

## FROM BURNSIDE'S ARMY.

Effect of the News from the West—  
The Weather—The 8th Illinois Cavalry—  
How the Proclamation Works—  
Its Effect upon the Rebellion.

[From Our Own Correspondent.]  
8th ILLINOIS CAVALRY, ON PICKET,  
KING GEORGE Co., Jan. 11, 1863.

The glorious news from the Southwest inspires our soldiers of the Potomac with an enthusiasm and joy that almost counterbalances their chagrin and impatience at their own baffled attempts. The feeling seems to be a general one. Ill management somewhere has thwarted our efforts in the East. If success crown the arms of the West, we have no feeling of envy, but all glory to the West—and meanwhile, we are warring, with as little impatience as possible, humbly hoping that camp life north of the Rappahannock may not be of long duration.

Picket life, however, on the banks of the Rappahannock, is just at present by no means unpleasant. With duties active and responsible enough to satisfy any conscientious scruples (feelings at least as common in the rank as elsewhere in the army.) The glorious weather of the last two weeks is rapidly recruiting the men and horses of the 8th Illinois cavalry, who have been on constant picket duty since Christmas. The weather has been so pleasant, indeed, that on the second of January some of our boys tried a bath in the waters of the Rappahannock.

Allow me to say that the reports concerning the weather here have been rather exaggerated. But twice since the army has been lying on the Rappahannock have we had two rainy days in succession, and the weather in general has been remarkably fine. Our long wagon trains have made the condition of the roads, after every shower, indeed terrible: but an immense pioneer force has soon rectified this with brief exceptions, (once, unfortunately, just when the success of a great army depended on the speed of its pontoon trains,) the roads at last have been in a passable condition. I protest against blaming weather and accident (give the devil his due), for failures which have made an entire campaign a signal defeat and which demand as thorough investigation, as anything during the war.

The 1st of January inaugurated a new era for the slave, and there need be no fear that he will not discover it. Wherever our army have passed, the slaves have become practically free; free not by the word of the President, but by the feeling and instinct of manhood which the mere thinking and talking of freedom has awakened within them, and across the river, if we may believe the reports, and into the heart of slavery and rebellion, like a death-bolt, the word of freedom is speeding. But it is quiet, and without outbreak; and a concerted rise among the negroes of the South is about as probable as the truth of Mr. Kirk's pleasant fiction, "Among the Pines." There is superstition, but not intelligence enough, to overcome the almost innumerable obstacles to concerted action among them; and so far as I can learn from conversation and inter-

course. There is no fear, on the part of the inhabitants, of insurrections, north of the cotton States, where cruelty and a policy that makes men brutes, must abide their own consequences.

South of the Rappahannock the negroes seem to be making no demonstrations, quietly waiting till, as they firmly believe, "The Lincoln army will come and free them." Indeed, at present it is simply impossible for any save the most skillful and daring to cross the two picket lines along the river into freedom; and this strictness of the pickets, it is unnecessary to say, cannot at present be abated.

But in regions where our army has remained any length of time, one can hardly credit the change that has taken place in the whole negro population as a class. Instead of the contented ignorance and docility which generations of oppression had made the chief characteristics of the slave, there is an air of quiet but happy manhood and thoughtfulness on every black face you meet. They assume no arrogance, and you seldom find a feeling of revenge toward their masters (though I can assure you that pity for their adversity is quite as rare); but the anxious question for the future seems to absorb all: "Where shall we go, and what shall we do?" Among hundreds of negroes with whom I have conversed, this seems to be the great trouble.

As I was riding near the river, this evening, one of the drays I met seemed inclined to stop. He took off his hat, with a scrape and a bend of his body, and stood by the roadside as I approached:

"Good evening, uncle."

"Good evening, sir." A little hesitation, and then, "Please, sir, be's dere many cullud in de Norf, and can dey find work?"

"Yes, colored people are scattered all through the North, and men who are willing to work find work to do."

"Since your army come, and de white folks let me, I find plenty work 'round har to keep me 'n de chillen. But can't tell how long you all stay here, and I dasn't wait for de rebels."

"But where will you go?"

"Dunno, sir. Cal'clate to 'range to leave next Sunday night 'n go to Washington. Better starve dar, than be sold South."

"The President wants the colored people to go to Hayti or Africa and make a State of their own." A double shake of the head. "Hearn o' dat Hayti. Don't like it. De 'rangements 'jurious. Say dey makes slaves of 'em dere. Find plenty work here, and when peace comes and slaves free, come back and work for ole massa. "But," and he looked up with a doubtful air, "de Norf's not conquered yet. Please, sir, tink I can find work in de Norf?" Poor fellow, it has been the reasoning of them all. Nothing but the success of our arms is needed to give them confidence enough for an open rise. But until then their movements must be silent and by night.

I said this has been their reasoning. But few, who can get away, are now left where their freedom is in any danger. On New Year's Eve the stampede began, and hundreds of negroes are nightly lessening the slave power of those few counties of Eastern Virginia. I suppose the same is done through the South, wherever our army has any influence; but in those letters I confine myself to facts as I see and know them, and in speaking thus of the negroes, I wish to be understood as meaning those along our lines in Eastern Virginia.

Virginia.

At least two-fifths of the slaves escaped when our army was here last year, and about one-half of the remainder were sold to the far South, immediately after; leaving about three-tenths of the 400,000 slaves (I quote from memory alone) Eastern Virginia was said once to contain, who will be immediately benefited by the President's proclamation. In truth, the passage of a Union army through the country, with free communication North, is the one thing needful to give freedom to the slaves, and the President's proclamation can only legalize the operation, and perhaps make it more sweeping.

But what are the masters doing?

The white population of Virginia make but little ado, now, at anything. One of the planters on the head waters of the Rappahannock said to me not long since: "I wish the earth would swallow both armies, and me with them. Everything else is gone; they may as well take the slaves, and the sooner we all starve the quicker it will be ended."

Slave labor in Virginia has been, within the past year, rapidly decreasing in value. Slaves who once sold for a thousand dollars now have a nominal value about half as great; while the highest price at which they can be sold, is—generally nothing. As a consequence, slaveholders are losing their high estimation of the peculiar institution, and, if Lincoln's proclamation had been delayed much longer, they themselves would probably have urged a gradual abolition of slavery, not only as a war measure, but for the permanent good of the C. S. A. as well. This, as I said before, is only in the border States. The cotton States, instead, are seeking to revive the slave trade.

Let me give a few examples to illustrate the condition of men and things in this region:

One man, Royal Mason, (a relative of Mason the infamous, with five sons and sons-in-law in the rebel army, and a safeguard from Gen. Burnside, which makes the penalty for molesting him or his, in any way, death,) lost forty from his ninety slaves, escaped when our army was here last year. Most of the remainder he sold South soon after, leaving but a dozen, old men and women, who have deserted him within the last week.

Major Lewis, of whom I have spoken in a former letter, one of the first F. F. Vs., with the best part of his property and family in the rebel army, has lost between twenty and thirty slaves escaped. He retained twenty of his best, thinking, (as he cares for them better than any other master,) they would stay to do his next year's work. But, strangely enough, on New Year's eve, the whole score took it into their heads to seek colder weather, though some of them are bound to by relationship as unnatural as they are common, in this land of refinement and family pride. Two of them, a mother and daughter, were as interesting and intelligent girls as any of the "dominant" race I have met in Virginia. The youngest had fair hair and blue eyes, and her master is both her father and grandfather.

Another of these gentry, who is looked up to as the first man in the region for wealth, education and morality, has five children whom he has been trying for a month to smuggle across the river to a slave driver who has bought them, but was unable to take his whole "drove" over when he crossed, because of our army's near approach. A squad of the 8th Illinois were sent out, a few evenings since and relieved this gentleman of them and all of the blacks on the place, nineteen in number.

But this is heart-sickening, and I will carry it no further.

The effect of the Emancipation Proclamation on the rebellion can hardly be calculated. The already weakened "forces" (as they are called here,) on the various plantations, have been tasked to their utmost to put in the wheat crop for the ensuing year. All these crops, (with the small reserve needed for home consumption,) would, unless destroyed before harvest, in some manner, have been transported to the Southern Army. As it is, the corn crop of next year can neither be planted nor cultivated, and the wheat now sown can only be harvested by soldiers. Here is where the armor of the South has a joint. Planters who are forced to use their slave labor for the government or not at all, keep by no means the keen hold on their slaves that they once did, when self-interest didn't have to share so largely with patriotism, and the indignation manifested from the South are felt keenly enough by Jeff. Davis, indeed, but are backed by little or no feeling on the part of the planters, (who are here the people. The freedom of the slaves is no loss to the permanent agricultural interests of the South, and but little, comparatively, to the slaveholders. It is strictly a blow at the rebellion, and one whose full effects will be months in their development.