

**SUFFERINGS OF EMANCIPATED SLAVES.**

A meeting was held on Monday evening, the 7th instant, in the large hall of the Cooper Institute in this city, under the auspices of the "National Freedmen's Relief Association," in behalf of the emancipated slaves in the department of the Mississippi, who are in a deplorable state of destitution and suffering. Their condition is such that Gen. Grant has sent the Rev. A. S. Fiske, Chaplain and Superintendent of Contrabands in his Department, to lay it before the people of the North, and to solicit means to provide for the comfort of the wives and children of such of them as are now in the army of the United States, and of others who are without employment and utterly dependant for subsistence. The meeting was large and the statements that were made excited the deepest interest. Rev. Dr. Tyng presided and delivered a brief address. Remarks were also made by Dr. Hitchcock, Dr. Ballows, and Gen. Sickles, but the interest of the evening was centered in the account which Rev. Mr. Fiske gave of the deplorable condition of this unfortunate people who are suffering so deeply from the war. No one can read the extract from the address of Mr. Fiske, which we give below as copied from the report in the New York Times, without having his sympathies painfully excited. There have been the most contradictory accounts of the condition of the liberated slaves, but this statement is made by the authorised agent of Gen. Grant who has had the most abundant opportunity of knowing the actual truth in regard to the matter. Thousands, he tells us, have already died of destitution and exposure, and tens of thousands are ready to die from the same causes:

The Rev. Mr. Fiske stated that there were not less than fifty thousand blacks upon the banks of the Mississippi, from among whom had been culled every able-bodied man for the military service. This sable throng was composed of women, children, and the infirm. They rested in crowded camps, sheltered by leaky tents whose tatters flutter in every breeze. They were fed by the Government a cheap ration, unserviceable military clothing being supplied to some extent to the infirm men. Officers, until recently chaplains, were detailed for their care. They were clothed in just that apparel in which months ago they fled from their masters. He should have some hard things to say of officers and soldiers in our army, but amidst them all let him—the modest, unpretending hero of Vicksburg—stand spotless. He early overcame all the prejudice of education and training, and had stood the black man's friend. All that he could do he had done, nobly, liberally. By his order, every step for their care and the supply of their necessities had been taken. The honor of his action in these affairs should brighten forever the lustre of his imperishable name. This patriot-hero should be greeted, as he lived on through the ages of the world's history, as not only great but good.

Mr. Fiske proceeded to detail several scenes of suffering and injustice which had passed before his eyes previously to his being detailed to the care of the contrabands. He said that the key to all their destitution in these camps was to be found in the method of their coming in. They came from plantations from which everything had been stripped. Our armies this summer had subsisted on the country, and swept vast regions of all forms of supply. The blacks could not remain behind. Their only chance was to come to the river with the army or flee further into the interior. They chose the former of course, and so came in by long marches, without transportation for anything, in utter destitution. What could you ask a mother, with a babe in her arms and another clinging to her skirts, to bring for the shelter of her children during the winter? You could hardly ask why she did not bring bed and blankets and clothing for their shelter during all the months. The blacks of Jeff. and Joe Davis came in back of Vicksburg in June last in great destitution. Blankets were distributed among them, the gift of the Sanitary Commission, by the speaker's own hand, as they were lying in their bivouack, with nothing between them and the cold earth, nothing between them and the clear sky. They started in with teams and goods, but the teams were taken by the army and their goods lost at the out-posts of our forces miles away. So they came in in utter destitution.

Out of an average number of four thousand blacks under his charge at Memphis during the months of February, March and April of the present year, there died during that time twelve hundred. Three-fourths of them had no change of raiment—probably one-fourth of the women had but one garment between themselves and utter nakedness. Many children were kept night and day rolled in the poor blanket of a family—its sole apparel. They had multitudes of these—no beds. There were no floors in their leaky tents, and no chance for fires. The wonder is not that so many died, but that so many lived.

The suffering of this people is our national dishonor. If they were not rescued, history would write something thus: "The American people enticed within their lines tens of thousands of slaves, alluring them thither with promise of liberty, took from among them all able-bodied men to reinforce their armies, huddled the rest together in great camps, and left them to perish in nakedness by the hundred." How will that page of history read? The tidings of their sufferings had gone back to the Confederacy till these people had ceased to come in as eagerly as they did. If it ever proved possible for the South to arm her blacks against us, it would be by reason of the sufferings of those who had reached our lines. Perhaps, with the baleful light of this too well-attested fact, he might be led to strive for his liberty in arms against us.

The following is an extract from a letter written some time since to Rev. W. G. Elliot, D. D., of Milwaukee, Wis., by a delegate of the Christian Commission, giving an account of the condition and treatment of the liberated slaves after the capture of Vicksburg:

Vicksburg was looked upon by the negroes as the very gate of Heaven, and they came trooping to it as pigeons to their roost at night. After the departure of Pemberton's army on the 15th of July, thousands of these miserable creatures filled the vacant houses, churches, sheds and caves. Here they crowded together, sometimes twenty or more in a single room, weary, weak and sick from their long march and abstinence, spiritless and sad, and many of them longing to be once more on massa's plantation.

About the first of August, the military authorities became alarmed lest a pestilence should break out among them and extend to the army. Porempatory orders were issued to at once remove, across the river, all negroes, of every age and sex, whether sick or well, who were not in some employment. One morning I went out to inform a certain Lieutenant W—who, with an inadequate force, was executing the order, that one of them in the Baptist church was dead, and that another, a woman, was lying behind the fence dying. He told me that he had detailed for the purpose of removing the negroes twenty army wagons; that he hauled them, well, sick and dead, with all their traps, to the river, where he had a steamer to convey them across to a point opposite the lower part of the city; that he had one wagon to haul the dead, and that some days he found as many as twenty; that in one house he found six dead bodies, with living ones sitting and lying around them, apparently unconscious of their situation. Holes were dug on the river's bank and the dead buried.

The searching out and removal of these negroes consumed about fifteen or twenty days. About 200 were thus removed to the low grounds opposite Vicksburg, and there left in the woods, without any shelter, under the care of a man who was appointed to organize them into a camp, and separate small pox cases from the rest—in general to do what he could for their relief. He was soon taken sick and a certain Capt. \_\_\_\_\_, was appointed to take charge of all the contrabands in and around Vicksburg; the captain was soon prostrated with disease, but was at his work again when I left Vicksburg. August 24th, Capt. \_\_\_\_\_ appointed a chaplain to take charge of those who had been removed from the city, in place of the man who was first appointed. He entered upon his labors, but was soon prostrated by disease, and was conveyed across the river in a skiff, whence he made his way to a house adjoining that of the United States Christian Commission. Here he was found alone, and very sick. He was invited to our house, where he was still remaining when I left the city. The chaplain told me that these negroes had suffered, and were still suffering untold want and wretchedness; that nearly 400 had died since no had taken charge of them; that from 15 to 20 die daily. Sometimes they would crawl off to the woods and die, where their bodies would be found by the stench which arose from their decay. That there was no white man with them but a nephew of his; that rations were furnished them by the Government, but sometimes he had difficulty in getting them over the river; they were five days without receiving any food, and the negroes threatened to kill him, thinking the fault was his. He also stated that they had no tents or shelter except brush, to shield them from the sun or storms, or dews of night. Capt. A—stated to me that there were in this camp 1,000; at Young's Point, 8,551; on Passaw Island, where he purposed gathering most of them, 2,800; and on Black's Plantation, on the Yazoo, 2,400—in all over 16,000. One morning I went among the wretched masses where they were being sent across. I tried in vain to find some women who were able to work, as we wished their labor at our house. All

were sick, or taking care of the sick. I saw nothing but one sad scene of misery. Hoping that you may be able to do more for these suffering, ignorant beings than is in my power to devise, and that God may bless your efforts, I am respectfully yours,

Wm. D. BUTLER.  
Delegate of the U. S. Ch. Com.

These statements can be read only with feelings of distress and horror, and they appeal to every philanthropic heart. The poor blacks are, so far as the war is concerned, innocent sufferers; they had no share in bringing it on, however their condition may have influenced others; but they have become the greatest sufferers in consequence of it; and unless immediate and very extensive arrangements are made for their relief, these sufferings will be still greater in the future.

A committee appointed at the Cooper Institute meeting to raise subscriptions for this unhappy people, have recommended that a simultaneous collection be made for their benefit on the Sunday preceding the National Thanksgiving (next Sabbath).

Warm clothing may be sent to C. C. Leigh, National Freedmen's Relief Association, No. 1 Mercer street; and money to Rev. A. S. Fiske, Chaplain, care of George Francis Shaw, 86 Trinity Building, New York city.