

Article title: The Army Correspondent by
L. L. Crouse

P. 627-634

628

HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

being no news to write, we sought for trophies, and not a pile of *dibris* any where that escaped the inspection of the curiosity hunters. The enemy had been very circumspect in his departure, and the only ornaments we found were broken frying-pans, leaky kettles, and dilapidated clothing. The disgust at the result of our early efforts for "making history" was supreme.

When the major part of the Army of the Potomac, under McClellan, turned its head toward Alexandria for debarkation for the Peninsula, I tarried a while with McDowell, and marching through the mud of Manassas, which was an ever-present subject, finally bivouacked in the front yard of old Mrs. Catlett, at Catlett's Station, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, a spot which every man in King's old division of the First Army Corps could sketch from the memory of frequent visits, and the spot rendered more historical than ever in August of last year by the capture of General John Pope's baggage-train by Stuart. Jeb Stuart always stopped with Mrs. Catlett when he visited that section, and profited thereby, for this woman knew constantly all about our movements through her graciousness to many of our officers, whose tongues were less discreet than they should have been. But this advance soon promised to be fruitless; and though a part of the force did afterward shoot off and take the hills of Falmouth, yet I returned to Alexandria, and with Franklin's division set sail for Ship Point, then the base of the army before Yorktown.

When riding back from Catlett's to Alexandria, by way of Manassas, darkness overtook us, and we spread our blankets that night on the hard floors of the mansion of William J. Weir, a large brick house, the only one left standing at Manassas, and in which Beauregard had his head-quarters before and after the battle of Bull Run. There is a very interesting personal history connected with this estate, almost legendary in its character. Weir was an aristocratic slaveholder of liberal views, whose possessions in the immediate vicinity of the house were twenty-four hundred acres in extent, while another plantation of six hundred acres was located on the bank of Broad Run, about three miles distant. Many years since Weir married a foreign lady, who brought him a large fortune and a family of eleven active sons and daughters. The old man's broad acres were enough for all; but while some were prudent and sagacious, others wasted their substance in riotous living, and three sons betrayed their country and joined in the rebellion. The old mansion was still standing in tolerable repair; but it was only spared because of its occupancy by the rebel General; for Weir was strongly suspected of Unionism, did vote against secession when the question came up at the polls, and was actually shut up in the guard-house for saying, as he witnessed his fruit trees being made into fire-wood, that he "didn't know as he would be used any worse by the Yankees than he had been by those who professed to be his friends."

His "property in man" had consisted of about one hundred pieces, nearly all highly valuable field-hands. Many of these had escaped, some were driven South, while about twenty remained on the two farms. When the rebels retreated the old man, then over seventy, went with them. In company with a friend I conversed for an hour with an aged "uncle," who "dandled Massa Weir on his knee when a child," and was still more vigorous than his owner. He gave us much information. "Massa Weir," he said, "was persuaded to go off by young massars, who wore de sho'der-straps, and swar de Yankees kill him." My friend asked if Massa Weir's return would be looked upon with favor. "Dunno," was the sober reply: "spec' he neber cum back 'cept in a pine box."

The farm on Broad Run was the residence of the overseer and quite a number of likely chattels. A small race turned a mill, which ground the corn, and furnished the remaining negroes with meal—all they had to subsist upon. The Run had been forded by the troops at this place a few days before, and, the movement being slow, some of the men entered the mill and inflicted some injury. The next day old uncle hobbled up to the head-quarters of General Cutler, to ask him to protect the mill, "and keep de cullud folks from starvin'." After giving him the assurance desired he was asked some questions about his "massa," and was just turning on his heel when my poetical friend, Adjutant Haskell, struck up a strain from one of Whittier's latest, slightly varied for the occasion, thus:

"Me massa on his trubbls gone;
He leab de mill behind;
De Lord's bref blow him furdur on,
Like corn-shuck in de wind."

The son of Afric stopped, listened, turned, and with a broad grin and a face illuminated as with the light of youth, he bowed himself out, and limped down the road as briskly as though he had seen but the half of his fourscore years. A few days after we heard from the old man. "De Lord's bref had blown him furdur on"—to his last Eternal Home. He died at Culpepper, deserted by his sons, who had followed the retreating army on its march to Richmond.

Arriving at Fortress Monroe I found that, in consequence of some indiscretions of overzealous correspondents, the most severe as well as absurd regulations had been prescribed with reference to their government. The extent to which the censorship was used here has never been fully known. Correspondents were not allowed to state it at the time. It extended to the mails, so far as they were concerned, and no letter for publication, nor even private letter to the editor, could pass through the Post-Office without the approving initials of a young aid-de-camp on General Wool's staff. Soon after this extreme was modified by the adoption of a *parole*, really more precise and rigorous in its requirements than any ever administered to an enemy. This parole will be a great curiosity when the final history of the war is written. But all