

STAMPEDE OF NEGROES IN KENTUCKY.

General Palmer to the President.

HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF KENTUCKY, }
 LOUISVILLE, Ky., July 27, 1865. }

To his Excellency ANDREW JOHNSON, President of the United States:—

Sir—I have already by telegraph acknowledged your despatch of yesterday, containing copy of a despatch of Mr. Price, which states that provost marshals issue "free papers" to negroes indiscriminately. I refer you to my despatch, in which I say no "free papers" are issued by any officers of this department, which, though literally true, does not quite meet the facts as they are.

I forward you my General Orders Nos. 32 and 40. Under these orders many passes have been issued by provost marshals, &c., to negroes to hold them, and, I am told, in many cases they regard and act upon them as "free papers."

The reason for issuing Order No. 32 will be found on the face of the order; but the reasons which influenced the Mayor and his friends to apply to me do not. Large numbers of the negroes were then in Louisville from the surrounding country, who had escaped from or repudiated the authority of their masters.

The Mayor and others desired my approval of a plan they had arranged for the general enforcement of the laws against vagrancy, and the law which forbids slaves to go at large and hire themselves out as free persons. To have enforced these laws would have produced great misery and alarm among the blacks. To leave the negroes in the city would have alarmed the fears of the citizens, who were beforehand taught to think their presence would cause pestilence. They sought to make me responsible for either consequence.

To avoid both I issued Order No. 32. Under it over ten thousand negroes have crossed the Ohio river at this point alone.

Before the Fourth of July an impression got abroad among the negroes throughout the State that on that day they would all be made free. Inflamed by this belief, thousands of them left their masters' houses, and came into our ports and different points in the State. Every nook and hiding place at such places as Camp Nelson, Lexington, Frankfort, Bowling Green, Mumfordsville, &c., was filled with them. They were without work or means, and the greater the number and the more destitute they were the more the people resisted employing them. I was compelled, from these causes, to issue General Order No. 49; and the "free papers" referred to in the telegram of Mr. Price are merely the passes issued under that order.

I have been greatly embarrassed in respect to the colored people by the acts and declarations of politicians and presses in the anti-administration interest. They

have given the negroes extraordinary ideas of the purposes of the government by announcing in their speeches and columns that it was the intention of the government to free them all, furnish them with food and clothing, and put them upon an equality with the whites. Invariably a conservative gathering in the neighborhood is followed by a stampede of negroes.

I think, and respectfully submit, that it is impossible, under the existing state of facts here, to enforce the laws of the State in reference to slaves and slavery.

At the beginning of the war Kentucky had two hundred and thirty thousand slaves, say 230,000
 Our reports show number of negro enlistments. 28,518
 Estimated number of women and children freed by resolution of Congress of March 3, 1865, two and a half for each man 72,045

Total 100,863

Balance 120,134

One half of this residue are presumed to have belonged to the rebels, and are, therefore, free 61,562
 From this small number ought still to be taken a percentage for the thousands who have escaped from the State.

For the sake of keeping the small number in subjection to masters, the whole race in the State are most cruelly oppressed and outraged under color of laws which render freedom to a negro in Kentucky impossible.

I have felt it my duty to give protection to this large free population as far as possible, but in doing so I have been, on occasions, compelled to do acts which, in effect, greatly impair the tenure of the small number of persons who are still technically masters of slaves. Indeed, it must be admitted that many slaves have left the State under Orders Nos. 32 and 40 (which are enclosed), and every decision I make in favor of a negro seems to start a host of individual cases, which come within the same principle.

In short, slavery has no actual existence in Kentucky, and if the constitutional amendment is defeated at the election, the whole active colored population will fly, unless I employ the troops to prevent, and you have not and will not be likely to order that to be done.

To illustrate the effect of any fair rule upon the status of slavery in Kentucky I will advert to the effect of one rule which I am compelled to recognize and observe.

By the laws of Kentucky—laws once, when all were slaves, just enough in their application—all negroes were presumed to be slaves. Now a large majority are certainly free. To presume slavery from color alone is contrary to justice; to presume freedom, without regard to color and give protection accordingly, is to end slavery. I am often called to afford protection where there is no proof at hand, and am compelled to presume one way or the other.

I submit these difficulties to meet some of the complaints which will probably reach you from the loyal people of Kentucky. I have the honor to be, very respectfully,