

"Is Slavery to be an Element in the War?,"

Philadelphia (PA) *Inquirer*, November, 16, 1861

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Is Slavery to be an Element in the War?

If there is anything in the relations of the Slave controversy to the slaveholders' rebellion, it is very likely to be developed by the descent of a powerful military force upon a populous slave district, like that which is just now triumphant at Port Royal and Beaufort. The servile institution was known by all to have had more or less share in the origin of the struggle; but the extent to which it was to affect the war has been until now a question surrounded by great doubt.

First, then, we may remark that heretofore it has certainly affected it in a very inappreciable degree. Neither the rendition of fugitives by our commanders early in the contest, nor the subsequent reception and employment of many hundreds of them by General BUTLER, at Fortress Monroe, nor the later "confiscation decree" of FREMONT, in Missouri, appear to have had any considerable result. Whether this was because, in all the regions hitherto the theatre of war, the whites were far in excess of the slaves, and therefore held them under the bonds of ancient awe, or whatever may have been the cause, the result is certain—that there has nowhere, until now, been any "stampede" or insurrectionary movement of remarkable importance.

Secondly, therefore, we may repeat our starting point—that whatever is to be the influence of slavery on this struggle, now first does it come prominently enough upon the stage for men to look anxiously at its action and appearance, and question themselves how large may be the part assigned for it to play in this sanguinary drama. Now first has a great naval expedition, with a powerful land force, mastered the coast, and in some degree the interior, of a rich and populous slave district, where "the institution" flourishes in full luxuriance, and as it flourishes nowhere else, except among the sugar plantations of the Gulf. And as similar expeditions are supposed to be in progress for similar points along the seaboard of the Rebel planters, the like cases may be expected to be followed by like consequences. Of the final results of this we can make no prophecy; but every one may guess, according to his faculty of guessing, by the following picture of the scenes which occurred in and around Beaufort:—

In the upward passage of the boats to that point the negroes all forsook the plantations,

crowding towards our boats, "with bundles in their hands," as anxious for a passage. At Beaufort, says Flag-officer DUPONT, "they were wild with joy and *revenge*, and said they had been shot down like dogs, because they would not go off with their masters." Says another officer: "When General DRAYTON took to his horse, his two hundred servants took to the *Wabash*," that among the crowds around Captain AMMAN, one cried out joyfully, "I didn't think you could do it, massa!" and that "they were wild, plundering their masters' houses, who had been forcing them off or shooting them down, and were still crowding to the gun-boats for protection."

The public anxiety to see what will be the results there, and in similar cases, of this negro excitement, and the certainty that, in any such case, they will flock to us in great numbers, calls on us to state the duties imposed on our commanders as to their protection and employment. We, therefore, condense the order of the Secretary of War, issued to General SHERMAN, October 14th, and which we published October 29th. It is mainly a more full and precise statement of the instructions given to General BUTLER on the 30th of May and 8th of August.

He must guide himself by the principles laid down in the instructions just referred to. For "special circumstances," much is left to his own discretion." He must, "in general," employ "the services of any persons, whether fugitives from labor or not, who may offer them to the National Government." He must employ them "in such services as they may be fitted for, either as ordinary employes, or, if *special circumstances seem to require it*, IN ANY OTHER CAPACITY, in squads, companies, or otherwise," as he may deem best. But he must not take this to mean a *general arming* of them for military service." He must "assure all *loyal* masters of just compensation" from Congress, "for the loss of the *services* of the persons so employed." The Secretary concludes with the belief that such course "will best secure the *substantial* rights of "loyal masters," and benefit the United States by the services of the well-disposed, while avoiding "all interference with the social systems or local institutions of every State, *beyond that which insurrection makes unavoidable*, and which a restoration of "peaceful relations to the Union, under the Constitution, will immediately remove."

Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands

National Park Service Network to Freedom / House Divided Project at Dickinson College

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These instructions were, doubtless, well considered. The "special circumstances" must mean military emergencies, and "any other capacity" implies military service in battle; in other words, that the fugitive, though ordinarily employed in plain labor, may be made, in case of great peril, to help to man the battery he has helped to build; to mount guard around the tent where he had served, and even to charge on the disloyal master from whom he had lately run away. That would be "confronting" the chivalry with a vengeance! But the fugitives will, of course, be generally employed only in services with the axe, spade, etc., and "play the soldier" only in great extremities. The "just remuneration to loyal masters," it will be noticed, is promised only for the "services" of the fugitives, not for their "persons," in case of death, or some other final escape. But since "the greater includes the less," the loss of "persons," too, is probably intended.

From the large powers, direct and discretionary, thus given to our Generals, and from the great numbers of fugitives already subject to them at Beaufort, and not unlikely there and elsewhere to extend trouble among the slaves, our original premise becomes clear, that if there is anything in the relations of the slave controversy to the slaveholders' rebellion, it must certainly be developed now in the neighborhood of Port Royal and Beaufort.

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