

PART III—RECONSTRUCTION

COMMISSIONER OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU;
FOUNDING HOWARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER XLVI

NEGRO CONDITIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

BEFORE the beginning of the summer of 1865 the Civil War had been brought to a close. The Union volunteers were soon thereafter mustered out of the military service; and, carrying with them as tokens of honor their certificates of discharge, proud of their achievements, and full of hope for a happy and prosperous future, they joyfully sought their widely scattered homes.

The Confederate soldiers who had confronted them for four long years, from Generals Lee and Johnston to the humblest privates in the ranks, were treated with delicacy and kindness by our officers. After their surrender, however disappointed they might be at the result of the conflict, they were, nevertheless, not without spirit and hope. So, enjoying an American's confidence in his ability to get on in the world and protected by Grant's generous parole, they returned to their Southern households. They found their farms stripped, their plantations overgrown with weeds, their cotton destroyed, and their laborers disbanded. Business in cities and villages was at a standstill, and their late Confederate currency absolutely without value. The prospect at the best was dark. Still, these men had Anglo-Saxon courage, and with few exceptions did not succumb to the appalling difficulties of their situation, but promptly went to work to gain

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a living for themselves and for those who were dependent on them for support.

These ex-Confederate soldiers were, however, but a small part of the entire population of the Southern States. Four millions of negro slaves, who had been hitherto bound to labor in both the cotton and border States, had been set free: First, by the successive operations of the great war; second, by the proclamation of the President; and third, indirectly, from the effects of statute and constitutional law. Generally these millions had left their places of work and abode and had become indeed nomadic, wandering wherever want drove or untutored inclination enticed them. They had drifted into nooks and corners like *débris* into sloughs and eddies; and were very soon to be found in varied, ill-conditioned masses, all the way from Maryland to Mexico, and from the Gulf to the Ohio River. An awful calamitous breaking-up of a thoroughly organized society; dark desolation lay in its wake.

It was not the negroes alone who were so thoroughly shaken up and driven hither and thither by the storms of war. Those named in the South the "poor whites," especially of the mountain regions of Georgia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, were included. These had all along been greatly divided in their allegiance—some for the Union, and some for the Confederacy. Family and neighborhood feuds, always indigenous and contagious there, naturally took on new fire during the war and its resulting conflicts, so that these people were sooner or later scattered to the four winds. To these two classes, negroes and whites, were usually given the names of freedmen and refugees.

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To arrive at a clearer view of the actual condition of Southern neighborhoods, hamlets, villages, and cities during and at the close of our internecine strife, here follow a few brief sketches of these indigent classes as they came under my own observation during and after the war.

As early as 1861 there were several significant illustrations of the approaching problems. For example, after the first battle of Bull Run my headquarters and staff belongings as a brigade commander were at a farmhouse, three miles westward from Alexandria, Va. One day a woman, tall, straight, healthful, and active presented herself at the picket guard bearing on her arm a lad of some two years. The child had a darker hue than the mother, and his kinky hair, cut short, enveloped his round head with its woolly dress. This woman and child were brought to me by the officer of the outpost. Seeing that the woman was terrified, I endeavored to reassure her of her safety.

"What do you wish?" I asked.

"Sir, I'm a slave woman, and this here's my child. Let me and my child go free!"

While I was listening to the woman's plaint and entreaty, a sallow-complexioned, poorly clad white woman of middle age was ushered in. Addressing me in a shrill voice she said at once:

"That there woman is my slave. I have always treated her well, and here she is. She has run off. Now, sir, you must send her back to me, for she is mine. She and the boy, they're my property."

It will be remembered that at first the Government proposed to itself to overcome the armies in rebellion, and save the Union as it was, without touching slavery at all. This course appeared to be necessary, in view

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of the fact that the border States were in their majority loyal to the Union. As many of the friends of the Union in those States had slaves, it was indeed difficult to deal with the question of servitude. Public opinion, it is true, was changing from day to day, but the friends of freedom were obliged to wait yet many days to realize much of what they had been so long hoping, praying, and striving for.

On this occasion, commanding an outpost, I found myself under most stringent orders not to harbor any slave property. In face of this actuality I was greatly puzzled with the case before me. The white woman, seeing my embarrassment, became more and more excited, and soon began to use abusive language, directed partially to me, but mainly to her slave.

The woman kept pressing her child to her breast and with her large eyes filled with tears continued to look toward me, repeating: "Oh! my child, my child!"

At last, of course, I was obliged to decide the case. So turning to the impatient white woman, I said:

"There's your property, take it!"

She promptly answered: "But I can't take it. She's stronger than I! You must give me a guard."

My heart rebelled against using military force for such a purpose, and so I answered:

"No, no, I will not give you a guard. I will never use bayonets to drive a poor girl and child into bondage."

I had reluctantly complied with the letter of the law and fancied that to be enough. Somehow that night, without my knowledge, the slave woman and her child found their way eastward to Alexandria and thence to Washington—thus she and her child became free. Two citizens from Maine, who were unqualified

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abolitionists, were that same day with me for a short time. They condemned my apparent hesitancy in strong terms. "You should pay no attention whatever to such uncalled-for orders," they said.

After that I was hopeful that I should have no more slave cases to deal with. But soon after this, there was led in a large, dark fellow, with the thickest of lips and the broadest of noses, whose utterance was hard for one uninitiated to understand.

"How did you get past the picket?" I asked.

"I thoroanded um, thir."

He, too, found the Potomac and freedom. A man who could surround a picket was smart enough to reach and pass Mason and Dixon's line.

There were other commanders on our front lines in the East and the West who more fully carried out their instructions; so that, for a time, hundreds of escaping slaves who had come in, full of the hope of freedom, were caught as in a net and given up to men and women who visited the camps and laid claim to them; such visitors were permitted to carry their servants back to bondage, and sometimes soldiers were sent to escort the fugitives on their return.

All the armies of the Union were then in a great ferment on this subject. General H. W. Halleck, in the West, prohibited the slaves from "entering the lines of any camp or any column on the march." General Thomas Williams in the far South at Baton Rouge gave equally decisive instructions; but on the other hand General John C. Fremont, in Missouri, August 31, 1861, attempted by public orders to confiscate the property of all citizens in rebellion and establish the freedom of their slaves.

As this action was in advance of President and

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Congress on both subjects, that of confiscation and emancipation, Mr. Lincoln was obliged to modify Fremont's premature proclamation. This he did clearly and cautiously by an executive order prepared and issued by himself.

Again, General J. W. Phelps, at Ship Island, in the winter of 1861 and 1862 issued an emancipation pronunciamento, which brought upon him severe newspaper and other censure. General David Hunter, later, May 9, 1862, from Hilton Head, declared in orders for the States of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina: "That persons heretofore held as slaves are therefore declared forever free."

The "therefore" was based on what appeared to him a self-evident proposition: "Slavery and martial law in a free country were altogether incompatible."

After Hunter's action, President Lincoln again, with evident sorrow, interfered, declaring, in substance, that whether or not it was proper for the Chief Executive to emancipate slaves, that action was at least reserved to himself, an action "which he could not feel justified in leaving to commanders in the field." Thus General Hunter was reprimanded. Still, by these antislavery officers and many others on our extended lines, the escaping slaves were never returned to bondage, and when within our lines were treated humanely.

General B. F. Butler's shrewd experiments at Fort Monroe and Hampton greatly helped the whole observing army. A Confederate officer, Colonel Charles Mallory, sent an agent from Norfolk to Butler for the purpose of recovering three escaped slaves. Butler refused to give them up. In the interview, May 23, 1861, he said to the agent:

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"The question is simply whether they shall be used for or against the Government of the United States. I shall hold these negroes as *contraband* of war."

After that action the slaves northward bound who crossed our lines, were denominated "contrabands." They were in many places organized into camps and the able-bodied employed in army work. Our armies, made up mostly of volunteers, could not help at any time being participants, more or less pronounced, in the controversies that appeared in the press and the country. Some proslavery officers on various occasions denounced Mr. Lincoln, applying to him all sorts of epithets as, "mountebank," "old ape," and "a consummate tyrant."

Extreme abolitionists also impugned his conduct with equal violence on account of his apparent hesitation and slowness. While General Geo. B. McClellan annoyed him by public promises "to suppress all servile insurrection by force," and General Don Carlos Buel, in Kentucky, continued to allow slave holders to come within his lines and recover their property, and General Halleck, in Missouri, forbade slaves to enter the lines; other commanders, especially in the West, grew wiser, and before long maintained a sounder war doctrine, viz.; "God means us to free all the slaves. We will not succeed in putting down the rebellion till we set every slave free." It was not a brazen attempt to interpret the divine will, but, somehow, a settled conviction of such men's souls.

Touching slaves and slave property, before long the Eastern, the Middle and the Western armies with little reasoning or open discussion caught the fire of vigorous and unsparing war measures. True, under

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such orders, some slaves for a while were refettered after they had come within the Union lines, but in time press and people, officers and soldiers, with meager exceptions were united and with one voice said: "The slaves of men in arms against the Government shall be forever free."

General Butler in a letter to Simon Cameron, then Secretary of War, dated July 20, 1861, showed that he was in the advance. In this letter he afforded glimpses into camps and workshops where the implements of emancipation were being forged. These glimpses, next to those of the premature bivouac of John Brown, were the most fruitful sources yet put forth of agitation north and south, and later became the cause of remedial legislation.

It appears that several regiments, by a sudden call of service, were taken away from Butler's command. In consequence, the general's outlying troops had to be called in toward Fort Monroe, and the village of Hampton abandoned. With evident feeling he wrote that in that village there were large numbers of negroes, composed in a great measure of men, women, and children who had fled within his lines for protection; they had escaped from marauding parties of Confederates who had been gathering up able-bodied blacks to aid them in constructing their batteries. He had employed the men in Hampton in throwing up intrenchments, and they were working zealously and efficiently at that duty, saving his soldiers from that labor under the midday sun. The women were earning substantially their own subsistence in washing, marketing, and taking care of the clothes of the soldiers; and rations for the support of the children were being served out to the men who worked. But by the evacu-

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ation of Hampton all these black people were obliged to break up their homes and flee across the creek within his new lines for safety and support. He described it as a most distressing sight to see these poor creatures who had trusted to the arms of the United States, and who had aided the troops, thus obliged to flee from their houses, and the homes of their masters who had early deserted them. They had become fugitives from fear of the return of the Confederate soldiery who had threatened to shoot the men who had wrought for us, and to carry off the women again into bondage.

General Butler further argues: "When I adopted the theory of treating the able-bodied negro, fit to work in the trenches, as property liable to be used in the aid of the rebellion and so contraband of war, that condition of things was so far met, as I then believed and still believe, on a legal and constitutional basis. But now, several new questions arise. Passing by women, the children certainly cannot be treated on that basis; if property they must be considered the incumbrance rather than the auxiliary of an army, and of course in no possible legal relation could be treated as contraband. Are they property? If they were so they have been left by their masters and owners, deserted, thrown away, abandoned like the wrecked vessel upon the ocean." He draws this conclusion: "I confess that my own mind is compelled by this reasoning to look upon them as men and women. My duty as a humane man is very plain. I should take the same care of these men, women, and children—houseless, homeless, and unprovided for—as I would for the same number of men, women, and children, who, for their attachment to the Union, have

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been driven or allowed to flee from the Confederate States."

Butler would have had no doubt on this question had he not seen an order issued by General Irvin McDowell substantially forbidding all fugitive slaves from coming within his lines or being harbored there. If left to his own discretion he would have taken a widely different course from that which McDowell's order indicated. In a loyal State he would put down a servile insurrection. In a State in rebellion he would confiscate that which was used to oppose our arms, and take all that property which constituted the wealth of that State, and furnished the means by which the war was prosecuted, besides being the cause of the war; and if, in so doing, it should be objected that human beings were brought to the free enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, such objection would not require much consideration.

Our President and Congress diligently studied all the phenomena, noticed the gradual clearing of the skies, and in some fitting manner, by proclamations and by timely acts of legislation, helped to drive away the remaining mists from men's minds and hearts.

An Act of Congress, approved March 13, 1862, created a new Article of War. It prohibited all persons in the military service from employing the forces under their command to return slaves to claiming owners and provided trial by court-martial and the penalty of dismissal for its violation. This was a legal step that the friends of freedom hailed with no little satisfaction.

Thus legislation after a germinating period had emphasized and enforced the better view, and all commanders had been gradually brought to treat as freed-

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men the escaping slaves. But from the beginning there continued to exist a chaotic condition of society where the masters and their immediate families were escaping in one direction and the great bulk of their slaves in another.

As the war further progressed the number of fugitives continually increased till all the woes of destitution and confusion came on like a great freshet, the springs and rivulets were full and swift, the rivers high and angry with overflows, and the gulfs and bays into which they entered, though more quiet, were deeply moved, casting up mire and dirt from the very bottom. The surging masses of poverty-stricken people flowed into the larger cities, and idleness and viciousness infected them. All the border States were in great trouble because slave property was becoming of little value anywhere. Border loyalty became shaken when thousands of dollars' worth of human chattels disappeared in a night. For a time, as we have seen, a few commanders had returned their slaves to loyal owners. Early in 1862 an officer operating in Missouri, commanding an Iowa regiment, brought to his camp several fugitives through whom he had obtained valuable information. He asked for their freedom. But the owner came for them. The Iowa officer denied him and allowed the slaves to escape. In consequence the department commander, General Halleck, sent a detachment in pursuit of the negroes. They were overtaken; one of them was shot and the others returned to the owner; at the same time the Iowa officer was placed under arrest.

This sharp action caused the matter to be speedily brought to Congress. In the midst of the discussion which followed the introduction of a Bill of Relief into

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Congress, in itself the excitant of advancing thought, many a representative made a record which to-day seems incredible. For example, one member said: "Must the Northern fanatics be sated with negroes, taxes, and blood, with division North, devastation South, and peril to constitutional liberty everywhere, before relief shall come? They will not halt until their darling schemes are consummated."

Another, more proslavery still, cried out in despair: "Sir, pass these acts, confiscate under these bills the property of these men, emancipate their negroes, place arms in the hands of these human gorillas to murder their masters and violate their wives and daughters, and you will have a war such as was never witnessed in the worst days of the French Revolution, and horrors never exceeded in San Domingo, for the balance of the century, at least."

These dreadful prophecies were never fulfilled. The famous Confiscation Act was approved July 17, 1862. Besides provision for the emancipation of slaves and confiscation of other property in any district in insurrection, the President, at his discretion, was authorized to use negroes in such manner as he should judge best for the public welfare in the suppression of the rebellion. Under this legislation numerous colonies were organized along the southern coast.

When the extreme destitution of the negroes at Hampton, Va., and vicinity became known in the North, Lewis Tappan, Esq., Treasurer of the American Missionary Association, wrote August 3, 1861, to General Butler suggesting the removal of the destitute negroes to the North. The general replied to him, August 10th, that it was better for them to remain

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South, but that the help of his Association would be most welcome. Obeying his call, the Rev. L. C. Lockwood was sent. He reached Fort Monroe September 3d and immediately called on General John E. Wool, who had, August 7th, superseded General Butler as department commander. In the evening, while conversing on the piazza of the hotel, he heard music, and following the sound found a number of colored people assembled for prayer. They hailed his coming as an answer to their prayers and an assurance that the good Lord had opened His arms to bless them.

The first Association day school was opened by this agent September 17th. It was held in a small house near the female seminary building, which, after the war, became the Hampton Home for Volunteer Soldiers. The first teacher was Mrs. Mary S. Peak, a well-educated free woman of color.

With a view to bettering the condition of these people, after a careful investigation by a commission of which Colonel LeGrand B. Cannon was a member, and by whose personal efforts the approval of the Secretary of War was obtained, General Wool issued a general order, March 18, 1862, appointing Mr. Charles B. Wilder Superintendent of Negroes, and providing that all wages earned by persons of African blood be paid to the laborers themselves for their own use and support under such regulations as should be devised by the superintendent. This was an advance from the contraband, fed, clothed, and housed for his labor, to the free wage-earner.

February 8, 1862, in North Carolina the battle of Roanoke Island was fought; immediately after it crowds of fugitives, most of them poor and ignorant negroes, poured into camp. Very soon a prominent

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member of the Christian Commission, Vincent Colyer, Esq., of New York was set at work to care for these fugitives. He was designated in orders as Superintendent of the Poor.

In the ensuing March after New Berne had been captured, Colyer exercised the same functions there. The following was his method: He took a house for himself and his helpers and made it the center and store of active benevolence for his beneficiaries. For the able-bodied he secured employment as carpenters, blacksmiths, longshoremen, and laborers on military works. Officers in command also received some negroes from him and used them as scouts, a few chosen fugitives being dispatched to go beyond the lines and return with information.

Evening schools were here opened for the freedmen. At New Berne alone nearly a thousand joyfully accepted the privilege of attending, while willing soldiers in most cases became their instructors. The eagerness of the negro men, women, and children for knowledge of books was a remarkable fact, here emphasized.

Later Chaplain Horace James of the Twenty-fifth Massachusetts Volunteers became Superintendent of Negro Affairs for North Carolina, and other officers were detailed to assist him. These covered the territory gradually opened by the advance of our armies in both Virginia and North Carolina. Becoming a quartermaster with the rank of captain in 1864, he, for upward of two years, superintended the poor, both white and black in that region. He grouped the fugitives in small villages, and diligently attended to their industries and to their schools. Enlisted men were his first teachers; then followed the best of lady



MRS. ELIZA OTIS GILMORE, MOTHER OF GENERAL HOWARD,
AND GRANDDAUGHTER.

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teachers from the North and success crowned his efforts.

In February, 1864, while there were about two thousand freed people in the villages outside of the New Berne, North Carolina, intrenchments, an enterprising Confederate general, George E. Pickett, with a division of troops, attempted to retake that city. Concerning his approach an eyewitness wrote that every man, woman, and child from these negro camps came rushing wildly into town, and felt as keen a sense of danger as if they had been actually returned by force to their old masters. Negroes, to the number of nine hundred, were then put into the trenches with the white soldiers, and were highly complimented for their uniformly brave conduct during the assault. The attempt of General Pickett failed, and the negro defenders received a due proportion of credit for the repulse. After this the several negro settlements, for safety, had to be consolidated within the fortified lines. Lots were now assigned and about eight hundred houses erected, which at one time sheltered some three thousand escaped slaves.

Though such a village was not productive of the best fruits in all respects, yet even there under the thorough system of police instituted and the daily drill of the men, the schools taught by excellent teachers steadily increased in numbers and the freed people improved rapidly in intelligence, in cleanliness, and order. It was altogether a new life to the late slaves.

The capture by our navy of the forts at its mouth, November 7, 1861, had brought into our possession Port Royal Harbor, S. C. Such cotton as was found on the islands tributary to this region was at once taken possession of by treasury agents.

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June 28, 1862, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, with headquarters at Beaufort, South Carolina, assumed the government and control of all places and persons in the Department of the South which were not embraced in the operations of General Quincy A. Gillmore, commanding the department. General Saxton, as military governor, appointed three division superintendents, each having charge of several of the Sea Islands. Market houses were established at Hilton Head and Beaufort for the sale of the produce from the plantations, and negroes put to work, the larger settlements being on Port Royal Island and near the town of Beaufort.

Colored men in that vicinity were soon enlisted as soldiers and an effort was made to cause the laborers left on each plantation, under plantation superintendents appointed for the purpose, to raise sufficient cotton and corn for their own support, rations being given from the Commissary Department only when necessary to prevent absolute starvation. These conditions with hardly an interruption continued until the spring of 1865.

Grant's army in the West occupied Grand Junction, Miss., by November, 1862. The usual irregular host of slaves then swarmed in from the surrounding country. They begged for protection against recapture, and they, of course, needed food, clothing, and shelter. They could not now be reënslaved through army aid, yet no provision had been made by anybody for their sustenance. A few were employed as teamsters, servants, cooks, and pioneers. Yet it seemed as if the vast majority must be left to freeze and starve; for when the storms came with the winter months the weather was of great severity.

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General Grant, with his usual gentleness toward the needy and his fertility in expedients, introduced at once a plan of relief. He selected a fitting superintendent, John Eaton, Chaplain of the Twenty-seventh Ohio Volunteers, who soon was promoted to the colonelcy of a colored regiment, and later for many years was Commissioner of the U. S. Bureau of Education. He was then constituted Chief of Negro Affairs for the entire district under Grant's jurisdiction. The plan which Grant conceived the new superintendent ably carried out. There were all around Grand Junction, when our operations opened, large crops of cotton and corn ungathered. It was determined to harvest these, send them North for sale, and place the receipts to the credit of the Government. The army of fugitives, willingly going to work, produced a lively scene. The children lent a hand in gathering the corn and the cotton. The superintendent, conferring with the general himself, fixed upon fair wages for this industry. Under similar remuneration woodcutters were set at work to supply with fuel numerous Government steamers on the river. After inspection of accounts, the money was paid for the labor by the quartermaster, but never directly to the fugitives. The superintendent, controlling this money, saw to it first that the men, women, and children should have sufficient clothing and food; then Colonel Eaton built for them rough cabins and provided for their sick and aged, managing to extend to them many unexpected comforts. General Grant in his memoirs suggests this as the first idea of a "Freedmen's Bureau." It was, doubtless, a harbinger of that larger institution which Congress subsequently provided for the wants of the millions of the emancipated, but it was not the

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first inception. There were other groups of fugitives quite as large and similarly cared for in the East and South; yet Grant's enterprise afforded an object lesson and had a sensible completeness from the start.

While in camp on the Rappahannock at Falmouth, Va., I well remember the unusual excitement in our army upon the receipt of the remarkable preliminary proclamation of Mr. Lincoln, promulgated September 22, 1862. It was like Elisha's call on Mt. Carmel: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve!" Officers and men did choose. The pregnant phrases of that proclamation have a voice which still resounds pleasantly in loyal ears: "That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward and forever free." This proclamation republished the new law which forbade the return of slaves and also the Confiscation Act, intended to punish treason and rebellion by the seizure of property and the freeing of slaves.

We were also further apprised at the same time of an additional step that Mr. Lincoln would soon take—a step which made all men who were hostile to his administration very angry. It was the formal avowal of his purpose, in his next message, to suggest to Congress what he believed to be an equitable method of the gradual abolishment of slavery altogether, not only in the States in insurrection, but in the border States which the friends of secession had failed to carry out of the Union, and among many people who had thus far cordially maintained our cause. How

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this action of the President affected the proslavery element in that portion of the army with which I was connected may be illustrated by one or two occurrences.

During a temporary absence of General Darius N. Couch, I was commanding the Second Corps near Falmouth, Va. More incautious than scores of others, a young officer of that corps was one day loudly talking to his comrades against General Ambrose E. Burnside, then commanding the Army of the Potomac, and also against the President. The officer declared that he would never fight in company with accursed abolitionists. He was surrounded by other commissioned officers, including the surgeon and chaplain of his regiment, and his soldiers were within hearing. Two or three prominent civilians on a visit to the army chanced to hear his pronounced offensive words, and noticed the growing excitement in that neighborhood. Coming straight to me, these gentlemen reported the case and deplored the condition of the army which they judged to be bad enough from this and other incidents which had come under their observation. The charge of uttering disloyal language was preferred and witnesses summoned. The offending officer was promptly tried and sentenced to dismissal. For years afterwards he sought in vain to procure a reversal of that sentence.

In another regiment of that same corps for tendering his resignation in face of the enemy for the alleged reason that this had become an abolition war, a lieutenant was similarly tried and cashiered. For this prompt enforcement of discipline I was commended by Mr. Stanton.

All outward demonstrations were thus nipped in

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the bud, so that while other officers in the command ground their teeth in vexation they wisely refrained from insubordination and mutinous expressions.

Among our enlisted men there were not a few who at one time held views similar to the New York rioters of 1863. They hated a negro except as a slave, and they kept alive in their circle of influence an under-current of malice more or less active.

Close by my headquarters the First Minnesota Regiment of volunteers was stationed near a cluster of trees not far from the Rappahannock. Its field officers rejoiced in the possession of a number of good horses. Among the refugees were several negro lads who were employed to care for the horses, grooming them, and riding daily to water and back to camp. Among these was a mulatto of some eighteen years, of handsome figure, pleasant face and manners, and rather well dressed for the field. He appeared a little proud, especially when mounted on his employer's horse. One day, as he was riding as usual, a small group of soldiers were heard cursing him. One of them said distinctly that he should never ride and have the speaker walk as long as there was good stuff in his rifle. Little was thought of the man's threat at the time, but soon after, as the lad was passing the same point, sitting erect on his blanketed horse, a shot was fired, coming apparently from a group of soldiers to his left and not far from him. The lad was desperately wounded in the shoulder and would have fallen to the ground except for the help of a friendly neighbor. The Minnesota men carried him carefully to the hospital, where he was kindly treated. Several officers of the army visited him. No harsh word ever fell from his lips. He lingered a few days, and with ex-

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pressions of forgiveness on his tongue and hope in his face the lad died. The murderer could not be found. His comrades covered him and his crime. The death of this colored youth made a deep impression in our camp. Evidently on account of his color he was slain. Friendly voices murmured against the crime, and with set teeth echoed the settled thought: "Slavery must go."

On January 1, 1863, Mr. Lincoln's promised proclamation was issued. It exceeded the preliminary one in intrinsic force and immediate positive effect.

On the coast of South Carolina our officers, under the Confiscation Act, had already enrolled large numbers of able-bodied fugitives as soldiers. Near one encampment were standing, scattered here and there, immense live oaks. Their lateral branches often covered a circuit of from seventy-five to a hundred feet, and innumerable birds lived and sang among the restless leaves. Not far from Beaufort under the shade of these magnificent trees the first tidings of the grand proclamation were read to a regiment of negroes. Their joy and enthusiasm were unbounded.

Even before the close of 1862 many thousands of blacks of all ages, clad in rags, with no possessions except the nondescript bundles of all sizes which the adults carried on their backs, had come together at Norfolk, Hampton, Alexandria, and Washington. Sickness, want of food and shelter, sometimes resulting in crime, appealed to the sympathies of every feeling heart. Landless, homeless, helpless families in multitudes, including a proportion of wretched white people, were flocking northward from Tennessee and Kentucky, Arkansas and Missouri. They were, it is true, for a time not only relieved by army rations,

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spasmodically issued, but were met most kindly by various volunteer societies of the North—societies which gathered their means from churches and individuals at home and abroad.

During the spring of 1863, many different groups and crowds of freedmen and refugees, regular and irregular, were located near the long and broken line of division between the armies of the North and South, ranging from Maryland to the Kansas border and along the coast from Norfolk, Va., to New Orleans, La. They were similar in character and condition to those already described. Their virtues, their vices, their poverty, their sicknesses, their labors, their idleness, their excess of joy, and their extremes of suffering were told to our home people by every returning soldier or agent, or by the missionaries who were soliciting the means of relief. Soon in the North an extraordinary zeal for humanity, quite universal, sprang up, and a Christian spirit which was never before exceeded began to prevail. The result was the organizing of numerous new bodies of associated workers, whose influence kept our country free from the ills attending emancipation elsewhere; it saved us from negro insurrection, anarchy, and bloody massacre, with which the proslavery men and even the conservative readers of history had threatened the land.

The Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, always anxious for successful emancipation, had had brought to his attention early in 1862 the accumulations of the best cotton on abandoned sea-island plantations; there was the opportunity to raise more; and the many slaves in the vicinity practically set free and under governmental control, could be worked to advan-

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tage. The cotton was to be collected by Treasury agents and the freedmen benefited.

During the summer of 1864, Wm. Pitt Fessenden, who had replaced Mr. Chase as Secretary of the Treasury, inaugurated a new plan for the freedmen and the abandoned lands. He appointed and located supervising special agents of his Department in different portions of the South which were now free from Confederate troops. These agents had charge of the freedmen. Each was to form here and there settlements on abandoned estates, each denominated a "Freedman's Home Colony," and situated in his own district, and he must appoint a supervisor for such colonies as he should establish. A number of such colonies were formed. The supervisor provided buildings, obtained work animals and implements of husbandry and other essential supplies; he kept a book of record, which mentioned the former owner of the land, the name, age, residence, and trade or occupation of each colonist; all births, deaths, and marriages; the coming and going of each employee, and other like data. These agents and supervisors were sometimes taken under military control by the local commander, and sometimes operated independently.

Under this plan the freed people were classified for fixed wages varying from \$10 to \$25 per month, according to the class, and whether male or female. There was a complete and detailed system of employment. Food and clothing were guaranteed at cost, and all parties concerned were put under written contracts. For a time in some places this system worked fairly well. It was a stepping-stone to independence. The working people usually had in the supervisors and treasury agents friendly counselors; and when

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minor courts of any sort were established under them for hearing complaints of fraud or oppression, these officials reviewed the cases and their decisions were final. These were rather short steps in the path of progress! They were experiments.

From the time of the opening of New Orleans in 1862 till 1865, different systems of caring for the escaped slaves and their families were tried in the Southwest. Generals Butler and Banks, each in his turn sought to provide for the thousands of destitute freedmen in medicines, rations, and clothing. Colonies were soon formed and sent to abandoned plantations. A sort of general poor farm was established and called "the Home Colony." Mr. Thomas W. Conway, when first put in charge of the whole region as "Superintendent of the Bureau of Free Labor," tried to impress upon all freedmen who came under his charge in these home colonies that they must work as hard as if they were employed by contract on the plantation of a private citizen. His avowed object, and indeed that of every local superintendent, was to render the freedmen self-supporting. One bright freedman said: "I always kept master *and me*. Guess I can keep *me*."

Two methods at first not much in advance of slavery were used: one was to force the laborers to toil; and the second, when wages were paid, to fix exact rates for them by orders. Each colony from the first had a superintendent, a physician, a clerk, and an instructor in farming. The primary and Sunday schools were not wanting, and churches were encouraged.

Early in 1863, General Lorenzo Thomas, the adjutant general of the army, was organizing colored troops along the Mississippi River. After consulting

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various Treasury agents and department commanders, including General Grant, and having also the approval of Mr. Lincoln, he issued from Milliken's Bend, La., April 15th, a lengthy series of instructions covering the territory bordering the Mississippi and including all the inhabitants.

He appointed three commissioners, Messrs. Field, Shickle and Livermore, to lease plantations and care for the employees. He adroitly encouraged private enterprise instead of Government colonies; but he fixed the wages of able-bodied men over fifteen years of age at \$7 per month, for able-bodied women \$5 per month, for children from twelve to fifteen years, half price. He laid a tax for revenue of \$2 per 400 lbs. on cotton, and five cents per bushel on corn and potatoes.

This plan naturally did not work well, for the lessees of plantations proved to be for the most part adventurers and speculators. Of course such men took advantage of the ignorant people. The commissioners themselves seem to have done more for the lessees than for the laborers; and in fact the wages were from the beginning so fixed as to benefit and enrich the employer. Two dollars per month was stopped against each of the employed, ostensibly for medical attendance, but to most plantations thus leased no physician or medicine ever came, and there were other attendant cruelties which avarice contrived.

On fifteen plantations leased by the negroes themselves in this region there was a notable success; and also in a few instances among the others where humanity and good sense reigned, the contracts were generally carried out. Here the negroes were contented and grateful and were able to lay by small gains. This

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plantation arrangement along the Mississippi under the commissioners as well as the management of numerous infirmary camps passed, about the close of 1863, from the War to the Treasury Department. A new commission or agency, with Mr. W. P. Mellen of the Treasury at the head, established more careful and complete regulations than those of General L. Thomas; this time it was done decidedly in the interest of the laborers.

Then came another change of jurisdiction. On March 11, 1865, General Stephen A. Hurlbut at New Orleans assumed the charge of freedmen and labor for the state of Louisiana. He based his orders on the failure of the Secretary of the Treasury to recognize the regulations of that Secretary's own general agent, Mr. Mellen. Mr. Thomas W. Conway was announced as "Superintendent of Home Colonies," the word having a larger extension than before. A registry of plantations, hire and compensation of labor, with a fair schedule of wages, penalties for idleness and crime, time and perquisites of labor, the poll tax of \$2 per year, liens and security for work done, were carefully provided for by General Hurlbut's specific instructions.

General Edward R. S. Canby, a little later, from Mobile, Ala., issued similar orders, and Mr. Conway was also placed over the freedmen's interests in his vicinity. Thus the whole freedmen's management for Alabama, Southern Mississippi, and Louisiana was concentrated under Mr. Conway's control. He reported early in 1865 that there were about twenty colored regiments in Louisiana under pay and that they could purchase every inch of confiscated and abandoned land in the hands of the Government in that

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State. All the soldiers desired to have the land on the expiration of enlistment. One regiment had in hand \$50,000 for the purpose of buying five of the largest plantations on the Mississippi. It was at the time thought by many persons interested in the future of the freedmen that the abandoned and confiscable lands if used for them would afford a wholesome solution to the negro problem.

On December 21, 1864, when the Confederate commander, General Wm. J. Hardee, withdrew his troops from Savannah, Ga., and our forces thus finishing Sherman's march to the sea, in joyous triumph came into the city, I saw plainly enough that the white people were overwhelmed with a sense of their defeat and helplessness. But it was the precise opposite with the slave inhabitants. It was a day of manifest joy, for wasn't it a visible answer to their long-continued and importunate prayers? It was a positive deliverance from bondage, the ushering in of the fruitage of brighter hopes. Certainly so it all appeared to these simple souls who met our columns of troops at every point in crowds, and with arms akimbo danced and sang their noisy welcome.

A few days after the triumphal entrance, Secretary of War Stanton came in person from Washington to convey his grateful acknowledgment to General Sherman and his army for their late achievements. While at Savannah he examined into the condition of the liberated negroes found in that city. He assembled twenty of those who were deemed their leaders. Among them were barbers, pilots, and sailors, some ministers, and others who had been overseers on cotton and rice plantations. Mr. Stanton and General Sherman gave them a hearing. It would have been

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wise if our statesmen could have received, digested, and acted upon the answers these men gave to their questions. Garrison Frazier was the chosen spokesman. The first question referred to the interpretation of Mr. Lincoln's proclamation. Frazier answered that it provided that if the States concerned did not lay down their arms and submit to the laws of the United States before January 1, 1863, all the slaves would be free henceforth and forever.

When asked to define slavery and freedom, he said that "Slavery is receiving by irresistible power the work of another man, and not by his consent. Freedom is taking us from under the yoke of bondage and placing us where we can reap the fruit of our own labor, and take care of ourselves, and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom."

In answer to a question as to where they would rather live, whether scattered among the whites or in colonies by themselves, he answered: "*I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that it will take years to get over, but I do not know that I can answer for my brethren.*" All but one agreed with Frazier, and that one was a Northern negro missionary.

Mr. Stanton's final question was occasioned by recently published statements that Sherman was unfriendly to the negroes. Question: "State what is the feeling of the colored people toward General Sherman; and how far do they regard his sentiments and actions as friendly to their rights and interests?" The answer, though doubtless somewhat diplomatic, was an able one:

"We looked upon General Sherman prior to his arrival as a man in the providence of God specially set

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apart to accomplish this work; and we unanimously felt inexpressible gratitude to him, looking upon him as a man who should be honored for the faithful performance of his duty. Some of us called upon him immediately upon his arrival, and it is probable that he did not meet the Secretary with more courtesy than he did us. His conduct and deportment toward us characterized him as a friend and a gentleman. We have confidence in General Sherman, and think what concerns us could not be in better hands. This is our opinion now, from the short acquaintance and interview we have had."

As a result of this investigation and after considerable meditation upon the perplexing problem as to what to do with the growing masses of unemployed negroes and their families, and after a full consultation with Mr. Stanton, General Sherman issued his Sea-Island Circular, January 16, 1865. In this paper the islands from Charleston south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns River, Fla., were reserved for the settlement of the negroes made free by the acts of war, and the proclamation of the President.

General Rufus Saxton, already on the ground, was appointed Inspector of Settlements and Plantations; no other change was intended or desired in the settlements on Beaufort Island which had, for three years been established.

The inspector was required to make proper allotments and give possessory titles and defend them till Congress should confirm his actions. It was a bold move. Thousands of negro families were distributed under this circular, and the freed people regarded

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themselves for more than six months as in permanent possession of these abandoned lands.

The immediate effect was good. Idle masses were sent from cities and villages and from the various army columns to find relief and to set out upon a course of thrifty industry which was hopeful and helpful to their future.

There were plenty of friendly hands to give aid where it was needed. Zealous, self-denying Christian teachers followed up the distribution to inaugurate primary schools. In one instance, on an island far from any white settlement, three maiden ladies of wealth who had come from New England started a school with all the appliances of object teaching and all the neatness of a Northern academy. Officers of the army of high rank and their friends, and immigrants with their wives and daughters from the Northern States took an active interest in this humane work. This part of the field came under my earliest personal observation. Here I found fairly good schools in January, 1865, and visited several of them.

At that time when with the advance of Sherman's army I came to Beaufort, South Carolina, moving that way to the North from Savannah, many plantations near at hand and on the different sea islands, deserted by their owners, had been sold by the United States tax commissioners and tax titles given to white immigrants from the North, to loyal white refugees, and to promising freedmen. Numbers of farms so obtained were occupied and under cultivation. One proprietor, Mr. C. F. P. Bancroft, had bought in at public auctions, held on the sea islands in March, 1863, thirteen plantations. He then employed 400 laborers, all being old men, women, and children. The average

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earnings of each over and above his house rent, food raised by himself, and his own crop of cotton were \$16.50 per month. This landholder, with \$40,000 outlay, received a net profit on his sea island cotton of \$81,000 in one year. He had maintained five schools with an attendance of 300 scholars. He also had kept in operation five stores wherein \$20,000 worth of goods such as housekeeping articles and necessary clothing were disposed of at cost.

When our great army came more or less to disturb the peace and quiet of the settlements along the coast everything was in a thriving condition. The people were happy, the schools appreciated, and the future hopeful. The tax titles to the abandoned lands were better than those under the Confiscation Act, or General Sherman's possessory tenures. These tax titles, at a later day, afforded some restriction to the merciless decisions and orders which swept over all the estates and stripped the freedmen of what they possessed.