

WM. E. PELL, Proprietor.

The Freedmen of North Carolina.

The author of the following letter is an original and eminent abolitionist, a brother-in-law of Chief Justice Pierpont, of Vermont, and brother of Judge Lawrence, of the Supreme Court of Illinois, and is consequently entitled to credit for the candid exposition contained therein.

FAYETTEVILLE, N. C., December 14, 1863.

Dear Sir: I venture to think that some account of the condition of things in North Carolina, within the sphere of my observation, may not be of the least interest to you.

After my transfer to the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, &c., I was ordered to this State and assigned to duty in charge of Warren and Franklin counties. Warren, in proportion to its extent and population, was formerly one of the most wealthy counties in the State—its white population equal in intelligence and refinement to any of which I have ever had observation. The slave population was proportionably more numerous, I believe, than in any other county. The people had been almost unanimously in favor of secession. The county had rather a bad reputation at the State Bureau Headquarters, when I was sent there, as regards the disposition of the people and their treatment of the blacks. There had been many reports in the Northern newspapers of gross outrages upon the blacks. Franklin county is much like Warren, having many characteristics of the latter in a less degree. I went to my district with my mind unfavorably predisposed towards the people. I remained there a very short time, when I was ordered to this place. In the interval, I think I met, personally, at least three-fourths of the planters and other citizens of Warren, and a large, though less number, in Franklin. The proportion of the freed people who sought my office in Warren, and whom I sought and talked to on the plantations, could hardly have been less. My office was rarely free from the presence of some of both classes. Having my own horses, I travelled about my district a great deal, to investigate the situation of affairs, assist in making legal settlements, and try to inform the minds of the negroes as to their rights and responsibilities. I talked to them in a body on each plantation I visited, and listened to what they had to say. I accepted only such hospitalities as were tendered as were needed when travelling. The people, almost invariably, are kind and generous to the negroes to a degree that the North will, I fear, be slow to credit. They do not seek to be placed upon the footing of employers, and to do only what is just to the freedmen as laborers. They are forbearing and indulgent to their inexperience and ignorance. By the regulation of the Bureau the freed people are considered entitled to pay for labor from the 27th of April last, and one-fourth of the main articles of the crop was fixed upon by Colonel Whitaker as their just share in that district, where no contract or definite understanding existed as to payment. The laborers also had, of course, their ration houses, fuel, &c. Most had also (I think nineteen in twenty) their own private "patches" of corn, producing ten to thirty bushels—potatoes, melons, peas, &c., and usually, chickens and hogs from one to four or five in many instances. I very soon learned to tell, unerringly, which were the negroes' hogs upon a plantation. The proportion of the crop spoken of was given to those who did the labor. They were held liable to support their own families, reimbursing the planter from their own share of the crop, if sufficient. Of course there were numbers on nearly every plantation—far more than the usual proportion, so many of the men had left, who were wholly charge upon the planter, the old, the young, the sick and helpless, who had no one whose labor was justly chargeable for their support. Medical attendance could seldom be had, except at the planter's expense. They are sadly impoverished, yet in the large majority of cases they voluntarily give to the laborers more than the Bureau required, while recognizing and meeting the heavy claims upon their humanity in behalf of the sick and helpless. Very few cases of hardship came to my knowledge from helpless persons having been driven off before I was there, or during my stay, and in most of these there seemed palliating circumstances, in the misconduct of blacks or the destitution of the whites; and so many cases of unselfish kindness, and real self-sacrificing generosity came to my notice, that I confess these late bitter rebuffs made me think better of human nature than I did before, and I do not know but my respect and regard for them make me too ready a favorable witness. They certainly feel no bitterness, or manifest hostility toward the black race, for the change that has wrought their instrumentalities, been wrought in the condition, and for which they justly consider them to be in no way responsible. Some are sanguine as to the future property and elevation of the black race, many more doubtful as to it, depending both as to the blacks and themselves. All, of course, see that it depends upon the conduct of the freedmen, and not upon what is done for them, as they may, in influencing them in the right. The desire to see them educated, I think, is general—certainly so with the better classes.

Now as to the negroes. They are ignorant and have few ideas of what I had supposed. I see that more of intelligence and moral culture, I should say they were victims in the extreme. But they are no lackluster in this, which is the basis of moral accountability, that it is not to be found in them so. They are so far removed from their savage ancestry of one, two, or three generations back as the influence of a system directed chiefly to their rapid increase and the most profitable use of their muscular capacity, as its prime results would naturally bring about, being themselves strongly imitative, and brought in slight contact with civilization. I think they possess the characteristics of tropical races; that they are indolent, sensual, false, and when aroused, cruel. They are excitable, imaginative, and by nature brave. In a few years they will be the finest material for a religious fanatic the world possesses; and many Mahomedans, may, perhaps, arise, who will endeavor, at least to march and lead them to conquest. But this is all speculation. I set down to try and give you facts. You will remark, however, that if Brigham Young would more contents, here is his field with the people to whom polygamy is native. I wish to head them beyond the Caribbean Sea. They have expected that the Government would give them land here, taking it away from the rebel owners. The officers of the Bureau have labored diligently to disabuse their minds of this error, but with little success. All have told them, in speeches, plainly, what their position is, and of all they said, when the speaker had finished—General Howard as well as others—'But no Yank, dat just um ber dressed up in blue clothes and brought um here to be us.' Those who are convinced they will not have land for their own insist they must have it tenanted, to be furnished with teams and all necessary appliances, and food to live

upon, and then give a very small allowance to the owners. There is universal demand for labor at fair prices—large prices, indeed, considering what this poor soil produces, and what the labor is likely to be, and I made every effort to know how to induce the negroes to hire for next year. Being a farmer myself, I think I know what is a fair bargain. I do not think any had hired in my former district when I left it, two weeks ago. They are offered cash wages and slaves in the crops. If they make a bargain, as some will for a short time, the chances are for me, and some more ready to hire to them. They are as imprudent as children. Drunkenness is, of course, increasing among them, and they are more addicted to it than I had supposed. You know what their domestic relations usually are. The idea of freedom, of wages, is not to work—or only for themselves directly. The word 'overseer' is now tabooed on the plantations. It must hereafter, when one is tolerated, be superintendent. Now, what is to be done with this ignorant, degraded element which may, if not wisely controlled, push back, if it does not overtake, civilization here at the South? While elevated and enlightened by all available means, it must, at the same time, be held in check in its evil tendencies by sternly repressive laws. The criminal must be punished, the idle must be forced to work. The children, homeless and deserted, or of parents unfit guardians for them, as most are, should be apprenticed to the men should be forced to enter into contracts, and to abide by them. All this may not be very democratic, but I think it is better under the circumstances. These people must be allowed their civil rights; to sue and be sued, and to testify in courts; but nineteen in twenty are no more fit for the political responsibilities and duties of citizens of a citizen than my horse. I wish Charles Sumner would come down here and occupy a position like mine for a while. He should say nothing more against slavery, if he thinks it a fit school in which to educate savages, in two or three generations, of the lowest human race too, to discharge wisely and well the responsibilities of a citizen in a government which can only exist upon a basis of intelligence and virtue. He should think most worthy of slavery to justify his present course—or such worse of it, and then act more wisely.

I think the disposition of the people here towards the Government is misunderstood and misjudged at the North. I have not met a Northern man who was not satisfied with Worth for Governor as a Union man.

Mr. Worth, of a Quaker family, had always been in principle opposed to slavery. He was one of three in the State Legislature who opposed and voted against calling the convention to pass the ordinance of secession. He refused an election to the convention itself. He opposed secession as far as he could. These people here, however, cannot their bad cause. When it fell I think they honestly and in good faith gave it up and accepted the result. It wounds their pride deeply that at the North they are considered incapable of good faith. Nor do I wonder at it, nor am I without sympathy for them. I would trust that a hundred times over to sit in Congress and legislate for our whole country before I would cease to be a Union man, and men of that stripe, who would have assassinated our country as Booth did Mr. Lincoln if they could, instead of meeting, as it is, and finally fight as these men did. These men were the victims of a political heresy, in which they had been educated by such means as they have given it up. They were true to a bad cause—I believe they will be so to a good one. In case you feel bound to read this far, I accept my apology for such an unintended intrusion on your time and patience. If you think this would have any interest to you, I think it of course don't care who sees it, as I think it is the truth, and needs to be told. Very respectfully, H. C. LAWRENCE, Brevet Major, A. Q. M., U. S. Vol.

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