen any one I like so well, we did not correspond as she was too ill to write but I know she was very fond of me.

This war does not seem very much like coming to an end. I think it will not until we have marines or soldiers to take Morosi's stronghold⁷⁷. The Volunteers, Burghers and Yeomanry will not do it. I hear Emily's baby is very much like me. When the war is over I hope to pay a visit to her.

George could not get a situation in Transvaal but has one at Kimberly. Excuse haste and accept lots of love

From your affect son

C. E. Nelson

⁷⁷ Mount Moorosi, during Morosi War, March – November 1879. Morosi was a Baphuthi chief in Quthing area of Lesotho.

1879 November, Thomas Shop Camp

Recd 28 Dec Answd 15/1/80

Answd 15 Jany thro G'Ma

Address Barkley via Dordrecht

Thomas Shop Camp
Basutoland
Via Aliwal North
17th Nov 1879

My dear Father

I cannot describe the feeling with which I received the sad news of the death of my darling mother, though the grief I felt for myself was soon swallowed up in the thought of the dear ones at home and of the three out here. It seemed more than I could bear, but Uncle's⁷⁸ kind & sympathizing letter directed me to look above; this I was enabled to do and to know that it was a Father's hand that had struck the blow.

I am so thankful to know that you my dear father have had God's help in bearing this sad bereavement. It seems a dark and mysterious act, there seems no reason for it and we cannot feel "all is well", but we know it, for our God is a kind and loving Father.

"He himself hath done it", he who loves us best, he who loves us with an unchanging never dying love, he who has given himself for us, he who hath bought us with his own precious blood, Himself hath done it can it then be ought than full of wisdom, full of tenderest love, he holds the cup and we know he'll give us grace to drink it up. That you may indeed be sustained is my earnest prayer for you, that as day by day passes and you realize more and more the blank that is in your life, as you feel more deeply if not more keenly your great loss, you may find that your God is able to supply all your need out of his fulness.

And the little ones, God grant that they may be enabled to bear it, especially those who are older and will realize it more, and may he grant to that we may find a home for them.

Yes my dear mother is "dead" but that word carries no terror with it, she is not dead but sleepeth and God shall raise her up at the last day, even now she is happy and joyful, she is clothed upon with a spiritual body, a body that knows no aches, or pains no fear or sorrow. Let us then not sorrow as those who have no hope but let us look forward to the time when we too shall go and meet her to be forever with the Lord.

Dear Grandmother feels it very much but God who has been with her all through her life will be with her now in the hour of weakness and sorrow.

It is Grandmother's wish (and in it both Uncle & I unite) that you should all come out again to the Colony. Willie has kindly offered his assistance in this matter, and as I have told Uncle John I shall be glad to do all I can, so that I hope and trust a way may be opened for you.

I do not think it would be advisable for any to be left in England, John might do well there but I am afraid that without a fathers counsel he might be led astray. True our Heavenly Father can guide him as well there as here, but I think it would be better for him to be here.

The arrangement of all detail I must leave to yourself and Uncle John. Of course you would have to obtain the services of some trustworthy female to take charge of the children during the voyage.

You will be glad to hear that James is improving every day, his health is good and his spirits are getting brighter, we are hoping to get him a situation as second master in the school at Bedford or Grahamstown, meanwhile he is staying here just to knock about and have the full benefit of the fresh dry air.

⁷⁸ This is likely James C MINTO. His father was visiting with the MINTOs in Edinburgh at the time of Emily's accident.

I have written to Aunt Thompson giving her full particulars.

How thankful should we be that dear mother suffered no pain but that she passed peacefully away to her rest.

I am still in Government Employ and have just had my salary raised to 13/6 per day. I continue to give every satisfaction and have hopes that when the war is over I shall receive a permanent appointment in some town where I shall be able to do bookkeeping and agency as well as draw my pay.

Emily is well, also your little grandson.

Give kisses to the children for me I hope ere long to kiss them for myself and to be able in more ways than one to be an elder brother to them, and more than I have yet been

Your firstborn

In love and affection

C. E. Nelson



Figure 5: Emily Loxton NELSON, mother of Charles Edward, was killed in London October 1879. Photo dated September 1878.

1880 January, Barkly

Recd 20 Feby Ansd May 7

Barkly
via Dordrecht.
12th January, 1880.

My dear Father,

My last letter to you was dated at Camp Thomas Shop. At the end of November I was ordered to proceed to this place to take charge here.

The Commissariat will soon be closed here after which I anticipate my services will no longer be required when I shall have to look out for something else to do. I have no fear but that my Heavenly Father will provide for me, though of course I have been thinking a good deal as to what will be the best thing for me.

I had a letter a week or two ago from a firm in Aliwal with whom I had had some business transactions from the Commissariat. They had come to the conclusion from what they had seen of me that I was pushing & thoroughly upright and straightforward in my character and that I had something higher than the ordinary business morality. Their letter was to ask whether I would be inclined to go into business at Palmietfontein if as is expected a township be formed there. In reply I told them that I should be very pleased to do so, that there was no firm that I should so well like to be connected with. Here the matter rests at present until we know whether the township will be formed.

Should nothing come of this I may possibly go in for farming. It is a life that will suit me well. I have made up my mind not again to go as a clerk in any store. I must be my own master in future. It would never do for me to again be under a "baas".

My health just now is excellent. I have plenty of riding about. I have a comfortable room here, which is a great improvement on a tent. I get my own meals, consisting of bread, butter, cheese, milk, rice, & stewed apricots. Tea, coffee and meat I never in any consideration take. I find this diet agrees with me splendidly. I can do any amount of work and any amount of knocking about on it and never had better health. Bilioussness, headache, dyspepsia, & indigestion are unknown to me.

George seems well satisfied with his situation at Kimberley though he complains of the heat & want of rain and says that it is very unhealthy there. I trust he will get on.

James is almost all right again. He is very quiet and reserved, and sometimes seems very melancholy. He does not seem to care to visit friends. He has since I came here been staying with Mr & Mrs Samuel Dicks old Grahamstown friends. He has just arranged to stay with them a twelve month & to teach their three children for his board & lodging. Of course he may be able to get other pupils who would pay. They would have been glad to have paid him a salary but cannot afford it, last year having been a bad one & this season not promising much better. His health is good and the climate agrees with him, so I hope that after he has been with them some time he will be more disposed to go down to the Colony again.

I dare say you will remember Mr Dicks, he was a baker in Grahamstown. He went insolvent some years ago and so left G'Town and came up this way farming.

I have not heard from Grandmother or Uncle John for some time, so do not know exactly what they may have to propose for the children.

James & I have been talking the matter over and think the best plan will be for Alick to stay at School until you have decided where to live, Octavius to come out and live with Emmy, Ellen to go to school near Uncle Clemence⁷⁹ who might take her to live with him, the expense of her education to be borne by me. Marianne & Frankie to come out to Grandmother.

⁷⁹ I have not been able to establish who this is but presumably husband of Aunt Clemence mentioned earlier. Ellen went to Grahamstown to their grandmother with Marianne. Frankie (Francis) lived with his oldest sister Emily (Mrs Webber).

I had a nice long letter from John he writes very cheerfully. I should think he must be a fine fellow and must have been a comfort to you in your great trial.

I hope & trust that in answer to the many prayers that are sent up to the throne of Grace you are being sustained and can realize day by day as the loss is brought to you in many ways that it is a loving Father and not an angry God that has seen fit thus to deal with you.

God has been very good to me and has enabled me to bear up under it and to write consolingly to the members of the family here.

I wrote to Aunt Thompson and received a nice letter from her. As also to Jessie & Ellen.

I must try & write to John this first so will close with best love to yourself and the little ones.

Your affect. son
C. E. Nelson



Figure 6: Charles Edward NELSON, apparently in mourning dress. Probably 1890 following the death of his grandmother Emily NUTTER.

1880 February, Barkly

Recd 25 March Ansd May 7

Barkly.
18th February, 1880.

My dear father

I have received from you a parcel containing one of Spurgeons Sermons⁸⁰, The Christian, The Christians week & other pamphlets, part of which I have already read. I note you mark Canon Wilberforce's remarks in morality, I also see advertised a pamphlet on the same subject, a subject which I think may well be agitated, a subject in which I have frequently thought, and in which public opinion is the very reverse of the teachings of the bible. There is no doubt in my mind that people are wrong when they suppose and act on the supposition that on this point what is sinful for a female is not so for a man, and unfortunately doctors encourage this idea. I have read one of Dr Nicholl's works in which he goes into the subject and shows plainly that the public and that medical men in so far as they support the public are wrong. There is one stand point in particular from which I look at it viz that when a man gets married he expects his wife to be pure and surely she has as much right to expect the same from him. I wonder how many even in the so called respectable society are so. I venture to say very few up to the present time I am happy to say I have been able to keep with the few, but it has often been a terrible struggle to do so and had I not had the assistance of a power higher than myself I could not have resisted.

James has arranged to stay with Mr S Dicks on a farm near here, he is to teach the children. I am very happy to say that since he came up here he has improved wonderfully, I may say he is now quite well, and very different to what he was, he does not seem to care about visiting his old friends and at present he would not like to live near them, so I think it is best for him to stay where he is.

Thanks for the particulars about John, I am glad that he is getting on so nicely. I do not think it would be advisable for him to come out to the Colony, as affairs here are so unsettled and business seems overdone.

I have not hear from Grandmother or Uncle John for some time, so do not know what your plans for the future are. I wish I had a home of my own so that I might have one of the little ones to live with me.

I had a letter from Jessie Thompson last post; she enquires very kindly after you all. Aunt has not been very well lately, she has gone into King W^{ms} T. for a change. Jessie tells me that Loveday Nelson⁸¹ is engaged to a widower with eight children. She does not give his name.

George seems to be getting on well at Kimberly, I hope he writes more frequently to you than he does to me.

I cannot tell you how I sometimes long to see my little brothers & sisters, when I see other children especially. There is one little girl of Mrs Dicks who is just about Nelly's age. She used to be my pet when they lived in Grahamstown, and she still is, I sometimes sit and look at her and try to picture Nelly to myself.

I often wish my dear father that I could be with you now to assist and comfort you, but it must not be.

Emily was well when last she wrote though little Lily⁸² was still poorly.

You will no doubt see by the Grahamstown paper that there has been a most destructive fire in Grahamstown, several stores burnt down including Uncle John's. I hope he was fully insured.

⁸⁰ Charles Spurgeon, a well known preacher of the day. www.spurgeon.org

⁸¹ Loveday NELSON (1843-?), daughter of John Edward NELSON, who married Mr De Hart.

⁸² Sarah Elizabeth King WEBBER (1877-1880), daughter of Willie WEBBER and his first wife Sarah KING (1856-1877).

At the end of this month it is probable that my services will be no longer required in the Commissariat Department. I am thankful to say that I have given satisfaction during the twelve months I have been in the service. Mr. Nesbitt is anxious to retain my services but Mr. Sprigg, the Premier, telegraphed to him from Cape Town that all Commissariat officers were to be dismissed, but Mr. Nesbitt will see him on his return to King and try and get him to retain me & two or three others. I have not yet decided what I shall do. I have thought of two plans. One is to go farming, the other is the business mentioned in my last. I shall probably leave here next week for Aliwal where I shall be able to see the firm who have written about business and find what their terms will be etc. I propose going to Grahamstown & Bedford before I settle down, as I shall not again have an opportunity of doing so.

I have written this letter very hurriedly but hope you will have no difficulty in reading it.

Give all the little ones a kiss from me and accept love and sympathy
from your affect. son

C. E. Nelson



Figure 7: Charles Edward NELSON at about 60 years old. A masonic emblem is attached to the chain.

1880 February, Barkly

Recd thru (James?) 21 Apl Ansd May 7

Barkly
29th February, 1880.

My dear my Father,

As you may suppose my thoughts are much occupied with the plans and arrangements that you may be making as to your future residence and of the children.

The more I think of it the more difficult it seems to me to decide what plan will be for the best.

Of course the idea of all coming out to the Colony seemed at first the best but I think this plan has many serious objections. In the first place, the Colony is not so prosperous as it might, situations are more difficult than they used to be to get, and the pay is not as good as I think it used to be and expense of living is very much higher, so you see the boys would not have the same chance of getting on as in the more prosperous days of the Colony. Had I a good business of my own I could easily take one or perhaps two of the boys entirely under my care, but as I am at present situated I do not feel that I can do so. Possibly in a short time I may be differently situated and in a better position for helping in this way.

Then again for yourself, your income would not go so far out here as in England and it is a question whether the heat would agree with you.

I should think it would be best for you to remain in England and allow us to help you as best we can from here. I should be glad to give you £20 a year Willie would do the same, and George will be pleased to help as soon as he is out of debt. Will not this be better than your coming out here.

I am now on my way to Grahamstown and while there I shall be able to talk the matter over with Uncle John and Grandmother and shall be able to hear from them what you have thought is best to be done.

As I supposed when last writing to you, the whole of the Commissariat staff have been dismissed, the Government not thinking it necessary to keep us any longer. I am going round by Aliwal to see what chance there is for business in Palmietfontein.

You must excuse a long letter this time as I am already on my way to Aliwal being detained here in consequence of my horse having received a hurt.

Give all the children a kiss from me.

Although all seems so dark now I believe that the cloud has a silver lining and that if we have faith and wait with patience for it that Our Father well may a way out of it and that we shall be able to say "Ebenezer". In fact we can now say it and in the saying it believe that He who has helped us this far will help us all the journey through.

With best love

I am

your affect son

C. E. Nelson

1880 May, Grahamstown

Recd 15 June Ansd 30 July

Grahamstown.
19th May, 1880.

My dear Father,

I have not written to you lately as I have been knocking about so much as to make me quite disinclined to writing. I believe my last to you was written from Barkly & that I was then laid up with a sprained wrist.

I left James very much better and I have since heard that he took a ride to another farm some thirty miles from where he is staying and that he seemed more cheerful after his trip, so I think we may now rest satisfied that he is all right, poor fellow, I do not think he knows how bad he really was.

George I hope writes to you in my last from him he seemed in better spirits than during the very hot weather, which seemed to try him very much.

After leaving Barkly I went through the New England & Herschel Districts to Aliwal North, staying there for over a week with Mrs. Hamlin a sister of Willie Webber's, from there to Q' Town where I was heartily welcomed by some of my old friends & after spending a week there I went out to see Cousin Ellen⁸³, she was quite well, the children were also pretty well; they are moving up to the Cradock District shortly.

On arriving at King W^{ms} Town I found Mr. Nesbitt was out of town so went the following day to Aunt Thompson's farm⁸⁴, Aunt, Jessie, & Libby⁸⁵ (Wright) were very glad to see me as they had been wondering what had become of me. I spent a week very pleasantly with them, it was a great pleasure to get into the bush country again after being so long in a place where there is hardly a tree to be seen. From Aunts I took a ride down to East London spending a couple of days there and then back to Aunts. I forgot to mention that on my way from Aliwal to Q' Town I went round by the Indwe coal mine. The coal there seems very good, burning without a stove of any kind, I think it a great pity that Government does not work the thing up and get the coal out in large quantities.

I travel on the cheap, having two horses I am able to take food with me and a tent so that I have no need to go to an hotel in the night but just camp out wherever I may be.

I rode from Aunt's to King in company with Jessie who was going in to see Peter Wright who married a sister of hers. I stayed in King about a week with Mrs McDonald (Cousin Agnes⁸⁶) who was very kind to me. I had a good many friends to see there; closed a/cs with Mr. Nesbitt and handed every thing over to him satisfactorily. While in King I was told that the last steamer had brought as passengers two misses & master Nelson. I therefore concluded that it must be some of the family.

I arrived here last Saturday and right glad was I to see the children, they are very fond of me, it is a hug all round every time I go to see them which is two or three times a day. Poor dears I could not keep back my tears when their loving arms were thrown round neck. It is such a pleasure to have my own sisters and brother to play with and to love; I shall not at all like leaving Grahamstown now they are here. I took them all for a walk this afternoon, and with them the children of Mr W.A. Smith son of Mr W.C. Smith who used to be in Bathurst Street, a book maker. I am staying with Mr W.A. Smith they are nice people and very kind to me. I find my sister & brother much better children than I expected, are more loving and kind to each other than I think we elder ones were as children. Marianne is full of fun and frolick, Nelly is quicker & deeper in feeling and much resembles Emmy; Frankie is a smart little fellow, full of mischief but kind and good tempered, he went with me to the swimming bath this morning, I found he could not stand in the shallowest part, so I took him on my back and swam with him which he

⁸³ Ellen Maria WRIGHT, daughter of Elizabeth THOMPSON and Peter K WRIGHT.

⁸⁴ "Pleasant Vale", Chalumna.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth THOMPSON, wife of Peter Knowles WRIGHT.

⁸⁶ Agnes THOMPSON (1832-1907).

thought fine fun. Yesterday the three one after another had a ride with me on the horse. I feel as if I could not do enough for them. I expect Emmy will be down shortly to see them.

I am glad to hear through Grandma that you are likely to be comfortable with Mrs Brooks. I am sure my dear father I hope that such will be the case and that you may soon revive your spirits.

As you are aware I thought it would be best for the children to remain in England, but now that they are here I think yes feel sure that it is the best thing that could have been done.

In one of your letters you ask about Jame's sight. I was not aware that anything was wrong with it, he wears no shade nor did he ever say anything about it.

The children seemed to have been very happy and comfortable on the voyage.

I saw Mrs Fuller in King. She is a very nice old lady and was able to tell me about James & John, from what she says John must be a very good fellow as well as careful and industrious, I was very pleased to hear such a good account of him.

Aunt Emily⁸⁷ is quite well, also the children, the three eldest are very nice girls.

I intend spending about a fortnight here, I shall have my time fully occupied as I have lots of friends to go and see and I want to give as much of my time as possible to the children, who would have me with them all day if possible.

Give my kind love to John, Octa, & Alick. I shall be glad to hear from either or all of them

I shall write you again when I have made up my mind where I shall settle.

Your affect & loving son

C. E. Nelson

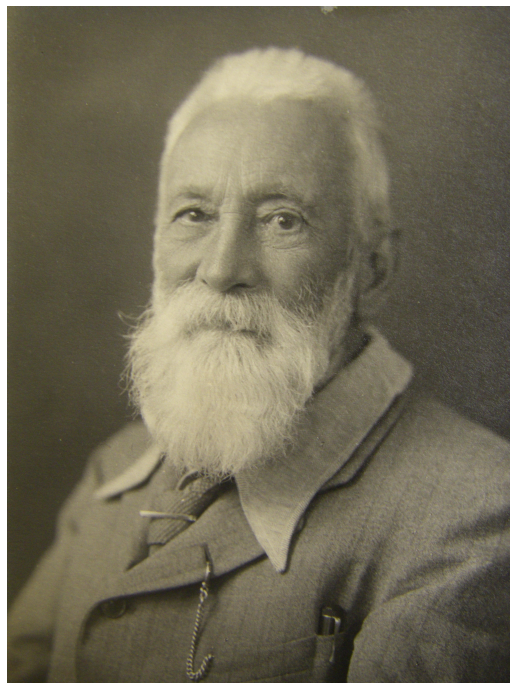


Figure 8: Charles Edward NELSON in later years.

⁸⁷ Emily Margaret GREEN, wife of George Grey LOCKE, half brother to his mother.

1880 July, Kimberley

Recd 18 Augt Ansd 14 Oct

Kimberley
21st July, 1880.

My dear Father,

My last letter to you was written from Grahamstown. While there Uncle John wished me, or rather offered me the situation as traveller for him. After carefully thinking the matter over I decided that I would not take it as a permanency but would take a trip or two so that I might have a little more capital to start farming and also that I might see parts of the country I have not previously seen. Since starting on this trip I have seen no reason to alter my decision. Business is so cut up, it is such a wear and tear, such anxiety and worry and after all so little satisfaction to be got out of it that the conviction is growing stronger every day that farming will be a far healthier & happier life; there are too many in business already and I think it would be very unwise of me to add to the number.

I have been in the Fields⁸⁸ just a week and have had quite enough of it, it is a terribly dusty place. Kimberley is a very large place and though with two or three exceptions the houses are all made of corrugated iron, yet they look very well and are comfortable inside especially those that are lined with raw bricks.

I have of course been to all the mines and into some of them, but it is hardly worth while my giving you a description of them as the machinery used in getting diamondiferous soil up from the mine, in washing it and sorting etc, as you have no doubt read descriptions of it all.

George seems to be getting on very well, he gives great satisfaction to his employer. He does not like living here and dreads the return of the hot weather, so that if he can get other employment I think it very probable that he will leave. He has grown a fine fellow and I am very pleased with him, though he must have many temptations up here he has had strength to resist them.

On my way up from Queenstown I hired a horse at Dordrecht and rode up to see James, he was quite well though still so quiet and reserved.

I had it very cold there. I had to break the ice and move it off before having my bath and in coming back to the house my beard was frozen stiff with icicles hanging to it. But although so cold I thoroughly enjoyed it. Often I have to start before daylight but generally have a towel bath, that is, a rub down with a wet towel. I neglected this for two mornings which, combined with being obliged to eat meat there being nothing else, gave me a severe cold in the head & chest, which I am glad to say has quite gone now.

I hope my dear father you are comfortable where you are staying, and that you will be content to remain where you are for some time. I know it must be hard for you to be away from the children but even were you to come to the Colony you could not be with them for already you see that the three are separated, Frankie having gone to live with Emily.

It is near time for me to be off so you must excuse more this time but accept love for yourself and the boys from your affect son

C. E. Nelson

⁸⁸ Diamond Fields, Kimberley

1880 August, Grahamstown

Recd 25 Sept Ansd 14 Oct saying he need not pay more than 5% for this money. Pay the interest to J Locke⁸⁹ Enquired if James has his leather portmanteau My letter in 1 Oct wishing him many happy returns.

Grahamstown.
24th August, 1880.

My dear Father,

As I shall be leaving tomorrow morning I think it will be well for me to write you a short note this afternoon as it may be some time before I again have an opportunity of dropping you a line.

I have decided to go in for sheep farming. I shall go with Mr Samuel Dicks for say twelve months, all the money I have I shall put into sheep, by this means I shall gain the experience I require both in sheep and agriculture, so that at the end of that period I hope to be able to hire a farm and sheep sufficient in number to stock the farm; my own sheep will by that time have increased about 75%, of course I shall somewhat uphill work at first but I hope in about three years time to be in a fairly good position; many farmers have started with very little and have now got good stocks & this with little or no trouble and no system. In return for the "veldt" my sheep take and my board I shall help Mr Dicks with his agriculture & about the farm generally. I should have been glad if I could have borrowed say £100 or £150 at 5% interest as it would have given me a better chance, failing this I must try & hire the sheep.

You will remember there was some money in the Savings Bank belonging to Mother, it was transferred to the E.G. Bank in my name and is now in the Bank of Africa, the amount with accumulated interest is £46-2-4 bearing interest at the rate of 4½%. I propose drawing this sum and using it as I shall be able to give 7½ or 10% for it and it will be very useful to me, in fact will be a great help. I do not know what you would like done with the interest.

I have just had letters from Emmy, Willie & George⁹⁰. The latter is well, though complaining of the dry weather and the dust. The two former are well & happy and Frankie⁹¹ seems happy & contented with them.

I went for a stroll the other day and the marked difference in the size of Grahamstown now and what it was when I was a boy and was learning to ride with you. You will remember the windmill near the magazine, the site of this is now no longer out of the town, the town extends right up to the gate of Currie's grounds, houses are close to the hedge leading up to Sugar Loaf hill, going round that way we find the skit kraal is surrounded by houses and the cemetery is fast becoming so, Settlers Hill towards the swimming bath is getting filled with neat substantial dwelling houses. I think you would hardly know the old town again, the people too have changed, even during the last three years there have been great alterations.

Excuse this scribble, my thumbs & wrist are still very weak from a severe strain so that it is painful to write.

Accept heaps of love from the two girls and from your affect. son

C. E. Nelson

⁸⁹ John LOCKE, half brother of his mother, trader in Grahamstown.

⁹⁰ George NELSON, at this time working in Kimberley.

⁹¹ Charles and Emily's younger brother Francis Tudhope NELSON, not Emily and Willie's son Francis King WEBBER (1879-1945).

1881 January

First sheet of letter missing

... James has his leather portmanteau all right. He preaches at farmhouses, generally two or three families assemble together. There is much need of preaching in the district and no doubt he will be able to do a good work.

Address to James same as to me

Barkly

Via Dordrecht

I have had promotions lately to Deputy Commiz pay 15/- per diem with rations. I have any amount of work to do and anxiety. Do not spend all my time in Barkly but have to visit the various camps. Besides this I draw 6/0 a day for doing two hours guard in town every other night. When night on guard of course I have to sleep in my clothes but this I have got quite used to, in fact I sleep as well in the guard room as in my bed. I just put my blanket on to a form, put my great coat under my head for a pillow lay flat on my back and am soon sound asleep, indeed the other fellows are rather surprised to see how soundly I sleep on so hard a bed and with so much noise as they make, though they call my name I do not wake, but if the Office of the Guard speaks to me I am awake at once. I suppose having lots to do I am generally tired when I lay down and being healthy am able to sleep soundly.

I have three assistants but I shall dismiss one tomorrow, he has been on the drink several times, and though he promises that each shall be the last I can put up with it no longer.

I have sold my two roomed tin house, at a profit and have purchased a larger & better one which I hope to get placed this week on an erf⁹² of ground which I have purchased. I think the war⁹³ will last some time yet for though our forces have been victorious & captured lots of cattle I think it will be some time before the natives are thoroughly subdued, besides affairs cannot be really settled here until the Basutus are conquered.

What a sad thing it is that these Transvaal Boers⁹⁴ are fighting, and it seems likely that the Free State will join them if so we may expect a long struggle. There are a great many Dutch in this district who are I believe all in sympathy with the Transvaal and would fight were they strong enough. I am afraid that the Colony will be thrown back a long way by all this fighting.

Love to the boys I hope they are getting on well at school. How is John getting on? Any idea of them coming to the Colony now must be abandoned for a long time.

I hope you will be able to read this hurriedly written letter.

Believe me to be your affect son

C. E. Nelson

⁹² Erf, from Dutch. Typically an urban plot of about half an acre, ~2000m².

⁹³ Gun War or Basutoland Rebellion 1880/1

⁹⁴ First Anglo Boer War of 1880/1.

1881 April, Barkly

Recd 25 May Ansd 1 June 4½ sheets & copy of "Lead me aright"

Barkly
April 17th 1881

My dear Father,

Last post brought me a welcome letter from you dated the 1st of March as also from Aleck.

I am surprised to hear that nearly five months have elapsed without my writing to you; you do not take one of my excuses namely disinclination, I do not think this term conveyed my exact meaning, it was not that I had for one moment forgotten you or that I did not wish to write, but after being busy all day and then having lots of writing in the evening I felt that I could not write as I should like to and so post after post slipped past and the letter remained unwritten, besides having no letter of yours to reply to also helped to this end.

Many thanks for your kind sympathy in my lost love, not lost but gone before, for that we shall recognise each other in the next world I believe as fully as I believe any truth of the bible, in fact were it not so what good would be a future life, we might as well die altogether. What body we shall have we know not, for there is a spiritual body and there is a natural body, whatever the spiritual body may be we shall undoubtedly recognise it, for even here it is not the body we recognise & love, but the soul as seen through the body, the soul speaks through the eyes, and I rejoice to think that we shall have better ways of conveying our thoughts and wishes than by speaking, even here we can often convey more by a look in the presence of a hand than by any words we can utter. I believe we shall some day stand soul to soul as hand to hand, no longer "strangers yet", but knowing each other fully.

My pay is not 21/- as you think but 15/-. I was getting 21/- while doing night duty but this has been discontinued for some time, I do not turn my "meat" to a/c I give my rations for my board which is a good exchange. Some here have had to pay three or four pounds in addition. I am very comfortable where I board, I get good brown bread, plenty of butter and milk and stewed apricots and peaches. George has lately adopted my style of living and he finds it very advantageous as regards health while others are being struck down with fever he continues in good health, in fact never had better.

George and I still correspond regularly and the feeling of love and sympathy between us grows stronger. I see much very much to admire in George, and am truly thankful that amid the great and many temptations at the fields he has had strength given him to stand fast. I think he & I resemble each other more than any others of the family; in our views too upon religious and social questions we agree.

I do not see much chance of the Basuto war coming to an end just yet. Our forces are only just within the border and Basutoland is a rough & mountainous country and if the Basutos choose to hold out they can keep our men at bay for a long time and can lead them a long chase over the hills, besides the late temporary cessation of hostilities has given them the time to strengthen their scansen & to get in their mealies & wheat.

The Tambookies along this border appeared to be so thoroughly routed that part of the forces here have been withdrawn, consequently they have again been stealing from the farmers and I expect that soon we shall have to place more men on the border.

I think that I may perhaps get a permanent appointment in the Department, that is if they do not break up all the Commissariat at the end of the war; not that I have any friends at court to help me, nor do I know that I should ask if I had, I am content to stand or fall by my own merits in this matter.

I have of course given up the idea of farming for the present and would prefer an appointment to farming. Ostrich farming as I anticipate is going back, feathers do not command such high prices, and young birds I believe have considerably decreased in value, several large farmers are selling off, I am very glad I did not go in for it.

In reply to questions about James. His congregations are English and an occasional collection is made. He has not required much in the way of clothes, I have helped him a little in this, and have also given him another horse, the first I gave him had got so poor, not through having too much work but through being badly worked and badly looked after. I hope with two that he will be able to manage. I am three hours from the "Caves" but James is not there now having gone to "Eagles Craig"⁹⁵ Mr John Dicks, so I do not see much of him that place not being in the line of my visits to camps.

There is singing at his services, he stands as the conveniences of the room may admit, generally at the dining table with the people round him; the singing is sometimes if not always accompanied by the piano. I think his style rather hard, I fancy he takes a hard view of life though if course I cannot judge as we have never had any conversation together that would give me any idea.

He did speak about his books but afterwards said that he would write to Uncle John about them. There is no reason why he should not have his books, except those on the mysteries of the future as I know it was studying these subjects that produced his illness for the other day he saw "Salvator mundi" on my table and told me not to read it as the questioning of such theories as eternal punishment was the first step on the road to insanity. I read the book for all that and have had thereby many ideas which were somewhat unsettled, decided. I do not know that I should read a book of that kind if it opened up any new theory to my mind, but if my mind has been led insensibly to such thought I read to decide one way or another. I may as well tell you that after reading that book, I do not believe in "Hell" as commonly understood nor do I believe in "eternal" punishment in the sense of everlasting. That book did not cause my doubts on the subjects for I cannot tell when or how those doubts came, certainly not from reading any book on the subjects, but that book certainly decided me. I do not know what you now think on these points, if your believe is different to mine I hope you will not grieve at my adjusting such views, views that to you would seem to go against Christ's own teaching but which to me are plainly taught by Christ.

Many thanks my dear father for your good advice to me, it is indeed often hard to keep close to Jesus with so few outward helps, I must say that I have not that communion with Him that I should like, and yet I have his love and sustaining power for without it I should go to the bad I know and that very fast. Did I not believe that God in heaven was my Father and that he loves me and is working for me I could not withstand the temptations I have, I could not bear the longings that come over me, but knowing that he will some day satisfy me I can manage to wait, though sometimes it is awfully hard work. I do believe that he will someday give me a help meet for me but it seems a long time coming. The other day one of my Dick's sons-in-law out the "Caves" asked me in fun, "Nelson have you every really been in love" and then followed with a few trifling remarks, it was more than I could stand, I had to go outside to give way to my feeling, and is seemed hard that while others had their loved ones with them I should be as it were left out in the cold. It is not often that I give way to my feelings but on this occasion I could not help myself. I ought not to have taken any notice of what he said for he is always trying to tease, I have known he and another to sit for hours both at me as hard as they could trying to put me out of temper but all to no purpose, but it happened that day I had been thinking a great deal about my lost one and so was touched to the quick when the memory was called up in jest; of course I was not angry but only hurt and he did not know anything of the past or he would not have said what he did for he told me afterwards he was sorry that he had hurt me.

I well remember the morning in 1870⁹⁶ when I wished you goodbye and I felt that I was embarking on the voyage of life with no longer an earthly father to be near only and how those feelings caused me to ask an interest in your prayers; ever since then I have

⁹⁵ A farm near Barkly East, Eagle's Crag

⁹⁶ Charles Edward returned to Grahamstown from Crediton in 1870, aged 17.

felt that you and my dear mother have been praying for me and this knowledge has tended not a little to keep my faith bright.

I am afraid you will have some difficulty in reading this but somehow I cannot write slowly especially when time is short and I cannot change my usual style which is pretty distinct to others. The crossing my t's in this way comes naturally to this style. Paper is thin & I cannot get hand made.

I am sorry to hear that the more useful branches of education the three R's are comparatively neglected at the Grammar School, it is a great pity it is so for however well a boy may be up in the so called higher branches if he is not well grounded in these he has little chance of getting on. I am glad to see Alick write such a legible hand, but does he write very slowly? I cannot encourage the idea of his coming out here yet, I fancy the Colony has a hard future before it for some time, business is pushed very much and these wars are a terrible draw back. I wish one of the boys had learned a trade, say capentering, that always pays.

I am very pleased that John is working so hard. I hope he will continue to improve so as to make his mark. His pay does seem small to mine; I got 2£ a month for my first six months and then 4£ for 12 months, half of this went for board and lodging and with the other I kept myself in clothes etc; I should like to help him but for two reasons one is that it will do him no harm to have to be careful now, other is that I want to get some capital together so as to have something to work on in case Commr work closes and I of course help with the two girls in Grahamstown. By the bye I have had a letter from each of them, they write in good spirits but want me to come and see them. You have of course heard of the addition to Emmy's family; I feel quite jealous of Willie.

I have not seen Thomas Edward⁹⁷ since the Moriosi war⁹⁸, I am a long way from him and quite out of the line of communication.

You give me some Crediton news but I have forgotten a great many of the names mentioned.

I have not much news to give you. Of course I have my worries in my work but they do not upset me much, the only thing that seems to trouble me very deeply is "someone to love". I had a row with one who holds a position higher than mine but gets the same pay, he was travelling with a column through Barkly, he wanted to interfere with my work in the District, I would not put up with this and refused to obey his orders, he was of course very angry being an elderly man, but I would not be trampled on, I suppose he sent a long report to my Chief, in fact I know he did, but nothing has come of it. I suppose Nesbitt was quite satisfied with the way I was working that he took no notice.

Give my kind regards to the Le Louifs Dymonds & Marwords. Love to Alick⁹⁹ & Octa and accept heaps of love from

Your affect son

C. E. Nelson

Separate sheet but clearly posted together

Recd 25 May

Took me more than two hours to read this letter

21/4/81

I have today received a letter from John, I feel very sorry for him, he certainly could not be much worse off here and his prospects would be brighter.

⁹⁷ Colonel T.E. MINTO, his cousin.

⁹⁸ Morosi, a minor chief in southern Basutoland rebelled and was killed in 1879

⁹⁹ Younger brothers, Alex Minto (1865-1940), Octavius (1868-1945).

As he has so far learnt the publishing business it would be a pity to throw it away. I wish I could get him into a house in the Colony but there is not much opening in that branch here.

I will think over it and see if I can in no way help.

C.E.N.

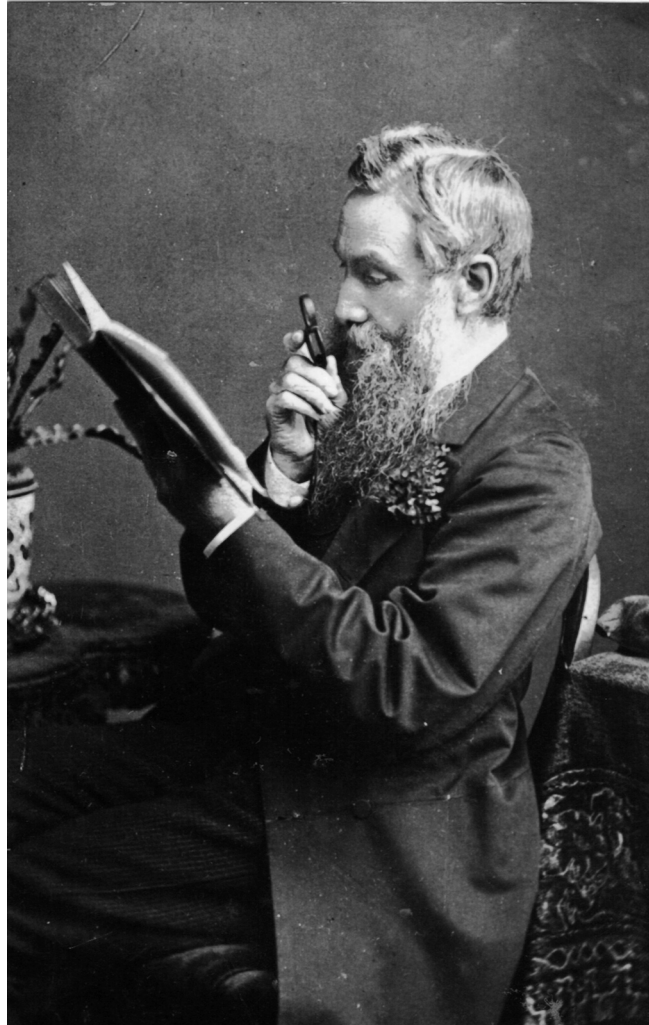


Figure 9: Charles Horatio NELSON, probably from about the time of the letters.

1881 July, Palmietfontein

Recd 23 Augt Ansd 30th under cover to Emmy 1 sheet

Palmietfontein via Aliwal North
21st July, 1881

My dear Father,

I have just got my books posted up to date and now await the arrival of the post so shall spend the half hour or so writing to you in reply to yours 20th May received last post.

But let me first say how it is that I am here instead of at Barkly. The work there got somewhat slack and as a good man was wanted here to superintend affairs in the Herschel District I was obliged to leave my comfortable house, harmonium & tools and take once more to a tent. I have lots of work to do, plenty of riding about and any amount of worry. Here's the post so I must shut up until that is all replied to, which probably means two good days' work.

I now take up my pen to write to again, by going hard at it yesterday and today I have got through the greater portion of my correspondence, I would not like to say how many letters I have written, it looked a good many when I took them to the post today. I feel pretty well tired tonight having had a trying day but I must write something towards this letter for I can see lots of work sticking out for tomorrow. The post was not so great as usual. I received the paper with the account of Stock fare but have not yet had time to read it.

It is hardly worth while sending me the Illustrated London News, as I occasionally see one but have not time to read it.

I am trying your plan of writing part one day and part another but it does not suit my ideas and is seldom practicable as when I begin anything I like to finish it and I am not often long in one place.

I certainly did have a cold bath after my night in the veldt and before breakfast. I felt I could stand it and I do not like bathing after breakfast. I only eat twice a day now. Breakfast at 10, porridge, bread & cheese and cocoa, the latter I take because I cannot get milk, and the water is not good; dinner at 4 or 5, rice, stewed apricots, bread & cheese & cocoa. Of course I have been asked to join the officers mess but I did not care about this.

I manage to make out your writing pretty well, the back hand is more distinct than the other.

I have only had a short note from James since leaving Barkly in May last so can tell you nothing about him, he is always reserved with me.

I promised to give 12£ every half year towards the childrens expenses in Grahamstown but up to date I have sent 15£ every half year. I should like to give more but I want to save all I can for sheep.

I expect I shall eventually go in for farming. The war seems pretty well over now, so I expect ere long the forces will be disbanded and the Commissariat broken up, then I am off for a visit to old Grahamstown.

It is by no means comfortable living in a tent again, it is bitterly cold in the night and in the day we have wind and clouds and dust.

Majola Letsei, one of the old chief's sons¹⁰⁰ was over here the other day, the Commandant Paymaster & myself had a long talk and argument with him, he is well educated but very conceited.

Thanks for your advice about brooding over a lost love. I do not as much as I used to and I can quite believe that my heavenly Father was good & kind in removing her.

I do not find smoking a very expensive habit, between 6^d & 3^d a week will cover it, I do not smoke expensive tobaccos, Transvaal is my favourite in fact the only kind I care

¹⁰⁰ "Old chief" probably Paramount chief Letsie who succeeded Moshoeshoe as King of Basutoland, ruling 1870 - 1891.

about. As to smoking being accompanied with drinking, not a bit of it, just now I can only call to mind two of my acquaintances up this way who do not smoke but they both drink, I do not know one who does not drink who does not smoke.

Thanks for accounts of Aleck, I am sorry you bought a watch for him at a sale, I do not forget that you cautioned me never to buy at a night sale. George will send you a P.O.O¹⁰¹ for £5 for a watch, ½ from himself ½ from me. I could have sent it but cannot get P.O.O here.

Fancy you taking ham and coffee by way of refreshment. Coffee was not so bad as it would act as a stimulant, but ham, pig's flesh. No, no, good beef or mutton is bad enough. Do you think the Israelites were told not to eat pork merely as a test or an arbitrary command. I don't. I believe you will find that for every command of the ceremonial laws there was good cause, and that we should enjoy better health if we went by that law. Even circumcision had its uses.

Your letter is a very long one and I cannot possibly reply & comment on every paragraph as I am in the habit of doing. The news of the Minto's¹⁰² the Dymond's, the Jackson's and others is interesting, though it is long since I saw them that I almost have lost sight of them in my mind, besides present interests, cares, hopes, Joys & sorrows, and interested in friends here helps to drive those that I knew in England out of my head, nevertheless I should be very glad of trip to England to see them all.

Many thanks for the hymn "Lead one aright" I like it much, it suits me & I should like to the music Solfa or Staff notation. I shall now go for a walk to get my benumbed feet a bit warm and then turn into bed for a read and a smoke, so "good night"

I have read carefully all you say about Eternal Punishment but am not convinced that I am in the wrong. I do not care about going into an argument on the subject as I do not see that anything would be gained by it for I do not suppose I could convince you that I am right & I do not think you could prove that I am wrong. The meaning of "Salvatus Mundi" The Saviour of the world or to take the reading from Scripture "Jesus the Saviour of all men". I certainly do not believe in the annihilation of the soul, but I certainly do believe that the effect of the punishment hereafter will be to bring men to God. Christ preached the Gospel to Spirits in prison, - but I must not go into the subject for I could write lots on it, I only go by what I read in the word of God and not by anything that man says.

It is getting near post time so I must hasten to close.

In my last from George he tells me that he thinks he will get the management of their Jagersfontein branch so this will be a lift for him.

Well good bye for the present and accept lots of love from your affect son

C. E. Nelson

¹⁰¹ Post Office Order perhaps?

¹⁰² James and Mary Ann MINTO, Charles Horatio's sister, at this time resident in Edinburgh.

1881 November, Palmietfontein

Recd 13 Dec Ansd 15 2½ sheets enclosed to Emmy Scolded him on giving up Govt Appoint advised him to get into it again & not go farming

Palmietfontein
6th November, 1881

My dear Father,

I think it is time I wrote to you again. I have been very much worried and busied lately. Since the sitting of the war expenditure commission new men have been placed at the head of the Commissariat Department, and consequently things have not gone on so smoothly; all sorts of questions and queries have been coming in of such a kind as to be very annoying, and also showing that very little was known of the actual working of the Commissariat and of the difficulties of working in the field, queries too referring to matters that had been authorized long ago. Then they have been treating us officers in a very ungentlemanly way. The result has been with me that I have taken up the pen in defence of myself and my juniors and written very plainly, and that I have become very dissatisfied with the service, and unless things were placed on a different footing would not enter it again.

Cousin Tom¹⁰³ has received the appointment pro tem of Inspector of Stores. I saw him a short time ago when on a visit to Aliwal and had a long semi-official chat with him, and I think opened his eyes somewhat. He had just received a telegram from the General saying that I had been writing cheekily and suggesting that I be knocked on the head at once. I told him that they were quite welcome to do, that I should not in the least regret it, that I had served the Government to the best of my ability and had only been snubbed for my trouble, that I did not think the Government appreciated a good servant.

I heard from him that the General was anxious to reduce expenses as much as possible (knowing this I had already reduced the staff in my district) and that it was not at all unlikely that ere long a cheaper man would be sent to take my place. I therefore sent by last post my resignation and I expect to receive a telegram this week accepting it.

I propose taking a holiday in Grahamstown, Bedford, Beaufort etc. for a couple of months. I can travel almost as cheap if not cheaper than I can live in a town for, as I take my tent with me and cook my own food, this I could not do in town unless I hired two or three rooms.

After my holiday I return to Barkly to finish my house that I put up there and other work that I have will keep me employed a month or two, by that time I shall know whether it is peace or war; if peace I intend to go farming as I have now saved enough to start fairly. One speck I went in for did not turn out well, viz half share of wagon and span of oxen, every ox has died with cold and hard work, I don't think I shall loose much by it, if Government compensate for oxen I shall make something.

George has probably written you that he is out of a billet.

I was sorry to see by the papers that Uncle John is again in difficulties. I feel sorry for him, for he works very hard and yet does not seem to be able to get on.

We are having hot weather now. Flies are very troublesome. During the Gaika war I got so used to them that I did not have to drive them off my face, but could bear their bites without flinching, it is not so now.

Please send this to John to read as I know he would like to see it and as I am writing to him it is not worth while giving him just the same.

Now to reply to your letter of 30 Augst received through George.

In writing to George that I had not heard from you for some time I did not in any way mean to grumble for I know you have many demands on your pen and am therefore content with my share of letters.

James has been on a visit to Grahamstown and I have no doubt is all the better for it, he has not written me since his return.

¹⁰³ Thomas Edward MINTO.

The writing in the newspaper addressed to John was that of Mr Beukardt bookkeeper to Mr W.C. Orsmond. He is a great friend of mine. I daresay you may remember him. Walter, brother to George & Eddie & Albinia Orsmond. Touching the writing if I write as Mr B. does my work would never be done.

My ground and house are still in Barkly, two rooms of the house are let, the other is filled with my furniture and other personal effects. If I am not actually in want of the money I shall hold as property is going up in Barkly.

I am glad to hear that Alic is trying to curb his fiery temper, it will be a hard battle as I know. How does he like his present employment. I wish I were settled and in a position to get you all out here, but as I am not I must put up with it. When are you going to get settled? I fancy I hear you ask; well I don't know; if this peace is not permanent it will be no good going farming.

I am sorry you had to pay 1/- on my last letter. You see yours are the only letters that require stamps so that I get into the way of franking all my letters, did not frank the one to you, intending to stamp it, but put it in post without. Thought of it after post had gone so to save you paying wired to next post office to stamp it, this he promised to do, but it is evident he did not or perhaps stamped the wrong one.

I fancy Jessie Thompson is somewhere near Cradock staying with Ellen, she has not written me for some time. I may perhaps go up as far as that and see Ellen during my holiday. I travel with buggy and pair of good horses, by easy stages, shall not go to hotels except for forage and shall not want much of that if veldt is good. Carry enamelled saucepan and dried peaches with me.

I believe the girls in Grahamstown and Frankie in Bedford are quite well. Also Emmy & Willie.

Hoping to hear again from you soon,

I am,

Your affectionate son,

C. E. NELSON

P.S. 9th November Resignation accepted, I leave in a day or two.



Figure 10: Charles Edward and Laura Annie with their four sons in 1910.