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## A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT: THE PORT ROYAL JOURNAL OF CHARLOTTE L. FORTEN, 1862-1863.

Charlotte L. Forten, the author of the following *Journal*, was born of free Negro parents in Philadelphia in 1838, the granddaughter of James Forten, wealthy sail-maker and abolitionist,<sup>1</sup> and the daughter of Robert Bridges Forten. Her father, a staunch enemy of prejudice,<sup>2</sup> refused to subject her to the segregated schools of her native city, sending her instead to Salem, Massachusetts, when she

<sup>1</sup>Accounts of James Forten's important contributions to antislavery will be found in Lydia Maria Child, *The Freedmen's Book* (Boston, 1865), 100-103; William C. Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1855), 166-169; Robert Purvis, *Remarks on the Life and Character of James Forten, Delivered at Bethel Church, March 30, 1842* (Philadelphia, 1842); and more briefly in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-1937), VI, 536-537.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bridges Forten was so opposed to discrimination that he repeatedly threatened to leave the United States for Canada. Just before the Civil War he did move to England, only to return and enlist as a private in the Forty-Third United States Colored Regiment. He died while in recruiting service in Maryland, and was buried with full military honors. Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5* (Harrisburg, 1868-1871), V, 1084. *The Liberator*, May 13, 1864, contains an account of his life and a description of his funeral.

was sixteen years old. There she was cast in an environment exactly suited to her background and temperament. Living at the home of Charles Lenox Remond, most prominent of William Lloyd Garrison's Negro followers,<sup>3</sup> she came in constant contact with the great and near-great of radical abolitionism. Her life during the next years was a constant round of antislavery meetings, while her intimates included such friends of emancipation as Garrison, Wendell Phillips, William Wells Brown, William C. Nell, Lydia Maria Child, and John Greenleaf Whittier.<sup>4</sup> Little wonder that in such an atmosphere Miss Forten determined to dedicate her life to an attack on slavery and discrimination.

If abolitionism was one of her loves, self-improvement was the other. Already well read, "with finely-chiselled features, well-developed forehead, countenance beaming with intelligence, and a mind stored with recollections of the best authors,"<sup>5</sup> she was determined to prove that members of her oppressed race could hold their own intellectually with the cream of New England youth. With this as her goal, she studied avidly at the Higginson Grammar School,<sup>6</sup> where she was looked upon as an "attentive and progressive student."<sup>7</sup> On her graduation in the spring of 1855 she enrolled in the Salem Normal School, completing the

<sup>3</sup> Remond, a free Negro who had been born in Salem in 1810, launched his career as an abolitionist when he was named lecturing agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1838. He had been a prominent Garrisonian since that time, devoting himself entirely to lecturing and writing for the American Anti-Slavery Society and other abolitionist organizations. William Wells Brown, *The Black Man* (New York, 1863), 246-250.

<sup>4</sup> Miss Forten began her *Journal* on May 24, 1854, on her arrival in Salem. The two manuscript volumes that deal with this period of her life contain a full account of her friendship with abolitionists and her attendance at anti-slavery meetings.

<sup>5</sup> William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston, 1875), 468-469.

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Salem. February, 1855* (Salem, 1855), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *The Rising Son*, 475.

course "with decided eclat" in July, 1856.<sup>8</sup> To her surprise and delight she was offered a position as teacher in the Epes Grammar School of Salem.<sup>9</sup> Despite the prejudice existing in even that enlightened town, the appointment was accepted by both parents and pupils without even a flurry of excitement. For the next two years she taught her classes, read widely in books that ranged from the classics to the latest sentimental novels, tried her hand at writing,<sup>10</sup> taught herself French, attended a constant round of antislavery meetings, and won the friendship of most of the stars who sparkled in the firmament of radical abolitionism. Ill-health forced her to return to Philadelphia in 1858, and for the next four years she taught intermittently in that city and in Salem while carrying on a continuous battle with sickness.<sup>11</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War, however, Miss Forten's interest in the world around her was reawakened. As she breathlessly followed news of the fighting, she realized that she was in a position to make a unique contribution to the cause that interested her most. She could, she saw, help demonstrate that the freed slaves were as capable of progress as abolitionists had long maintained.

This opportunity was created by the military situation at Port Royal, South Carolina. Captured by the North early in the war as a blockade base, the region contained some ten thousand slaves who had been abandoned by their fleeing masters. Most were extremely backward, for the

<sup>8</sup> *Salem Register*, quoted in *The Liberator*, March 26, 1858.

<sup>9</sup> Miss Forten held the rank of assistant with a salary of \$200 a year. *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Salem* (Salem, 1857), 10, 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> Poems and articles by Miss Forten, written during this period, are printed in *The Liberator*, March 16, 1855, August 24, 1855, May 27, 1859; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 19, 1858, January 15, 1859; and Brown, *The Black Man*, 169-199.

<sup>11</sup> Miss Forten describes her illness, which was diagnosed as "lung fever," in her *Journal*. During most of this period she made only scattered entries, allowing as much as a year to pass without a notation.

isolation of the sea islands where they lived, the density of the slave population, and the lack of contact with civilization, had left them illiterate, untrained, and retarded. Even their language consisted of a strange mixture of garbled English, imperfect words, and African expressions.<sup>12</sup> The plight of these unfortunates was publicized by the region's conqueror, General Thomas W. Sherman, who in January, 1862, urged that "suitable instructors be sent to the Negroes, to teach them all the necessary rudiments of civilization, and . . . that agents properly qualified, be employed and sent here to take charge of the plantations and superintend the work of the blacks until they be sufficiently enlightened to think and provide for themselves."<sup>13</sup> This request was referred to Salmon P. Chase, secretary of the treasury, a man of humane disposition and visionary foresight. Here, Chase saw, was an outstanding opportunity; if the Negroes could be trained by skilled supervisors, educated by experienced teachers, and given a slight helping hand by the government, the social experiment would have implications for the entire South.<sup>14</sup>

The experiment was launched in February, 1862. Edward L. Pierce, Chase's abolitionist-minded secretary, was named general superintendent of the Port Royal freedmen, while sub-superintendents were appointed for each plantation and a call went out for teachers and missionaries. Although no provision was made to pay the latter, abolitionists quickly formed societies to collect funds; the Boston Educational Commission, the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New York, and the Philadelphia Port Royal

<sup>12</sup> Guion G. Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands With Special Reference to St. Helena Island, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1930), 114.

<sup>13</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1836-1901), Ser. 1, VI, 218. Hereafter cited as *Official Records*.

<sup>14</sup> A. W. Stevens, ed., *Addresses and Papers by Edward L. Pierce* (Boston, 1896), 67.

Relief Association were all operating by March 3, 1862.<sup>15</sup> On that day the first contingent of superintendents and teachers—forty-one men and twelve women, all white—sailed from New York. The results were far from encouraging. Many who made the journey were poorly suited for the difficult task; moreover the ex-slaves were suspicious and hostile particularly after the superintendents forced them to plant cotton as they had in slavery times.<sup>16</sup> Their discontent led to a shift in policy in June, 1862, when the administration of the district was transferred to Edward M. Stanton, secretary of war. He selected as his agent in the area Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, a native of Massachusetts, whose kindness and understanding soon won the respect of the Negroes.<sup>17</sup>

This was the situation at Port Royal when Charlotte Forten decided to cast her lot with the "contrabands." Armed with a letter from John Greenleaf Whittier, she first applied to the Boston Educational Commission for a position as teacher. Receiving little satisfaction from that group, she turned instead to the Philadelphia Port Royal Relief Association. The secretary of that organization, J. Miller McKim, knew her abilities well, having worked with her as a fellow-abolitionist in prewar days. Nevertheless he hesitated to accept her application, fearing for her safety on the long journey southward. When it was discovered that an elderly Quaker friend of Miss Forten's, John A. Hunn, was about to depart for Port Royal to open a store, this difficulty was solved. Accompanied by this kindly gentleman and his daughter, Lizzie, she sailed from New York in October, 1862.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Edward L. Pierce, "Second Report," in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry* (New York, 1861-1868), Sup. I, 315.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Sup. I, 315; J. Miller McKim, *The Freedmen of South Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1862), n.p.

<sup>17</sup> *Official Records*, Ser. 3, II, 14, 152-153.

<sup>18</sup> Miss Forten describes her efforts to secure an appointment as a teacher in her *Journal*.

The following extracts from the manuscript *Journal* which she kept at the time describe her arrival at Port Royal and some of her more unusual experiences there. They have been selected from her complete *Journal* because they present a vivid picture of the freed slaves and of the successful education experiment in which Miss Forten participated. A portion of the original *Journal*, which was used in the preparation of this article is in the possession of Miss Forten's close friend, Dr. Anna Cooper of Washington, D. C. The rest of the original *Journal* has been deposited in the Moorland Room, Founders Library, Howard University.

Northwestern University      Ray Allen Billington

Tuesday Night, [October 28, 1862]. T'was a strange sight as our boat approached the landing at Hilton Head.<sup>19</sup> On the wharf was a motley assemblage,—soldiers, officers, and “contrabands” of every hue and size. They were mostly black, however, and certainly the most dismal specimens I ever saw. H[ilton] H[ead] looks like a very desolate place; just a long low, sandy point running out into the sea with no visible dwellings upon it but the soldiers' white roofed tents.

Thence, after an hour's delay, during which we signed a paper, which was virtually taking the oath of allegiance,<sup>20</sup> we left the “United States,” most rocking of rockety pro-pellers,—and took a steamboat for Beaufort. On board

<sup>19</sup> Hilton Head was the sandy promontory protecting the southwestern entrance to the Port Royal harbor.

<sup>20</sup> All newcomers at Port Royal were required to take the following pledge: “I do solemnly swear that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and Government of the United States against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign; that I will bear true and faithful allegiance, resolution or law of any State convention to the contrary notwithstanding. And further, that I do this with a full determination and pledge to perform it without any mental reservation whatever; and further, that I will faithfully perform all the duties which may be required of me by law. So help me God.” Elizabeth H. Botume, *First Days Among the Contrabands* (Boston, 1893), 30.

the boat was General Saxton<sup>21</sup> to whom we were introduced. I like his face exceedingly. And his manners were very courteous and affable. He looks like a thoroughly *good* man.—From H[ilton] to B[eaufort] the same low long line of sandy shore bordered by trees. Almost the only object of interest to me were the remains of an old Huguenot Fort, built many, many years ago.

Arrived at B[eaufort] we found that we had yet not reached our home. Went to Mr. French's<sup>22</sup> and saw there Reuben T[omlinson],<sup>23</sup> whom I was very glad to meet, and Mrs. Gage,<sup>24</sup> who seemed to be in rather a dismal state of mind. B[eaufort] looks like a pleasant place. The houses are large and quite handsome, built in the usual Southern style with verandahs around them, and beautiful trees. One magnolia tree in Mr. F[rench]'s yard is splendid,—

<sup>21</sup> Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, who in June, 1862, had been given charge of all plantations in the Department of the South by Edward M. Stanton, the secretary of war. Stanton instructed Saxton to "take such measures, make such rules and regulations for the cultivation of the land and protection, employment, and government of the inhabitants as circumstances might seem to require." *Official Records*, Ser. 3, II, 292.

<sup>22</sup> The Reverend Mansfield French came to Port Royal from New York in January, 1862, on a government-approved mission to study the needs of the people of the Sea Islands. E. L. Pierce, "Second Report," in Moore, *Rebellion Record*, Sup. I, 314. In March he became an agent of the New York Freedmen's Relief Association. Mrs. A. M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves, or, The Port Royal Mission* (New York, 1862), 25. French later became chaplain in the Union Army, Department of the South. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, XIV, 189.

<sup>23</sup> Reuben Tomlinson, an officer of the Pennsylvania branch of the American Freedmen's Union Commission, was one of the first agents sent south by the Port Royal Relief Association of Philadelphia. Henry L. Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville, 1941), 90.

<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Frances D. Gage, an ardent abolitionist, had written and lectured against slavery in Ohio and Missouri. She had recently come to Port Royal, without appointment or salary, to aid the Negroes in any way possible. Mrs. Gage remained at Port Royal until the autumn of 1863 when she returned to the North where she lectured widely on her experiences. L. P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughn, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Boston, 1867), 683-690.

quite as large as some of our large shade trees, and, with the most beautiful foliage, a dark rich glossy green.

Went into the Commissary's Office to wait for the boat which was to take us to St. Helena's Island which is about six miles from B[eaufort]. T'is here that Miss Towne has her school,<sup>25</sup> in which I am to teach, and that Mr. Hunn<sup>26</sup> will have his store. While waiting in the office we saw several military gentleman [*sic*], *not* very creditable specimens, I sh'd say. The little Commissary himself. . . is a perfect little popinjay, and he and a Colonel somebody who didn't look any too sensible, talked in a very smart manner, evidently for our especial benefit. The word "nigger" was plentifully used, whereupon I set them down at once as *not* gentleman. [*sic*] Then they talked a great deal about rebel attacks and yellow fever, and other alarming things, with significant nods and looks at each other. We saw through them at once, and were not at all alarmed by any of their representations. But if they are a fair example of army officers, I sh'd pray to see as little of them as possible.

To my great joy found that we were to be rowed by a crew of negro boatmen. Young Mr. F[rench] whom I like—accompanied us, while Mr. H[unn] went with a flat to get our baggage. The row was delightful. It was just at sunset—a grand Southern sunset; and the gorgeous clouds of crimson and gold were reflected in the waters below, which were smooth and calm as a mirror. Then, as we glided along, the rich sonorous tones of the boatmen broke upon the evening stillness. Their singing impressed me much. It was so sweet and strange and solemn. "Roll, Jordan, Roll" was grand, and another

<sup>25</sup> Laura M. Towne of Philadelphia, a teacher and physician. The school that she started is still in existence as the Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School on St. Helena Island. Swint, *Northern Teacher*, 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> John A. Hunn and his daughter, Lizzie, made the trip from New York to Port Royal with Miss Forten. Hunn, a Quaker, was bound for St. Helena Island to open a store where Negroes could purchase goods at reasonable prices. *Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association, Report* (Philadelphia, 1864), 1.



“Jesus make de blind to see  
 Jesus make de deaf to hear  
 Jesus make de cripple walk  
 Walk in, dear Jesus,”

and the refrain

“No man can hender me.”

It was very, very impressive. I want to hear these men sing Whittier’s “Song of the Negro Boatmen.”<sup>27</sup> I am going to see if it can’t be brought about in some way.

It was nearly dark when we reached St. Helena’s, where we found Miss T[owne]’s carriage awaiting us, and then we three and our driver, had a long drive along the lonely roads in the dark night. How easy it w’ld have been for a band of guerillas—had any chanced that way—to seize and hang us. But we feared nothing of the kind. We were in a jubilant state of mind and sang “John Brown” with a will as we drove through the pines and palmettos. Arrived at the Superintendent’s house<sup>28</sup> we were kindly greeted by him and the ladies and shown into a lofty *ceilinged* parlor where a cheerful wood fire glowed in the grate, and we soon began to feel quite at home in the very heart of Reeldom; only that I do not at all realize yet that we are in S[outh] C[arolina]. It is all a strange wild dream, from which I am constantly expecting to awake. But I can write no more now. I am tired, and still feel the motion of the ship in my poor head. Good night, dear A!<sup>29</sup>

Wednesday, Oct. 29 [1862]. A lovely day, but rather cool, I sh’ld think, for the “sunny South.” The ship still

<sup>27</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, the “poet laureate of abolitionism” had become one of Miss Forten’s most treasured friends when she lived in Massachusetts before the war.

<sup>28</sup> The superintendent was Richard Soule of Boston, General Superintendent of St. Helena and Ladies Island. Elizabeth W. Pearson, ed., *Letters from Port Royal Written at the Time of the Civil War* (Boston, 1906), 223.

<sup>29</sup> Miss Forten addressed her diary to an imaginary friend, designated as “A.”

seals [*sic*] in my head, and everything is most unreal, yet I went to drive. . . . We drove to Oaklands, our future home.<sup>30</sup> It is very pleasantly situated, but the house is in rather a dilapidated condition, as are most of the houses here, and the and the [*sic*] yard and garden have a neglected look, when it is cleaned up, and the house made habitable I think it will be quite a pleasant place. There are some lovely roses growing there and quantities of ivy creeping along the ground, even under the house, in wild luxuriance.—The negroes on the place are very kind and polite. I think I shall get on amicably with them.

After walking about and talking with them, and plucking some roses and ivy to send home, we left Oaklands and drove to the school. It is kept by Miss Murray<sup>31</sup> and Miss Towne in the little Baptist Church,<sup>32</sup> which is beautifully situated in a grove of live oaks. Never saw anything more beautiful than these trees. It is strange that we do not hear of them at the North. They are the first objects that attract one's attention here. They are large, noble trees with small glossy green leaves. Their great beauty consists in the long bearded moss with which every branch is heavily draped. This moss is singularly beautiful, and gives a solemn almost funereal aspect to the trees.

We went into the school, and heard the children read and spell. The teachers tell us that they have made great improvement in a very short time, and I noticed with pleasure how bright, how eager to learn many of them seem. The singing delighted me most. They sang beautifully in their rich, sweet clear tones, and with that peculiar swaying motion which I had noticed before in the older people, and

<sup>30</sup> Oaklands was a former plantation, situated near the center of St. Helena Island.

<sup>31</sup> Miss Ellen Murray of Milton, Massachusetts, joined Miss Towne shortly after the latter arrived at St. Helena. Swint, *Northern Teacher*, 191; Johnson, *Social History of the Sea Islands*, 181.

<sup>32</sup> "Brick Church" is still used by a Negro Baptist Congregation. Johnson, *Social History of the Sea Islands*, 117-118.

which seems to make their singing all the more effective. Besides several other tunes they sang "Marching Along" with much spirit, and then one of their own hymns "Down in the Lonesome Valley," which is sweetly solemn and most beautiful. Dear children! born in slavery, but free at last! May God preserve to you all the blessings of freedom, and may you be in every possible way fitted to enjoy them. My heart goes out to you. I shall be glad to do all that I can to help you. . . .

Sunday, Nov. 23 [1862]. Attended church to-day. T'was even a pleasanter experience than before. Saw several new arrivals there—old ones returned, rather—among them Mr. S[amuel] Phillips, a nephew of *the* Phillips.<sup>33</sup> He has not the glorious beauty of his illustrious relative, but still has somewhat the Phillips style of face. He is not at all handsome! has bright red hair, but a pleasant face, and an air *distingué*.

After the sermon an old negro prayed a touching and most effective prayer. Then the minister read Gen. Saxton's Proclamation for Thanksgiving<sup>34</sup>—which is grand—the very best and noblest that c'ld have been penned. I like and admire the Gen. more than ever now.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel D. Phillips, a medical student and graduate of Harvard University, was a nephew of Wendell Phillips, the well-known abolitionist and one of Miss Forten's idols. He had just returned from a vacation in the North. Edward L. Pierce, "The Freedmen at Port Royal," *Atlantic Monthly*, XII (September, 1863), 300.

<sup>34</sup> The proclamation set aside Thursday, November 27, as a day of public thanksgiving and praise not only for the blessings of the past year but "for the signal success which has attended the great experiment for freedom and the rights of oppressed humanity inaugurated in the Department of the South." It continued: "You, freemen and women, have never before had such cause for thankfulness. Your simple faith has been vindicated. 'The Lord has come' to you, and has answered your prayers. Your chains are broken. Your days of bondage and mourning are ended, and you are forever free. If you cannot yet see your way clear in the future, fear not; put your trust in the Lord, and He will vouchsafe, as He did to the Israelites of old, the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, to guide your footsteps 'through the wilderness' to the promised land." *The Liberator*, December 26, 1862.

Six couples were married to-day. Some of the dresses were unique. Am sure one must have worn a cast-off dress of her mistress's. It looked like white silk covered with lace. The lace sleeves, and other trimmings were in rather a decayed state and the white cotton gloves were well ventilated. But the bride looked none the less happy for that. Only one had the slightest claim to good looks. And she was a demure little thing with a neat, plain silk dress on. T'was amusing to see some of the headdresses. One, of tattered flowers and ribbons, was very ridiculous. But no matter for that. I am *truly* glad that the poor creatures are trying to live right and virtuous lives. As usual we had some fine singing. It was very pleasant to be at church again. For two Sundays past I had not been, not feeling well.

This eve. our boys and girls with others from across the creek came in and sang a long time for us. Of course we had the old favorites "Down in the Lonesome Valley," and "Roll, Jordan, Roll," and "No man can hender me," and beside those several shouting tunes that we had not heard before; they are very wild and strange. It was impossible for me to understand many of the words although I asked them to repeat them for me. I only know that one had something about "De Nell Am Ringing." I think that was the refrain; and of another, some of the words were "Christ build the church widout no hammer nor nail." "Jehovah Halleluhiah," which is a grand thing, and "Hold the light," an especial favorite of mine—they sang also with great spirit. The leader of the singing was Prince, a large black boy, from Mr. R[uggles]'s place.<sup>35</sup> He was full of the shouting spirit, and c'd not possibly keep still. It was amusing to see his gymnastic performances. They were quite in the Ethiopian Methodists' style. He has

<sup>35</sup> T. Edwin Ruggles, a Yale graduate from Milton, Massachusetts, was the superintendent of a neighboring plantation. Johnson, *Social History of the Sea Islands*, 167n.

really a very fine bass voice. I enjoyed their singing so much, and sh'd have enjoyed it so much more if some dear ones who are far away c'd have listened it to [*sic*] with me. How delighted they would have been.

The effect of the singing has been to make me feel a little sad and lonely to-night. A yearning for congenial companionship *will* sometimes come over me in the few leisure moments I have in the house. T'is well they are so few. Kindness, most invariable,—for which I am most grateful—I meet with constantly, but congeniality I find not at all in this house. But silence, foolish murmurer. He who knows all things knows that it was for no selfish motive that I came here, far from the few who are so dear to me. Therefore let me not be selfish now. Let the work to which I have solemnly pledged myself fill up my whole existence to the exclusion of all vain longings. . . .

Thursday, Nov. 27 [1862]. Thanksgiving Day. This, according to Gen. Saxton's noble Proclamation, was observed as a day of "Thanksgiving and praise." It has been a lovely day—cool, delicious air, golden, gladdening sunlight, deep blue sky, with soft white clouds floating over it. Had we no other causes the glory and beauty of the day alone make it a day for which to give thanks. But we have other causes, great and glorious, which unite to make this peculiarly a day of thanksgiving and praise. It has been a general holiday. According to Gen. Saxton's orders an animal was killed on each plantation that the people might to-day eat fresh meat, which is a great luxury to them, and indeed to all of us here.

This morning a large number—Superintendents, teachers, and freed people, assembled in the little Baptist church. It was a sight that I shall not soon forget—that crowd of eager, happy black faces from which the shadow of slavery had forever passed. "Forever free!" "Forever free!" Those magical words were all the time singing themselves

in my soul, and never before have I felt so truly grateful to God. The singing was, as usual, very beautiful. I thought I had never heard my favorite "Down in the Lonesome Valley" so well sung.

After an appropriate prayer and sermon by Rev. Mr. Phillips,<sup>36</sup> Gen. Saxton made a short but spirited speech to the people—urging the young men to enlist in the regiment now forming under Col. T. W. Higginson.<sup>37</sup> That was the first intimation I had of Mr. H[igginson]'s being down here. I am greatly rejoiced thereat. He seems to me of all fighting men the one best fitted to command a regiment of colored soldiers. The mention of his [name] recalled the happy days passed last summer in Mass., when day after day, in the streets of W[orcester] we used to see the indefatigable *Capt.* H[igginson] drilling his white company. I never saw him so full of life and energy—entering with his whole soul into his work—without thinking what a splendid general he w'd make. And that too may come about. Gen. Saxton said to-day that he hoped to see him commander of an army of black men. The Gen. told the people how nobly Mr. H[igginson] had stood by Anthony Burns, in the old dark days, even suffering imprisonment for his sake;<sup>38</sup> and assured [them] that they might feel sure of meeting with no injustice under the leadership of such a man; that he w'd see to it that they were not wronged in any way.

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Phillips is mentioned in Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 103, 115, 244, 269.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson of Worcester, Massachusetts, a Unitarian clergyman, had long been a prominent Garrisonian abolitionist. He had recently arrived at Port Royal to assume command of the First South Carolina Volunteers, a regiment of three thousand Negro troops being recruited from the freedmen in the Port Royal area. Before this time he had seen service as a captain in the Fifty-First Massachusetts Volunteers. His new position gave him the rank of colonel. Thomas W. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston, 1900), 147-162.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Then he told them the story of Robert Small[s],<sup>39</sup> and added. "To-day Robt. came to see me. I asked him how he was getting on in the store which he is keeping for the freed people. He said he was doing very well—making fifty dollars a week, sometimes, "But" said he ["]Gen I'm going to stop keeping store. I'm going to enlist." "What," said I. "Are you going to enlist when you can make fifty doll[ar]s a week keeping store." "Yes Sir," he replied "I'm going to enlist as a private in the black regiment. How can I expect to keep my freedom if I'm not willing to fight for it? Suppose the Secesh sh'ld get back here again? what good w'ld my fifty dolls. do me then? Yes, Sir I sh'ld enlist if I were making a thousand dollars a week."

Mrs. [Frances D.] Gage then made a few beautiful and earnest remarks. She told the people about the slaves in Santa Cruz, how they rose and conquered their masters, and declared themselves free, and no one dared to oppose them and how, soon after, the governor rode into the market-place and proclaimed emancipation to all the people of the Danish W[est] I[ndies]. She then made a beautiful appeal to the mothers, urging them not to keep their sons from the war fearing they might be killed but to send them forth willingly and gladly as she had done hers, to fight for liberty. It must have been something very novel and strange to them to hear a woman speak in public but they listened with great attention and seemed much moved by what she said.

Then Gen. Saxton made a few more remarks. I think what he said will have much effect on the young men here. There has been a good deal of distrust about joining the

<sup>39</sup> Robert Smalls was an intelligent Beaufort slave who had been a pilot on the Confederate steamer, *Planter*. When the ship's officers went ashore at Charleston on the night of May 14, 1862, Smalls brought the vessel out of the Charleston harbor with about forty-five slaves on board. Once at sea he hauled down the Confederate flag, raised the Union emblem, and sailed safely to Beaufort, where he surrendered the ship to Union officials. *The Union Army* (Madison, 1908), VII, 114.

regiment[.] The soldiers were formerly so unjustly treated by the Government. But they trust Gen. Saxton. He told them what a victory the black troops had lately won on the Georgian coast,<sup>40</sup> and what a great good they had done for their race in winning; they had proved to their enemies that the black man can and will fight for his freedom. After the Gen. had done speaking the people [sang] "Marching Along," with great spirit.

After church there was a wedding. This is a very common occurrence here. Of course the bridal costumes are generally very unique and comical, but the principal actors are fortunately quite unconscious of it, and look so proud and happy while enjoying this—one of the many privileges that freedom has bestowed upon them—that it is quite pleasant to see them. . . .

Sunday, November 30 [1862]. Farewell Autumn! It seems so very long since we came here, and yet, as they pass, the days seem short enough. But to look back upon the time seems very long.

Attended church. Mr. Thorpe, one of the young Superintendents,<sup>41</sup> a N[ew] E[ngland] man, was so kind as to send his wagon for us. L[izzie]<sup>42</sup> did not feel well enough to go, but I went and had a very pleasant drive with old Jack—Mr. T[horpe]'s foreman, as he told me. He is a *very* polite old man, and seemed quite pleased and proud

<sup>40</sup> Twice in November, 1862, the colored troops won victories along the coast. On November 3 and again on November 13 companies of the First South Carolina Volunteers were sent by Brigadier General Rufus Saxton on expeditions up the rivers and lagoons between St. Simon's Island, Georgia, and Fernandina, Florida. In each case the object was to test the fighting ability of the Negroes, to destroy Confederate salt works, to capture slaves, and to wipe out picket stations. Leaders reported that the men fought well, while both forces returned with quantities of captured stores. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, XVI, 189-194.

<sup>41</sup> David F. Thorpe, a Brown University student from Providence, Rhode Island. Johnson, *Social History of the Sea Islands*, 167n.

<sup>42</sup> Lizzie Hunn, the daughter of John A. Hunn, who kept a store on St. Helena Island.



at driving a lady. It was very kind in Mr. T[horpe]. I like him much, and Mr. L. Phillips also.<sup>43</sup> The latter invited me to come and get some slips from his garden. And oh, dear A. he has japonicas in bloom. I shall not go, of course, but live in hourly hope that he will be moved by the spirit to bring me some japonicas.

Mr. P[hillips], the minister, is an excellent man, but certainly not an interesting preacher. To-day he was unusually dull, and I got very tired. I thought I sh'd certainly go to sleep. Fortunately I did not. We had a bit of a Sunday School. Taught the children a hymn—"Heaven is my Home." After church three couples were married.

This eve. heard Harry read, then the children came in, and sang for us, and had a regular "shout" in the piazza, of which, of course Prince was the leader. He is the most comical creature I ever saw. Besides the old songs they sang two new ones, so singular that I must try to note down the words—some of them. But of the tune and manner of singing it is impossible to give any idea. The first is—

"Old elder, old elder, where hab you been  
When de gospel been flourishin  
All over dis world  
I have somethin fur to tell you  
From the secret of my heart  
Marry King Jesus  
And no more to part."

Then

Young sister, young sister where hab you been etc.  
Young bruder, young bruder where hab you been etc.  
Young member, young member where hab you been etc.

Another commences

"My mudder's gone to glory and I want to git dere too  
Till dis warfare's over hallelujah

<sup>43</sup> L. D. Phillips was superintendent of a nearby plantation, The Oaks. *Official Records*, Ser. 3, II, 11.

Chorus—Hallelujah, hallelujah  
 Till dis warfare's over, hallelujah, etc.  
 All de members gone to glory, etc.  
 Then chorus.  
 Cinda gnaw my sin, hallalujah,"  
 Chorus

The singular hymn that I heard them sing in school one day, about the graveyard begins thus.—

"I wonder where my mudder gone,  
 Sing oh graveyard!  
 Graveyard ought to know me  
 Sing Jerusalem!  
 Oh carry my mudder in de graveyard  
 Sing etc.  
 Oh grass grow in de graveyard  
 Sing etc.  
 Lay my body in de graveyard  
 Sing etc.

It is a very strange wild thing.

I am quite in love with one of the children here—little Amaretta who is neice [*sic*] to our good old Amaretta. She is a cunning little kittenish thing with such a gentle demure look. She is not quite black, and has pretty close hair, but delicate features[.] She is bright too. I love the child. Wish I eld take her for my own.

Am in a writing mood to-night, and think I will give to you, my dearest A. a more minute description of the people around than I've yet given to anyone. I shall write down their names too, that I may remember them always. Don't know them thoroughly enough yet to say much about their characters.

To begin with the older ones. First there is old Harriet. She is a very kind, pleasant old soul. Comes from Darien Ga. Her parents were Africans. She speaks a *very* foreign tongue. Three of her children have been sold from

her. Her master's son killed somebody in a duel, and was obliged to "pay money" H[arriet] says. I suppose she means to give bail. And she and her children were sold to this place, to raise the money. Then there is her daughter Tillah. Poor creature, she has a dear little baby, Annie, who for weeks has been dangerously ill with whooping cough and fever. Our good Miss T[owne] attends it, and does all that can be done, but the baby is still very ill. For Tillah's sake I hope it will get well. She is devoted to it night and day. T[illah]'s husband is a gallant looking young soldier—a member of the black regiment[.]

His mother, Bella, is rather a querulous body[.] But who can blame her. She has had enough to try her sorely. One by one her children at a tender age have been dragged from her to work in the cotton fields. She herself has been made to work when most unfit for it. She has had to see her own children cruelly beaten. Is it strange that these things sh'd have embittered her? But she has much of the milk of human kindness left her yet. She nurses the poor baby faithfully, and often, old as she is, sits up the entire night with it. Harry is another of her sons. I have told you, dear A. how bright, how eager to learn, he is. His wife, Tamar, is a good-natured, easy soul. She has several nice little children, and the baby—Mary Lincoln—as Mr. R[uggles] the superintendent has named her—is a very cunning little creature, an especial pet of ours.

Celia is one of the best women on the place. She is a cripple. Her feet and limbs were so badly frozen by exposure that her legs were obliged to be amputated just above the knees. But she manages to get about almost as actively as any of the others. Her husband, Thomas, has been a soldier, and is now quite ill with pneumonia. She has several children—Rose, who is our little maid, Olivia the eldest, Dolly[,] a bright little thing who goes to school with me every morn. and who likes to go. Lastly Aiken, whose proper name is Thomas. He is an odd lit[tle] fellow,

very much spoiled. Amaretta, Celia's sister is our laundress and cook. I like her very much.

Then there is Whilhelmina, a mulatto (the others are all black). She comes from Virginia, and speaks therefore quite intelligibly. She is a good sensible woman, and both she and her husband Robt.,—who is one of my night pupils—are most anxious for their three little ones to learn.

Cupid our major-domo, is as obliging as possible. A shrewd fellow, who knows well what he is about. His wife Patience, is Tamar's sister, and lives across the creek at Pollywana. Their children—two of them—come to our school. They are good scholars.

I do enjoy hearing Cupid and Harry tell about the time that the Secesh had to flee. The time of the "gun shoot," as they call the taking of Bay Point, which is opposite Hilton Head.<sup>44</sup> It delights them greatly to recal [*sic*] that time. Their master had the audacity to venture back even while the Union troops were occupying Beaufort. H[arry] says he tried to persuade him to go back with him, assuring him that the Yankees w'd shoot them all when they came. "Bery well sur," he replied["]if I go wid you I be good as dead, so if I got to dead, I might's well dead here as anywhere. So I'll stay and wait for the Yankees." He told me that he knew all the time that his master was not telling the truth. Cupid says the master told the people to get all the furniture together and take it over to Pollywana, and to stay on that side themselves. "So" says Cupid, "dey c'd jus swap us all up in a heap and geder us up an' put us in de boat. And he telled me to row Patience and de chilens down to a certain pint, and den I c'd come back if I choose." "Jus' as if I was gwine to be sich a goat" adds Cupid, with a look and gesture of ineffable contempt. The *finale* of the story is that the people left the premises and

<sup>44</sup>The Port Royal area was captured by a Union naval force on November 7, 1861. The attacking fleet, sailing slowly in and out of the harbor entrance through the morning and early afternoon of that day, laid down such a heavy fire that the Confederates were completely outclassed. By nightfall the entire Port Royal area was in northern hands. *Ibid.*, Ser. 1, VI, 186-193.

hid themselves so that when the master returned not one of all his "faithful servants" was to be found to go into slavery with him, and he was obliged to return, a disappointed, but it is to be hoped, a wiser man. . . .

Thursday, New Year's Day, 1863. The most glorious day this nation has yet seen, *I think*.<sup>45</sup> I rose early—and early we started, with an old borrowed carriage and a remarkably slow horse. Whither were we going? thou wilt ask, dearest A. To the ferry; thence to Camp Saxton,<sup>46</sup> to the Celebration. From the Ferry to the camp the "Flora" took us.

How pleasant it was on board! A crowd of people, whites and blacks, and a band of music—to the great delight of the negroes. Met on board Dr. and Mrs. Peck<sup>47</sup> and their daughters, who greeted me most kindly. Also Gen. S[axton]'s father whom I like much, and several other acquaintances whom I was glad to see. We stopped at Beaufort, and then proceeded to Camp Saxton, the camp of the 1st Regi[ment] S[outh] C[arolina] Vol[unteer]s. The "Flora" could not get up to the landing, so we were rowed ashore in a row boat.

Just as my foot touched the plank, on landing, a hand grasped mine and a well known voice spoke my name. It was my dear and noble friend, Dr. Rogers.<sup>48</sup> I cannot tell you, dear A., how delighted I was to see him; how *good* it was to see the face of a friend from the North, and *such* a friend. I think myself particularly blessed to have him for a friend.

<sup>45</sup> Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation became effective on January 1, 1863.

<sup>46</sup> Camp Saxton, the headquarters of the First South Carolina Volunteers, was situated a few miles from Beaufort.

<sup>47</sup> The Reverend Solomon Peck of Roxbury, Massachusetts, came to St. Helena as a missionary and established the first school on the island shortly after the Union occupation. Moore, *Rebellion Record*, Sup. I, 314.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. Seth Rogers of Worcester, Massachusetts, whose water-cure establishment Miss Forten had visited when she lived in Salem. Dr. Rogers had just arrived in Beaufort to become surgeon in the First South Carolina Volunteers. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 390.

Walking on a little distance I found myself being presented to Col. Higginson, whereat I was so much overwhelmed, that I had no reply to make to the very kind and courteous little speech with which he met me. I believe I mumbled something, and grinned like a simpleton, that was all. Provoking, isn't it? that when one is most in need of sensible words, one finds them not.

I *cannot* give a regular chronicle of the day. It is impossible. I was in such a state of excitement. It all seemed and seems still like a brilliant dream. Dr. R[ogers] and I talked all the time, I know, while he showed me the camp and all the arrangements. They have a beautiful situation, on the grounds once occupied by a very old fort, "De La Ribanchine," built in 1629 or 30. Some of the walls are still standing. Dr. R[ogers] had made quite a good hospital out of an old gin house. I went over it. There are only a few invalids in it, at present. I saw everything; the kitchens, cooking arrangements, and all. Then we took seats on the platform.

The meeting was held in a beautiful grove, a live-oak grove, adjoining the camp. It is the largest one I have yet seen; but I don't think the moss pendants are quite as beautiful as they are on St. Helena. As I sat on the stand and looked around on the various groups, I thought I had never seen a sight so beautiful. There were the black soldiers, in their blue coats and scarlet pants, the officers of this and other regiments in their handsome uniforms, and crowds of lookers-on, men, women and children, grouped in various attitudes, under the trees. The faces of all wore a happy, eager, expectant look.

The exercises commenced by a prayer from Rev. Mr. Fowler, Chaplain of the reg.<sup>49</sup> An ode written for the occasion by Prof. Zachos,<sup>50</sup> originally a Greek, now Supt.

<sup>49</sup> James H. Fowler. *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>50</sup> John C. Zachos of Cincinnati, Ohio, was a teacher and superintendent sent to Port Royal by the New England Educational Commission. *Extracts*

of Paris Island, was read by himself, and then sung by the whites. Col. H[igginson] introduced Dr. Brisbane in a few elegant and graceful words.<sup>51</sup> He (Dr. B.) read the President's [Emancipation] Proclamation, which was warmly cheered. Then the beautiful flags presented by Dr. Cheever's Church [in New York] were presented to Col. H[igginson] for the Reg[iment] in an excellent and enthusiastic speech, by Rev. Mr. [Mansfield] French.<sup>52</sup> Immediately at the conclusion, some of the colored people—of their own accord sang "My Country Tis of Thee." It was a touching and beautiful incident, and Col. Higginson, in accepting the flags made it the occasion of some happy remarks. He said that *that* tribute was far more effective than any speech he c'd make. He spoke for some time, and all that he said was grand, glorious. He seemed inspired. Nothing c'd have been better, more perfect. And Dr. R[ogers] told me afterward that the Col. was much affected. That tears were in his eyes. He is as Whittier says, truly a "sure man." The men all admire and love him. There is a great deal of personal magnetism about him, and his kindness is proverbial. After he had done speaking he delivered the flags to the color-bearers with a few very impressive remarks to them. They each then, Sgt. Prince Rivers and [Cpl.] Robert Sutton,<sup>53</sup> made very good speeches indeed, and were loudly cheered[.] Gen. Saxton and Mrs. Gage spoke very well. The good Gen.

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*from Letters of Teachers and Superintendents of the New England Educational Commission for Freedmen (Boston, 1864), 10.*

<sup>51</sup> Dr. William Henry Brisbane, a South Carolinian, who had freed his slaves several years before the war. Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 129.

<sup>52</sup> The Reverend Mansfield French, who had come to South Carolina in January, 1862, was at this time a chaplain in the Union Army, Department of the South. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, XIV, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Rivers and Sutton were Negro members of the First South Carolina Volunteers. Rivers was an intelligent young man who had spent much time in the North. Colonel Higginson described Sutton as "the wisest man in the ranks." Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 62.

was received with great enthusiasm, and throughout the morning—every little while it seemed to me three cheers were given for him. A Hymn written I believe, by Mr. Judd,<sup>54</sup> was sung, and then all the people united with the Reg. in singing “John Brown.” It was grand. During the exercises, it was announced that Fremont was appointed Commander-in-chief of the Army, and this was received with enthusiastic and prolonged cheering.<sup>55</sup> But as it is picket news, I greatly fear that is not true.

We dined with good Dr. R[ogers] at the Col’s [T. W. Higginson] table, though, greatly to my regret he, (the Col.) was not there. He partook of some of the oxen, (of which ten had been roasted) with his men. I like his doing that. We had quite a sumptuous dinner. Our party consisted of Dr. R[ogers] [,] Adjutant D[ewhurst] [,]<sup>56</sup> Capt. R[ogers],<sup>57</sup> Mr. and Miss Ware<sup>58</sup> (Mrs. Winsor’s brother and sister) [,] Mr. Hall[,]<sup>59</sup> their cousin, whom I like much, and Mr. and Miss H[unn] and me. We had a merry, delightful dinner. The only part that I did not enjoy was being obliged to read Whittier’s Hymn aloud at the table.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> General superintendent of Port Royal Island and master of ceremonies at the celebration. Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 129, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Major General John C. Frémont had been commander of the Department of the West, with headquarters at St. Louis. In August, 1861, he proclaimed martial law for his district, arrested active secessionists, suspended newspapers charged with disloyalty, and issued a proclamation freeing all slaves. President Lincoln annulled the proclamation, which was widely acclaimed by abolitionists. After numerous conflicts, Frémont resigned from the army in 1862 and went to New York, where he waited in vain for another appointment. *The Union Army*, VIII, 91-92.

<sup>56</sup> First Lieutenant G. W. Dewhurst, adjunct of the First South Carolina Volunteers. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 391.

<sup>57</sup> Captain James S. Rogers of the First South Carolina Volunteers. *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>58</sup> Chares P. Ware, a graduate of Harvard University, was a superintendent. Johnson, *Social History of the Sea Islands*, 78.

<sup>59</sup> The Reverend William W. Hall of Providence, Rhode Island, a superintendent. *Extracts from Letters of Teachers and Superintendents*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Miss Forten had written John Greenleaf Whittier some months before, asking him for a poem that she could teach the school children. He replied in December, 1862, enclosing a special “Hymn” written for the occasion.



I wanted Dr. R[ogers] to do it. But he w'd insist on my doing it. So of course it was murdered. I believe the older I grow the more averse I get to doing anything in public. I have no courage to do such things.

Col. H[igginson] invited us into his tent—a very nice, almost *homelike* one. I noticed a nice secretary, with writing utensils and “Les Miserables” on it. A *wreath* of beautiful oranges hung against the wall, fronting the door. I wanted to have a good look at this tent; but we were hardly seated when the Dr. and Col. were called away for a moment, and Lieut. Col. Billings<sup>61</sup> coming in w'd insist upon our going into his tent. I did not want to go at all, but he was so *persistent* we had to. I fear he is a somewhat vain person. His tent was very comfortable too, and I noticed quite a large piece of “Secesh” furniture, something between a secretary and a bureau, and quite a collection of photographs and daguerres. But I did not examine them, for my attention was occupied by Col. H[igginson] to whom I showed Whittier's poem, letter and photo. “He looks old,” he said to me sadly, as he handed back the picture.

Dr. R[ogers] introduced me to Dr. H[awks] and his wife<sup>62</sup>—pleasant people, and *good* anti-slavery. They mentioned having Liberators with my letters in them.<sup>63</sup> I am sorry they have come down here.

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His letter is in Samuel T. Pickard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston, 1894), II, 472-473. The incident is described in Charlotte Forten Grimké, “Personal Recollections of Whittier,” *New England Magazine*, VII (June, 1893), 468-476.

<sup>61</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Liberty Billings of the First South Carolina Volunteers. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, XIV, 239.

<sup>62</sup> Dr. J. Milton Hawks and Esther H. Hawks, of Manchester, New Hampshire. Dr. Hawks was an assistant surgeon in the First South Carolina Volunteers, while Mrs. Hawks, a physician and advocate of women's rights, later taught in the freedmen's schools of South Carolina and Florida. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 390; Swint, *Northern Teacher*, 186.

<sup>63</sup> Miss Forten had written two letters to William Lloyd Garrison. The first describing her trip to Port Royal, her home at Oaklands, and the school in which she taught, was published in *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862. The second, which was printed on December 19, 1862, described the Thanksgiving celebration of 1862.

Col. H[igginson] asked me to go out and hear the band play, which I very gladly did. But it stopped just as we stepped outside of the tent. Just then one of the soldiers came up to the Col. and said "Do Cunnel, do ask 'em to play Dixie, just for me, for my lone self." The Col. made the request, but the leader of the band said he feared they w'd not be able to play the whole tune as they had not the necessary pieces. "Nebber mind," said the man "just' half a tune will do.[''] It was found impossible to play even that but the leader promised that the next time they came they would be fully prepared to play Dixie for him.

The Dress Parade—the first I had ever seen—delighted me. It was a brilliant sight—the long line of men in their brilliant uniforms, with bayonets gleaming in the sunlight. The Col. looked splendid. The Dr. said the men went through the drill remarkably well. It seemed to me nothing c'd be more perfect. To me it was a grand triumph—that black regiment doing itself honor in the sight of the white officers, many of whom, doubtless "came to scoff." It was typical of what the race, so long down-trodden and degraded will yet achieve on this Continent.

After the Parade, we went to the Landing, intending to take a boat for Beaufort. But the boat was too crowded, and we decided to wait for another. It was the softest, loveliest moonlight. We sat down among the ruins of the old fort. Just [as soon] as the boat had reached a favorable distance from the shore the band in it commenced playing Home, sweet Home. It was exquisitely beautiful. The lovely moonlight on the water, the perfect stillness around seemed to give new beauty to that ever beautiful old song. And then as my dear friend, Dr. R[ogers] said, "It came *very near* to us all."

Finding the night air damp we went to the tent of Mr. Fowler, the chaplain, whom I like much better in private conversation than as an orator. He is a thoroughly good, earnest man. Thither came Col. H[igginson] and Dr.

H[awks]. We sat around the nice fire—the tent has *chimney* and fire place, made by Mr. F[owler]’s own skilful hands. Col. H[igginson] is a perfectly delightful person in private.—So genial, so witty, so kind. But I noticed when he was silent, a careworn almost sad expression on his earnest, noble face. My heart was full when I looked at him. I longed to say “I thank you, I thank you, for that noble glorious speech.” And yet I *c’ld not*. It is always so[.] I do not know how to talk. Words always fail me when I want them most. The more I feel the more impossible it is for me to speak. It is very provoking. Among other things, Col. H[igginson] said how amusing it was to him—their plan of housekeeping down here. “This morning I was asked ‘Well, Colonel, how many oxen shall we roast today.’ And I said, just as calmly as I w’ld have ordered a pound or two of beef, at home.—well I think *ten* will do. And then to be consulted as to how many gallons of molasses, and of vinegar, and how many pounds of ginger w’ld be wanted seemed very odd.” I wish I c’ld reproduce for you the dry humorous tones in which this was said. We had a pleasant chat, sitting there in the firelight, and I was most unwilling to go, for besides the happiness of being in the society of the Col. and the Dr. we wanted dreadfully to see the “shout” and grand jubilee which the soldiers were going to have that night. But it was already late, and hearing that the “Flora” was coming we had to hasten to the Landing. I was sorry to say good-bye to Dr. R[ogers]. What an *unspeakable* happiness it was to see him. But I fear for his health. I fear the exposure of a camp life. Am glad to see that he has warm robes and blankets, to keep him comfortable. I wish I c’ld do something for him. He has done so much for me.

Ah, what a grand, glorious day this has been. The dawn of freedom which it heralds may not break upon us at once; but it will surely come, and sooner, I believe, than we have ever dared hope before. My soul is glad with an exceeding

great gladness. But before I close, dear A., I must bring our little party safe home to Oaklands. We had a good time on the Flora. L[izzie Hunn] and I promenaded the deck, and sang John Brown, and Whittier's Hymn and "My Country Tis of Thee." And the moon shone bright above us, and the waves beneath, smooth and clear, glistened in the soft moonlight. At Beaufort we took the row boat, and the boatmen sang as they rowed us across. Mr. Hall was with us, and seemed really to appreciate and enjoy everything. I like him. Arrived at St. Helena's we separated, he to go to "Coffin's Point"<sup>64</sup> (a dreadful name, as Dr. R[ogers] says) and we to come hither [Oaklands]. Can't say that I enjoyed the homeward drive very much. T'was so intensely cold, yes *intensely*, for these regions. I fear some of the hot enthusiasm with which my soul was filled got chilled a little but it was only for a short time.

Old friend, my good and dear A. a very, very happy New Year to you! Dear friends in both my Northern homes a happy, happy New Year to you, too! And to us all a year of such freedom as we have never yet known in this boasted but hitherto wicked land. The hymn, or rather one of the hymns that those boat[men] sung [*sic*] is singing itself to me now. The refrain "Religion so . . . sweet" was so sweet and touching in its solemnity.<sup>65</sup> . . .

Saturday, Jan. 24 [1863]. Had to-day the pleasantest visit I've had since I've been here[.] L[izzie] and I drove to Mr. Thorpe's plantation. . . . The gentlemen took us round to see the people of whom there are 150 on the place. 100 have come from Edisto. There were no houses to accommodate so many, and they had to find shelter in barns[,] outhouses and any other place they c'd get[.]

<sup>64</sup> A plantation on St. Helena Island.

<sup>65</sup> Two other descriptions of the New Year's Day celebration have been preserved, both agreeing in substance with Miss Forten's account. One by Harriet Ware is in Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 128-134; the other by Colonel Higginson is in his *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 55-56.

They have constructed rude houses for themselves—many of them—which do not, however afford them much protection in bad weather. I am told that they are all excellent, industrious people.

One old woman interested me deeply. Her name is Daphne, and she is probably at least a hundred years old[.] She has had fifty grandchildren, sixty-five greatgrandchildren, and three great, greatgrandchild[ren]. She is entirely blind, but seems quite cheerful and happy. She told us that she was brought from Africa to this country just after the Revolution. I asked her if she was glad that all her numerous family were now and forever free. Her bright old face grew brighter as she answered. “Oh, yes, yes missus.” She retains her faculties remarkably well for one so old. It interested me greatly to see her. As Mr. H[all] said “it was worth coming to S[outh] C[arolina] to see that old relic of a past time.”

15 of the people on this place escaped from the main land, last spring. Among them was a man named Michael. After they had gone some distance—their masters in pursuit—M[ichael]’s master overtook him in the swamp. A fierce grapple ensued—the master on horseback, the man on foot:—the former drew a pistol and shot the slave through the arm, shattering it dreadfully. Still the brave man fought desperately and at last succeeded in unhorsing the master, and beat him until he was senseless. He then with the rest of the company escaped. With them was a woman named Rina, now a cook at Mr. T[horpe]’s. She was overtaken by her master’s cousin, and nearly run over by his horse. But he, having a liking for her, wheeled his horse around, when he saw who it was, without saying a word, and allowed her to escape.—A story which I record because it is a rare thing to hear anything good of a rebel. I had the pleasure of shaking hands with Rina, and congratulating her on her escape. She is a very neat, sensible looking black woman.

Mr. T[horpe]'s place—which used to be the property of one of the numerous family of Fripps—Thomas by name—is most beautifully situated in the midst of noble pine trees, and on the banks of a large creek which deserves—almost—to be dignified by the name of river. 'Tis the pleasantest place I've seen yet. And Mr. T[horpe] says it is quite healthy[.]

Of *course* we lost our way coming back, and I, in trying to turn the horse, ran up against a tree and there our “*shay*” staid [*sic*]. In vain did L[izzie] and I try to move the horse, and then the wheels. Both were equally immovable, till fortunately we saw a man at a little distance and called him to our aid. With his assistance we soon got righted again. All this I tell you, dear A. as a great secret. Wldn't have anybody else know of my *unskilfulness*. Despite this little *contretemps* we had a delightful sunset drive home.

Sunday, Jan. 25 [1863]. Saw a wonderful sight to-day. 150 people were baptized in the creek near the church. They looked very picturesque—many of them in white aprons, and bright dresses and handkerchiefs. And as they, in procession, marched down to the water, they sang beautifully. The most perfect order and quiet prevailed throughout. . . .

Saturday, Feb. 7 [1863]. One day this week Tina, an excellent woman from Palawana, came in, and told us a very interesting story about two girls, one about ten the other fifteen, who, having been taken by their master up into the country about the time of [the] “Gun Shoot,”<sup>66</sup> determined to try to get back to their parents who had been left on this island. They stole away at night, and travelled through woods and swamps, for two days without eating.

<sup>66</sup>The battle on November 7, 1861, which ended with the Port Royal region in Union hands.

Sometimes their strength w'd fail and they w'd sink down in the swamps, and think they c'd [go] no further, but they had brave little hearts, and struggled on, till at last they reached Port Royal Ferry. There they were seen by a boat-load of people who had almost made their escape. The boat was too full to take them but the people, as soon as they reached these islands, told the father of the children, who immediately hastened to the Ferry for them. The poor little creatures were almost wild with joy, despite their exhausted state, when they saw their father coming to them. When they were brought to their mother she fell down "jus' as if she was dead" as Tina expressed it. She was so overpowered with joy. Both children are living on Daltaw<sup>67</sup> now. They are said to be very clever. I want to see the heroic little creatures.

Another day, one of the black soldiers came in and gave us *his* account of the Expedition [up the St. Mary's River].<sup>68</sup> No words of mine, dear A can give you any account of the state of exultation and enthusiasm that he was in. He was eager for another chance at "de Secesh." I asked him what he wld do if his master and others sh'd come back and try to reenslave him. "I'd fight um Miss, I'd fight um till I turned to dust!" He was especially delighted at the ire which the sight of the black troops excited in the minds of certain Secesh women whom they saw. These vented their spleen by calling the men "baboons dressed in soldier's clothes,[''] and telling them that they ought to be

<sup>67</sup> One of the Sea Islands near St. Helena Island.

<sup>68</sup> On January 23, 1863, the First South Carolina Volunteers were sent up the St. Mary's River to capture Confederate supplies and cripple a vessel reputedly about to run the blockade. Although repeatedly under enemy fire, the men fought bravely. The mission was a complete success, for the troops not only reported that the vessel was worthless, but returned with 40,000 captured bricks, 250 bars of railroad iron, quantities of lumber, a number of prisoners, and several Negro families. *Official Records*, Ser. 1, XIV, 195-198; Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 84-131.

at work in their master's rice swamps, and that they [“]ought to be lashed to death.” “And what did you say to them.” I asked. “Oh miss, we only tell um ‘Hole your tongue, and dry up,’ You see *we wusn’t feared of dem, dey cldn’t hurt us now*. Whew! didn’t we laugh to see dem so mad!” The spirit of resistance to the Secesh is strong in these men.