

LETTER
OF
THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

In answer to a resolution of the Senate of the 4th ultimo, copies of all instructions given to commanding generals in pursuance of the acts of Congress approved August 6, 1861, setting free slaves who have been employed, by the consent of their masters, against the government of the United States.

JULY 10, 1862 —Read, ordered to lie on the table, and be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, D. C., July 8, 1862.

SIR: In answer to the resolution of the Senate of the 4th ultimo, calling for copies of any instructions to commanding generals in pursuance of the acts of Congress approved August 6, 1861, setting free slaves who have been employed, by the consent of their masters, against the government and lawful authority of the United States, and also if any steps have been taken to make the statute effective, and to insure its due execution by our advancing armies for the benefit of slaves who have been so employed, I have the honor to transmit herewith copies of all the instructions on file given by this department to commanding generals on the subject of the resolution.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Hon. SOLOMON FOOT,
President of the Senate pro tem.

CAMP PARAPET,
Near Carrollton, Louisiana, June 16, 1862.

SIR: I enclose herewith, for the information of the major general commanding the department, a report of Major Peck, officer of the day, concerning a large number of negroes of both sexes and all ages, who are lying near our pickets with bag and baggage, as if they had already commenced an exodus. Many of these negroes have been sent away from the neighboring sugar plantations by their owner, a Mr. Babillard La Branche, who tells them, I am informed, that "the Yankees are king here now, and that they must go to their king for food and shelter."

They are of that four millions of our colored subjects who have no king or

chief, nor, in fact, government, that can secure to them the simplest natural rights. They cannot even be entered into treaty stipulations with, and deported to the east, as our Indian tribes have been to the west. They have no right to the mediation of justice of the peace or jury between them and chains and lashes. They have no right to wages for their labor; no right to the Sabbath; no right to the institution of marriage; no right to letters or to self-defence. A small class of owners rendered unfeeling, and even unconscious and unreflecting by habit, and a large part of them ignorant and vicious, stand between them and their government, destroying its sovereignty. This government has not the power even to regulate the number of lashes that its subjects may receive. It cannot say that they shall receive thirty-nine instead of forty. To a large and growing class of its subjects it can secure neither justice, moderation, nor the advantage of the Christian religion. And if it cannot protect all its subjects, it can protect none, either white or black.

It is nearly a hundred years since our people first declared to the nations of the world that all men are born free; and still we have not made our declaration good. Highly revolutionary measures have since then been adopted, by the admission of Missouri and the annexation of Texas, in favor of slavery, by the barest majorities of votes, while the highly conservative vote of two-thirds has at length been attained against slavery, and still slavery exists—even, moreover, although two-thirds of the blood in the veins of our slaves is from our own race. If we wait for a larger vote, or till our slaves' blood becomes more consanguined with our own, the danger of a violent revolution, over which we can have no control, must become more imminent every day. By a course of undecided action, determined by no policy but the vague will of a war-distracted people, we run the risk of precipitating that very revolutionary violence which we seem seeking to avoid.

Let us regard for a moment the elements of such a revolution.

Many of the slaves here have been sold away from the border States as a punishment, being too refractory to be dealt with there, in the face of the civilization of the north. They come here with a knowledge of the Christian religion, with its germs planted and expanding, as it were, in the dark, rich soil of their African nature, with a feeling of relationship with the families from which they came, and with a sense of unmerited banishment as culprits, all of which tends to bring upon them a greater severity of treatment, and a corresponding disinclination "to receive punishment." They are far superior beings to their ancestors who were brought from Africa two generations ago, and who occasionally rebelled against comparatively less severe punishment than is inflicted now. While rising in the scale of Christian beings, their treatment is being rendered more severe than ever. The whip, the chains, the stocks, and imprisonment, are no mere fancies here; they are used to any extent to which the imagination of civilized man may reach. Many of them are as intelligent as their masters, and far more moral; for while the slave appeals to the moral law as his vindication, clinging to it as to the very horns of the altar of his safety and his hope, the master seldom hesitates to wrest him from it with violence and contempt. The slave, it is true, bears no resentment; he asks for no punishment for his master; he simply claims justice for himself; and it is this feature of his condition that promises more terror to the retribution when it comes. Even now the whites stand accursed by their oppression of humanity, being subject to a degree of confusion, chaos, and enslavement to error and wrong which northern society could not credit or comprehend.

Added to the four millions of the colored race whose disaffection is increasing even more rapidly than their numbers, there are at least four millions more of the white race whose growing miseries will naturally seek companionship with those of the blacks. This latter portion of southern society has its representatives who swing from the scaffold with the same desperate coolness,

though from a directly different cause, as that which was manifested by John Brown. The traitor Mumford, who swung the other day for trampling on the national flag, had been rendered perfectly placid and indifferent in his desperation by a government that either could not or would not secure to its subjects the blessings of liberty which that flag imports. The south cries for justice from the government as well as the north, though in a proud and resentful spirit; and in what manner is that justice to be obtained? Is it to be secured by that wretched resource of a set of profligate politicians called "reconstruction?" No; it is to be obtained by the abolition of slavery, and by no other course.

It is vain to deny that the slave system of labor is giving shape to the government of the society where it exists, and that that government is not republican either in form or spirit. It was through this system that the leading conspirators sought to fasten upon the people an aristocracy or a despotism; and it is not sufficient that they should be merely defeated in their object, and the country be rid of their rebellion—for by our Constitution we are imperatively obliged to sustain the States against the ambition of unprincipled leaders, and secure to them the republican form of government. We have positive duties to perform, and should hence adopt and pursue a positive and decided policy. We have services to render certain States which they cannot perform for themselves. We are in an emergency which the framers of the Constitution might have easily foreseen, and for which they have amply provided.

It is clear that the public good requires slavery to be abolished; but in what manner is it to be done? The more quiet operation of congressional law cannot deal with slavery as in its former status before the war, because the spirit of law is right reason, and there is no reason in slavery. A system so unreasonable as slavery cannot be regulated by reason. We can hardly expect the States to adopt laws or measures against their own immediate interests. We have seen that they will rather find arguments for crime than seek measures for abolishing or modifying slavery. But there is one principle which is fully recognized as a necessity in conditions like ours, and that is, that the public safety is the supreme law of the State, and that amidst the clash of arms the laws of peace are silent. It is then for our President, the commander-in-chief of our armies, to declare the abolition of slavery, leaving it to the wisdom of Congress to adopt measures to meet the consequences. This is the usual course pursued by a general or by military power. That power gives orders affecting complicated interests and millions of property, leaving it to the other functions of the government to adjust and regulate the effects produced. Let the President abolish slavery, and it would be an easy matter for Congress, through a well-regulated system of apprenticeship, to adopt safe measures for effecting a gradual transition from slavery to freedom.

The existing system of labor in Louisiana is unsuited to the age, and by the intrusion of the national forces it seems falling to pieces. It is a system of mutual jealousy and suspicion between the master and the man; a system of violence, immorality, and vice. The fugitive negro tells us that our presence renders his condition worse with his master than it was before, and that we offer no alleviation in return. The system is impolitic, because it offers but one stimulant to labor and effort, viz: the lash, when another, viz: money, might be added with good effect. Fear and the other low and bad qualities of the slave are appealed to, but never the good. The relation, therefore, between capital and labor, which ought to be generous and confiding, is darkling, suspicious, unkindly, full of reproachful threats, and without concord or peace. This condition of things renders the interests of society a prey to politicians, and politics cease to be practical or useful.

The questions that ought to have been discussed in the late extraordinary convention of Louisiana are:

1st. What ought the State of Louisiana do to adapt her ancient system of labor to the present advanced spirit of the age; and

2d. How can the State be assisted by the general government in effecting the change?

But instead of this the only question before that body was how to vindicate slavery by flogging the Yankees.

Compromises are not to be made hereafter with politicians, but with sturdy labor and the right to work. The interests of working men resent political trifling. Our political education, shaped almost entirely to the interests of slavery, has been false and vicious in the extreme; and it must be corrected with as much suddenness almost as that with which the Salem witchcraft came to an end. The only question that remains to decide is how the change shall take place.

We are not without examples and precedents in the history of the past. The enfranchisement of the people of Europe has been and is still going on through the instrumentality of military service, and by this means our slaves might be raised in the scale of civilization and prepared for freedom. Fifty regiments might be raised among them at once, which could be employed in this climate to preserve order, and thus prevent the necessity of retrenching our liberties, as we should do by a large army exclusively of whites. For it is evident that a considerable army of whites would give stringency to our government, while an army partly of blacks would naturally operate in favor of freedom and against those influences which at present most endanger our liberties. At the end of five years they could be sent to Africa and their places filled with new enlistments.

There is no practical evidence against the effects of immediate abolition, even if there is not in its favor. I have witnessed the sudden abolition of flogging in the navy against the prejudice-warped judgments of both, and from the beneficial effects there I have nothing to fear from the immediate abolition of slavery. I fear rather the violent consequences from a continuance of the evil. But should such an act devastate the whole State of Louisiana, and render the whole soil here but the mere passage-way of the fruits of the enterprise and industry of the northwest, it would be better for the country at large than it is now at the seat of disaffection and rebellion.

When it is remembered that not a word is found in our Constitution sanctioning the buying and selling of human beings, a shameless act which renders our country the disgrace of Christendom, and worse, in this respect, even than Africa herself, we should have less dread of seeing the degrading traffic stopped at once and forever. Half wages are already virtually paid for slave labor in the system of tasks, which, in an unwilling spirit of compromise, most of the slave States have already been compelled to adopt. At the end of a period of five years' apprenticeship, or of fifteen at furthest, full wages could be paid to the enfranchised negro race to the double advantage of both master and man. This is just; for we now hold the slaves of Louisiana by the same tenure that the State can alone claim them, viz: by the original right of conquest. We have so far conquered them that a proclamation setting them free, coupled with offers of protection, would devastate every plantation in the State.

In conclusion, I may state that Mr. La Branche is, as I am informed, a descendant from one of the oldest families in Louisiana. He is wealthy and a man of standing; and his act in sending away his negroes to our lines, with their clothes and furniture, appears to indicate the convictions of his own mind as to the proper logical consequences and deductions that should follow from the present relative status of the two contending parties. He seems to be convinced that the proper result of the conflict is the manumission of the slave, and he may be safely regarded, in this respect, as the representative man of the State. I so regard him myself, and thus do I interpret his action, although my camp now

contains some of the highest symbols of secessionism, which have been taken by a party of the 7th Vermont volunteers from his residence.

In the meantime the slaves, old and young, little ones and all, are suffering from exposure and uncertainty as to their future condition. Driven away by their masters with threats of violence if they return, and with no decided reception or welcome from us, what is to be their lot? Considerations of humanity are pressing for an immediate solution of their difficulties; and they are but a small portion of their race who have sought and are still seeking our pickets and our military stations, declaring that they cannot and will not any longer serve their masters, and that all they want is work and protection from us. In such a state of things the question occurs as to my own action in the case. I cannot return them to their masters, who not unfrequently come in search of them, for I am fortunately prohibited by an article of war from doing that even if my own nature did not revolt at it. I cannot receive them, for I have neither work, shelter, nor the means nor plan of transporting them to Hayti, or of making suitable arrangements with their masters until they can be provided for.

It is evident that some plan, some policy, or some system is necessary on the part of the government, without which the agent can do nothing, and all his efforts are rendered useless and of no effect. This is no new condition in which I find myself; it is my experience during the some twenty-five years of my public life as a military officer of the government. The new article of war recently adopted by Congress, rendering it criminal in an officer of the army to return fugitives from injustice, is the first support that I have ever felt from the government in contending against these slave influences which are opposed to its character and its interests. But the mere refusal to return fugitives does not now meet the case. A public agent in the present emergency must be invested with wider and more positive powers than this, or his services will prove as valueless to the country as they are unsatisfactory to himself.

Desiring this communication to be laid before the President, and leaving my commission at his disposal,

I have the honor to remain, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. W. PHELPS, *Brigadier General.*

Captain R. S. DAVIS,

Acting Asst. Adjt. Gen., New Orleans, La.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, D. C., June 16, 1862.

SIR: You are hereby assigned to duty in the department of the south, to act under the orders of the Secretary of War. You are directed to take possession of all the plantations heretofore occupied by the rebels, and take charge of the inhabitants remaining thereon within the department, or which the fortunes of the war may hereafter bring into it, with authority to take such measures, make such rules and regulations for the cultivation of the land, and for the protection, employment, and government of the inhabitants as circumstances may seem to require.

You are authorized to exercise all sanitary and police powers that may be necessary for the health and security of the persons under your charge, and may imprison or exclude all disorderly, disobedient, or dangerous persons from the limits of your operations.

The major general commanding the department of the south will be instructed to give you all the military aid and protection necessary to enable you to carry out the views of the government. You will have power to act upon the decisions of courts-martial which are called for the trial of persons not in the mili-

tary service to the same extent that a commander of a department has over courts-martial called for the trial of soldiers in his department; and, so far as the persons above described are concerned, you will also have a general control over the action of the provost marshals.

It is expressly understood that, so far as the persons and purposes herein specified are concerned, your action will be independent of that of the other military authorities of the department, and in all other cases subordinate only to the major general commanding.

In cases of need or destitution of the inhabitants, you are directed to issue such portions of the army rations and such articles of clothing as may be suitable to the habits and wants of the persons supplied, which articles will be furnished by the quartermaster and commissary of the department of the south upon requisitions approved by yourself. It is expected that by encouraging industry, skill in the cultivation of the necessaries of life, and general self-improvement, you will, as far as possible, promote the real well being of all people under your supervision.

Medical and ordnance supplies will be furnished by the proper officers, which you will distribute and use according to your instructions.

You will account regularly with the proper bureaus of this department and report frequently—once a week, at least.

Yours, truly,

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Brigadier General R. SAXTON.

[Extract.]

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, November 26, 1861.

GENERAL: * * * * *

Your purpose in relation to the pay of the negroes employed for the government, at your post, meets with the approval of this department, and you will therefore take such action thereon as to you may seem just and proper. * *

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

THOMAS A. SCOTT,
Assistant Secretary of War.

Major General JOHN E. WOOL,
Commanding Fortress Monroe.

[Extract.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA,
Fort Monroe, November 25, 1861.

SIR: * * * * *

I would ask your attention to the pay made to contrabands. I have a uniform price both for men and women. I think you have my plan before you. Some of the officers pay on account of the government as high, I believe, as \$20, being special cases to individuals. For laborers I allow ten dollars and subsistence. It is my intention to reduce all to ten dollars. I hope this will meet the approbation of the Secretary.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN E. WOOL,
Major General.

Hon. SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *October 14, 1861.*

SIR: In conducting military operations within States declared by the proclamation of the President to be in a state of insurrection, you will govern yourself, so far as persons held to service under the laws of such States are concerned, by the principles of the letters addressed by me to Major General Butler, on the 30th of May and the 8th of August, copies of which are herewith furnished to you.

Special directions adapted to special circumstances cannot be given. Much must be referred to your own discretion as commanding general of the expedition.

You will, however, in general avail yourself of the services of any persons, whether fugitives from labor or not, who may offer them to the national government. You will employ such persons in such services as they may be fitted for, either as ordinary employés, or, if special circumstances seem to require it, in any other capacity, with such organization, in squads, companies, or otherwise as you may deem most beneficial to the service; this, however, not being a general arming of them for military services. You will assure all loyal masters that Congress will provide just compensation to them for the loss of the services of the persons so employed. It is believed that the course thus indicated will best secure the substantial rights of loyal masters and the proper benefits to the United States of the services of all disposed to support the government, while it will avoid 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.

Respectfully,

THOMAS A. SCOTT,
Acting Secretary of War

Brig. Gen. T. W. SHERMAN,
Commanding Expedition to the Southern Coast.

Extract of letter to Major General John E. Wool.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
September 20, 1861.

"You will, as early as practicable, send to General McClellan, at this place, all negro men capable of performing labor, accompanied by their families. They can be usefully employed on the military works in this vicinity."

SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, September 22, 1861.

SIR: I am directed by the President to request that you keep all contraband servants at Fort Monroe until otherwise ordered, instead of sending them to Washington, as directed some days since. They will be used for government purposes along the southern coast.

Very respectfully,

THOMAS A. SCOTT,
Acting Secretary of War.

Major General JOHN E. WOOL,
Commanding Fortress Monroe, Virginia.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, October 5, 1861.

SIR: Please select one thousand active men from the lot of "fugitive contrabands" now on hand at Fortress Monroe, and prepare them to accompany General Sherman's expedition to the southern coast.

Have them ready to embark by the 15th of October. General Sherman will provide transportation.

I have the honor to be, very truly, yours,

THOMAS A. SCOTT,
Acting Secretary of War.

Major General JOHN E. WOOL,
Commanding Fortress Monroe,

WASHINGTON, August 8, 1861.

GENERAL: The important question of the proper disposition to be made of fugitive slaves from service in States in insurrection against the federal government, to which you have again directed my attention in your letter of July 30, has received my most attentive consideration.

It is the desire of the President that all existing rights, in all the States, be fully respected and maintained. The war now prosecuted on the part of the federal government is a war for the Union, and for the preservation of all constitutional rights of States, and the citizens of the States, in the Union.

Hence no question can arise as to fugitives from service within States and Territories in which the authority of the Union is fully acknowledged. The ordinary forms of judicial proceeding, which must be respected by military and civil authorities alike, will suffice for the enforcement of all legal claims.

But in States wholly or partially under insurrectionary control, where the laws of the United States are so far opposed and resisted that they cannot be effectually enforced, it is obvious that rights dependent on the execution of those laws must, temporarily, fail; and it is equally obvious that rights dependent on the laws of the States within which military operations are conducted must be necessarily subordinated to the military exigencies created by the insurrection, if not wholly forfeited by the treasonable conduct of parties claiming them.

To this general rule rights to services can form no exception.

The act of Congress approved August 6, 1861, declares that if persons held to service shall be employed in hostility to the United States, the right to their services shall be forfeited, and such persons shall be discharged therefrom.

It follows of necessity that no claim can be recognized by the military authorities of the Union to the services of such persons when fugitives.

A more difficult question is presented in respect to persons escaping from the service of loyal masters. It is quite apparent that the laws of the State under which only the services of such fugitives can be claimed must needs be wholly, or almost wholly, suspended as to remedies by the insurrection and the military measures necessitated by it. And it is equally apparent that the substitution of military for judicial measures for the enforcement of such claims must be attended by great inconveniences, embarrassments, and injuries.

Under these circumstances it seems quite clear that the substantial rights of loyal masters will be best protected by receiving such fugitives, as well as fugitives from disloyal masters, into the service of the United States, and employing them under such organizations and in such occupations as circumstances may suggest or require. Of course a record should be kept showing the name and

description of the fugitives, the name and the character, as loyal or disloyal, of the master, and such facts as may be necessary to a correct understanding of the circumstances of each case after tranquillity shall have been restored. Upon the return of peace Congress will, doubtless, properly provide for all the persons thus received into the service of the Union, and for just compensation to loyal masters. In this way only, it would seem, can the duty and safety of the government and the just rights of all be fully reconciled and harmonized.

You will, therefore, consider yourself instructed to govern your future action in respect to fugitives from service by the principles herein stated, and will report from time to time, and at least twice in each month, your action in the premises to this department.

You will, however, neither authorize nor permit any interference by the troops under your command with the servants of peaceful citizens in house or field; nor will you, in any way, encourage such servants to leave the lawful service of their masters; nor will you, except in cases where the public safety may seem to require, prevent the voluntary return of any fugitives to the service from which he may have escaped.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War.

Major General B. F. BUTLER,
*Commanding Department of Virginia,
 Fortress Monroe, Virginia.*

WASHINGTON, *May 30, 1861.*

SIR: Your action in respect to the negroes who came in your lines from the service of the rebels is approved.

The department is sensible of the embarrassment which must surround officers conducting military operations in a State, by the laws of which slavery is sanctioned. The government cannot recognize the rejection by any State of its federal obligations, nor can it refuse the performance of the federal obligations resting upon itself. Among these federal obligations, however, none can be more important than that of suppressing and dispersing armed combinations formed for the purpose of overthrowing its whole constitutional authority. While, therefore, you will permit no interference by the persons under your command with the relations of persons held to service under the laws of any State, you will, on the other hand, so long as any State within which your military operations are conducted is under the control of such armed combinations, refrain from surrendering to alleged masters any persons who may come within your lines. You will employ such persons in the services to which they may be best adapted, keeping an account of the labor by them performed, of the value of it, and of the expenses of their maintenance.

The question of their final disposition will be reserved for future determination.
SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War.

Major General BUTLER.

[Extract.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA, *May 27, 1861.*

* * * * * Since I wrote my last despatch the question in regard to slave property is becoming one of very serious magnitude. The inhabitants of Virginia are using their negroes in the batteries, and are preparing to send the women and children south. The escapes from them are very numerous, and a squad has come in this morning to my pickets bringing their women and children. Of course, these cannot be dealt with upon the theory on which I designed to treat the services of able-bodied men and women who might come within my lines, and of which I gave you a detailed account in my last despatch. I am in the utmost doubt what to do with this species of property. Up to this time I have had come within my lines men and women with their children, entire families, each family belonging to the same owner. I have, therefore, determined to employ, as I can do very profitably, the able-bodied persons in the party, issuing proper food for the support of all, and charging against their services the expense of care and sustenance of the non-laborers, keeping a strict and accurate account as well of the services as of the expenditure, having the worth of the services and the cost of the expenditure determined by a board of survey, to be hereafter detailed. I know of no other manner in which to dispose of this subject and the questions connected therewith. As a matter of property to the insurgents, it will be of very great moment, the number that I now have amounting, as I am informed, to what, in good times, would be of the value of sixty thousand dollars. Twelve of these negroes, I am informed, have escaped from the batteries on Sewall's Point, which, this morning, fired upon my expedition as it passed by out of range. As a means of offence therefore in the enemy's hands, these negroes, when able-bodied, are of the last importance. Without them the batteries could not have been erected, at least for many weeks. As a military question, it would seem to be a measure of necessity to deprive their masters of their services. How can this be done? As a political question and a question of humanity, can I receive the services of a father and a mother, and not take the children? Of the humanitarian aspect I have no doubt. Of the political one I have no right to judge. I therefore submit all this to your better judgment, and as the questions have a political aspect, I have ventured, and I trust I am not wrong in so doing, to duplicate the parts of my despatch relating to this subject, and forward them to the Secretary of War. * * * * *

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

B. F. BUTLER.

Lieutenant General SCOTT.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, July 3, 1862.

GENERAL: I wrote you last under date of the 29th ultimo, and have now to say that your despatch of the 18th ultimo, with the accompanying report of General Phelps, concerning certain fugitive negroes that have come to his pickets, has been considered by the President.

He is of opinion that under the law of Congress they cannot be sent back to their master; that in common humanity they must not be permitted to suffer for want of food, shelter, or other necessaries of life; that to this end they should be provided for by the quartermaster's and commissary's departments, and that those who are capable of labor should be set to work and paid reasonable wages.

In directing this to be done, the President does not mean, at present, to settle any general rule in respect to slaves or slavery, but simply to provide for the particular case under the circumstances in which it is now presented.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Major General B. F. BUTLER,
Commanding, &c., New Orleans, Louisiana.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE GULF,
New Orleans, Louisiana, June 18, 1862.

SIR: Since my last despatch was written I have received the accompanying report from General Phelps. It is not my duty to enter into a discussion of the questions which it presents. I desire, however, to state the information of Mr. Le Blanche, given me by his friends and neighbors, and also gathered from Jack Le Blanche, his slave, who seems to be the leader of this party of negroes. Mr. Le Blanche I have not seen. He, however, claims to be loyal, and to have taken no part in the war, but to have been quietly on his plantation some twelve miles above New Orleans, on the opposite side of the river. He has a son in the secession army, whose uniform and equipment, &c., are the "symbols of secession" of which General Phelps speaks.

Mr. Le Blanche's house was searched by the order of General Phelps for arms and contraband of war, and his neighbors say that his negroes were told that they were free if they would come to the general's camp. That thereupon the negroes, under the lead of "Jack," determined to leave, and for that purpose crowded into a small boat, which, from overloading, was in danger of swamping.

Le Blanche then told his negroes that if they were determined to go that they would be drowned in that boat, and he would hire them a large boat to put them across the river; and that they might have their families if they would go and leave his plantation and crop to him. They decided to go, and Le Blanche did all a man could to make that going safe.

The account of General Phelps is the negro side of the story; that above given is the story of Mr. Le Blanche's neighbors, some of whom I know to be loyal men.

An order against negroes being allowed in camp is the reason that they are outside.

Mr. Le Blanche is represented to be a humane man, and did not consent to the "exodus" of his negroes.

General Phelps, I believe, intends making this a test case for the policy of the government. I wish it might be so, for the difference of our action upon this subject is a source of trouble. I respect his honest sincerity of opinion, but I am a soldier bound to carry out the wishes of my government so long as I hold its commission, and I understand that policy to be the one I am pursuing. I do not feel at liberty to pursue any other. If the policy of the government is nearly that I sketched in my report upon this subject as that which I had ordered in this department, then the services of General Phelps are worse than useless here. If the views set forth in his report are to obtain, then he is invaluable, for his whole soul is in it, and he is a good soldier of large experience, and no braver man lives.

I beg to leave the whole question with the President, with, perhaps, the need-

less assurance that his wishes shall be loyally followed, even if not in accordance with my own, as I have now no right to have any upon the subject.

I write in haste, as the steamer Mississippi is waiting this despatch.

Awaiting the earliest possible instructions, I have the honor to be your most obedient servant,

BENJ. F. BUTLER,
Major General Commanding.

Hon. EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.