The Press.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1865.

Closing Scenes.

The march of SHERMAN through Georgia and South Carolina continues to be a triumph as great as the march of NAPOLEON through Italy. It is amusing to compare the threats and bravado of the rebels with the facts that are transpiring every hour. Plainly, the rebels are in a desperate situation. The Southern armies are like so many ten-pins, and SHERMAN rolls among them like the ball from the strong hand of the cunning bowler. To use the quaint and apt simile of another writer, in this warlike game of chess SHERMAN has won a piece from his opponent, and is an army ahead. He is pressing this advantage. The rebels divide, entrench, appeal, and concentrate, but in vain. Just where they expect to meet the conquering Yankee they do not meet him. When their line is selected, and the works manned, SHERMAN quietly walks around them, and leaves his enemy in his rear. This eccentric warrior violates every rule of military science. BEAUREGARD has been the "lion in his path" since he left Atlanta, but somehow the lion generally avoids the path of our army, and beyond a few snappish exhibitions of barking, like WHEELER's cavalry assaults, makes no serious demonstration. The news we print this morning shows that Charleston is a doomed city. Perhaps, as we write these lines, the hated Yankee may be sunning himself in the home of the indomitable Southerner. SHERMAN has already isolated the city from the rest of the Confederacy, and with the instinct of the rat, which never places trust in a sinking ship, the notorious *Mercury*, editors and all, has hurried off to some safer nest. There could be no surer sign of approaching storm. When the newspapers bundle up and hurry away there is danger. The footfalls of the Yankee are near at hand.

The mere capture of Charleston will be a moral as well as a physical triumph. In the streets of this city the name "Southern Confederacy" was first heard; here the first ordinance of secession was passed, and, since that fatal day in December, the people of Charleston have been clamoring for blood and vengeance. The war has been too tame and indirect for their sanguinary hopes. Even DAVIS has been too slow and peaceful. This very *Mercury*, whose peripatetic editor is now wandering with his types and paper for some spot where he may be out of the range of SHERMAN's guns, has clamored for the black flag of piracy and death. With him and his people there has been a constant demand for the blood of the whole Yankee race. Along the streets of this city the flag which even now may be floating in triumph over the bayonets of armed men was dragged and trampled in the dust. The hour of retribution has come. Nemesis, with guns and horsemen, and every instrument of war—Nemesis, in the person of one of the most illustrious soldiers of the age, is now engaged in the work of retribution.

While the people of Charleston are listening to the guns of SHERMAN with a feeling far different from that with which they heard the sad and slowly-booming guns of Sumpter four years ago, BENJAMIN, and DAVIS, and LEE are on their knees before the black man of Virginia, and begging him to arise up from slavery and fight this battle. They strike the fetters from his feet, and beg him to take his place in the battery and the column by the side of the RHETTS, the RANDOLPHS, and TALIAFERROS. The hands that once gave him the lash now give him the musket. Think of it! Could this closing scene be more majestic, or this hour of retribution more sweet? Charleston trembling before SHERMAN—Richmond begging the negro to save it from GRANT! God knows we do not write this wish in any spirit of revenge, for we would not wish any undue severity to the most hardened rebel, but we would rejoice at nothing more sincerely than the severest revenge upon this metropolis of South Carolina. We could see it razed from the ground and salt sown upon its foundations with satisfaction. The pardon we willingly hold out to Mobile and Savannah, and even to Richmond, we do not reserve for Charleston. It has sinned beyond hope or pardon, and we wish it to be made a naming and a memory to traitors until the end of time.

National Inquiry into Taxation.

It is the duty and especial privilege of Congress to impose the taxes which are necessary for maintaining our integrity as a nation—that is, for carrying on the Government, defraying the cost of the war which has been forced upon us, paying the interest of the money which necessity compelled us to obtain on loan, and, at the same time, proceed with the great public works which, under no circumstances, ought to be suspended. It must be confessed that, to a nation previously almost ignorant of internal taxation, the precipitancy with which our new fiscal system was organized and inaugurated was extremely trying, and it is not to be wondered at that, in the desire to raise money, little or no consideration was bestowed upon the just and proper principles whose operation bests adapts the burthen to the back. Perhaps it was a necessary consequence of this enforced yet not unnatural precipitancy that the manner of collecting the new revenue has been, and is, unnecessarily costly and cumbrous. The time has arrived, every one will admit, when the system may be advantageously revised, and the cost of collection simplified and diminished. If there is one species of public officers more unpopular than another in any country it is an army of tax-gatherers, and this, it frequently may be, without any personal demerit or wrong-doing of the parties themselves.

To-day, in the United States Senate, a very important resolution offered by Mr. SHERMAN will come under discussion. Mr. S. will move for a Commission of three to be appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury to examine into and report upon the subject of taxation, and Senator CLARK would add to this resolution, as "a rider" (or amendment), that this Commission shall also inquire into the manner of the collection of the Internal Revenue.

This inquiry, compound yet simple, for the two objects naturally dovetail into each other, comes three years too late, for it surely ought to have preceded taxation. However, better late than never. If made, it must be thoroughly and honestly, and ought not be confined to mere theorists—not to simple statisticians, imposing pamphleteers, smart speechmakers, or dreamy idealogists—but to practical men, who, having obtained their experience in the world of business, have also some book-knowledge of the subjects which they will have to investigate. It may be necessary for them, in order to pursue this inquiry satisfactorily, to visit other countries and obtain precise information as to the manner in which taxes are there imposed and the cost of collecting them.

On the *first* point, we belive that ADAM SMITH, in his "Wealth of Nations," has fairly stated the true principles of taxation—the *reason why* such and such imposts ought to be levied in preference to other imposts. His maxims are:

"*First.* The subjects of every State (the means of every country), ought to contribute towards the support of the Government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the State.

"*Second.* The tax which each individual is bound to pay ought to be certain and not arbitrary; the time of payment, the manner of payment, and the quantity to be paid ought to be clear and plain to the contributor and to every other person.

"*Third.* Every tax ought to be levied at the time, and in the manner, in which it is most convenient for the contributor to pay it.

"*Fourth.* Every tax ought to be so contrived as both to take out and keep out of the pockets of the people as little as possible over and above what it brings into the public treasury of the State."

Add to this the principle of *direct* taxation, and we can readily arrive, in this country, at a proper system, as a substitute for the ignorant guess-work of the "Ways and Means" imposers of taxes. Mr. CAREY observes, with equal force and truth (*Principles of Social Science*, vol. III., p. 191): "The Government of the United States has, throughout most of its existence, been misled by the erroneous idea that indirect taxation was the legitimate mode of raising the public revenue;" and he states another well-ascertained fact (page 198): "The countries in which direct taxation tends to supersede that which is indirect are those in which commerce is gradually acquiring power over trade, in which the circulation is becoming more rapid, and in which land and labor are gradually acquiring value." We may add, too, that *direct* would press less upon the productive industry of this country than *indirect* taxation. Put a tax of *two* cents upon the four-pound loaf of bread, and instead of laying on that addition the baker who sells "the staff of life" will inevitably add *three* cents, at least, to the price which he exacts.

On the *second* point (the manner of the collection of the Internal Revenue,) which is to be considered in the United States Senate this day, we have to say that it involves the important points—*how that revenue is collected, and what that collection costs.* It would not surprise us were the Commissioners to report that the internal revenue staff is at once too numerous and too costly, that three men are generally employed to do the work of one, and that the salaries and other emoluments of office are exorbitantly great. In this city of Philadelphia, each of the four Collectors of Internal Revenue receives a salary considerably larger than the Vice President of the United States, or any or every member of the Cabinet is allowed; indeed, considering that to this salary may be added a per-centage on the sale of stamps, and that each recipient is under no necessity, as at Washington, to exercise a liberal hospitality and make a certain display, each Internal Revenue Collector here, and in other great cities, is much better off, in a pecuniary manner, than the Vice President, each Cabinet minister, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and most of our ambassadors to foreign countries. In point of fact, *one* active, intelligent, trustworthy person, with a reasonable but not absurdly large compensation, ought to be adequate to supervise, as Collector, the internal revenue taxation even of such great cities as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, &c.

Having considerable faith in the sagacity of "old laws" in preference to "modern instances," we have been unconsciously reminded, while discussing this payment part of the question, of an old English proverb—"The King's cheese is lost in the parings." This was true, in the old country, formerly. The implied reproach scarcely has any point now, for the cost of collecting the public revenue in England has become very small. We have no book at hand, as we write, to give us the precise cost, but venture to say, from our previous acquaintance with the subject, that the collection of all the British revenue is not more than, if as much as, three per cent. And we venture to predict that a searching inquiry into the cost of collecting our Internal Revenue would show it to be not less than from seven to eight per cent. It would not surprise us to find it average as much as even *ten* per cent., which, we need not say, comes out of the pockets of the public. Indeed, in our opinion (which is that of practical men who have favored us with their views upon the subject), responsible parties might readily be found who would give unexceptionable security for collecting the Internal Revenue, income-tax included, for *two* per cent., and would be handsomely compensated for their labor at that. Of course, they would abolish the present system, costly and cumbrous, of allotting great salaries, and also allowing large extra profits, to unnecessary and too numerous officials—ornamented figure-heads—men whose main duties are done by deputy. Verily, the parings absorb vastly too much of Uncle Sam's cheese.

IF our readers have forgotten Mr. WILLIAM CORNELL JEWETT, Mr. JEWETT has certainly not forgotten them, nor does he intend that they shall forget him. This wandering peace commissioner, who seems to be an uneasy and restless dove, with no place on the earth to set his feet; who flutters from the windows of the Tuileries to the walks of the Clifton House, and writes letters to everybody with an amiable indifference as to whether they are ever answered or not, is one of the characters of the war. We prefer him to STEPHEN H. BRANCH, or Count GUROWSKI, or even the recently non-suited Count JOHANNES, for JEWETT has been in good society and has actually written letters to the Emperor of France. JEWETT's last manifesto is that he is now convinced of the necessity of war—of war so extensive that he not only desires to whip the South, but France and England and the whole world. How JEWETT could have shed his feathers and changed his plumage so rapidly is a mystery; but this is a strange world, and beings like JEWETT are not to be tried by human tests. We congratulate him upon his sentiments, and suggest that, as he wants to fight so badly, he enter the army and receive the bounty like a good citizen. JEWETT with a musket on his back would certainly convince the rebels that their cause was hopeless, and lead to an unconditional submission.

THE appeal of the Christian Commission, published in another column, should not be disregarded. This is one of the charities of the war, spontaneously growing up out of the heart of the people, and with the Sanitary Commission doing good to thousands whom the more cumbersome routine of the Government could never reach. Now that the war is entering upon its closing scenes, we should make every effort to strengthen and cheer up these noble Christian gentlemen in their self-imposed duties. We cordially unite in the appeal, and if any contributions are sent to our care we shall see that they are handed over to the officers of the Commission.

"The Press" Relief Fund.

The amount of funds received, though personally in some instances very liberal on the part of the readers of *The Press*, yet, in the aggregate it is far below the requirements of full sympathy. It is impossible to *imagine* the deep distress resulting from the recent conflagration in the Second ward. The reality is sufficient to awaken a sympathetic response from a heart of stone.

The following subscriptions in aid of the sufferers were received at *The Press* office, on Saturday:

J. R. S.	$5 00
Cash	1 00
Cash	1 00
Pupils of the Northwest Secondary School	36 25
F. O.	1 50
W. M.	1 00
M. M.	5 00
	58 75
Previously received	4,536 51
Total amount received	$4,595 26
Amount paid over	2,411 53
Am't on hand awaiting the Committe	$2,388 75

GENERAL COLLIS.—We have pleasure in announcing that Brig. Gen. Collis has been confirmed in his rank by the United States Senate, and that he has been appointed commandant at City Point.

Arrival of Wounded at Annapolis.

BALTIMORE, Feb. 19.—*The American* has a special despatch from Annapolis saying that 926 paroled men have just arrived there from the South, many of them in the most horrid condition. The buildings will soon be filled with sick and wounded men.

The Overland Telegraph.

CHICAGO, Feb. 19.—The Overland Telegraph line to the Pacific is fully repaired, and in perfect working order. Salt Lake City and New York have been in direct communication without repetition all day.

The Great Boston Sale of Dry Goods.

BOSTON, Feb. 19.—The hotels are filling up with merchants from all sections of the country to attend the trade sale, which commences on Tuesday next. It will be a great event in the dry goods line, and will surpass anything of the kind heretofore known. Over 10,000 bales of goods were entered up to last evening.

Arrival from New Orleans.

NEW YORK, Feb. 19.—The steamer Guiding Star has arrived from New Orleans.

The steamer Fort Morgan, from New Orleans and the Gulf Squadron, has arrived, with 37 officers and 447 discharged men from the West Gulf Squadron.

Movements of General Palmer.

LOUISVILLE, Feb. 18.—Major General Palmer arrived here this morning.

SOUTH CAROLINA.

GREAT NEWS FROM GEN. SHERMAN.

COLUMBIA IN HIS POSSESSION.

HUMILIATING ADMISSIONS OF THE REBEL PAPERS.

CHARLESTON PROBABLY BEING EVACUATED.

Sherman Able to Subsist without any Base of Supplies.

His Main Body Concentrated at Columbia.

Wilmington Threatened from a New Point.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CAPTURE OF BRANCHVILLE.

ARRIVAL OF A COURIER FROM SHERMAN.

FORT ANDERSON PROBABLY ABANDONED AND BURNED.

REINFORCEMENTS SENT TO GEN. TERRY.

Despatches from Sherman sent to Washington.

OFFICIAL GAZETTE.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18—10 o'clock P. M.—The announcement of the occupation of Columbia, S. C., by General Sherman, and the probable evacuation of Charleston, has been communicated to this Department, in the following telegrams just received from Lieutenant General Grant.

EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

CITY POINT, Feb. 18—4.45 P. M.

Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, War Department:

The Richmond *Dispatch* of this morning says that Sherman entered Columbia yesterday morning, and its fall necessitates, it presumes, the fall of Charleston, which it thinks likely is already being evacuated. U. S. GRANT, Lieutenant General.

CITY POINT, Feb. 18.

Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, War Department, Washington:

The following is taken from to-day's Richmond *Dispatch*:

"THE FALL OF COLUMBIA.

"Columbia has fallen. Sherman marched into and took possession of the city yesterday morning.

"This intelligence was communicated yesterday by General Beauregard in an official despatch.

"Columbia is situated on the north bank of the Congaree river, just below the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers.

"From General Beauregard's despatch it appears that on Thursday evening the enemy approached the south bank of the Congaree, and threw a number of shells into the city. During the night they moved up the river, and yesterday morning forded the Saluda and Broad rivers. Whilst they were crossing these rivers, our troops, under General Beauregard, evacuated Columbia. The enemy soon after took possession.

"Through private sources we learn that two days ago, when it was decided not to attempt the defence of Columbia, a large quantity of medical stores, which it was thought impossible to remove, were destroyed.

"The female employees of the Treasury Department had been previously sent off to Charlotte, N. C., a hundred miles north of Columbia. We presume the Treasury lithographic establishment was also removed, though as to this we have no positive information.

"The fall of Columbia necessitates, we presume, the evacuation of Charleston, which we think likely is already in process of evacuation.

"It is impossible to say where Sherman will next direct his columns.

"The general opinion is, that he will go to Charleston and establish a base; but we confess that we do not see what need he has of a base. It is to be presumed that he is subsisting on the country, and he has had no battle to exhaust his ammunition. Before leaving Savannah, he declared his intention to march to Columbia, thence to Augusta, and thence to Charleston. This was uttered as a boast, and to hide his designs.

"We are disposed to believe that he will next strike at Charlotte, which is a hundred miles north of Columbia, on the Charlotte and Columbia Railroad, or at Florence, South Carolina, the junction of the Columbia and Wilmington and the Charleston and Wilmington railroads, some ninety miles east of Columbia.

"There was a report yesterday that Augusta had also been taken by the enemy. This, we do not believe. We have reason to feel assured that nearly the whole of Sherman's army is altogether at Columbia, and that the report that Scofield was advancing on Augusta is untrue."

[From the Whig.]

"REMOVAL.—The Charleston *Mercury* of Saturday announces a brief suspension of that paper, with a view to its temporary removal to another point. This is rendered necessary by the progress of military events cutting it off from facilities for distributing its paper to a large portion of its subscribers, while the lack of transportation renders its supply of paper precarious.

"Semmes has been made Rear Admiral, and will take command of the James River Squadron."

U. S. GRANT, Lieutenant General.

FORT FISHER, N. C., Feb. 13.—A courier from General Sherman to Admiral Porter arrived at Smithville yesterday, having ridden across the country at great peril, announcing the capture by Sherman's forces of the town of Branchville, after three days' hard fighting.

The capture was doubtless effected on the 8th instant. This glad news is confirmed by the Wilmington papers of the 9th, as well as by other arrivals of refugees at Smithville. No particulars of the affair are given.

The announcement of the result has caused the highest exuberance of spirit in this command.—*New York Herald.*

FORTRESS MONROE, Feb. 17.—The steamers New York and George Leary arrived here last evening with released Union prisoners from Richmond, and sailed for Annapolis. Col. Mulford remained at Varina to effect the exchange of prisoners as fast as they arrive. Other steamers have gone up the James river with rebel prisoners, and the exchange will be made as rapidly as possible.

The steamer Ariadne arrived here to-day from Fort Fisher. Her captain reports that our forces had expected to make an attack upon Fort Anderson on the 13th inst., but failed to do so for some cause to him unknown. Before he left Fort Fisher he saw a bright light in the direction of Fort Anderson, and the supposition was that the fort had been abandoned and burned by the rebels.

The steamers Northerner and Ellen S. Terry sailed from here this afternoon for Fort Fisher, with colored troops for Gen. Terry. The steamer Louisiana, of the Bay Line, arrived here to-day from Baltimore, the ice being broken up sufficiently for travel to be again resumed between here and Baltimore. Several more schooner loads of coal are anxiously looked for here.

The steamer Blackstone arrived here this afternoon from Savannah, stopping at Hilton Head, S. C. The captain of the Blackstone brought despatches from General Sherman for the authorities at Washington, which were telegraphed from here to the capital.

The captain of the Blackstone was not informed of the nature of the despatches, and knew nothing important of Sherman's movements.

GEN. GRANT'S ARMY.

CAPTURE OF A REBEL REGIMENT ABOVE BERMUDA.

The Howlet House Battery at Work Again

OUR IRON-CLADS FIRED ON.

Shelling the Military Road.

SUPPOSED DESIGNS OF THE ENEMY.

ARRIVAL OF EXCHANGED PRISONERS.

CRAWFORD'S DIVISION IN THE HATCHER'S RUN BATTLE.

HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING WITH THE ENEMY.

THE DIVISION COMPLIMENTED BY GENERALS MEADE AND WARREN.

—C. Edmunds.—

[Special Correspondence of The Press.]

CITY POINT, February 17, 1865.

Night before last there was quite a heavy artillery and musketry fire heard on the left of the Army of the James, indicating heavy picket skirmishing, if nothing more; and yesterday we had the gratifying intelligence that some little hostilities had taken place, resulting in the capture of a regiment. They are now en route for this point, and will, no doubt, reach here to-day. By a "rebel regiment," however, must not be understood the full complement of a thousand and ten men; a rebel regiment that numbers three hundred men is considered to be, numerically, an efficient organization.

The Howlet House Battery, one of the most formidable batteries that the enemy possess this side of the James, though mostly silent except upon extra occasions, gave some indications of life and energy day before yesterday. Half a dozen of our iron-clad gunboats having gone up the river upon that day, until directly within range of the battery, the rebels opened fire vigorously. Several shells passed over the deck of the Miami harmlessly, and killed and wounded nine men on one of her iron-clad consorts. Our fleet was necessarily unable to respond to the salute with any effect, being unable to elevate their guns to a sufficient height to play upon the rebel works.

Opposite Hancock Station, and some distance beyond, the rebels have guns in position, with which they have on numerous occasions shelled the City Point Railroad, but never with damaging effect, as, in the short time required by the trains to pass a given point, it was impossible for the rebel gunners to get the required range. Once they succeeded in putting a shell through the smoke-stack of a locomotive. The officers in charge of the railroad took the hint, and at the most exposed portions of the route caused embankments to be thrown up. Nevertheless, the trains are more or less visible still within the rebel lines, and the enemy, every little while, send over a few shells to scare timid travellers. Yesterday they dropped three or four shells within two hundred yards of the track just as the train was dashing along. If they had not cut the fuses so short somebody might have got hurt. But, practically, travel on the United States Military Road is attended with no greater dangers than a trip on the Camden and Amboy, or any other Northern route, would be. Though having but a single track, and running trains night and day over rails laid totally regardless of "grades," a collision has never yet taken place, nor probably half a dozen lives been lost.

The indications still lead to the conclusion that Lee, tired of lying on the defensive, will, at an early day, make a determined aggressive movement; and there are conclusive reasons for believing that his operations will be directed with a view to piercing our centre, and so forcing us to relax the tight grasp we now hold upon Petersburg. Opposite our centre the enemy have some of their strongest forts, mounting artillery of formidable calibre, which could be used with great effect to cover any advance upon our lines from this direction. Still, mere *speculation* as to the design of the rebels is, of all occupations, the most unsatisfactory.

Just as the mail is closing I am informed that three thousand of our soldiers, released by exchange from the Richmond prisons, are coming down the river. The statement may not be incorrect.

At the front everything is very quiet, very muddy, and very foggy this morning.

—Burritt.—

[Special Correspondence of The Press.]

WASHINGTON, D. C., Feb. 18, 1865.

Much indignation exists among the officers and men of Crawford's division, of the 5th Corps, at the injustice which was done them in some of the published accounts of their late fight at Hatcher's Run. The reputation of this division is especially dear to Pennsylvanians, as a majority of its regiments are from that State. It is a consolidation of the old 1st Army Corps, and has *esprit de corps* enough to be sensitively proud of its record. The facts, as gathered from numbers of my acquaintances who participated in the movement, are that the troops never behaved better, not even at Gettysburg. They fought the two rebel divisions of Gordon and Pegram at close range, alternately driving them and being forced back again, until not one man in four had a single round of ammunition left, standing in their lines with fixed bayonets, and keeping up the firing with what cartridges could be gathered from the wounded and dead, until they were charged on the flank by a third rebel division (Mahone's), when they fell back, in as good order as the nature of the ground would permit, and without panic, to their breastworks. The stubbornness of the fighting is attested by the fact that men of the 121st Pa. Vols. are in hospital with bayonet wounds received in hand-to-hand conflict. The fighting having been in a dense forest, the casualties are not so great as would have been the case in an open country. The instances of personal gallantry which have come to my knowledge are so numerous that I can mention none without being invidious. Generals Meade and Warren both thanked General Crawford, the evening of the battle, for the conduct of the troops.

ARMY OF THE JAMES.

ATTEMPT OF THE REBELS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR LINES.

THE ENTRENCHING DETACHMENT DRIVEN BACK BY OUR TROOPS.

Arrival of Released Union Prisoners.

THE REBEL EXCHANGE BOAT BLOWN UP BY A TORPEDO.

[Correspondence of the Associated Press.]

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE JAMES, February 17, 1865.

Deserters from the Confederate army arriving at headquarters state that this morning between 12 and 1 o'clock, a company from each regiment of Stewart's brigade of Pickett's division, were sent out to advance their picket line about 150 yards, in order to strengthen as well as straighten their line on the Bermuda Hundred front, opposite the position held by the 2d Pennsylvania heavy artillery. On being discovered they were fired upon by our pickets, and after about twenty shots they retired to their own lines. The party making the attempt are reported as having been supplied with entrenching tools to throw up works for their defence, and when fired upon retreated in the utmost disorder, not waiting to return our fire. Their loss is not known.

Nine hundred and eighty-three Union prisoners, including ten officers, mostly from Danville, came down from Richmond on the rebel steamer William Allison, Cox's Landing. They were received and cared for by Lieutenant A. S. Merrill, acting assistant quartermaster at these headquarters.

About five o'clock, as the Allison was on her return trip to Richmond, and when a short distance above Fort Brady, she struck a torpedo, which exploded and completely wrecked her. She had on board 213 packages of blankets and a number of other articles for the prisoners, belonging mostly to the State of Indiana. The loss of life is unknown. There is no change in the weather and the roads are very bad, owing to the continued rains.

DEPARTMENT OF THE GULF.

The Mexican Refugee-Hunting Story Discredited.

REPULSE OF REBELS AT PLAQUEMINE.

NEW YORK, Feb. 18.—The steamer George Cromwell has arrived with New Orleans advices of Feb. 11th. She left the steamers Guiding Star and Morning Star ashore below New Orleans.

The *Times* makes light of the report that rebel refugees have been sent back from Matamoros to Texas, and that Canby is to retaliate. The story is probably a canard.

A rebel force of one hundred and twenty men attacked twenty-five men of the 31st Massachusetts Regiment, near Plaquemine, on the 4th inst. Capt. Rice and his men stood the rebel charges, and beat them off, leaving some of their dead and wounded in our hands. Our loss was one killed and two wounded.

THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI.

MOVEMENTS OF GEN. WASHBURNE.

THE DRAFT AT MEMPHIS.

CAIRO, Feb. 18.—The steamer Liberty passed up to-day from Memphis, with eighty bales of cotton for Evansville.

General Washburne had arrived at Memphis from Vicksburg *en route* for the Army of the James, but, meeting with countermanding orders, would return to Vicksburg.

The draft to fill the quota of the district of Memphis, under General Canby's order, passed off quietly. Three hundred and eighty-seven names were drawn.

THE REBEL RED RIVER FLEET—ATTACK ON A MISSISSIPPI STEAMER—FORREST AT JACKSON.

CAIRO, Feb. 19.—Five hundred and fifty bales and one hundred and fifty bags of cotton have arrived here for St. Louis, and three hundred for Cincinnati.

New Orleans advices of the 13th have been received. The rebel iron-clad Missouri, and two wooden gunboats, comprising the entire fleet of the enemy on Red river, are below Alexandria, closely watched by our gunboats. Three hundred bales of cotton from the prize back Science were sold at auction at New Orleans. Good ordinary 58c; middling 67. Sugar 19@20c. Molasses $1.20@1.25.

MEMPHIS, Feb. 17.—The steamer Mercury was attacked by rebels near Helena, and several soldiers were wounded. The rebels were finally dispersed by the gunboats.

The Memphis *Bulletin* says it is reported, upon authority worthy of consideration, that the cotton trade will shortly be opened at a position that in twenty days, by order of the President, and will be reopened upon new principles after his proposed visit South and West, which is looked for soon after the 4th of March.

The Union men of this city are preparing a grand reception banquet for W. G. Brownlow, who is expected here in a few days.

The rebel General Forrest, commanding the district of Mississippi, West Tennessee, and East Louisiana, has established his headquarters at Jackson, Miss., and is conscripting guerillas and sending them to Richmond, to be put into the Army of Virginia.

The steamer Dove was captured and burned near Helena, Arkansas, and the 56th Regiment were taken prisoners. Colonel Dean, commanding, was killed.

ST. LOUIS.

BANQUET TO THE LEGISLATURE AND STATE CONVENTION—DESTRUCTIVE FIRE.

ST. LOUIS, Feb. 18.—The Legislature has accepted an invitation of the Chamber of Commerce of this city to visit St. Louis and partake of a banquet, and have designated Tuesday, February 21, as the time. The State Convention has also been invited to share in the festivities.

The extensive spoke factory of Woodburn & Scott Homer, at the corner of Broadway and Cott streets, was burned last night. The loss amounted to two hundred thousand dollars, on which there was an insurance of forty-four thousand dollars.

CALIFORNIA.

WAR RESUMED AGAINST THE INDIANS IN ARIZONA—GOV. BLAISDELL, OF NEVADA, ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT—CUSTOM-HOUSE SUIT.

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 15.—Arizona papers report that scouting parties have been started out against the Indians, and that exterminating warfare will be commenced.

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 16.—Arrived, ships Sea Serpent and Great Republic, from New York.

Governor Blaisdell, of Nevada, has presented a message to the Legislature, relative to the passage of the constitutional amendment for the abolition of slavery. He recommends action thereon. The Governors of Idaho and Arizona Territories are on their way hither *en route* for Washington.

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 17.—A suit is now pending in the United States District Court to test the validity of various seizures of champagne by the custom-house authorities, on the ground of an attempt to evade duties by systematic underrating of value and false invoices. The result of the suit will make a difference of $100,000 annually at this port.

Arrived, mail steamer Sacramento, from Panama, with the passengers that left New York on January 23d. The opposition steamer America, with the passengers that left New York January 20th, has also arrived.

THE SOUTH.

LATEST FROM RICHMOND

THE MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

SOUTHERN OPINIONS.

The Recent Peace Conference

SEVERER MEASURES IN THE SOUTH.

ROBBING THE CRADLE AND THE GRAVE.

Preparations for a Fearful Struggle.

Mortar Firing near Petersburg.

RUMORS ABOUT SHERMAN.

LEE'S ORDER ON ASSUMING GENERAL COMMAND.

AFFAIRS IN THE REBEL CONGRESS

THE WAR.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18.—Richmond papers to the 16th have been received at THE PRESS Bureau in this city:

SOUTH CAROLINA—SHERMAN'S MOVEMENTS.

Sherman's movements in South Carolina still draw attention. Parties who left Columbia Friday last report a general belief that Sherman had cut loose from Branchville and was moving towards Kingsville or Columbia. The Congaree has to be crossed before reaching either place. At Kingsville Sherman would be able to destroy the Columbia and Charlotte and Wilmington and Manchester Railroads at one and the same time. But this is looking very far into the distance and over the head of a great many uncertainties.

A Columbia paper of Sunday last says that Gen Beauregard and staff, consisting of Col. Otey, Col. Rice, Captain Beauregard, Captain Ferry, and Dr. Brodie, had been in that city, and were stopping at Nickerson's hotel there.

The same paper states that a portion of the enemy's forces have crossed the South Edisto at Bennaker's ferry, and are slowly pushing forward towards the north branch of that river; and it thinks that the probabilities are that this movement is made for the double purpose of cutting the Columbia and Charleston road, and Wilmington and Manchester road at or near Kingsville. This, however, is speculation; and the facts are only those which were stated, in another and official form, some days ago.

LATER.—We learned, at a late hour last night, that a despatch had been received here in one of the offices of the Government, stating that the local force in Columbia had been ordered out, and that skirmishing was going on with the enemy in the vicinity of that city. The despatch is dated the 14th instant.

[From the Examiner, 16th.]

We are indebted to the courtesy of the Southern Express Company for late Georgia and Alabama papers. In every instance during the war, where the lines of communication have been cut or interrupted by the enemy, we, as well as the public, have had to rely wholly for advices upon the enterprise and energy of this express company.

We get from the Southern papers before us the following summary:

FROM AUGUSTA—SHERMAN'S MOVEMENTS.

Our dates from Augusta are to the 10th. The *Chronicle* of that date thus sums up the latest rumors:

The Federals on Thursday morning were at Windsor, about fifteen miles from Aiken. It is not known in what force. No movements were made by them on Thursday. Cause of this is not ascertained.

The troops in the vicinity of Windsor are Kilpatrick's corps.

It is reported that General Hampton and Wheeler engaged the enemy on the 7th and 8th, repulsing them at all points. Our loss was about seventy killed, wounded, and missing; that of the enemy is much greater.

The enemy are reported to be moving towards the Congaree river.

A gentleman from Columbia states that Slocum's corps is moving on that city on this side of the Edisto. His main line, when last heard from was on the railroad.

It is stated in Columbia that Kilpatrick's corps is protecting Slocum's left.

It is ascertained that Porter is again moving on Charleston. When last heard from he was at Green Pond.

It is not known where Gen. Sherman himself is.

Barnwell Court House was burned on Monday night.

The roads are teeming with vehicles, stock, and all kinds of movable property, fleeing for Georgia and Upper Carolina.

WHEELER BEATS KILPATRICK NEAR AUGUSTA.

The Augusta papers of last Wednesday state that, at that time, Slocum was at Windsor, ten miles east of Aiken, advancing on Augusta, his right flank being protected by the South Edisto river and his left by Kilpatrick's cavalry. The report that Kilpatrick was defeated by Wheeler, Slocum had with him the 15th and 16th Corps. The 14th and 20th Corps comprise the force operating against Columbia and Charleston. This leaves one corps of Sherman's army unaccounted for. We presume it has been left at Savannah. By the latest advices through the Yankee papers, we learn that Sherman was still at his headquarters at Beaufort.

NORTH CAROLINA—MOVEMENTS AT FORT FISHER.

It was reported yesterday morning that our troops were evacuating Wilmington. The report is not confirmed by official despatches received yesterday. The Yankee papers state that Gen. Terry is still in the vicinity of Fort Fisher, waiting for Gen. Hoke to attack him. Hitherto the Yankee press have represented Terry as about to march towards Wilmington, with the confident expectation of taking the place. Fort Anderson proves a more effectual obstruction than they had anticipated.

THE VIRGINIA-TENNESSEE FRONTIER.

Gen. Echols has succeeded Gen. Breckinridge in the command of this department. The enemy has generally gone into winter quarters at Knoxville; but it is reported that a small Yankee force is stationed near Morristown, on the French, Broad, and Clinch rivers. Recent reports from this department represent everything as quiet, and give occasion to suppose that the Yankees will make no effort towards the permanent occupation of the country until spring.

GRANT SENDING TROOPS TO THE NORTH SIDE.

Throughout Tuesday night the rumbling of wagons and artillery were heard in Grant's lines, in the neighborhood of Deep Bottom. It is supposed that Grant was transferring a heavy body of troops to the north side. This may simply be the return of the troops sent over to Butler to participate in the Hatcher's Run affair last Monday.

DISAFFECTION AMONG GRANT'S NEGRO TROOPS.

Yankee deserters who have recently come into our lines around Richmond report that there is great uneasiness and commotion among the negro soldiers in Grant's army at the prospect of employing blacks in the Confederate army with the same rewards as the White men. They also state that they show a general inclination to desert to our lines, preferring to fight for the South, if they can equally secure their freedom by such service. Our information on this subject comes from a very intelligent source. It is stated to us that most of the negro soldiers in the enemy's armies around Richmond are freedmen from Louisiana and Mississippi, and other parts of the Southwest which have been abolitionized; that they have great horror of the cold climate and other unpleasant things in the North; and that a prevalent desire exists among them to get homes in the South, by taking advantage of the anticipated profiter of freedom on our part to those of the negroes who may be employed in our army.

It is suggested that this sentiment among the black soldiers in the enemy's ranks is so extensive and exhibits so much of disgretion, that the authorities may make important use of it by some sort of official notice or appeal to them, to assure them of such protection and status as the Government may determine to assign to this class of deserters. At present, we are informed, a great many of them are kept in the Yankee army by the idea that if they come over to our lines they will be certainly murdered.

This delusion, which is, no doubt, the product of Yankee ingenuity, should be dispelled; and if the negro is to be employed in our armies, we suppose the authorities can have no hesitation in assuring the same reward to those who desert the Yankees and adopt our service, as to those who are enlisted in our own jurisdiction.

DRUMMING UP THE REBEL SKULKERS.

Mr. J. T. Leach, of North Carolina, offered the following resolutions:

Resolved, That the views of J. P. Benjamin, Secretary of State, as reported in a speech made by him on the 10th inst., in the city of Richmond, is derogatory to his position as a high public functionary of the Confederate Government, a reflection on the action of Congress as a deliberative body, and an insult to public opinion.

Resolved, That our army is not composed of mob-law materials, that our soldiers are law-abiding men; that, in common with their representatives and their friends at home, they deprecate croakers, official insolence, or mob law, as being repugnant to justice, incompatible with the rights of freemen, and revolting to the feelings of patriots and Christians.

Mr. Leach moved that they be laid on the table and printed.

The resolutions were laid on the table, but the motion to print failed—yeas 24, nays 46.

Mr. J. M. Leach offered a resolution that the Military Committee inquire as to the condition of Junior Reserves, and report what portion have not received sufficient clothing, blankets, &c., &c., &c.

Mr. Farrow, of South Carolina, presented sundry papers relative to the advance of one million of dollars in specie by the banks of the State of South Carolina for the purchase of horses for Hampton's cavalry. Referred to the special Committee on Claims.

Mr. Farrow offered, also, the following:

Whereas, Allegations exist of abuses perpetrated in connection with the transportation of supplies held on private account by speculators, to the great injury of the public interest, and the adequate supply of the army; therefore,

Resolved, That the Committee on the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments be, and they are hereby, instructed to inquire into the grounds for such allegations; and, for this purpose shall have power to send for persons and papers, and that said committee report the results of their inquiries to this House.

Resolved further, That in view of the importance of ascertaining the truth or groundlessness of such allegations, and the comparatively limited means of a committee in making such investigations, the House requests all good citizens who happen to know any facts that would aid the ends of justice in such investigations, to communicate such facts to the committee, by affidavit, accompanied by suitable certificates as to character and credibility of affiants, to the end that the probable truth of their statements.

Mr. Farrow read the following extract from the Richmond correspondent of the Charleston *Mercury*:

"Five young men hold exemptions from certain bureaux, and busy themselves buying and procuring transportation for private parties."

The resolutions were adopted.

Mr. Farrow also introduced the following:

Whereas, By an act entitled "an act to organize forces to serve during the war," approved February 17, 1864, stringent legislation was enacted for the purpose of ridding