

The Independent.

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN NORTH CAROLINA.

[A FRIEND sends us the following extracts of a private letter from a young gentleman connected with the Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina, whose name can be given to the public if necessary.]

RALEIGH, N. C., Oct. 31, 1865.

* * * I will try to give you some idea of what we have done in North Carolina. The object of the Bureau seemed to be to carry out the pledge of the nation through its head, our honored martyr-President, to the freedmen. Congress established the Bureau, and enacted a few general directions for its guidance, but made no appropriations for its support.

Gen. Howard was appointed by the President as its head, and, to carry out at all the act of Congress, his assistants had to be detailed from the army, and the Bureau be a part of the War Department.

Gen. Howard recommended Col. Whittlesey as assistant commissioner for North Carolina, and his appointment was made and approved by the President. Col. W.'s first step after reaching Raleigh was to divide the state into districts and sub-districts, and put over each suitable officers. By an order of the War Department, commanders of departments and districts were ordered to detail such officers as were required by the Bureau.

You will see the difficulty Col. W. had in organizing when you know that, after 31 written applications for officers, he received only 11 from the department commander. His first plan was to make four districts, and each county in the state a sub-district. But the difficulty in obtaining officers obliged him to change his plan, so that the state is now divided into four districts and twenty-seven sub-districts. Each district has a superintendent, or would have, if we could get an officer for the position. Capt. James has the eastern, Maj. Wickersham the southern, Lt.-Col. Clapp the central, and the western district is without a superintendent.

Three times has the roll of officers almost entirely changed, so that system is almost impossible. An officer just gets at work, and he is mustered out, and his place taken by one who must learn for himself. Officers, too, do not take so much interest in the work, for they expect to be withdrawn every day, and cannot lay out any satisfactory plan. We have now, however, quite a good corps of officers at work, and have in the state ten citizen agents, who do quite well. When we first came here, negroes and whites flocked to our headquarters for rations. We issued only to freedmen; the military authorities took care of others. Our issues in July were 215,285, to 10,000 people; in August, 150,289, to 9,000 people; in September, 137,350, to 7,000.

There are 350,000 freedmen in this state. Of this number only 8,000 are dependent. This does not show a very lazy or inactive spirit among these people, for the whites, who had all the land and money, have been supported to a larger extent than the negroes.

The negroes, brought up to doubt everybody when declared free, could not believe it until they tried for themselves; consequently, some left old homes and went to cities and towns, and tried the life of ease and loafing a while. Many, too, heard and believed that Uncle Sam would give each of them a farm, and refused to make any arrangements to work with landowners. Others thought they had earned, by a life's work, the piece of land they lived on, and demanded it of former owners.

Col. W. issued a circular, telling the freedmen that the Government would divide no lands in this state among freedmen, and advised them to work with old masters, but make written contracts, and when they had earned money they could buy land. Forms of contracts were printed, and many were induced to go to work. They sometimes break a contract, and it will take time for them to learn all their obligations. They have been cheated in every county, and have some reason to doubt the same men, even though a written contract is made. Another trouble with the contract system is this: they are to receive a third or a fourth of the crop; a man must work through the year, a little doubtful all the time of his employer, receiving nothing but his peck of meal and four pounds of pork every week, and work and wait at least eight long months, before he receives anything like pay.

There are no laborers that will work in this way but negroes, and I wonder that no more of them refuse to do it. If a man should come here with capital, and pay his hands every Saturday night, he might pay them one-sixth less than one-third of the crop, and his labor would be everything he could wish. This is fact. I have the records of many such cases in the office. They want to feel of money; want to be able to buy for themselves; and, in the now unsettled state of things, don't feel free if they work along one year without receiving anything until the crops are gathered. I don't wonder, either.

They do work now, the majority of them; and I would risk, if I had it, \$30,000 in a cotton-farm to-morrow, for I know that, if I paid my hands every week, they would be the best and cheapest labor the world can furnish.

The people of the South, too, have a different way of treating laborers from Northern employers. They demand, and often threaten. They have always compelled, and cannot get over that way of doing now. We at the North offer a man so much money for such and so much labor, and, if he do not suit, we offer it to some one that will. If our hands are insolent or unruly, we don't shoot them or knock them down, but send them off. If a hand whom you hire to do farming objects to dig a ditch, you tell him he can dig it, or you will find some one who will. But if a negro here tells Mr. Chivalry that he is not accustomed to dig ditches when he hires to plant and hoe, Mr. Chivalry feels insulted, and shoots or beats the lazy black scoundrel for presuming to demur at any job set him.

Negroes will work if you treat them as any efficient laborers must be treated—viz., as human beings. Irish, German, or any other people will not work in any other way. A planter in North Carolina thought to try white labor. He sent North, made a contract with fifty Irish laborers, brought them to his farm at great expense, and thought he had done with "niggers." The men came to him the second day after their arrival, and told him they would burn his house down unless he sent them all home. He did it. They will not work for ten dollars a month and a peck of meal and four or five pounds of pork a week; nor any other people, but these people just freed and virtually slaves still.

We have, through our officers, heard and settled 547 cases of different misdemeanors; theft, abuse, assault and battery,

etc. I have reports of them all. Many fines have been levied on the whites for knocking down "niggers." It is a new order of things. They pay with a poor grace. We have sent twelve cases before military commissioners, all of them crimes; murder four, assault with intent to kill eight. If a man attack a negro with a whip or cat-o'-nine-tails, we try him for assault; and if he beats severely, we put in with intent to kill.

Two murder cases have been tried, and in each one the sentence has been a mere farce.

A woman (lovely young lady of good family) shot in cold blood a negro. The murder was proved a brutal one of the first degree. The sentence was \$1,000 fine. Black makes a distinction in some men's minds, that destroys all sense of right and justice.

A man shot a negro dead. The negro had taken a horse to ride. White man shouldered his gun and started in the same direction, and met the negro coming home with the horse.

"What are you doing with that horse, you black — — —?"

"Nothing, massa; I gwine home now; went to do some business for you."

White man replies by blowing his brains out, for presuming to insult him. A court of U. S. officers fined this man \$600, and sentenced him to six months in jail.

Do you ask what will be the fate of these people when the Bureau is gone? I do not believe Southern courts will be more just toward them than a court of officers in the U. S. service, and such are their decisions.

However, a freed people must suffer in the change from slavery to freedom; but when once free, they will know how to appreciate and use freedom.

There are now in the state 68 schools for freedmen, with 85 teachers and about 5,634 pupils. Many of these schools are taught by freedmen and are self-supporting; others are taught by teachers from the North, whom I consider as true self-sacrificing missionaries as ever earned a crown. They are not received into white society here, but are looked down upon by the citizens, and, although ladies of refinement and education, are dependent entirely on themselves for society. They live uncomfortably, teach dirty, ragged children in old dirty rooms, because the South don't think niggers ought to be intelligent, and the negroes are too poor to clothe themselves.

We are restoring all property in the state as fast as we can make out the orders. There is no land confiscated in the state. We have employed about 9,000 negroes on farms, plantations, etc., and have raised about 900,000 lbs. cotton, 57,000 bbls. turpentine, 32,715 bushels corn, 1,000 bushels potatoes, 5,800 bbls. tar.

We have in the state 14 hospitals, reporting to us for the first quarter—July, August, September—2,680 deaths. We have aided 5,441 sick persons. 257 contracts have been made, giving employment to 1,917 freedmen, at wages averaging from \$10 to \$15 per month for men, \$7 to \$10 for women, and rations.

513 marriages have been performed by ministers selected by officers of the Bureau. We are trying to elevate the morals of this people. They have never felt the sacredness of the marriage-tie. They have had no good example set them by their masters. In two instances I have seen mother and daughter children of one white man. I think these points will give you some idea of what we are doing and trying to do.

F. H. B.