Near Orange Courthouse, Va

May 3rd, 1864

Miss Cho,

Yours of a recent date has been rec’d. I should have replied earlier, but thought from the signs of the times I might possibly have some news to chronicle. I allude to the fact universally prevalent that a battle is imminent at this point. And I had hoped that ere this another victory had redounded to the matchless glory of our cause, and another inscription had adorned the war-room banners of our army. Things remain in “status quo”. It is daily, hourly expected that the loud-mouthed cannon of the two armies will open a campaign fraught with issues of life and death, political, moral, and social, to the two nations now at war. Since such a stake is the forfeit, is it strange, then, that the two armies should hesitate? Genl Lee is ready, but every day adds to his strength. The men are hopeful, confident.

I have just finished “Macaria” by the author of “Beulah.” I must express the great satisfaction with which I read it. It certainly is a master-piece in its way, elegant in style, fine in conception and I think, quite natural in its characters. Macaria was the daughter of Hercules, whose descendants had gone to war but were brought under the yoke by their barbarous foe. Afterwards it was decided that their freedom would be given them if they would surrender one of the immediate family of Hercules to be sacrificed upon the altar to the gods of the common enemy. Macaria accepted this as her share of the priceless boon, and was burnt upon the altars in honor of the unknown gods of the heathen. The book is intended to illustrate the heroism of our women, and right well and truthfully has it done it. Irene is a noble character and Russell Aubrey is one of the finest I ever found in a novel. But I presume you have read it yourself.

The whip-poor-wills have come again and with them fresh beautiful spring, tho’ the mountains just on the north side of the Rapidan are yet capped with snow. These birds are omens of ill to the soldier and their inauspicious presence betokens long summer days, hard marches, hot weather, short rations, and bloody fights. We look sorrowfully upon the fresh green grass and foliage, and the buds and blossoms are sad objects of beauty. The music of the birds is harsh discord, and the beautiful sun rise undimmed by a cloud, excites pain instead of pleasure. The soldier prays for a rain, “second only to the deluge”, and a night twenty-four hours in duration. Sad change that the beauties of nature should be so associated as to produce a contrary emotion to that which an education of years has taught us to expect. I tell you plainly that there is no poetry in war. Philosophy and science have improved the art—poetry has adorned it. The theory, as we learned it from Latin and Greek epics—“cano virumque arma”—does not hold in fact. The true picture is a combination of Sinbad’s most terrible adventure presided over by the queen of the Furies. Here are orders to leave.

Two days’ rations and be ready to leave. We are preparing with all possible dispatch. Fare-well! May it not be a long farewell!
Your friend,

E.S.M.