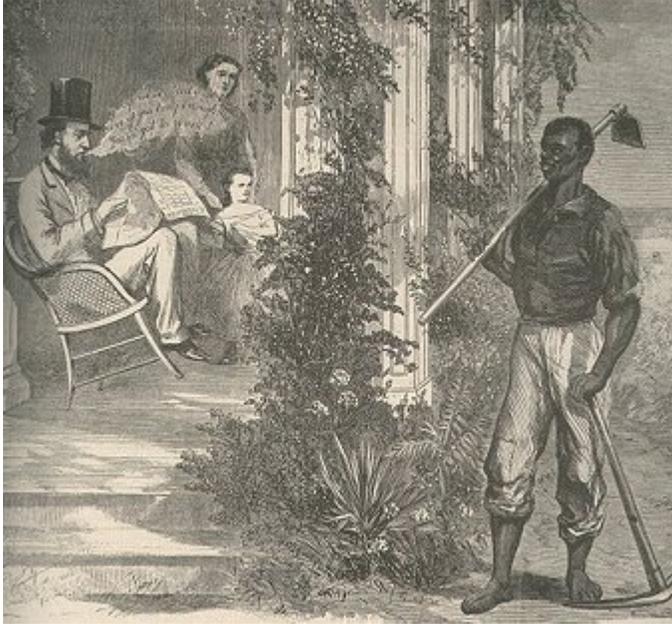


George F. Thompson: A Tour of Central Florida and the Lower West Coast, Dec. 1865 through Jan. 1866

An online transcription by James G. Cusick
P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History



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The Great Labor Question from a Southern Point of View. *Harper's Weekly*, July 29, 1865
Text reads: "My boy, we've toiled and taken care of you long enough--now you've got to work!"

Introduction: A Tour of Central Florida and the Lower West Coast



George Franklin Thompson
From the American Images Gallery of the U.S.
Military History Institute

The journal of George Franklin Thompson, housed in the diary collection of the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, is a 216 page leather-bound volume chronicling a tour of inspection through central and lower Florida during the winter of 1865-1866. Thompson was appointed to this tour of duty as an Inspector for the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, the federal agency charged with the task of overseeing Reconstruction in a non-slave South. In a lively style and a clear hand, he records his impressions of Gainesville, Paynes Prairie, Ocala, Silver Springs, Tampa, the Manatee River, Charlotte Harbor, Fort Myers, and Key West, as well as his encounters with Florida cattle-baron Jacob Summerlin and steamboat operator Capt. James McKay.

This web version of the journal is presented together with a series of articles that ran in *The Tallahassee Sentinel* publicizing Thompson's official report of his tour. The text is a direct transcription of the journal entries, reproducing Thompson's spelling and punctuation, with page breaks and page numbering according to the original. Editorial comments are included in italics in brackets. Words that were struck out or changed in the original are also shown in brackets. In cases where Thompson's handwriting was illegible or difficult to decipher, the word used is followed by [?] to indicate it is in doubt.

Biography

George Franklin Thompson was born in Medway, Massachusetts, on August 9th, 1827, one of eleven children, and spent his early years in Worcester. At the age of 22 he began work in a local shoe factory. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Thompson was mustered into the 21st Massachusetts Volunteers, along with his youngest brother Edward, and was appointed regimental quartermaster with the rank of 1st lieutenant. Serving during the entire term of the war, he fought at Kelly's Ford, Second Bull Run, Chantilly, Antietam, and Brandy Station, and achieved the rank of captain. On June 16th, 1866, he left the service in Tallahassee, Florida, having just completed a tour of inspection for the Freedmen's Bureau. His rank at retirement was that of major and he was also breveted lieutenant colonel. Returning to Worcester, he briefly resumed work in the shoe business, tried his hand in insurance, served for a time as internal revenue collector, and then became a clerk in the statistical department of the Boston customs house. He had ventured into politics in 1857, when he was elected to represent Worcester in the legislature, and continued to seek public office following the Civil War, becoming a member of the state senate for Worcester in 1873, and then serving for several years on the town's school board. Thompson died on November 13, 1895 from complications

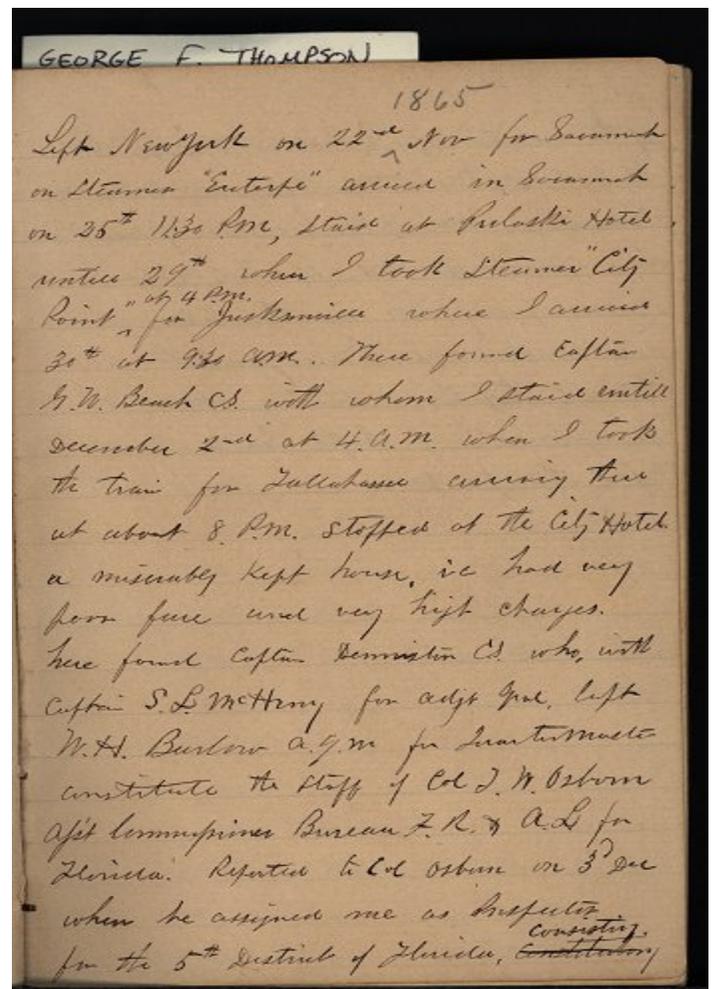
caused by heart disease and pulmonary illnesses. He was survived by his widow, Caroline (Sanborn) Thompson, a native of Lowell, and four sons and two daughters, another son having predeceased him.

Background to the Journal and Thompson's Tour

As a memoir of post-Civil War Florida, Thompson's journal is a rich source of both fact and hyperbole, and records his early investigations for the Bureau of Freedmen at the beginning of Reconstruction. Thompson arrived in Tallahassee on December 2, 1865, to receive confirmation of his appointment as Inspector for the Bureau, with orders to proceed to District 5. The district assigned to him comprised all of Florida below Ocala, embracing the 1865 counties of Volusia, Orange, Polk, Hillsboro, Manatee, Monroe, Dade, and Broward ([see map](#)).

While he was in Tallahassee, Thompson's superiors introduced him to William Henry Gleason, an attorney and engineer from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Gleason was eager to see Florida and obtained permission to accompany Thompson. He would later become a major land broker in Brevard, Broward, and Dade counties, and would serve as Lt. Governor of Florida from 1868 to 1870, and in the state legislature from 1871 to 1874. It was his journey with Thompson that first convinced Gleason to move his family from Wisconsin and take up residence and investment in Florida.

The exact provenance of the journal is unknown. It probably came to the University of Florida as part of the Gleason Family Papers. Although written by Thompson, it does not appear to be the original diary that he kept while making his tour. The journal bears none of the weather-staining, smears, or hard use one would expect of a pocket diary that accompanied a military man through many nights of outdoor camping in rainy weather. Thompson's entries are small, neat and frequently emended, covering 123 pages of the journal, with post-scripts on page 213 and on the inside back cover. Additional notes, in pencil by an unknown hand, appear on the inside front cover and title page. Thompson abruptly left off writing on page 124, Saturday, January 20th, 1866, for which there is no entry. At that date, the journal records him as being in Key West, planning a trip into South Florida.



It is likely, therefore, that the journal is a transcription of a portion of Thompson's original field notes, copied out at the conclusion of his travels. As part of his duties as Inspector, Thompson was obligated to submit a report on Florida to his superior, Col. T. W. Osborn. In particular, he was charged with discovering the condition of the district, its suitability for settlement and agriculture, the loyalty or disaffection of residents for the government, and the status of the freedmen. The journal seems to be an early draft of his report, containing the personal information, opinions, and observations that Thompson omitted from the official version. It is possible to compare the two because Thompson's report to Col. Osborn was later published as a series of articles in *The Tallahassee Sentinel* between April 19 and May 7, 1867.

Thompson's Attitude Toward Florida: Published and Unpublished

The journal and the *Sentinel* articles therefore complement and sometimes complete each other. Without question, the official report is drier and less picturesque than the journal entries, omitting most of the vignettes Thompson recorded about his conversations and misadventures. A practical Massachusetts man, someone who had worked with his hands in manufacturing and whose interests included rhetoric and statistics, Thompson brought both a keen wit and a keen eye to his task of assessing Florida. As a Yankee, a confirmed Republican, and a battle-hardened veteran of the Union Army, he was congenial enough to those around him but contemptuous of the "cracker" life style he saw in Florida and often ridiculed Southerners for their indolence and for blaming their hard life on the loss of slave labor. Micanopy, he observed with disdain, was a "southern town" full of "loafers and hangers on," with a "universal appearance of shiftlessness." Indeed, Thompson's overall reaction to Florida was unfavorable until he reached Tampa, which he described as having a prosperity and industriousness more in keeping with his New England business sense.

Taken together, the journal and Thompson's later report afford historians a more complete account of his trip than either work provides by itself. For example, the journal describes Thompson's experiences in Alachua and Marion counties, a segment of his tour that the report omits. It also reveals the latent hostility between Confederate and Union Floridians in the immediate post-war period. People were careful about where and with whom they discussed politics, according to Thompson. In one fortuitous encounter with a "General Owens" of Marion County, he and Gleason learned of the Regulators (local groups formed to harass Floridians who sided with the Union during the war). While mentioning such hostilities in his report (see *The Tallahassee Sentinel*, April 23, 1867), he tended to downplay the tensions as exaggerated.

On the other hand, the entries in Thompson's journal cease prior to his excursion to Dade County, an area that clearly made a great impression on him and that comprised about one-third of his entire tour. Hence, this portion of his trip might have been lost to posterity had it not been for three articles that appeared in the *Sentinel* (on April 30, May 3, and May 7, 1867). In them, he recorded his great hopes for development in Southern Florida, and his oft-repeated recommendation that the Government undertake draining to increase arable land. A portion of this official report can also be found in the papers related to the Florida offices of the Freedmen's Bureau housed in the National Archives.

Although Thompson was an agent for the Freedmen's Bureau, his journal entries provide surprisingly little information on the condition of recently emancipated slaves in Florida, a subject that he dedicated more space to in his report. Thompson's attitude toward freedmen was typical for a Northerner in the South, being both sympathetic and patronizing. He characterized blacks as hard-working while whites were idle; however, he seemed uncertain that black residents could succeed in a free labor market. As a former quartermaster, he

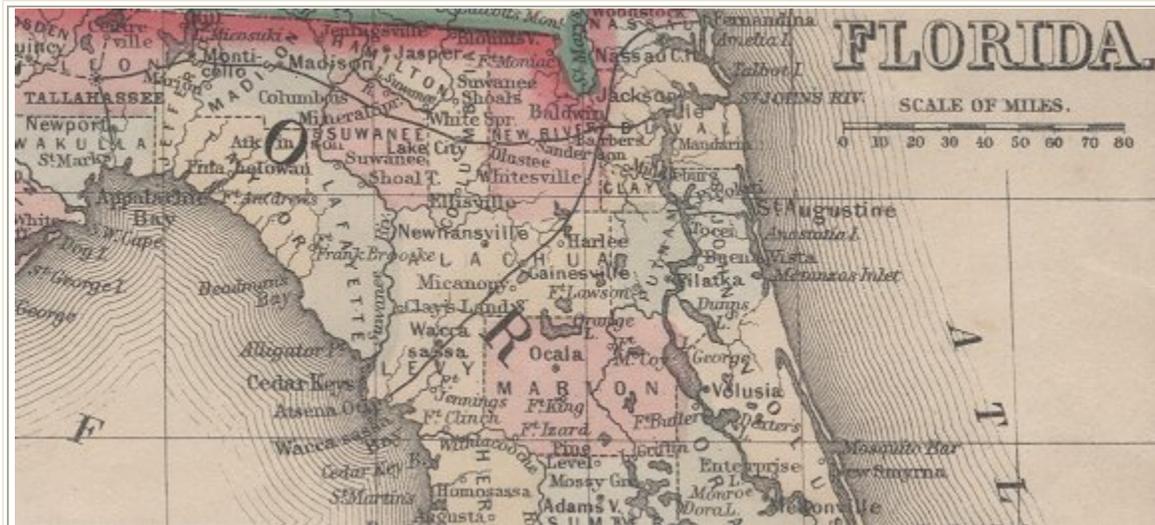
focused more on the problems of supply and labor that the freedmen faced, rather than incidents of intimidation or political disenfranchisement. In concluding his report to Col. T. W. Osborn, Thompson summed up his impressions of the freedmen's condition by saying: ". . . there will be but little, if any, occasion for the interference of the powers of the Bureau, unless it should be to establish schools and assist them in settling upon public lands. The desire to become land owners is almost universal. I have, however, counselled them in all instances, to hire themselves out for a year or two, and save their earnings as far as possible, so as to have some capital [*The Tallahassee Sentinel*, May 7, 1867].

Other prejudices also emerge in his writing. In his visit to Jacksonville, he penned several anti-semitic remarks concerning Jewish store-keepers. Terms like "cracker" and "poor white trash" occur in entries about encounters with rural folk. Thompson was clearly amused by what he considered the outlandishness of the Florida frontier and took great pains to reproduce conversations and dialogue. Most of his stories, misadventures, and personal comments were left out of his official report, and therefore never appeared in print.

A prominent theme running throughout the journal is Thompson's and Gleason's profound interest in Florida's economic resources. Thompson entered many comments about forest cover, drainage, soil fertility, and natural features such as sinks and springs. In particular, his description of the fish die-off in Paynes Prairie and of the fishing enterprises along the Gulf Coast are significant glimpses into local ecology. References to Florida's healthy climate, found in both the earlier works of John Lee Williams and the subsequent work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, are also much in evidence in this journal.

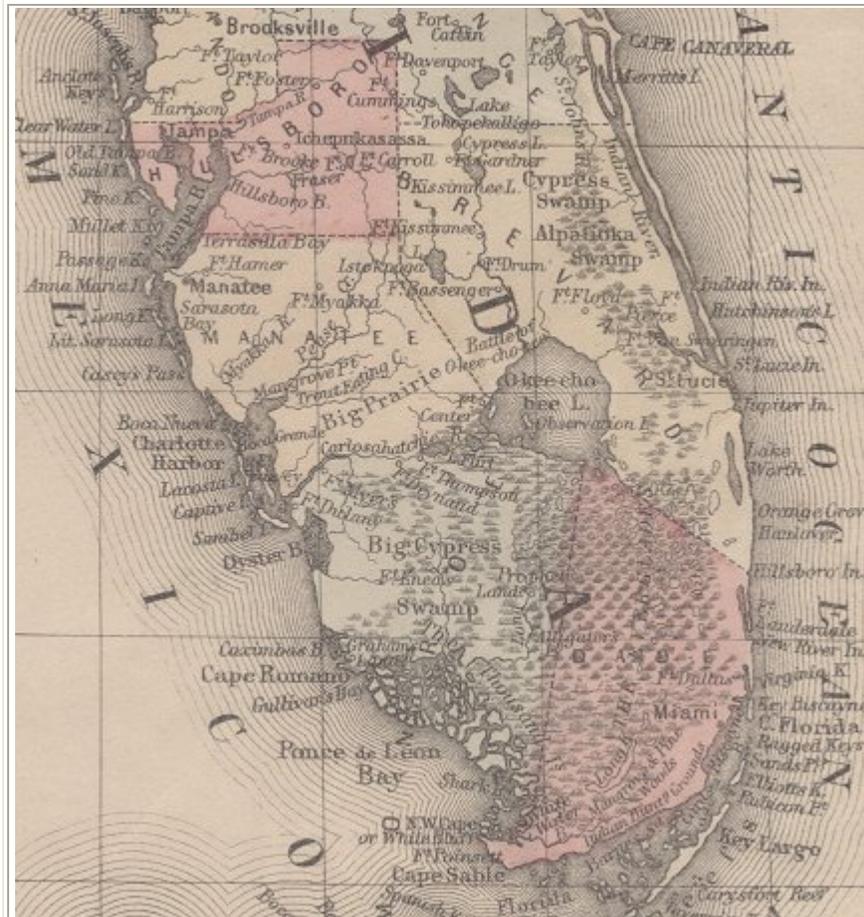
Overall, Thompson's journal and later report provide a fascinating assessment of a Confederate state just recovering from the turmoil of the Civil War and still beset with dissensions and divisions. Thompson directed his attention to many aspects of the physical and social landscape of Florida that were omitted or overlooked by other writers. For additional information, the best account of Thompson's tour is George R. Bentley's "Colonel Thompson's 'Tour of Tropical Florida'" in *Tequesta*, Volume 10, 1950, pp. 3-12. Bentley identifies many of the individuals mentioned in the journal and describes the latter part of the tour into South Florida. See also the *Worcester Daily Telegram*, November 14, 1895, and the *Worcester Spy* of the same date for brief abstracts of his life, published at the time of his death.

Map: A Tour of Central Florida and the Lower West Coast



Detail, from S. Augustus Mitchell, County Map of Florida, 1865.

As described in the first section of the journal, Thompson and Gleason traveled from Tallahassee to Jacksonville, then proceeded southwest to Baldwin, Gainesville, Ocala, and Hillsboro County. Volusia County (at right) was part of the district Thompson was assigned to cover in his tour. The journal does not cover his trip there.



This portion of the Mitchell map depicts the rest of Thompson's District Five. He and Gleason stopped in Tampa and then, after a short stay, continued their journey by boat along the Gulf Coast to the Manatee River, Ft. Myers, the Peace River, and Oyster Bay. On the return voyage, they were forced to remain at Boca Nueva, or Little Gasparilla, for several days due to "a violent tornado" (probably a severe and unusual winter storm in the Gulf). Arriving back in Tampa, they discovered that the storm had sunk the gunboat "Narcissus" off Egmont Key with the loss of all hands.

Journal: A Tour of Central Florida and the Lower West Coast by George Franklin Thompson

November 22, 1865 through December 21, 1865

[On inside front cover in pencil]

Journal of Geo. F. Thompson, as Inspector, Bureau Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands, on a tour of central Florida and the Lower West Coast, Dec. 1865

G.ville--p. 7
Paines Prairie--p. 21
Silver Springs--p. 40
Tampa--p. 54, 100
Manatee River--p. 59

[On first leaf in pencil]

Summerlin--p. 80
McKay--p. 79
Ft. Myers--p. 91

[in pencil]

(Journal of)

[in ink, the beginning of Thompson's handwriting]

Geo F. Thompson.
Tallahassee,
Florida

[no page number]

[added in pencil]

1865

Left New York on 22nd Nov for Savannah on steamer "Euterpe" [Enterprise?] arrived Savannah on 25th 10:30 p.m., staid at Pulaski Hotel until 29th when I took Steamer "City Point" at 4 p.m. for Jacksonville where I arrived 30th at 9:30 a.m. There found Captain G.W. Beach C.S. with whom I staid untill December 2nd at 4 a.m. when I took the train for Tallahassee arriving there about 8 p.m. Stopped at the City Hotel a miserably kept house, it had very poor fare and very high charges. Here found Captain Demington C.S. who, with Captain S. L. McHenry for adjt. Genl., Capt W.H. Burtow A.G.M.. for Quartermaster, constitute the staff of Col. J. W. Osborn, Asst. Commissioner, Bureau F.R. & A.L. for Florida. Reported to Col. Osborn on 3rd Dec when he assigned me as Inspector for the 5th District of Florida, consisting [constituting]

[no page number]

of the counties of Volusia, Orange, Polk, Hillsboro, Manatee, Munroe, Dade & Broward. Mr. [?] W. H. Gleason of Eau Claire, Wis. was appointed Special Agent to accompany me on the tour, and we made our arrangements to travel together, obtaining horses & equipments of Capt. Burlow A.G.M. for the purpose.

[1]

Left Tallahassee for Jacksonville on Wednesday Dec 6th at 8 a.m. arrived at Jacksonville at 10 p.m. delayed two hours by train getting off track. The most noticeable thing on the way from Tallahassee to Jacksonville is the excessive stupidity and lack of a spirit of enterprise and accommodation on the part of the employees of the Rail Road. The train was advertised to start at 7 a.m. and knowing my peculiar weakness to over-sleep myself in the morning, I solicited [ef] the landlord to wake me as early as 5 a.m. in the morning that I might have plenty of time to get in readiness for the train. This I felt to be more than usually important as I had to see that the three horses (Gleason's the orderlie's and my own) were put in a car to be transported

[2]

to Baldwin.

As good fortune would have it I awoke shortly after daylight and supposing it to be quite late, jumped out of bed, and taking a hasty glance at my watch thought it was past 6 o'clock. Hurrying on my clothes I hastened down stairs and feeling some what enraged with the remissness of the landlord commenced giving vent to my feelings in expressions of disgust with the neglect and want of promptness on the part of the Hotel Keeper.

After berating him somewhat sourly with the strongest language I could command, and sending the first colored American citizen I could find to arouse the landlord and Mr. Gleason, my travelling companion, I turned to a very quiet man seated on a bench on the porch and directed

[3]

my conversation to him in particular when he very quietly [?] observed "You will get used to such things after you have lived in this country awhile."

Never! I said, I would rather die than be so stupid.

I thought so once myself, "said he."

Then you are not a native of Florida, are you?

Oh, no. I was from New Hampshire and came to this country fourteen years ago and have learned to get along with all the delays and this lack of business habits.

His first expression convinced me that it was [his] a [expression] matter [?] of his own experience, and then I commenced to make inquiries in regard to the country, people, land, and especially the political [feeling] condition of the state. I informed him that I was from

[4]

Massachusetts, which seemed to unloosen his tongue, and looking first to the right and then to the left to see if any one was watching him or listening to the conversation, he said

"Come this way, I don't like these people to see me talking of these things for the fact is, the Election is but just over, and they are like a hive of bees or nest of hornets which has been stirred up with a large stick and they are buzzing around trying to find victims upon whom they can vent their spleen, and I do not care to become one of their victims. I am now living in

Florida. I came from Georgia to avoid the Rebel Army as the alternative was given me, either to go into the Army or leave the state

[5]

and leaving the Union I chose the latter." After conversing with this gentleman several minutes, the landlord came out rubbing his eyes with his fists looking more like a half-grown bear than a gentlemanly and accommodating Hotel Keeper, when I began to open my battery of invective upon him for his want of fidelity and the danger of my being left by the train.

"Oh! You have plenty of time, it's only half past five now, plenty of time! Plenty of time!!"

Upon taking a calm view of my watch I found I had made a mistake of only one hour, which [was] proved to be very fortunate, as I doubt if he would have awakened until now if some one had not aroused him. After partaking of a break-

[6]

fast such as Kings seldom have, vis "hog & hominy" we started for the Depot some half a mile distant and on arriving there were doomed to another trial of patience and good nature. The train should have started at 7 a.m., but by dint of the masterly inactivity of the agent, conductor, and every other employee of the road we started about 15 minutes past 8 and then I presume it was by the consent of the baggage master or some brakeman.

After taking a seat in the car and composing myself a little I began to look around for objects of interest and was not long in finding two. One was the dilapidated, dirty and uncomfortable condition of the car, and the other a young lady

[7]

from the country, whose attire and general appearance indicated her origin, as being from the "poor white trash." After she had taken a full survey of all the passengers, she pulled from her pocket a red handkerchief, or what there was left, of what once was one, and commenced tearing it into strips about an inch wide. My fears were at once excited, as thoughts of suicide flushed through my mind. I [at once] determined, if she should attempt such an act, that I would become a hero by saving her life and returning her to her parents unharmed. After she had deliberately arranged the strips, under my eagle eye she stooped over and gently raising the lower extremities of her crinoline

[8]

she placed them upon some part of her person not visible to me and as I saw no signs of strangulation concluded that these could be no immediate danger.

We arrived at Lake City, distant from Tallahassee 105 miles about 4 p.m., and here we were doomed to another disappointment. The car containing our horses could not or rather would not go forward any further until the next day on account of the road from Lake City to Jacksonville being under the control of another Corporation, and neither company being any agents to labor for the interest of the corporations and the accommodation of the travelling public. The agent promised that the

[9]

car should come forward with the horses the next morning and we concluded to proceed to Jacksonville and meet our horses at Baldwin to go to Gainesville on Saturday morning.

We arrived at Jacksonville about 10 p.m. after being delayed about two hours by another train being across the track about 10 miles from Jacksonville. On arriving at J. I proceeded to the Quarters of Captain Griest C.S. who welcomed me to his home, with the usual commisary honors.

Jacksonville, December 7th

This is the National Thanksgiving and of course I devote myself to the usual rejoicings of the day. The people of this place are cognisant that there is such a country

[10]

as the United States and though they do not all close their places of business yet there is a strong indication that a large part of the business men here are disposed to recognise the national authority. About two thirds of the places of business are closed, only the small two-cent-stores and few shops being open for trade. It is remarkable how the Jew finds his way into every nook and corner of the country, large enough to squeeze a three cent piece into it. I think if you should drop a penny into the crevice of a rock ten thousand feet below the surface of the Earth and should examine the place twelve months afterward, you would find a

[11]

Jew or his shadow there with a store 6 x 8 filled with every conceivable notion trying to get it by trade. This place has a full store of this class of trades people, whether they are a desirable population for any country is a point upon which I have very decided opinions but as my opinions on this matter cannot be law I forbear their expression. Thermometer today 64 to 70.

8th December

We find no train leaves Jacksonville for Baldwin before tomorrow morning consequently must remain here until tomorrow morning at 4 o'clock. The train runs from Jacksonville to Tallahassee only every other

[12]

day, this is owing to the want of two things, one of which being supplied, the other would soon come to exist, vis, 1st want of Rolling stock 2nd want of enterprise and business capacity. The distance between these two places is 165 miles and there is no difficulty in arranging a daily train provided they had a reasonable amount of enterprise. We spent most of the day in making arrangements for our tour by purchases and setting the route which we would travel. We went into one store and in making our selections of the different articles naturally engaged the man in conversation about the country, soil, rivers, and in fact everything which might be important or gratifying to our curiosity. We were thus pushing our inquiries when in turn

[13]

the man made of us the usual inquiry of a Southerner, vis "What part of the country are you

from?" I answered for myself, that I was from Massachusetts, when from that moment he turned from me and seemed to feel that he had nothing further to say. The change in his manners was so marked that my companions concluded that the way to silence a rabid secessionist was to hail from Mass. He was a sort of Mongrel New York Dutchman who had emigrated to Florida years ago and managed to crawl down lower and get slimier than any native born Southerner could do. There is a degree of despicable meanness which a renegade Northerner can and does reach which a native Southerner can never degrade himself to.

[14]

About 4 o'clock p.m. I was surprised to see Mr. Foster come into the room and was glad to see him for the purpose of arranging for my monthly papers. I advised him in reference to my business. Saw Mrs. Foster who appeared in excellent health. The thermometer today stood at 69 without varying much through the day or evening. Tomorrow morning we start for Gainesville via Baldwin where we expect to find our horses.

Dec 9th

I arose this morning at 3 o'clock and made my toilet and reached the Depot about 4 o'clock with Mr. Gleason and Mr. Rowley, a young man from Conn. and formerly connected with the 7th Regt from that state, as private, but from his

[15]

appearance and intelligence would have honored a commission. In getting into the car I thought I had left my transportation papers in my room & stepped out and asked the conductor how long before the train would start. He informed me very shortly. 10 minutes. I immediately started for the room $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile distant running through the sand and bush and just made the time almost entirely exhausted and not finding my papers at the room, commenced a more thorough search in my pockets and succeeded in finding them; and felt not a little vexed with myself for being so negligent in putting them up as not to have remembered where they were put. However, it was a lesson, hereafter to be more careful in arranging such things.

[16]

We arrived at Baldwin, distant from Jacksonville about 20 miles about 7 a.m. and found our orderly with the horses. The conductor in the Gainesville road informed me with an air of dignity which would appear more appropriate to a rich man like "Uncle Samuel" than a subordinate on a Florida Rail Road, that he could not take the horses for want of a car. I told him that it seemed to me that it was his business to get a car if he had none. Or at any rate to provide the transportation in some way, but he replied with his usual dignity that he couldn't and that was the end of the controversy." I then determined to send them through the country to [~~that~~] for Gainesville the distance being only about 50 miles

[17]

and they would be required to wait at Baldwin until the next Tuesday before they could be transported over the road. We took Breakfast at this place and concluded to take the train for G'ville at 8 o'clock arriving at that place about 12. M., where we found Mr. W. Root formerly private in 2[#] Indiana Vols. In Army Potomac.

The country from B. to G. is level & sandy, covered with a growth of pine not heavy enough for timber in any great quantity, but suitable for the Turpentine business and noticed several rude manufactories for this article on the way. The country is very sparsely settled and the

appearance of the inhabitants indicates that common schools and churches of a high order do not exist in great numbers if at all.

[18]

We remained at Gainesville until Monday morning. The weather was cloudy and rainy during our stay which did not add to the beauty of the place. It is a settlement of about 500 inhabitants with a church and stores. Here we saw a Mr. Sanchez [~~Nichols~~] who owns a tract of land of about 6000 acres covered with live oak in the neighborhood of Indian River which he offers to sell for 8 dollars per acre. He is laboring under the impression that the stock of live oak is nearly exhausted and that it will be a necessity for the government to purchase this tract at his price for the building of its ships. But this idea only indicates how [curious?] are the views entertained as to the extent and productions of this coun[page break]

[19]

-try. An occurrence happened here showing the grade of civilization which prevails. A Dr. Clay, said to be a cousin of Henry Clay, had an altercation with a defeated political candidate in the last election when the argument of Dr. Clay became demonstrative upon the face and head of the defeated candidate and if it did not produce conviction at least produced a liberal flow of blood highly mixed with a poor quality of whiskey.

Here also I saw for the first time the operation of ginning cotton. The cotton gin is a machine which separates the seed from the staple and is the invention of Eli Whitney an ingenious Yankee of Westborough, Mass. This mill had seven pins and was operated by a Yankee 14 years from Taunton, Mass.

[20]

The average amount of clean cotton turned out per day by such machine is about 150 lbs and this man received 4 cents per pound for ginning besides the seed which is worth about 25 cents per bushel. It required a man to each machine who receive about one dollar per day for their labor.

Dec 10th Sunday

We had heard much said here about some "sinks," as they are called, small bodies of water with no visible outlets, situated about 3 miles from Gainesville, being filled with dead fish and alligators, so we decided to appropriate this day to their examination.

Mr. Gleason & myself started out immediately after

[21]

breakfast to visit them. We found them bordering on the edge of what is called Paines' Prairie, formerly called the Alachua Savana, a low body of land about 15 miles in length and 7 in width. They number some half a dozen small irregular bodies of water running towards the southwest [~~northwest~~] slowly & [~~into one~~] from the last one no outlet could be seen except a slight eddying on the outer edge as though the water had found a subterranean passage through a fissure of the rock beneath. The entire surface of the water was completely covered with dead fish and alligators on the body of water which had the subterranean outlet and upon the surface of the other ponds some half a dozen in number. There were hundreds of thousands of fish

[22]

with their mouths just protruding into the air gasping in the agonies of death. So numerous were they that the sound of their gasping resembled the noise of a heavy shower of rain.

There were 20 to 25 alligators floating upon the surface, from 5 to 10 feet in length, in a state of decomposition. In the ponds were numerous live ones feeding upon the dead fish. The stench was so intense that it extended its noxious smell for a distance of two miles. That part of the lake or pond having the outlet is reported to have a depth of more than a hundred feet. The cause of the fish dying is not understood by the inhabitants. It appears to be that it is the result of the exhaustion of the oxygen in the water, for I

[23]

can hardly believe that such innumerable numbers of fish could exist for any length of time in so small a quantity of water. This prairie was overflowed a year ago and it is probably that the fish increased to such numbers as not to be supported in the small ponds to which they were driven when the waters receded from the plain. The rock formation near and around these ponds is pure limestone. Indeed so soft is it that you can easily dig it out with a spade.

After gratifying our curiosity and sense of smell here, we returned to Gainesville through the Hammock in which we found many depressions on the surface, in a tunnel shape. A Hammock is a piece of land covered with

[24]

Hard wood and is always considered the most desirable tracts. The soil is richer and more productive and more especially adapted to grains and fruits, while the Pine lands are suitable for cotton, cane, and rice. We arrived at our Hotel about 4 o'clock and after regaling ourselves took a seat in the sitting room and passed the evening in conversation until we retired to bed to forget our weariness and become refreshed for our journey in the morrow. Thermometer stood at 64.

11th December Monday

This morning about 11 o'clock we had our horses at the door ready to commence our journey to Tampa. We left Gainesville and travelled

[25]

southwest towards Ocala crossing Paines' Prairie and found nothing particular interesting until 8 or ten miles on our way when we passed a low marshy tract about 4 miles in length and from 1 to 2 miles in width and if I should state my belief as to the number of wild ducks there found I feel [?] I should find few to credit my story.

I know that to judge correctly of numbers in such cases requires much experience, and after resolving in my own mind what would be a fair estimate of the number of Ducks in that space I ventured the inquiry of my companions as to the number. Mr. Gleason, who has travelled extensively, after stopping and surveying the field or as much as could

[26]

plainly be seen said that there could not be less than a million but I had previously fixed my estimate at 300,000 and I believe could they have been gathered and counted the number would have exceeded rather than fallen short of that number.

We rode our horses towards the edge of the water and as they ascended near us, the sound of their flying was like the thunder. We passed on with the intention of stopping at the house of Colonel McCormick 22 miles from Gainesville but we missed our way and found ourselves at night fall on a narrow strip of land extending into Orange Lake. Finding that the darkness would prevent us from retracing our steps a dis[page break]

[27]

-tance of about four miles we exercised a little philosophy and made the best of our mistake and spread our blankets on the ground in the woods, built a rousing fire, and went to bed supperless.

Our horses found but little better than ourselves for the only feed we could give them was the long bundles of Spanish moss hanging from the trees. This Spanish moss is found in abundance in the hammocks, and it is suitable after proper dressing, [for] as a substitute for hair in the manufacture of mattresses or stuffed chairs. The process of preparation is to bury the moss in the soil, or water rot it, and then after drying, the outside covering comes off by threshing and leaves a fine and wiry fibre quite similar to

[28]

horse hair. It is very abundant throughout the counties of Alachua and Marion and I doubt not throughout the state.

During the night the sky became clouded and the rain came pattering down upon us, but our blankets were sufficient to keep us perfectly dry and the thermometer indicated about 68. We experienced no inconveniences from cold. We arose about 7 o'clock [12th Dec] and perambulated the forest which gave us shelter and to our utter astonishment we found it to contain orange groves with the fruit hanging in large and tempting clusters. We found not less than 20,000 orange trees bearing what is termed the sour [~~bitter-sweet~~] orange. All that is necessary to make them

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bear the most delicious sweet orange is to graft unto the stock the desired kind, and the third year you have the fruit in abundance. Without doubt the "bitter sweet," or sour orange is capable of producing a brandy of superior flavor but the better way, and the more profitable, would be to graft in the sweet orange and obtain a fruit which would command a high price in the Northern market. The cabbage Palmetto also abounds and from an examination of its structure I am satisfied may be profitably manufactured into cordage or paper of superior strength.

Dec 12th Tuesday

The early part of the morn-

[30]

ing was spent in "prospecting" the narrow strip of land upon which we made our bed the night previous and about 11 o'clock resumed our saddles for the journey to Col McCormicks with empty stomachs and enthusiastic hearts instead.

After following several trails in the dense wood in hope to find a shorter route to our goal we finally reached the main road and shortly afterward met a citizen going to Micanopy of whom we inquired the most direct route to Col McCormicks. We parted from him but little wiser as to the course, but kept on our way relying more upon our own judgement and the information we could gather

[31]

from the negroes then anything we could get from the white people, not because the whites are disinclined to give all the information they have but our principal difficulty was in appreciating all the crooks and turns they would mention, while as a general thing the negro was more direct in his statements & could confine himself to the point.

[overwritten with the words The day before] (We arrived at Micanopy at 12 M. This is a "southern town" and as I am in a hurry to get to my destination for the day cannot stop to describe its dingy stores and houses, its loafers and hangers on and universal appearance of shiftlessness but will leave this part of my task for a future time).

After pursuing a zig-zag route for about 12 miles we came to the plantation of a late Dr. Paine where

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we found an old colored man busily at work surrounded by his family of children and a lot of hogs. On coming up to him he laid aside his adze and readily communicated his wrongs. He said that since 'Freedom came in' his old mistress (Mrs. Paine) had been very exacting and severe with them, requiring of them every chicken & pig and delaying the payment of the wages which she had promised. After directing him to make known all his wrongs to the judge of Probate, whom he knew, we rode on past the family mansion towards Col McCormicks, arriving there about 3 p.m.

On entering the house we took the first opportunity to inform the Mistress of the house that we had excellent appetites when she very cheerfully gave

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directions to have a dinner prepared for us. While the dinner was in preparation we engaged a lively conversation with the Mistress of the house (Miss Carman) in regard to the country, its products, the people, their habits manners customs, &c. We found her to be a very careful observer of passing events and capable of forming a correct judgement of men & things. She iterates the story we had heard so much in regard to the negro, that he would not work except under compulsion but yet, could see that the whites and especially the former owners do not try to alleviate the difficulty but rather rejoice in the evil because it proves their old theory that the negro is incapable of caring for himself and that slavery is the natural condition of the race.

She informed us that the

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Emancipation of the negro had wrought a great change already and instanced the case of the killing of a negro by one of her neighbors as a case in point. It seems that Marion Paine, one of the family previously referred to, had an altercation with a negro boy and becoming exasperated threw a knot of wood at the boy striking him down senseless and shortly after expired. Under the old system Marion might have gone before a magistrate and made a statement of the case and been released, but now, knowing that under the new order of things the negro boy had a right to life and that he (Marion) was amenable to the military authorities for one of the worst of crimes he felt the cord chafing his neck and fled and I believe to this day has not been

[35]

found to answer for his crime. Unquestionably his friends are knowing as to his whereabouts and provide him with the necessary means to evade detection. On inquiry of Miss Carman if there had ever been any cases where the owner had killed a slave without being molested by the civil authorities under the old system, she answered very readily, "yes, indeed."

Dinner was now announced and we readily repaired to the dining room where we appeased our appetites on the feast set before us. About 4:30 we left McCormicks and proceeded on our journey and had not gone far before it commenced raining, but forward was our word and through forest and in the rain we travelled untill about 8 o'clock we espied a light off at our right and we made for it.

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After wandering some time in the darkness we came to a fence which obstructed our progress but the fence soon gave way and on we went to the light. When within about 300 yards of the house we were saluted by half a dozen big dogs and warned to approach no further but our case would not allow us to heed their warning voices and up to the house we rode drenched with rain. The house proved to be a rude, leaky shanty with a white man, a big wench, and some half dozen mulatto children for occupants.

Can you keep some of us here tonight, was my inquiry. "No I cannot nohow" was the answer and after surveying the premises we concluded he was right in his meaning.

[37]

if not in his grammar for there was but one room to the shanty and a very large part of that intruded upon by the fire place. The white man however volunteered to pilot us to "General Owens" who, he said, had a large house and would gladly welcome us to his hospitalie, so, calling two or three of his mulatto boys to bring a pitch pine torch we followed on Mr. Owens about ¼ mile distant. On arriving at the "Generals" house I knocked, but he had retired and I repeated the summons some half dozen times when at last I heard the sound of footsteps inside and soon the door was slowly and furtively opened, and a bushy Indian head presented itself.

"What do you want and who are you!" inquired Mr. Owens.

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Four travellers, I answered, would like shelter for ourselves and feed for our horses. "Where are you from?" again inquired Mr. Owens. I am an officer of the U.S. Army. One is a soldier & one from Wisconsin and one a native Floridian. Are any of you of the 1st or 2nd Regt Florida troops in the Federal service? No sir: I answered. I would rather have a pole cat in my house than one of those d__d scoundrels, and never, when I know it can one of them enter, replied Mr or "General" Owens.

After he was satisfied that we did not belong to that class which he detested above all others, we were invited to come in and were offered all the comforts his home afforded.

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Dec 13th Wednesday

In the morning we were bountifully served and after breakfast had a long conversation with Mr Owens in regard to the country, soil, climate, negroes, free labor &c &c.

He informed us that the desire was almost universal among the old planters & slave holders to sell their estates and remove to some more congenial section. He was among that class, and would like to sell his property at once.

He said that the object of their special hate was the man who, during the war had joined the Federal service and fought the Confederacy. That the old organization called Regulators would attend to all those cases and that if they attempted to settle in this county [country ?] they would

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be disposed of summarily. That "they would under no circumstances whatever be allowed to live here." Indeed so full and free was information on these points that we were partially satisfied that it was the serious intention of the returned rebels to make war upon those who had adhered to the Union through all the trials of the rebellion.

After bidding Mr Owens good morning we proceeded on our way to Ocala via Silver Springs. We arrived at this place about 1 p.m. This is one of the most enchanting natural scenes I have ever seen. The spring is at the head of Ocklawaha river in Marion County 5 miles North East of Ocala. It forms a Pond or small Lake [about]

[41]

and I should judge at the deepest point would measure 45 feet. The water is very clear so that you can easily discern the bottom at any place in passing over it in a boat. The fish as well as any object in the water has the appearance of silver and probably from this peculiarity it derives its name. Could the spring be located in New York or some place where its beauty and perhaps medicinal properties be appreciated it would be a popular place of resort.

We left the spring at 3 p.m. and proceeded on our way towards Ocala and after making 3 or 4 miles stopped at a cabin by the road to inquire the most direct route to that place, when we were overtaken by a man on horseback who appeared to be

[42]

travelling to the same point. On making known to him that Brookeville was our objective point, he told us it would be nearer to go by his house and if we chose to do so could be entertained at his house for the night. We gladly accepted his information and invitation, (for which we paid \$6.- the next morning) and followed him home. His name was McGahajan and we found him [a] very pleasant and communicative on all matters of our inquiry.

He, as well as Owens with whom we staid the night before, was a Captain in the rebel army and his views and sympathies were all with that class of men. He had no faith in the disposition or capacity of the freedman to take care of himself, and despaired of employing them to any advantage. He related to us several instances of negro theiving which were really remark[page break]

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-able. One case, was of a negro preacher whom he had owned, and while a slave had never had occasion to suspect his honesty, but since he became free, had detected him in stealing an axe, a hog, and most positively denying having had anything to do with, or knowledge of the theft, but as two of Mr McGahajan's boys had witnessed the whole transaction there could be no doubt about the theft or the perpetrator.

Mr McG has no faith in free negro labor and is anxious to sell his property. The land is a rich hammock soil and capable of producing cotton, corn, sugar cane, sweet potatoes and oranges and other fruits in abundance. He holds the lands as worth from 10 to 15 dollars per acre and I should judge were well worth the money, as they produce from 150 to 175 pounds of the long staple or Sea Island cotton, or 1200 to 1500 pounds of sugar & 250 gallons of syrup, or from 300 to 400 bushels sweet potatoes.

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per acre. He also confirmed our opinion in regard to the purpose of the "Regulators" as related to us by Mr Owens. His sympathies are fully with the "regulators" but does not appear at all like a man who would resort to extreme measures, such as murder to accomplish his purpose. He is an instance of what a bad tool the system of slavery can make out of a naturally good man.

December 14th Thursday Therm. 64 7 a.m.

We left Mr McGahajans' this morning about 8:30 and made Sumterville our objective point, distant about 25 miles. We found nothing particularly interesting or noticeable on our route except the sinks or Ponds which are small bodies of water formed for a Tunnel shaft by a depression of the surface of the ground and in which the water is held. Many of them

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are fed or made by springs in their center. They are circular and vary from 40 to 75 feet in diameter and from 10 to 75 ft in depth. These furnish a supply of water for cattle and for use of the people who live in their neighborhood. The land passed over today seems to be of a poorer quality as we get into Sumter County and is covered with a growth of small pine, too diminutive for lumber. There is however occasionally a hammock covered with a fair growth of white, red & water oak and some bay trees. We arrived at Sumterville at 5 p.m. and obtained shelter and subsistence for ourselves and horses with a Mr Brunch. Therm. 64 6 p.m.

December 15th Friday Thermometer 51 6 a.m.
Left Sumter this morning about 8 o'clock and proceeded direc to to Munroes Ferry

[46]

distant about 12 miles where we arrived about 11 a.m. We here crossed the Withlacoochee River on a Ferry boat kept by Mr. Munroe. The river at this point is about 100 yards in width and 10 feet in depth. The channel below and above the crossing is almost completely filled with what is called "Water Lettuce" and would prove a serious obstruction to the advance of a boat, There is an abundance of game [in the river] such as ducks and snipes or plover [?] in this section. After we crossed the River the land for 5 or 6 miles appeared to be poor and sterile with an occasional exception of a small amount of Hammock. Timber not very plenty. Pine very small and generally unfit for anything except firewood.

As we came nearer Brookeville however the soil seemed to assume a darker hue

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and the surface of the county more undulating untill you reach Brookeville which sits upon quite an elevation of land, such as in New England would be called a hill. The water too seems to find vent [?] from the hill sides in springs and looks as cool and clear as could be desired. In fact I have seen no soil or surface in Florida which has better or more encouraging appearances than this in Brookville & vicinity.

On reaching Brookville about 4 p.m. we made inquiry for Judge P.G. Wall to whom I had a letter of Introduction from Colonel Osborne, and found that his residence was 5 miles west of the town. We pushed forward and arrived at the judge's at 5 p.m., where we were welcomed to the hospitalities of his house. The Judge is a very plain man in appearance but you cannot be in his presence long with-

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out being impressed with his intelligence and candour. He is a positive man & has decided opinions on all topics to which you direct his attention. His opinion seems to be, that if the negro is left to himself will in course of time become extinct; but he is not the kind of man to see them go to destitution without making an effort to better their condition. Though formerly owning about 60 slaves he has not treasured up a feeling of bitterness toward the negro because he is emancipated as a majority of slave holders seemed to have done; but desires to have them educated and made useful to one another and the community.

He has a plantation of about 1500 acres on which he resides and as he is getting well into years desires to sell or lease the same. He is also Executor of

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an Estate of about 2500 acres which he would like to lease on the most liberal terms. As it is stocked with mules cattle & hogs with plenty of tools and appurtenances for making sugar it affords an enterprising man a good chance for making \$13,000.

Thermometer 7 p.m. 56

December 16th Saturday Therm 6:30 p.m. 65

After partaking of a bountiful breakfast Judge Wall accompanied us to a part of his Plantation to view the quality of the Hammock soil and the timber. We found a dark, sandy soil of great depth covered with white, red & water and an occasional live oak. Red bay, Persimmon & Magnolia. The sight was truly refreshing after having seen so much small and useless Pine

[50]

during our journey from Gainesville. It seemed to me to be better soil and to present more encouragement to a man disposed to become a farmer than any lands I had seen in the state, and were I disposed to become such should up to this time have no hesitation in locating myself in Hernando County.

After viewing his premises to our gratification we returned to the house and made arrangements to continue our journey and here it is necessary to speak of a little incident having a bearing upon a loss we suffered today, if it may be called a loss. Before leaving the Judge's I procured about 24 pounds of sweet potatoes so that in case it became necessary to camp out we might have something to eat, and

[51]

gave the orderly accompanying us, directions to distribute them in our several saddle bags, but after bidding the Judge & family good morning and mounted my horse I noticed there were no potatoes in my saddle bags and asked the orderley what he had done with them when he said he had them on his horse.

I thought no more of the matter untill we had passed on several miles, when we looked back and no orderley could be seen. Supposing him to be still coming on behind we kept our way untill towards night we became satisfied that it was a deliberate movement of his to desert us. As there was a courier from Capt. Martin A.L.M. came on with us from Tallahassee and with whom he had been on the

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most intimate terms during the journey and returned this morning, we concluded it was an arrangement to return with him to Tallahassee.

As our business required us to advance rather than retreat we deemed it better to pursue our duty rather than a faithless orderly and without stopping to put on mourning for our loss we hurried on untill at dark we arrived at the house of Mr. Townsend where we were admitted for the night. Mr T. was absent and we attended to our horses in person and after that duty done we repaired to the shanty for our supper, which being a "short horse" was soon ruined. I will not attempt a description of our meal but if any one wants to live poor, die poor, and be damned let him become

[53]

poor white trash of Florida. Thermometer 7 p.m. 68

December 17th Sunday Therm. 6 a.m. 64

Arose at sunrise and left this dirty uncomfortable place for Tampa, distant 12 miles. Forde Hillsboro River which was about 3 feet deep & 40 rods in width and after passing through a miserable piece of country arrived at Tampa about 12 M tired, hungry, and not much cleaner than the law allows. Spent the balance of the day in resting from our labor.

Thermometer at 7 p.m. 74

[54]

December 18th Monday Therm. 8 a.m. 70

This morning after breakfast we took occasion to examine the town of Tampa and find it a place of about 800 inhabitants, 600 whites and about 200 colored. The principal business of the whites is trading that of the colored labor and to which they (the negro) seem to devote themselves with commendable assiduity. There is no suffering among them for they seem impressed with the necessity of providing for themselves by labor and it is difficult to find one without an engagement or prospect of one. We wanted to employ one to accompany us on a trip to Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River but found it very difficult to find one and when at last we succeeded

[55]

in doing so we could not arrange with him for less than one dollar per day and found and as the service required was not important enough to warrant the expenditure we concluded to get along without.

We were informed that labor was in such demand that an ordinary laborer was worth one dollar per day. This is a very important place being the principal Depot of supplies for the country north of Caloosahatchee River and west of the Kissimmee but notwithstanding the superior location of the town and the facilities for doing an extensive business there is wanting the energy and enterprise to stimulate production in the interior of those articles of real worth in the market. Fruits are cultivated to very little extent, scarcely sufficient for the wants of the producer though the climate and soil are specially adapted

[56]

to the production of oranges, grapes, figs &c in abundance. The soil in and around Tampa is a light sandy formation, extending to a great depth and to a casual observer would appear very sterile, but upon examination will be found to have the qualities necessary for all kinds of vegetables and fruits common to southern Florida.

Our land lady had a small gardens [near?] her house where Peas, turnips & radishes appeared to flourish remarkably for the winter months. As we desired to be on our journey as soon as possible, and our horses were unfit to proceed we concluded to make a visit to Manatee, Charlotte Harbor & Caloosahatchee River in a small boat so we effected our arrangement with Louis Bell who was formerly the Mail

[57]

Carrier between Tampa & Fort Myers and well acquainted with the coast.

Our arrangements being made we only awaited a fair wind to take us down the Bay.

Thermometer 7 p.m. 66

December 19th Tuesday. Therm 7 a.m. 68

We still remain at Tampa but have determined to start on our trip tomorrow. Today has been spent in getting our supplies and completing the arrangement for a coast voyage.

Thermometer 7 p.m. 64

December 20th Wednesday Therm 7 a.m. 67

Started this morning at 10 o'clock for Charlotte Harbor. The wind was against us and were obliged to row the boat for about 5 miles. ~~when~~ The channel being narrow

[58]

as the day advanced the wind from the South East increased and we made rather poor headway and as the sun was going down found ourselves at Gadsdens Point, where we landed & fixed our camp for the night. The mosquitoes annoyed us exceedingly and being too warm to cover our heads with our blankets we concluded to make our beds on the beach where we came very near being flanked by the sand flies. After exercising a little patience we fell asleep and passed the night very comfortably.

Thermometer 8 p.m. 66

December 21st Thursday. Therm 6 a.m. 60

Left Gadsdens Point at 6:30 and beat against the wind all day making Teresea [Terra Ceia] Bay at dusk where we cast **[59]** anchor. Eat a few mouthfuls of Pork and Hard Tack and slept in the boat at night.

December 22st, 1865 through January 20, 1866

[continued from p. 59]

December 22d Friday. Therm 7 a.m. 61

Left Teresea [Terra Ceia] Bay at daylight and put into Manatee River landing at the right bank of the mouth of the river and cooked our coffee & Pork. Here we found on the bank, facing the Bay several mounds of shell from 20 to 40 feet high. These shells are an almost inexhaustible source of fertility to the adjacent lands and are particularly adapted to the growth of oranges, lemons, & Limes. How they came there no one can tell. Some suppose them to have been washed up by the waters of the Bay others, that this was a place selected by the Indians for fishing and obtaining their supplies of oysters.

[60]

The Manatee River derives its name from the fact that in these waters years ago large numbers of fish of that name were found here. The signification of the words is cow-fish on account of its having either a real or fanciful similarity to that animal. They are said to have been taken weighing from 500 to 1200 pounds and upon the beach may now be found the bones of the animal or fish in a petrified state. There are some dilapidated buildings yet standing unoccupied. The soils appears rich and productive. We found an excellent spring of fresh water a short distance from our landing.

After partaking of a hearty breakfast of Pork & Bread we proceeded up the river 6 miles and stopped at the house

[61]

of Joseph Asteroth, formerly a sutler with the Army of 1836, who kindly invited us to dinner. He has a farm of 150 acres of Hammock & Prairie land which we examined and I should judge it to be [of] excellent soil. He has but little under cultivation but what he has is done thoroughly, like all Dutch farmers he uses the spade quite as freely as the plough. He is getting well in years and is desirous of selling out his property. Besides the 150 acres mentioned he has another tract of 160 acres with 500 head of cattle & 200 hogs all of which he would sell for \$4,000.

There is a well of excellent water near the house and but a few rods distant a mineral spring impregnated with Iron. The Manatee is a beautiful river and abounds with fish. The country is said

[62]

to be very healthy and judging from what I saw believe it to be so. Asteroth says he has always had quite a number of invalids at his house during the winter months from the North but the war occurring they ceased to patronize him. About 2 p.m. we went up the river about 4 miles to the Plantation of Davis & Scofield. Reaching here nearly at dark we had time only to make arrangements for stopping over night with Mr A McNeal Agent for the proprietors or [present?] [previous?] owners. Therm. 8 p.m. 52

December 23d Saturday. Therm 7 a.m. 56

After breakfast this morning Mr. McNeal invited us to make an examination of the Plantation of which

[63]

he is Agent. It comprises about 4000 acres. Mostly Hammock land of which about 2000 have been under cultivation until the war commenced in 1861. The product raised was the sugar cane. There were on the plantation at that time about 200 slaves, but one account of the disturbance or some other reason, all but 11 were removed to Louisiana and only enough left to care for the plantation.

The land is of superior quality and is easily cultivated. The house is a large concrete mansion and though now somewhat out of repair could easily be put in condition to afford comfort & protection. A large Sugar Mill stood upon this plantation for the grinding & crushing of the cane. Worked by Steam power. There were 24 kettles for boiling

[64]

the juice of the cane, containing from 60 to 80 Gallons. The amount of Sugar made when in full operation was about 300 Hogsheads of 1000 pounds each and [about] from 8 to 10,000 gallons of Syrup. In 1864 nothing was done in the manufacture of sugar or the raising of any crop, and in fact no amount has been cultivated since the rebellion commenced as Davis & Co removed the negroes in the commencement of the war to Louisiana. The land has been resting and the

consequence is that all that which had before been under cultivation is now grown up with a rank weed and the coarse [green?]. The soil affords evidence of great richness and capable of producing under proper cultivation immense crops of corn, cane Potatoes & Fruits.

[65]

There are now 11 negroes at this place and all anxious to be doing something. I took occasion to enquire of them if they were well treated by Mr McNeal and if he had performed his part of the agreement for their labor and not one had any complaint to make. I advised them to hire out and work faithfully according to contract which they all seemed disposed to do, though some were anxious to own some land to commence a home for themselves. In my opinion some effort should be made by the Bureau or those other charitable organizations, to settle men of that class upon the Government lands and let them develop the country under proper supervision. They would be adding to the taxable wealth of the State

[66]

and be identifying themselves with its interests and would become personally interested in maintaining the laws and stimulating industry among their own class and possibly put the whites to shame for their laziness.

Thus far we have noticed that though the whites are disposed to give the negroes a bad name by saying 'they will not work" the negroes are the only ones whom we find at work, the whites preferring to spend their time & strength in berating the Freedman.

The Manatee River is a beautiful stream filled with fish and oysters and is navigable for a distance of ten miles from its mouth for vessels drawing 8 feet of water. After examining the country as much as we desired we took to our boat about

[67]

10:30 o'clock and proceeded down the river into Sarasota Bay and [landed for the night at] remained in the boat all night near Cedar Island.

December 24th Sunday Therm 7 a.m. 60

At daylight this morning started for the Orange Grove about 5 miles distant and arrived at 7:30. Here is a Grove of about 250 orange trees and 100 Lemon, we round them loaded with fruit, the oranges were delicious and so well did they take our fancy that we bought 200 for \$4 and obtained breakfast (?) at Mr Whitakers. And such a breakfast. The Gods seldom feast upon the like that was served us. One of the peculiarities of the people and the most damning one is the fact that they will live

[68]

upon the most inferior food if more easily obtained. Mr Whitaker is not an isolated case. He is the representative of the larger part of the people, that is the common people, and to speak truly of him is to represent them all correctly. What do you suppose we feasted upon 'this morning.' Do not be in too much hurry and I will tell you. It was stinking salt fish and bread!!! Mr Whitaker has about 5000 head of cattle but he is too lazy and shiftless to kill one.

He has 150 acres of land most any part of which will produce Potatoes and other vegetables, but he is too indolent to cultivate them. The Bay, about 80 rods from his house, is alive with

nice Mullet, Grouper, Red-fish & oysters but it requires exertion to get them consequently Mr. W. cannot or will

[69]

not have them. He lives in a rickety old shell of a shanty or rather in two or three of them, for they are very small and contemptible, when there is a very good frame put up for a very respectable dwelling and only requires a little work to make himself and family comfortable and bear the semblance of respectability but work is required and the "nigger won't work" so Mr Whitaker is obliged to live poor, die poor and probably will be damned. All this is charged to the "nigger" though there isn't one within 12 miles of him. These are the people we are trying to conciliate in Florida.

After paying him for the oranges &c (I do not wish to call it by its proper name as it would look bad on paper) we took our departure and went to Big Sarasota Inlet.

[70]

where we camped, bathed, cooked, and slept during the night on the beach. The mosquitoes annoyed us so much however that we rose about 1 a.m. and commenced fishing to pass the time. After catching two or three nice pan fish, cooking & eating them we tried it again with better success.

Thermometer 7:30 68

December 25th Monday. Therm 6 a.m. 66

The wind being unfavorable to go outside this morning we concluded to wait awhile, but becoming impatient about 12 M we started for Little Sarasota Bar and after poling rowing & sailing found ourselves at 6 p.m. halted by an Oyster Bar which shelved [?] entirely across the Channel about 80 feet wide. Not wishing to

[71]

be detained by so insignificant a cause we pulled off our boots, rolled up our pants & sleeves and commenced making a channel by throwing out oysters. After working about 2 hours we made a channel through which the water reached quite freely, and were in hopes that the current would wash the sand sufficient to let our boat pass in the morning so we devoted an hour to culinary matters, and laid ourselves down in the boat to sleep but sleep we could not so we commenced fighting . . . M-u-s-q-u-i-t-o-e-s!!

Dec 26th Tuesday. Therm 68

We kept up this amusement until daybreak when finding that the water had not accomplished so much as we had expected, we stripped to the work and with a spade finished what the current failed to do. We were

[72]

detained here by the low tide until 3 p.m..

While waiting for the tide we traversed the main land for two or three miles which we found to be Hammock land with the limestone cropping out at various points. There was a thick growth of

Palmetto small oak and other brush which made it almost impenetrable. We made our way along side a small creek the banks of which were covered with monstrous Alligators which had crawled out to sun. Not liking their looks we introduced a few Minie balls into their bodies to see them jump and were highly gratified at the exhibition of their sprightliness.

One of them jumped up about 4 feet and started for the water as fast as his ungainly legs would

[73]

carry him. Another daring [?] to be braver than the rest stood with head erect as if to mock us with his courage for about 5 minutes when a ball introduced under & just back of his fore leg induced him to lie over on his back very quickly as though attacked with intense pain in the heart & bowels. These were the largest Alligators we had seen being from 14 to 18 feet in length.

At 3 p.m. after some considerable pulling and hauling we had our boat over the bar and started again with high hopes when we soon found the water too shallow to take us over into deep water and for a distance of two miles we worked our passage by pushing

[74]

the boat along much to our disgust and inconvenience being about as wet as though we had been wrecking [?] or sponging. We finally made an Island about 5 miles from Sarasota Bar which we named Cast Net Folly on account of leaving a cast-net there the next morning. Therm. 8 p.m. 64

December 27th Wednesday

Therm 6 a.m. 61

Left Cast-Net Folly this morning for Little Sarasota and reached there at 2 p.m. but the wind still came quite strong from the South East. Could not get outside to make the run to Little Gasparilla so we ran down to

[75]

the main land at Rine Spring and took on board a supply of fresh water and came back part way to a small Island and camped for the night.

It proved to be a very uncomfortable place for the mosquitoes & gnats or sand flies annoyed us so that we obtained but little rest during the night. All the Islands upon which we have landed thus far are composed entirely of the debris of shell & coral rock and having but little vegetable matter in them and possessing but little evidence of fertility I conclude they are worth but little except as fishing retreats. Thermometer 8 p.m. 68

December 28th Thursday Therm 6:30 62

Left the Island this morning about 10 o'clock and went up to Little Sarasota but the wind still coming from the South East

[76]

we concluded to make our camp on [the] Sarasota Island. After arranging for the night we tried

our hand at fishing. Attaching the largest hook we had to a bed cord we threw it out and in a few moments hauled in a small shark weighing about 50 pounds. We also hooked a Tarpon of about 300 pounds weight but he managed to extricate himself and he was lost to us very much to our mortification.

I caught several very fine red fish which served for our supper as well as my own amusement. This Island is of the same character of the rest though with a larger mixture of vegetable matter. There may be twenty or thirty acres fit for cultivation but the chief objection to attempting it is the fact that [they] it is liable to be overflowed in case of some storms and very high tides.

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December 29th Friday Therm 6 a.m. 58

At daylight this morning we found the wind had changed around to N.E. and we started outside for Charlotte Harbor. We made the run from Little Sarasota to Little Gasparilla a distance of 38 miles between daylight & 5 p.m. We began to fear (3 p.m.) that we should not be able to make an entrance over the bar for the wind ceased to come from the N.E. and showed signs of springing up from the South East. We barely got over the bar before the wind sprang up [and] with great fury from S.E. and had we been outside would have been obliged to put back to our starting point in the morning. We landed on Little Gasparilla and made ourselves as comfortable as possible, for the night. The bar is called in the Map, Buen Nueva. Therm 8 p.m. 61

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December 30th Saturday Therm 7 a.m. 62

Left Little Gasparilla this morning about 10 o'clock for Peace Creek. Had head wind all day and consequently made but little progress. At dusk cast anchor near an Island about 7 miles from mouth of Peace Creek. Here we were attacked by Mosquitoes at first by Brigade then by Division and afterwards by Corps and doubting our ability to withstand their severe [?] charges we concluded it would be wiser to retreat. Consequently we fell back about two miles and passed a miserable night in the boat.

December 31st Sunday

At daylight this morning we made our way as best we could for Pease Creek arriving at Punta Gorda about 12 M. Passing up the river about 10 miles we found

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a Steamer ("Gov Marvin") at anchor in the channel awaiting for cattle. We here found Liet. J.C. Shaw with a detachment of the 99th U.S.C.J. (39 men) who welcomed us to the hospitalities of his quarters.

The business of this section is exclusively Stock Raising & here we had an opportunity to learn somewhat of the business and the manner in which it is conducted. Mr. [James] McKay is the principal shipper of cattle. He owns the Steamer "Gov Marvin" and runs regularly, or as often as he can from either Tampa or Pease Creek to Havana. He purchases the cattle of the Stock Raisers at from 10 to 15 dollars (in gold) per head and sells them in Havana up from 17 to 27 dollars in gold. The cattle are very small and inferior in appearance and if offered in New York market would provoke jeers and ridicule rather than offers to purchase. The best of them will dress [?] about 500 nett.

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but the greater part of them would not nett more than 300 to 350 pounds.

Jacob Summerlin of Polk County is reputed to be the largest Stock raiser in the county having between 15 & 20,000 head. In fact, he told us he did not know how many cattle he had but supposed the number to be about 20,000. From the best information we could gather I should judge that the number of cattle now grazing in the counties of Hillsboro Manatee Munroe & Broward would approximate 100,000. They are nearly as wild and fleet of foot as the deer and only those who are trained to the business could succeed in herding them. Mr Summerlin had a party of ten or twelve men with him to herd and load the cattle. They are the poor class in the country & termed "crackers." They were as a class

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entirely destitute, ignorant and generally ambitious only for enough to eat regardless of quality to satisfy their hunger. They are governed almost exclusively by the cattle proprietors and present a sorry spectacle of what depths of ignorance and stupidity human nature is capable.

Mr Summerlin is a man of naturally great will power but devoid of culture in any of the refinements of life. The poor look up to him as their superior and revere his ideas as law. Though rough & uncouth in exterior from what we learn of him by others I believe he has a kind heart for quite a number testify that during the war he assisted the families of both refugees and rebels and reli[e]ved a great amount of suffering by furnishing bread and meat to them. He was a rebel, but I judge from his conversation

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he was one from policy and not from principle. On asking him, what was the feeling of the prominent men, as far as he knew, toward the U.S. Government? He very promptly replied "I will tell you sir, though they pretend to accept the result yet their hatred is just as intense as ever and if an opportunity is offered by a quarrel between France and the United States they would do all they could to break down the government." He does not consider the county from the Manatee River south worth settling & cultivation but such an opinion from him is worth but little when you consider that the settlement of the county would destroy the ranges for cattle and thereby ruin his business.

The year 1865 is exhausted and I feel in sympathy with it. Amen.

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January 1, 1866. Monday Therm 7 a.m. 68

Feeling unwell today I concluded to keep as quiet as possible for fear I might be attacked with disease, however I could not resist a very kind invitation from Mr McKay to go on board the "Marvin" and take dinner. Mr McKay is an Elderly Gentleman of Scotch birth large commanding in person open, frank countenance gentlemanly & kind to every one he meets. Full of energy and enterprise he gives to Tampa whatever of life and business it possesses. In fact we find that the people of that place dated and regulated about everything by McKay's movements. If they were to clear a piece of ground or plant a patch of Potatoes it would be contingent upon McKays bringing the necessary implements & seed from Key West or Havana.

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During the war he however floated with the current into secession and I presume with the defeat of the rebellion glided as gracefully back to Unionism as any man in Florida. On board the Steamer we found Judge Gettis of Tampa, the judge of the Circuit Court elected thereto by the people for his ability and rebellious proclivities. He is a thin cadaverous looking man and if Phrenology has any foundation in reason, is more cunning than profound. He is an instance of what great change, the southern climate and the institutions of the south have wrought in Northern men from time immemorial. He insists that a man necessarily becomes enervated in the southern country in the course of two or three years residence and soon becomes assimilated to those around him in

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manner & habits. I could not help thinking while he was talking in that strain, that he intended it as a justification of himself quite as much as it really was a libel upon Nature. He sings the old song "the nigger won't" but excuses the white man by libelling Nature.
Therm 8 p.m. 74

January 2nd Tuesday. Therm 7 a.m. 68

It was very warm & uncomfortable last night the mosquitoes & sand flies being out in full force, allowed us but little rest. The face of the country bordering on Peace Creek is generally low [and level] and is subject to overflow from the river at times and inundation in the wet season by rains. The soil is sandy and covered with a sparse growth of small pine unfit for timber in any quantity. There are numerous

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ponds supplied by the heavy rains but now are getting very low and some are completely dry and a heavy growth of coarse grass has come up unfit for animals. In passing through the country for a distance of about 10 miles south west from McKays wharf the appearance of the country does not materially differ from that immediately bordering on the River. Up the river however 8 or ten miles it appears to be a little higher. The land might be rendered fit for cultivation by a thorough system of ditching & draining, but one objection to this section is the difficulty of obtaining fresh water. Wells sunk within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the river supply a brackish water, very unpleasant to drink if not absolutely injurious. In this section I think a population would be obliged to depend upon the

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clouds rather than springs for their fresh water. We here find plenty of game such as deer snipes & ducks, & wild turkeys. The river is well supplied with fish. Mullet being the most common, though the Tarpon & Jew fish are taken in great numbers.

The River is very wide being from 1 to 3 miles in width for a distance of 8 miles from its mouth with a crooked channel. Vessels drawing 8 feet may proceed up as far as the mouth of Prairie Creek.

Therm 7 p.m. 62

January 3rd Wednesday Therm 7 a.m. 64

The wind this morning fair (N.E.) at 9 o'clock we left Lt. Shaw's camp and proceeded down the river, on our way to the Caloosahatchee River, Fort Myers being our objective point. We had a splendid run from our starting point and expected

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to make Fort Myers at night supposing it to be only 51 miles but we were convinced of our mistake by reexamining the chart when we found it to be 65 miles. It commenced raining about 1 p.m. today and kept increasing in quantity untill at 4:30 we were obliged to put in at Sword Point for the night. We here built a rousing fire upon the beach, extemporized a tent from the Main sail, cooked our supper and retired to rest. The storm was violent out side and we considered ourselves very fortunate in having made a landing as we did. About midnight however the rain ceased and the wind shifted around to the northwest running the thermometer down to 48 and reminding us of ice bergs, furs & overcoats.

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January 4th Thursday Therm 7 a.m. 44

Left Sword Point at daylight this morning for Fort Myers, distant 21 miles, on getting out into the channel we found a strong current against us and the wind having shifted back to the North East we had both to contend against.

After proceeding about 10 miles the wind and tide proved too much for us and we were obliged to put in at a point called Red Fish Point where we spent the balance of the day in perambulating through the woods and the night in trying to keep warm. The country along the river here is like all the rest of the river banks, low and subject to overflow. No Timber. Plenty of Mangroves and back from the river 2 miles small pine.

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Indeed as we come from Manatee south the pine seems to grow smaller and if it continues in the same ratio I shall expect to see it run down to small sprigs 40 miles below the river. Therm 7 p.m. 44.

January 5th Friday. Therm 8 a.m. 50

Left Red Fish Point at 7:30 a.m. wind & tide against us. After beating up the River 3 hours we were nearly chilled through and were obliged to effect a landing to warm ourselves. Staid on shore 1:30 minutes when we took to boat refreshed and kept on our way. Passing the point where Gen. Harney escaped in his night clothes from the Indians in 36 or 37 and finally at 5:30 p.m. effected a landing at Fort Myers.

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Here we put up at the home of the only resident at this place, Mr. McClenathan. He was a Refugee during the war and his appearance as well as that of his family indicated that he had endured a great deal more than he had enjoyed during the last three or four years. I was reminded of the Irishman who said that, "When I first came to this country I hadn't a rag to my back and now I'm all rags."

Therm 10 p.m. 44.

January 6th Saturday Therm 8:30 a.m. 38

This morning after breakfast we took horses and in company with Mr. McClenathan [we] visited the famous sulphur spring of the not less famous Indian Chief "Billy Bowlegs" about one mile distant from the old Garrison East occupied by our troops.

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The spring is about half a mile south from the river. The water is warm and very clear & resembles somewhat the waters of Silver Spring in Marion County. We drank of it and found it to be impregnated with sulphur but not so strongly as to be unpleasant to the taste. It gurgles up in a sort of a cave or hollow surrounded by a growth of small trees & shrubs. It is really a beautiful retreat and doubtless here the Seminole Chief formed his plans of attack upon the white man. On seeing the place I could not help admiring the taste even of the savage in its selection. It even surpasses the more educated whites of Florida. After gratifying our sight of this point of interest we started in the direction of Ostero Bay. (Ostero is probably the Spanish for Oyster).

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After travelling south about 12 miles we came to this place or approximated to it. The surface of the county is so low that the waters of the Bay extend up from its immediate bed and spreads over a vast surface to a slight depth. So that to get into the bay from the land side requires a small boat to go down in some of the small creeks leading into the the Bay. There is a peculiarity in the formation on the Caloosahatchee which is not noticeable in any other part of the State through which we have travelled and it is this. On the bank of the river the soil is from two to three feet in depth resting upon a bed of solid lime rock and as you proceed to Ostero Bay the surface soil becomes thinner and thinner untill at the Bay the rock protrudes itself upon

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the surface. You will notice the gradual change by the growth of the pine & cypress diminishing as you approach the Bay. On the River for instance the Pine [will] be found from 8 to 12 inches in diameter and diminishes in size untill at the Bay it does not generally exceed 8 inches.

At Fort Myers is an Orange Grove of about 300 trees, 150 Lemon several cocoa nut and ~~a few Pine~~ a few Almond & Lime trees. They are in bad condition at present many of them having been blown over by high winds and all of them requiring trimming. The buildings are in very bad condition. The floors of the Hospital building having been taken out, ceiling battered off windows & doors broken and destroyed one or two large

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wooden cisterns demolished and the smaller buildings formerly occupied as Officers Quarters almost utterly ruined. There were four cisterns yet remaining which with little labor might be made serviceable for holding fresh water.

One would suppose from the appearance of things that no one had been there for the last five years except to destroy. The wharves have suffered as well as the buildings but their destruction is probably owing more to natural causes than a spirit of vandalism.

There is plenty of cypress of small size in the vicinity of Fort Myers about large enough for fence posts. In our journey to Ostero Bay & back we scarcely found 50 trees of sufficient size for saw logs. There is plenty of game here. Seen wild turkies Bear

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ducks &c &c. The river is a beautiful stream about 2 miles in width with a crooked channel and

of a depth sufficient for vessels drawing about 4 feet to Ft. Myers.
Therm 7 p.m. 48

January 7th Sunday Therm 7:30 44

Left Fort Myers for Tampa at 8 a.m. with a fair wind made Punta Rosa at 11 o'clock where we stopped to obtain a supply [a supply] of fresh water. Here we found four Connecticut men engaged in the fishing business (Messrs Davy, Bennett & Co) They employ 18 men and have put up 1800 Quintales of fish since October last. The fish sell in Havana for 7 dollars per quintal (in gold). They invited us to dinner (which gratefully accepted) where

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we discussed or rather devoured as Christians only can to our entire satisfaction the first good meal for 3 weeks. Leaving Punta Rosa at 1 o'clock we reached Captiva Island at 5:30 p.m. where we camped for the night. This island is good for nothing except to help hold the world together and afford a resting place for weary travellers.

Therm 6 p.m. 55

January 8th Monday. Therm 6 a.m. 53

Left Captiva at 6 o'clock. Stopped at Fort Casey on Casey's Island at 11:30 where we found another fishing enterprise under Manuel Gonzales a Spaniard from Key West. In two months time he with 11 men had taken and cured 800 Quintales of fish. (Mullet). He leaves tomorrow for Havana with his cargo.

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This island has about 150 acres of land fit for cultivation. On this island are two cocoa nut trees the first full grown ones I have seen, those at Ft. Myers being small and immature.

We left this island at 12:30, passed Boca Grande at 3 p.m., Big Gasparilla at 5 p.m., and reached Little Gasparilla or Boca Nueva at 5:50 just as violent tornado commenced on the Gulf Coast. Here we camped for the night.

January 9th Tuesday Therm 7 a.m. 61

Could not get out to go on the coast. The wind strong and dead-a-head, remained on Gasparilla & toured the adjacent land & fished & fatted [fasted?].

Therm 6:30 p.m. 62

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January 10th Wednesday [Therm] Same as 9th

January 11th Thursday

Left Little Gasparilla this morning at 6 o'clock and passed over the bar into the Gulf of Mexico. Proceeded along the coast and passed Little Sarasota at 2 p.m. and arrived at Big Sarasota inlet at 3 p.m. where we entered Sarasota Bay and steered directly for the orange grove of Mr. Whitaker arriving at the place at 4:30 p.m. distant from the inlet 7 miles. Here we obtained 100 oranges some supper. (Great improvement on our last meal there, thanks to Mrs. W. not Mr. W.) Slept on board the boat during the night.

Therm at dark about 62

January 12th [Thursday] Friday Therm 6:30 63
Left Orange Grove at 6 o'clock with a fair wind all day, arrived at Tampa at 5 p.m. distance 75 miles.

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January 13th Saturday

On our arrival last night we were met by a motley group of men & boys loafing around the wharf to discern who had arrived. A great deal of anxiety had been felt for the safety of Mr. Bell by his friends, and we were not entirely destitute of them even in Tampa for several welcomed us back and seemed glad that we had escaped in the violent gale of the 8th. Here we learned that during that terrible tornado the gunboat "Narcissus" had been lost off Egmont Key with 29 or 31 souls on board, and not one survived to tell the tale. There was another loss of life from Tampa, two men were out fishing in the bay and being overtaken by the storm on their way home were capsized and lost. One of the bodies had been found but the other was still

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missing. The people of Tampa sincerely lamented this latter loss for these men were very useful in furnishing fish and oysters to the town. I don't know as I can remember any expressions of regret at the loss of the Gunboat [^]& crew, though doubtless some of them did sincerely regret it. Mrs. Roberts seemed more than ordinarily pleased with our return for having an eye to the profitable, she recognized us as paying visitors. She was formerly a Connecticut woman and from what she says, together with what I judge she must have been, when young probably married a Southerner with the high-expectations of being a lady. But her experience proves to her as well as others that misfortunes happen to the best of folks and her experience shows the effect of slavery upon conjugal relations sometimes to be anything but conducive to harmony and happiness.

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It seems that Dr. Roberts acquired a habit of spending his evenings elsewhere than at home, where a man of domestic feelings should, and the result was an internecine war. The Dr. coming out second best in the contest concluded to divide the house with his spouse, giving here the inside and himself the outside. Since which times Mrs. R. has lived a sort of widowhood, said by some to be of the vegetable species.

We have found an old [fellow] man 82 years old by the name Yourmans from a place about 10 miles from Tallahassee. He was one of those old dyed-in-the-wool defenders of slavery from scriptural grounds which to an intelligent man excite pity and disgust, pity that that human nature is capable of being so demented, and disgust that a man should have lived so long and learned so little.

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He was punctual in his religious habit of asking a blessing at every meal and seemed to me to think his entrance to Heaven beyond a doubt. If such men have no difficulty in being saved, I think the Hindoo has a very respectable chance without the interference of American missionaries. On asking him about the productiveness of his farm he could give no definite information, had even too limited knowledge to give a respectable guess. Said he raised "right smart" crops. How many bushels of sweet Potatoes could you raise to the acre? Said he, I don't know, I never measured them but I reckon will nigh on to 45 bushels. How many bushels

of corn did you get from an acre? I don't know but I reckon well nigh on to 15 bushels. He said he came down to Tampa to see if he couldn't find some "mush" upon which he could

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raise some Rice. I suggested to Mr. Gleason, though not in the old man's hearing, that his time would be much more appropriately employed in looking up a suitable burial place.

January 14. Sunday.

This was a beautiful morning but we just begin to feel exhausted from our trip, and today we have done little but yawn and shield [?] ourselves and make ourselves as comfortable as possible. The old man is too old and demented to afford us much amusement in quizzing him and the topics which naturally became subjects of conversation or controversy get old and stale and Gleason and myself agree generally so well in matters of opinion that we naturally grew [grow]

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reticent. Mrs. Roberts however like a great many other women has a great deal to say but when condensed into real practical common sense amounts to a very little, so we take little pleasure there. The streets of Tampa are so sandy that it is about as difficult to get around here as through the snow at home. People here are comparatively indifferent about going to church. They congregate at the corners of the streets, on the wharf, or go bout riding, or fishing, & amuse one another by telling oft told tales, drinking poor whiskey and laying around generally.

We went over to the Garrison and saw Capt. Harding and spent an hour or so very pleasantly with him and his Lieutenants Lagenderf and Hawley. Harding appears to be an American "paddy," that is, he has a good deal of the paddy's look about

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him with his general uncouthness & want of refinement. Enjoys fun, a pipe and glass of whiskey as frequent as Put [Pat?]. Lagenderf is weak generally, weak in the head, weak in body, weak in spirit, in fact has about as few qualities to commend him to any man I ever saw. He was repulsive to me at first sight and the more I saw of him the more I began to hate him. He says he is from Massachusetts. If that is true I hope he always will be for I don't think Massachusetts has any place for that kind of man unless it is the Potters Field. Hawley is from Connecticut and appears a nice little gentlemanly fellow, pleasant, affable, well behaved and withal has some streaks of good common sense which helps a man wonderfully.

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The Steamer "Gov Marvin" owned by Mr McKay of Tampa and named after the Provisional Governor of Florida, arrived this evening from Key-West and Havana bringing quite a number of passengers. Among them were Judge Beckwith of New Orleans and a Dr. Davis formerly Surgeon in the U.S. Army. The Judge is a brother of Genl Amos Beckwith of the Subsistence Department U.S.A., but I don't know as that is any recommendation where the Genl is best known. I think the Judge is a much abler man than the Genl though apparently several years younger. The Dr. is an Elderly Gentleman of the old Virginia pattern, pleasant, sociable and intelligent, though very evidently the last three or four years have furrowed his face quite deeply. He has been to Havana some little time and comes

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back to commence life anew having lost about all his property during the War. I say his name is Davis, I am not so sure of that however. He was formerly a Consul at one of the Mexican Ports and if I recollect correctly, under Fillmore. The old fellow appears very much subdued and evidently has made up his mind that the Universal Yanke [?] Nation is a big thing.

January 15 Monday.

Today we visited Mr. Hughes with whom we made ourselves acquainted in our first visit to Tampa on account of the representation made by Captain Ireland of the intense hostility of the people to the Government, and Mr. Hughes was among the number that he mentioned as belonging to that clan of men.

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Our main object today was to ascertain the State of the rivers across the Country as Mr. Hughes then informed us on our former visit that he was going to ride out to Bartow in a few days ~~then~~. He says that the water has not in all probability subsided enough to allow us to cross the Kissimmee without some difficulty if not danger. He represents the water as overflowing the banks on both sides for a distance of several miles & if not deep enough to hinder travel yet might cause us to lose sight of the trail and get lost, and we might find ourselves under obligations to travel many miles without finding any person to direct us in the right way. To make sure of visiting Dade County, therefore, we determined to ~~strike~~ go to Key-West and there procure a small boat and go down inside the Keys.

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We tried to prevail upon Mr. Bell to take us to Key-West and from there to the Miami while we were at Fort Myers but he represented the danger as being very great, in such a boat as his, and did not at all like the proposition and we thought it poor policy to force him to go against his own judgement. Mr. McKays Steamer starts Wednesday morning and we have plenty of writing to occupy our time untill then and we divided our time between the citizens of Tampa and our writing table.

Mr. Beckwith proves himself a very companionable man and seems to have a thorough knowledge of a great many things outside the legal profession. Among other things he called our attention to the Sisal Hemp and today we found some in Mr. Fletchers

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Garden and obtained several leaves from which we extracted the fibre. Beckwith says he is interested in the culture and manufacture of this Hemp in Campechy and has been for some time. He represented that one great object in coming to Tampa was to ascertain from actual observation whether the plant is injured by the frost in so high a Lattitude. The general impression is that the frost kills the plant, but here see plants ten years old as fresh and hardy as can be desired, indeed shows no sign of having been injured in the least.

The great ~~difficulty~~ [^] obstacle in making the plant available and profitable is the difficulty in separating the fibre from the vegetable matter. Beckwiths plan is substantially as follows. Run the leaves through heavy rollers similar to those of pressing

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the juice of the Sugar Cane put the juice in vat and let it ferment. After it has fermented the juice becomes ascetic in character, as soon as it gets into this state immerse the leaves and let them remain untill the liquid dissolves the vegetable matter, which ordinarily will not be more than about 24 hours. After the vegetable matter is dissolved [~~ife~~] the fibre is easily cleansed by rinsing in fresh water, then expose to dry, and pack. This theory is very plausible for the juice is very strong and in one kind of leaf sufficiently so to take the skin from your tongue and mouth.

One question which often presents itself to my mind is, If the Negro is so lazy and will not work why is it that some of these lazy fellows are not seen. There

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certainly are none roaming about the streets idle, and nothing suits a Negro any better if he has nothing to do but to loaf around and show himself. The fact is they are about the only ones I see at work. They are driving carts, doing the heavy work about the stores, at work as carpenters, masons, Gardeners, and doing what little work that is done in this town. So far as this place is concerned the charge is a falsehood, and it seems to be iterated and re-iterated to divert attention from the indolence of the white man.

January 17th Wednesday

Yesterday we spent in writing and visiting different parts of the town. Early [~~in~~] this morning I started Gleason out by making it appear that it was quite

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late and unless we hurried we should be too late to get on board the "Gov Marvin" for Key-West. Between the annoyance of the fleas and the heat, I slept very little last night and was glad to see a glimmer of light to justify getting up. We awoke Beckwith in the next room and soon made our appearance at the wharf where we found a small boat in readiness to take us to the Steamer about 5 miles distant.

There is only 5 or 6 feet of water immediately at the town and the channel from Hillsboro Bay into Hillsboro River is very narrow and tortuous and steamers of greater draught are obliged to anchor down 5 or 6 miles and lighter [~~lighten?~~] off their freights and passengers. We had a pleasant ride to the Steamer but were somewhat mortified to find that the tide

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was out and the steamer aground and consequently we had to wait untill high tide about 3 p.m. There were about 250 head of cattle on board bound for Havana and while were waiting for the tide the hands attempted to get on board a couple more steers. They were as wild as hawks and could be induced to come on board only by force. They had a long line & lassoed them and then dragged them aboard by main force.

While here a couple of Oystermen came along side towing the dead body of one of the men drowned in the Gale of the 8th inst. His name was John Montiokee, a son of the Indian Agent, living near to Kissimmee. John was a cross between the Negro and Spanish. His father being a Spaniard and mother a Negress. He was spoken of as being a very fine young man and

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but very recently married. They towed the body up to town where it was afterwards decently buried. Our list of passengers was rather light and we had to amuse ourselves as best we could. After dark the wind increased and the Surf rolled up the big waves against the Steamer and [-] rocked us in "the cradle of the deep" very much to the annoyance of Mr Gleason's stomach, and it in turn seemed all at once to take a great dislike to his last meal. I felt remarkably well and experienced none of those sensations, which on the water leads a person to set a light estimate on life. Gleason, however is very easily afflicted and during this trip my only enjoyment was in witnessing his torture.

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January 18. Thursday.

We were fortunate enough to rise early enough this morning to witness a sun rise at sea. To attempt a description of such a view would be too much for me so I will not attempt what I know would result in entire failure. The only event today to break the monotony of our trip was the throwing overboard of one of the steers which died on board. As it floated behind us I could not help thinking what a sweet morsel for the fish & sharks instead of the Cubans!!!

I was surprised at the [character] [^] quality of the cattle when they were put on board & remarked to Mr McKay that they seemed very small and poor for beef, but he say the Havana people do not feel so particular about their fresh beef as people of our own Country, in fact almost anything

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will pass in the Havana market which has the name fresh beef attached to it. I do not think the lot would average more than 300 lbs or 350 at the most each. I would as soon think of eating a piece of dog as such meat at home yet I am informed that in June or July after [^] [when] the cattle have a chance to renew their flesh, it is as tender and delicious as any beef in the country. Mr McKay pays from 10 to 16 dollars in Gold per head at the place where he receives them and usually gets in Havana from 17 to 26 coll. And has sold them for even as high a price as 50 dollars. The Cuban Spanish people are a peculiar race and have some very odd notions.

About 5 p.m. we came in sight of Key-West. The island looks like a very thriving city at the distance and with Fort Taylor on the S.W.

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corner commands the approach to the main land. After a great deal of backing & filling in which the captain of the "Gov Marvin" displayed a great deal of incapacity to manage a Steamer, the crew finally reached the wharf with a line and we finally executed a landing just about dark. Mr. Gleason had a letter of introduction to Geo Phillips the Postmaster and we made for his house about as fast as our legs would conveniently carry us. To our surprise and gratification it proved to be the "Russell House" and we were sure of effecting a lodgement without further travel. Mr Phillips was a Northern man, had lived here and at Fort Jefferson quite a number of years, but had seemed to lose but very little of the Yankee peculiarity [?].

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January 19th. Friday.

Our first business this morning after breakfast was to engage a boat for the voyage to Miami, so I went to the Quarter Masters Office and there found a very gentlemanly officer in the person of Liet. Major D.H. Kinzie of the 5th U.S. Artillery. After showing him my orders, he very pleasantly said he would have a boat rigged up & manned for me as early as possible. I here met General Seymour of Olustee fame, and he volunteered his opinion as to the practicability of my intended tour. It was at that time my design to visit not only Dade County but the County bordering on Indian River.

The General informed me that he had been all over the country from Indian River down to Cape Sable, and that in his opinion the whole country was good

[121]

for nothing but a hunting ground for the Indians and pasturage for cattle, that no white man could ever live there; first, on account of the impossibility of ever cultivating the soil, and second even if the soil would admit of it, the insects and vermin would of themselves be sufficient to break up any settlement. He said, Also that to attempt to go into Indian River Inlet, in nine times out of ten would swamp the boat and drown the crew. The whole country was not worth, in his estimation the risk of a single life.

The General had been over the country during the Seminole War and doubtless had found everything as forbidding and repulsive as he represented, but I took into account that he went as an officer, not from choice, but in obedience to orders

[122]

and not upon the most pleasing mission in the world. A man travelling through a country where he may expect a rifle pointed at him from any of the numerous pines he sees, will not be likely to see much beauty or many points of interest. A prisoner may ride through Central Park on his way to the gallows, and the chances are that it will be a very uninteresting place to him.

I thanked the General for the information he had given me but informed him that being decided to visit the county I did not feel like abandoning the tour because of the worthlessness of the country or the dangers attending the voyage and bid him good morning and left the Office. The balance of the day we spent in reconnoitering the town.

[123]

January 20th. Saturday:

[End of journal entries]

[Although the journal is numbered to Page 216, the only other entry, on 213, is the following:]

January 1st, A.D., 1866

This is to certify that Toby Starks has given his obligation to live with me till Jan. [June?] 1867 for such portion 10th of the crop and will not fail to do his part as far as he is able.

Toby Stark

X

His mark

Copy of paper given Toby Starke by Jackson Clifton, Broward County, 14 miles from Burrville.
[Bussville?].

[A note taped to the back cover of the journal reads:]

[obverse]

Residents of Miami known to Mr. Hughes of Tampa, Fla.

[reverse]

William Wagoner

Nicholas Adams

"French Mike"

Mr. Ferguson, Key-West-

Mr. Fletcher [?], Miami

[Thompson's tour did not stop with these last entries. He continued his travels into South Florida and reported on his impressions in the more formal reports that he published in The Tallahassee Sentinel].

The Tallahassee Sentinel

Observations in Tropical Florida

In five articles published between April 19th and May 7th, 1867, the Sentinel reproduced George F. Thompson's official report on Florida as submitted to the Freedmen's Bureau. Although in many ways a more sterile account than what Thompson entered in his journal, the report covers his analysis of continuing tensions between former secessionists and unionists, outlines his thoughts on the needs and abilities of the freedmen, and presents his assessments of stock raising, fishing, agriculture, and other activities around the state. The conclusion of his report on Dade County contains rather erroneous and second-hand information about the Seminole, together with his recommendation for draining land and lowering the level of Lake Okeechobee.

The Tallahassee Sentinel April 19, 1867

Observations in Tropical Florida

(from a report made in the Spring of 1866 to Col. T.W. Osborn, by Col. Geo. F. Thompson, and never published before)

Pursuant to your order of the 29th of November last, I have visited the counties of Hillsboro, Manatee, Monroe, Dade, Brevard, Polk, Orange and Volusia, in the State, and respectfully submit the following

Report:

I left Tallahassee in company with Wm. H. Gleason, Esq., appointed by you as special Agent, to accompany me on the 6th day of December, two days after the reception of this order. We proceeded by rail to Gainesville, in Alachua county. On account of the inefficiency or want of a spirit of accommodation on the part of the officers of the roads, we obtained transportation for our horses only as far as Baldwin; and this, only after having them detained at Lake City for twenty-four hours. On their arrival there, I was unable to get them taken over the Fernandina and Cedar Keys road to Gainesville, without being detained at least forty-eight hours. The whole detention seemed to me under the circumstances to arise almost entirely from a want of the disposition to accommodate the public. I therefore gave the orderly directions to drive our horses over the nearest road to Gainesville, and proceeded myself with Mr. Gleason to that point in the train. Our horses arrived on the evening of the 10th and the next morning we started on our way to Tampa via Brooksville.

We selected Tampa as our objective point because at that place we believed we should obtain such information, both in regard to the state of affairs in Hillsboro county and the best method of procedure for the examination of Manatee, Monroe, and Dade counties. In this we were not disappointed for here we found several men who were familiar with the country, from Tampa across the east coast, along Indian river and from thence down to the Miami river. From their representations of the state of the water in the creeks and rivers we were satisfied that to attempt to go across the Peninsula and down to Miami in the then state of high water would be

very hazardous if not entirely impracticable. After getting all the information we could from those best acquainted with the country, we determined to charter a sail boat, and proceed to different points on the rivers of the west or Gulf coast, and penetrate the interior on foot, as far as was necessary to obtain a satisfactory knowledge of the country and its condition. We effected an arrangement with a Mr. Louis Bell, a native of that section of the State, and perfectly familiar with the whole west coast, having during the Seminole war, in 1857, been the mail carrier from Tampa to Fort Myers on the Caloosahatchee river.

We started on our expedition from Tampa on the 20th of December and visited several points on the Manatee river, from thence went down into Charlotte Harbor, visiting several of the islands therein, up Pease Creek about ten miles, and there found a detachment of the 99th U.S.C.T. under command of Lieut. J.C. Shaw.

Lieut. Shaw had been there but a day or two, on our arrival, and, consequently, could give us no information touching the objects of our visit. We however found a party of herders with Mr. Jacob Summerlin (reported to be the largest stock raiser in the country) with a drove of beeves, loading them upon a steamer for the Havana market. By the kindness of Lieut. Shaw, we took his horses and went back from the river several miles to verify the descriptions which parties had given us of the country. To proceed further into the interior at this point we considered unnecessary as the major part of the men living within a radius of fifty miles were here employed by Mr. Summerlin in loading his cattle. After spending two or three days here we proceeded down the river and made for Fort Myers stopping at several of the Keys or Islands in Charlotte Harbor, where were congregated several parties engaged in taking fish.

We arrived at Fort Myers in the evening of the fifth of January. Here we found one family residing in an old dilapidated building or hut, which had been used or abused by its former occupants to such an extent that windows and doors were quite superfluous. Mr McClenathan and family really appeared as though they had been the victims not only of the rebellion but of most very other misfortune which could afflict a family in this charming and healthy climate. From Mr. McClenathan we obtained horses and with him as our guide went to Ostero Bay stopping on our way at the famous "Billy Bowlegs' Spring," situated about one mile east of Fort Myers, and one-half mile south of the river. This spring was a favorite resort of the chieftain whose name it bear, and his braves. The water is warm and impregnated with sulphur but not so strongly as to be disagreeable to the taste. I have heard that its water have been pronounced by physicians to contain properties particularly adapted to cases of a scrofulous character.

The country bordering on the river is low and level, and has a sandy soil resting upon a base of solid lime rock. Immediately upon the river the soil has a depth of two or three feet, but lessens in depth as you go south, until at Ostero Bay the rock protrudes upon the surface. The growth of pine also diminishes in the same ratio, and the trees, which are from twelve to fifteen inches in diameter at the river, at the Bay are scarcely more than three or four.

Immediately on my arrival at Tampa, I sought an interview with Capt. O.B. Ireland, 99th U.S.C.T., then in command of the post, and solicited from him such information as he might possess in relation to the several topics embraced in my order. So far as the negroes were concerned, he represented them as doing well, even better than the whites; there was no suffering among them for want of food or clothing, and they found plenty of labor at fair prices. None are dependent upon the Government, for either full or partial support. The people generally, he represented as exceedingly disloyal, and disposed in every way to oppress and

annoy those of Union sentiments. This he believed to be the case not only with residents of Tampa, but of the country around for miles. Although there were some few who entertained a feeling of loyalty to the Government, yet they were silenced and kept in entire subjection by the arrogant and tyrannical power of those whose course had been identified with the rebellion. This ostracism and enmity was so intense that the loyal inhabitants were not only shut out from all society, but some of them were pursued with murderous intent, representing that there was no safety for a Union man to walk the streets or be found alone in the highway by these men. To corroborate his views of the state of feeling among the people towards the Government and its supporters, he introduced a Mr. Jenks, who was represented as Deputy U.S. Marshal of the District, and perfectly familiar with the people in this whole section of the State.

Mr Jenks' representations differed with Capt. Ireland's only in regard to the intensity of the feelings and intentions of these people. Mr. Jenks spoke of them as actuated by the most malignant intention and instanced his own case as an illustration of their murderous designs. He said that he was hunted by that class of men day and night, and upon more than one occasion had barely escaped the assassin's bullet. These representations were too highly colored to gain entire credence without some proof, consequently while we were sitting in our room busily writing with the door open upon the street, and in full view to passers by, about ten o'clock in the evening of Dec. 19th, we heard the reports of three pistol shots, but a short distance from our hotel. Immediately after Capt. Ireland and Mr. Jenks entered our room apparently much excited, and inquired of us if we heard those reports, and informed us that an attempt was made upon the life of Mr. Jenks, when they returned shots with the unknown hidden assassin, and instead of ferreting out the would be murderer, hurried to inform us of the alarming state of affairs. This trick was too patent to impose upon our credulity, and we contented ourselves by obtaining from them the names of the men whom they believed to be the most unrelenting rebels, and who would have few scruples to murder an active Union man for his devotion to the Government. I have no criticism to make upon such conduct, believing that it will suggest its own, to every intelligent mind.

(Continued in the next story.)

The Tallahassee Sentinel
April 23, 1867

Observations in Tropical Florida

(from a report made in the Spring of 1866 to Col. T.W. Osborn, by Col. Geo. F. Thompson, and never published before)

The next day we visited several of these men, and found them quietly engaged in their business. Without informing them of the object of our visit, or giving them the least hint as to our intentions, we readily drew them in conversation in regard to all these topics suggested by the war.

They readily acknowledged that their sympathies and efforts had been with the rebellion and that the decision had been made, for all time, that the North and South must live together under one Government; and that to attempt again to resist the power of the general Government by force of arms, would be the height of folly, and that in their opinion, there was no intention, hopes or expectations among that class of people who were identified with the rebellion, of ever again resisting the will of Government by other means than those allowed by the constitution and laws of the country.

Most of these people owned a few slaves before the war, and several of them expressed themselves as glad that the system was abolished but had some fears that before the negroes and whites became familiar with the system of free labor, the negroes would occasion much trouble; and believed that the colored laborers were, and would be, too unreliable to justify any large operations in planting. They universally scouted the idea that those who had been identified with the rebellion had any intention to or did persecute any man merely because of his difference of political opinion or action and in the several instances which we cited of such apparent purpose, said it was entirely for personal and other reasons than political. They deprecated any such action for any reason, preferring that the law should step in and arrange all public and private grief in its accustomed mode. Although we gave them several opportunities by our inquiries to manifest somewhat of that intense hatred to the Government and to those who were of Union sentiments, that they had been represented as holding, yet we failed to detect any ground for those highly colored statements which had been made. We neither saw nor heard of any murdered victims of rebellious hate; no bands of roving desperadoes roaming through the country for their prey, which we would have a right to expect as the result of such a state of society as was represented to us; in fact, nothing to excite the fears or to discourage an honest, and courageous man.

One class of men inform us that the secessionists are as bad as ever; that they are thirsting for the blood of Union men, merely because of their sympathy and adherence to the Government. The abused class represent themselves as having succumbed to the will of the government, and now claim to be Union men, desiring that all animosities shall be banished and an era of good feeling established. Men of both of these classes are to be found in different parts of this whole district.

With these two diverse representations of facts, what is the truth in the matter, or what is the explanation of such a diversity of opinion? I might content myself with having given the statements of each party, and leave the actual condition of public feeling for inference; but a word or two may serve to explain. During the war, many of the Union men of the district, were forced into the rebel service; others fled from their homes and were hunted like wild beasts, even by their own former neighbors, their families, in many instances, rudely insulted, their houses burned, and their names made a hissing and a bye-word among all those who espoused the rebellion. Others, again, volunteered in to the Federal service, and for this have suffered the loss of property at the hands of their neighbors. On the return of these men to their places, they are freshly reminded of the indignities they have suffered, and neither can nor ever will forgive the agents of their misfortunes. Their hatred is so intense that even if their neighbor should change his views and feelings, it would be exceedingly difficult for them to recognize it.

Unquestionably, this state of feeling conduces more or less to misrepresentations and exaggeration. On the other hand, those who were secessionists, were the ruling class, always occupying places of trust and power. The control of the public policy was invested in them. As a class, they are more intelligent-the war ending in their defeat and impoverishment, with an

experience which poorly qualifies them as a producing class, without the power to dictate to and control labor. They understand very well that position and power must inevitably come to those who uphold the Government; and if they do not feel themselves in harmony with it, will conceal their opposition to it. They applaud President Johnson, and point to their support of him, as indicative of their fealty to the Government.

Although they confess the utter defeat of the doctrine of State rights, by the war, yet their abandonment of that corner stone of the rebellion is not so radical but they yet despise the men who choose to sustain the Government against their State. Between these two parties crimination begets re-crimination and all their difficulties of whatsoever nature become augmented and intensified by their political differences, either present or past. I am of the opinion that more serious results are to be apprehended from a collision of these two classes in the settlement of their personal grievances, than from any efforts of any class to subvert, or to resist the Government.

Notwithstanding the most extravagant predictions made to us that we should find the people hostile and repulsive wherever we should go, we were in no single instance, rudely treated or made to feel that our presence was unwelcome. Indeed, so far as the hostility of the people to Northern men is concerned, I would as soon live in any part of Southern Florida as in the city of Washington or Boston.

The people, generally, express themselves as heartily in favor of an emigration from the North, and I think this feeling honestly arises from the conviction of the necessity of institutions of learning, going hand in hand with the system of free labor, to develop the resources of the country. They have or effect to have an appreciation of the superior industry skill and enterprise of the people of the North.

In seeking information we have made our inquiries of men of all classes and pursuits in life. The means of disseminating information in this district are so extremely limited, for want of post offices and communications, one part with another, that the absurd and extravagant statements circulate and become adopted as true, for want of contradiction. Another misfortune for the people themselves is the fact that their former education was such as to lead them to place great confidence in such newspapers as the New York World; News and Metropolitan Record. I believe these papers exert a more pernicious influence and tend to delay the growth of loyal sentiment more than any other cause. In all such cases we have endeavored, temperately, yet firmly and kindly, to point out their mistake and to show them that all the misrepresentations of these papers are made, like the wares and fabric manufactured, for a market, and like the quack medicines of the day are purchased because the buyer is under the mistaken apprehension that they will effect a cure.

Stock Raising

The principal business of the people in the district, except at Key West, is raising stock; all other branches of industry are merely incidental. They do not even pursue agriculture sufficiently to produce the corn for their own use. At all places on our route across the State, we found it exceedingly difficult to obtain feed for our horses, and several parties informed us that they were obliged to haul their corn from sixty to ninety-five miles, paying from \$2,25 to \$2,50 per bushel at the place where obtained. This arises, not so much because there are not lands suitable for

the production of the crops, as from the exclusiveness with which the people are obliged to devote themselves to the care of the cattle. One of the principal owners informed us that he was obliged "to live with his stock, and that he had but little time to be at home with his family, or to give any attention to improvements or conveniences about his house." When we visited his house we found a part of his story to be but too true, for I doubt whether Adam and Eve had fewer comforts or conveniences for house-keeping than his family. After very thorough inquiries of the most intelligent stock owners, both east and west of the Kissimmee river, in regard to the probable number of cattle at present grazing through the district, I place the estimate at 150,000 head. When an entire stock is sold, the ruling price, at present, is six dollars per head; this would make a total value of \$900,000. Selected cattle for the Havana market bring from fourteen to eighteen dollars in gold, at the point of shipment. Large numbers are shipped to Savannah and Charleston. The cattle are generally small, the best of them netting no more than five or six hundred pounds. Of one lot of 2500, which I saw put on board the steamer and bound for the Havana market, I do not think the nett average could be more than 350 pounds.

Habits and Manners

To speak of the habits and manners of living of the people, and represent them truthfully, might be considered a delicate undertaking, especially as we enjoyed, or rather, endured their hospitality on many occasions. To say that they have no schools or churches, is enough to indicate their general condition; but this would be very far from giving a correct idea of the extent of their destitution. In the first place, the men seem to have extremely limited ideas as to providing; and in the second place, the women appear to have no idea how to use what little is provided.

Food

The principal food is pork, corn bread, hominy and Hayti potatoes, and what these articles naturally lack in repulsiveness to a refined taste, is fully made up in the abominable manner in which they are cooked and served. To cook a piece of meat, with them, means to fry it to the consistency of a piece of dry hide, and made about as palatable and digestible as live oak chips. The corn bread is usually made (the process I have never learned) so as to be about as delicious and gratifying to the taste as an equal quantity of baked saw-dust.

The hominy is prepared by scalding with hot water, and the potatoes by boiling until the vegetable matter leaves to the water a proportion of about 1 to 100.

Grease is used excessively as food; indeed, so repulsive is the manner of cooking, that to a person of refined habits and taste, nothing but the direst necessity and a deep sense of moral obligation to preserve his own life, could induce him to undergo such a diet. People living on the Gulf coast live much better, the art of cooking receiving much ore attention, and the articles of food being more numerous; in the interior, if we judge of the civilization of the inhabitants by the proficiency in the art of cooking and living generally, I fear the would take rank but little above the savages. I have frequently sat down to the table when my olfactories and stomach have joined in a united protest against the task before them, and have only quieted them by the

plea of necessity.

Houses

The log-house or hut, is universal, and might make a very comfortable residence. They are usually raised two or three feet from the ground by props, which allow of a free circulation of air as well as hogs and other animals, under the house. In a majority of instances they have no windows, and comparatively few houses are chinked up, so there is about as free circulation through as under the house.

(Continued in the next paper.)

The Tallahassee Sentinel
April 30, 1867

Observations in Tropical Florida

(from a report made in the Spring of 1866 to Col. T.W. Osborn, by Col. Geo. F. Thompson, and never published before)

The two schools at Tampa accommodate about eighty scholars, and are primary in character. If scholars advance to the higher branches of an English education, they must go to some academy at a great distance. At Key West they have three schools, two for the whites and one for the colored people, accommodating about 160 pupils. One of the most noticeable facts in the colored school is the rapidity with which the younger pupils learn. I believe it is conceded, even by those who have no little prejudice in favor of the superiority of the white race, that the colored children advance quite as rapidly as the white children in their first lessons. It is not so, however, with those of advanced age. Those from sixteen to twenty years of age do not seem to have that power of application, and learn less rapidly. These schools are supported by tuition, and from conversation with the negroes, I find that the expenditure is quite as cheerful to them as to the whites.

Churches

At Tampa, there are three churches, though without regular service at all of them. At Key West there are five churches, one of which is for the colored people. My observation and experience with the people of this district has thoroughly convinced me that, compare the negro with the whites, in reference to his desire for education, his respect for religion, or his disposition to lead an industrious life, he is in none of these respects their inferior. In coming to this conclusion, I will be frank enough to say, it was not without encouraging a strong predisposition to a different

result.

Disposition of the Whites and Negroes to Labor

One of the most general complaints among the whites is, that "the Negro won't work." I have investigated the ground of this complaint in many cases, and generally have arrived at the conclusion from facts ascertained, either that the employer wanted the labor for less than value, or the negro could do better at some other employment than that offered. While I was in Tampa, the same complaint was made by several parties, and I had occasion to test the justice of the charge. I desired to employ a man to accompany me, to assist in sailing the boat, cooking, &c., but was able to find but two men disengaged, and they said their labor was worth \$1.50 per day, with plenty of work. I advised them to remain at home and accept of the certain employment, and concluded to work myself. The fact is, the aversion to labor is quite as much in the mind of the white man as the colored, and in the course of quite a long conversation with one of the most intelligent men of this section, in regard to the country, institutions, climate, &c., he insisted that the long continued heat of the summer produced a lassitude, an unavoidable indisposition of physical exercise, which neither habit nor any amount of mental stimulant or association could remove. That such a thing is a libel upon the climate, is evident from the fact that in this same climate, in South Florida, are as active, hardy set of men as are found in any northern latitude. The men who tend stocks in the ranges are continually moving, and no class of men have a greater amount of physical exercise than they. Action and physical exercise are the requirements of their vocation, and qualify them for its endurance.

Indolence, and success in stock raising, are incompatible, and in this branch of business necessity stimulates to industry, and in return industry gives success, and vindicates the climate from the charge of being the cause of indolence.

Considering that the negro is set free from an odious system of compulsory labor, in a country without any system of industry, it would not be at all strange if some of them would indulge the erroneous idea that it was a liberation from labor itself. They have learned, however, that the boon conferred upon them is the right to choose the kind of labor and enjoy its fruits, and not to "reap when they have not sowed."

Negroes Peaceably Disposed

The negroes are almost universally peaceably disposed, and I believe have a higher regard for the law and civil authority than a majority of the whites. At Key West, where considerable numbers of the negroes have congregated, I was informed by the Mayor and Marshal, that they were generally peaceable, and occasioned them much less trouble than the same number of whites, and that but for the whiskey shops, they would be far more orderly than they now are. At Tampa, Captain Harding informed me that during his stay at that place, but one or two complaints had been made of their insubordination, and upon examination they proved to be trivial matters, and but for a prejudice on the part of the complainants, would not, probably, have been made at all.

Orange Orchards

Of the orange orchards, there are three or four on the Gulf coast, and one upon the Atlantic, worthy of notice; one at Old Tampa of about two hundred trees, owned by Mr. Phillipps; one bordering on Sarasota Bay, or about three hundred, with upwards of an hundred fine lemon trees, owned by Dr. Snell, and one at Fort Myers of between four and five hundred orange, lemon and lime trees.

Of the one at Old Tampa, I can say nothing from observation; but from representations made to us, I should judge it must be a valuable one. That of Dr. Snell's we visited, and obtained between four and five hundred of the most delicious oranges I ever tasted. The man who has it in charge pays no attention to it except to gather the fruit as it is called for, and even that labor he seems to consider a peculiar hardship. When we were there in December, and again in January 11th, the lemon trees were bent to the ground with the immense loads of fruit, and many of the trees were nearly ruined by the limbs being broken off under the great weight, and yet the ground was nearly covered with as nice looking fruit as yet hung upon the trees. The orange trees had been injured by the gale of October last. During the last five years the trees have had no care, and many of them are standing monuments to the indolence and stupidity of the present occupant. The grove at Fort Myers has been neglected by the proprietor, whoever he may be, and sadly abused by the temporary residents at that place, for the last two years. With a reasonable amount of care this might be made one of the most beautiful, as well as remunerative, places I have seen in Florida; the trees are all young and thrifty, and the soil in this vicinity seems to be particularly adapted to the growth of this fruit; and notwithstanding the want of care and hard usage these trees have experienced, they give promise of being exceedingly fruitful in a year or two. The orange tree bears about the seventh year from the seed, and the third from the graft.

The grove upon the East coast is situated about thirty miles south of New Smyrna, and is reported to be the most flourishing and valuable one in the State. It is owned by an old man by the name of Dummett, who, in addition to the raising of oranges, has tested the experiment of miscegenation, the results of which may be seen running about his place, with complexions of a color midway between charcoal and chalk. I merely speak of this fact to indicate the character of some of the men to whom has been entrusted the settlement of this country. If this was an isolated case it would hardly be worth mentioning, but such peculiarities are by no means rare.

When we take into account that oranges, lemons and limes require water transportation and that all along the West coast there are numerous places where this fruit may be cultivated with very little labor or expense, and that New Orleans and St. Louis are the best accessible markets for these productions, it would seem that not many years could elapse before a thriving population should skirt the coast from Tampa Bay to Cape Romans. I think the country bordering upon the Manatee and Caloosahatchee rivers, offers more than ordinary inducements for such enterprises, for besides having sufficient water for boats of five or six feet draught, the land is richer and better adapted to their growth than upon Pease creek, or generally immediately on the coast.

Of the productiveness of this fruit I could get no positive information, for those who have these orchards never have taken any exact account of the number raised upon a single tree, and their estimates vary so largely, that but little reliable data could be obtained to form an idea of the general average. Their estimates would vary from 1,000 to 10,000 oranges per tree. I saw no

tree which had upon it as many as the latter, though in several instance I should judge there were upon the trees as many as 2,000.

I find the same difficulty in getting accurate information in regard to other productions throughout the country. The people never weigh or measure anything except in delivering to a purchaser, and then it is generally done with great regard to their own protection. The idea of pursuing any system in agriculture has never yet even entered the mind of most people. They know that selected cattle are worth from ten to twenty dollars a head, but have no idea as to how many could be raised on any given amount of pasturage. They know that Hayti potatoes grow when they take the precaution to set the plant in the soil and that after they are raised are good for food, but as to the quantity raised, or value, can give us no definite idea, simply for the reason that they have none. They have not accustomed themselves to notice any such particulars, and consequently their knowledge is as unsatisfactory to themselves as it is unreliable to others. The peculiarity is remarkable among all the inhabitants of the interior, and is not in all cases confined to want of attention to products of the soil, for in one instance in making the enquiry of a man as to the number of his children, he actually named his fingers and then made the enumeration before he could give a decided answer.

Fisheries

The fisheries of Southern Florida promise, at no distant day, to attract the attention of many of the hardy fishermen of the North. In the vicinity of Charlotte Harbor we found several parties engaged in taking fish, especially for the Havana market; they numbered in all about twenty-five men. We visited two of them, and they imparted to us such information as led us to believe that the business was to them a very profitable one. Messrs. Dewey, Bennett & Co., from Connecticut, were located at Punta Rosa, and employed eighteen men, and although they had been there but five or six weeks, had succeeded in taking and curing upwards of 1,800 quintals of fish, which in the Havana market brought between six and seven dollars per quintal in gold. They employed white men exclusively in their fishery, and paid \$25 to \$30 per month and found. Besides taking and curing fish, they also caught large numbers of sharks, from which they extract the oil, although this was not a prominent part of their business, yet it served to keep the men profitably employed when the weather or other circumstances were unfavorable for taking fish with the seine. With the other parties, there was not that judicious division of labor, confining themselves almost exclusively, to taking such fish as they would find sale for in Havana. The mullet is the principal fish, and the waters of Charlotte Harbor as well as Sarasota and Tampa Bay, are completely alive with them. The tarpon, jewfish, redfish, and many other kinds, are also found in great numbers. Oysters of fine flavor are also found here in great abundance. Upon Indian river, also, are found immense quantities of mullet, turtle, and oysters. In Biscayne Bay are found large quantities of turtle.

Dade County

There are some distinguishing peculiarities about Dade county, which have induced me to speak of this part of the country separately. The other counties, except Monroe, have such a general similarity in climate, soil and productions, that whatever may be said upon these points in regard to one, may apply generally with equal justice to them all. By far the larger part of this

country, on the main land, is known as the Everglades, the available land comprising a narrow strip from three to fifteen miles in width, and extending from Hillsboro' Inlet to Cape Sable.

(Continued in the next paper.)

The Tallahassee Sentinel
May 3, 1867

Observations in Tropical Florida

(from a report made in the Spring of 1866 to Col. T.W. Osborn, by Col. Geo. F. Thompson, and never published before)

There are numerous Keys or Islands comprised within the county limits, and upon them the principal part of the inhabitants are to be found; they number probably about two hundred souls. Their principal occupation is wrecking, but when not engaged in this, they employ themselves in taking sponges, fish and turtles. They are entirely destitute of all educational institutions, but yet, as a general rule, are a more intelligent class of people than those found in the interior of the Peninsula. Their vocation brings them in contact with people from all parts of the world, and this keeps alive among them a spirit of inquiry, and they do not sink to that lethargy which seems to take so strong a hold upon those living inland. There are but three colored people in the county, and they are so circumstanced that any interference of the Bureau is entirely unnecessary. Two of them are the wives of white men, and one is the son of white parents. We did not stop to inquire the reason of this state of things, but simply contented ourselves with a knowledge of the facts as related to us by the parties themselves.

The history of this section of the State has frequently been written in blood, and during the last Indian war, the most cruel and barbarous murders were committed by the Seminoles, without a single premonitory warning. Many families were entirely annihilated, while others barely escaped in the darkness of night from the clutch of the infuriated savage. These savages have been reduced since then very materially by removal to the West and little or no apprehension is now felt on their account.

Climate of Dade County

The first and most noticeable characteristic of this section is the climate. Beyond all question it is the most equable of any in the United States, and by many travelers is pronounced superior to that of Italy. During our stay here from the 27th of January, to the 14th of February, the thermometer varied but little from 74 deg. at 8 o'clock in the morning than about the same at sunset; but what makes even a higher temperature endurable is the fact that about 8 o'clock in the morning an exhilarating breeze commences, and continues until the evening from the Bay, and in the evening returns from the land, so that there is continued cooling process going on and a person at no time feels uncomfortably warm or suffers from the cold. Our guide had lived

at the "Hunting Grounds" several years, and he testified that in midsummer he had never suffered any more with the heat than while there with us. There was no day when it was warm enough to endanger a man's health in any out-of-door occupation. The flowers were in full bloom, the birds as lively and gay, and vegetable growth as fresh and green as in New England in the month of June. It really seemed at times as though the season had changed, and instead of being winter had been suddenly converted into summer. We have found vegetables flourishing as rapidly as in summer and nothing whatever to remind us of the season of the year.

Surface of the Country in Dade County

Leaving out the Everglades, the balance of the country is divided into pine barrens, low prairies and hammock. The pine barrens seem to constitute about 6-10; low prairie 3-10; and hammock about 1-10 of the available surface. The pine barrens are at first sight rather repulsive. The surface at the "Hunting Grounds" is entirely a rotten lime-rock with a honey-comb surface; the trees are small and scattered, with a knotty and gnarled growth, which, with their diminutiveness, renders them entirely unfit for lumbering purposes. I really can see no useful purpose they can be put to, except in building cabins and fences, and for the manufacture of turpentine and tar. There have been several attempts to manufacture lumber but we were informed that the general result was a complete failure. As far north as the Miami river the rock is covered with a thin layer of sand, and this increases in depth as you proceed in that direction. Where this appears, there also comes a vegetable growth, a little grass, a great deal of kountee, and an unwelcome amount of the bastard palmetto. There are occasionally stuks or depressions in this lime-rock where the vegetable growth is very luxuriant. These places seem specially adapted to the growth of the banana, or in fact any of the tropical fruits.

Soil of the Low Prairie

The low prairies are by far the most inviting to the skill and industry of the country. They vary in extent from 500 to 5000 acres, and appear to have been formed by the washing of vegetable matter and lime from the Everglades. They are generally very long and narrow, and make their head near the Everglades. The soil bordering on the pine barrens is from six to twelve inches deep, and towards the center of the tract has an unknown depth. Mr. Addison, at the "Hunting Grounds," informed us that he had several times tried to touch the bottom on several of the tracts, by forcing a pole down when the soil was softened by water in the wet season, and reached from ten to fifteen feet without being able to strike the rock. The soil appears to contain a very large proportion of vegetable matter, with a liberal quantity of lime. That it is a rich, fertile soil is evident from the immense growth of grass which appears. The only difficulty in making them available for cultivation is in draining them. From a somewhat careful examination of several of them, I believe that a system of drainage and dyking would succeed in reclaiming some of them for profitable cultivation.

Hammock

The hammocks are small in extent, varying from forty to one hundred and sixty acres, considerably higher than the barrens, and covered with a dense growth of wood, such as red, white, and live-oak, mastic, wild fig, magnolia, &c. The soil upon these is extremely fertile, producing sugar-cane, cotton, tobacco, of superior quality, vegetables of nearly all kinds, and fruits of superior flavor. The hammocks are so small a proportion of this country that, unless the low prairies are brought under cultivation, the country would support but a small population from its own products.

Productions of Dade County

The productions of this county are very limited, but sufficient experiments have been made to indicate its adaptation to the culture of all the tropical fruits and plants. Here is found a root called by the Indians, kountee, resembling somewhat in shape, the maugel wortzel or ruta бага. It contains a large amount of starch and formerly large quantities were manufactured for the northern market. The process of manufacture is very similar to that of potatoe starch. At one time it had a high reputation among many of the manufacturers of cotton goods, and was largely sought for. The Indian wars, however, broke up the establishment where it was made, and the uncertainty of supply led the cotton manufacturers to abandon its use. There are several small establishments, however, on the Miami and other fresh water streams, where it is made to great profit. It readily commands from ten to twelve cents per pound at Key West, where it is preferred to other kinds for the laundry, besides large quantities being used for food. We visited one establishment where three hands were employed, using the rudest of machinery, and averaging 1000 lbs. per week. Six barrels of the root produce one barrel or 196 pounds of starch. It is very hardy, and grows upon the poorest soil, and the supply seems almost inexhaustible.

Sisal Hemp

Another plant found here and which grows with astonishing rapidity, even upon the poorest soil, is Sisal hemp. The value of this plant is in the fibre it produces; it has already a high reputation in the market, and only requires some feasible means of separating the fibre from the vegetable matter to make its production one of the most profitable on the continent. In appearance the Sisal hemp resembles the century plant, and flourishes even as high as the 30th parallel of latitude, but the general opinion is that its growth is very much retarded even if the strength of the fibre is not injured by the frost. In this section of the country it is beyond frost, and continues its growth throughout the year. The leaves or blades grow from four to six feet in length, and from flour to eight inches in width, yielding from one to one and a half ounces of clear fibre per leaf. It matures in three years, and then shoots up in a staff about twenty or twenty-five feet and from the branches of this staff ripens hundreds of young plants which drop down and immediately take root and grow, despite the most unfavorable circumstances. They are also propagated from suckers shooting up from the parent root. It is a plant which resists the drought beyond all calculation. When corn and vegetables are entirely subjugated, this seems as fresh and healthy as ever. The fact that it attains such growth in such poor soil and resists the drought so effectually, shows that a large part of its nourishment is derived from the atmosphere. From the indications of its growth upon the Keys and mainland, I should judge that one ton (of 2000 pounds) per acre would be a reasonable estimate. During my tour I became

acquainted with a gentleman who is interested in cultivation of this plant in Campeachy, and he informed me that he had found the following process for separating the fibre to be successful, viz: Pass the leaves through two sets of rollers, running the juice into vats; after the juice ferments, immerse the leaves, and let them remain from 24 to 48 hours. The juice takes an ascetic state, and when in that state will dissolve both the starch and vegetable matter. Shake and rinse the fiber in clear fresh water, and dry either in the sun or by steam. If this method is successful, it opens this country to rapid development, even by the lowest class of labor

(Continued in the next paper.)

The Tallahassee Sentinel
May 7, 1867

Observations in Tropical Florida

(from a report made in the Spring of 1866 to Col. T.W. Osborn, by Col. Geo. F. Thompson, and never published before)

Castor Bean

The castor bean, from which the castor oil is manufactured, grows here also to perfection. The increasing demand for this article, and the liberal protection afforded by the Government, by a revenue duty levied upon the importations, commends it to the especial attention of those who seek the settlement and development of this county.

Fruits, &c

Oranges, lemons, limes, bananas, cocoa nuts, grapes, and, in fact, all the most delicious of the tropical fruits, can be produced here with comparatively little labor. We saw some specimens of very fine long-staple cotton raised here, and were informed by the party who raised it that the yield was far more abundant on a given space than in the favorite locations in South Carolina, where the party formerly resided. Some samples of Cuba tobacco were also shown us, from which we made some cigars, and the flavor was superior to any I ever used. Sugar cane grows upon the hammock land to a prodigious size, and I have no doubt that, should the low prairies be drained, and cultivated for this crop, an immense harvest could be obtained. From the description of Demarara and Barbadoes, given by Anthony Trollope, I should judge that this country is similar in some respects, and especially these peculiarities, which make them valuable for the growth of the sugar crop.

Springs

There are numerous springs of fine cool water found in the hammocks, on the prairies, and also on the beach. Standing upon the beach at the "Hunting Grounds," you will find numerous

springs boiling up and rippling the waters of the bay. By placing a barrel or tube over any of the springs, the water will force itself above the barrel or tube, and furnish an inexhaustible supply of as pure fresh water as comes from a mountain's side. In the hammocks you will occasionally find an opening to a current of clear running water, making its way to the ocean or bay in its subterraneous passage-numerous fish are in these living streams. Unquestionably, these springs or streams have their source from the Everglades. In the bed of the Miami river, about four miles from the mouth, is found one of these springs, which seems to be strongly impregnated with iron. By placing a pen-stock over the spring, the water is raised three or four feet above the level of the river, and a continual supply furnished. The equable climate, the springs of pure water, and the continual supply of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout all the seasons of the year, commend this section to the especial attention of those suffering from pulmonary complaints from all parts of our country. Game is not as abundant as in some other sections, but deer are found, and the rivers and creeks abound with fish.

Insects, Reptiles and Wild Animals

Although this part of the State offers peculiar inducements for settlement, yet, it is not without its annoyances, for during the entire year mosquitoes and sand flies seem to vie with each other in their efforts to torment humanity. While we were there in the winter, they were almost intolerable, and during the summer months, are said to be still more numerous and aggressive. To sleep at night without a mosquito bar, would be nearly as fruitless as to attempt to fly without wings. In April and May appears a blue-head, and a grey fly, about the size of a honey bee, which attacks cattle and horses with great violence, and drives them mad. We were told of several cases where horses had been attacked by a swarm of these insects, and killed within three hours. We encountered a few of the grey flies on the sand ridge or "divide," between Pease creek and the Kissimmee river, and so violent was the attack that the blood oozed out of our horses in big drops when bitten or stung. The blue-headed fly is represented as much more numerous than the grey. It is thought by some, that on account of these insects, stock or horses can never be raised in Dade county, except by great care during the fly season.

Mocasins and rattle snakes abound in the hammocks. Wild cats, panthers and bears, infest the hammocks and jungles of the Everglades; but unquestionably, most of the annoyances would disappear, or at any rate, be very much diminished by a settlement and improvement of the country. They constitute the general objections to all new counties in a southern latitude.

The value of this county for general settlement, as well as the entire valley of the Kissimmee, embracing millions of acres of the best lands in the State, depends entirely upon its feasibility of draining or lowering the waters of Lake Okeechobee. It has been ascertained that the fall from the Everglades to Biscayne bay, through the channel of the Miami river, amounts to six feet nine inches. Could the water of the lake be reduced that amount, I am inclined to the opinion that Southern Florida would become the Garden of the United States. If the reduction of the lake is impracticable, these lands must remain unfit for cultivation or general settlement, until nature shall accomplish this result by some general upheaval or volcanic action.

Seminole Indians

We were unable to find any Indians; they had been at Key West about two weeks before our arrival at that place, and on reaching the "Big Hunting Grounds," they had a few days before started for their homes through the Everglades. We were informed that they manifest a feeling of friendliness, and occasionally come down to the coast to trade. Their principal article of barter is skins, such as deer, bear and panther. They are not entirely destitute of money, but have learned the value of greenbacks, and use them in their purchases and in adjusting balances. They have also obtained a passion for wrecking, but manage their business somewhat differently from the whites. Instead of putting the cargo into the hands of the Marshal and awaiting the decision of the Court for a decree of salvage, they make their own decree, and the cargo is generally considered the salvage. They dress on special occasions like white men and in some other respects imitate his customs, i.e., get drunk and "stick their head into the sand." Their passion for whiskey is inordinate, and the great misfortune is that there are white men debased enough to pander to their appetite. We found one man here by the name of Mike Sayers, or as he is called, "French Mike," who keeps a dirty shanty and trades with them, and without doubt, sells them whiskey. They number about 112 warriors, or, probably, about 600 in all; they live principally upon game, fish, corn and kountee. They still resist the march of civilization among them and probably in a few years will become entirely extinct as a tribe.

The result of my observations through the district, has convinced me that such is the condition and disposition of the colored people, that there will be but little, if any, occasion for the interference of the powers of the Bureau, unless it should be to establish schools and assist them in settling upon public lands, under the Homestead Bill. Their desire to become land owners is almost universal, and according to the provisions of that bill, they can become so by having a little direction how to proceed, from individuals or officers of the Bureau. I have, however, counselled them, in all instances, to hire themselves out for a year or two, and save their earnings as far as possible, so as to have some capital to commence with in case they should avail themselves of the provisions of the law. The lands available for actual cultivation are in comparatively small tracts, and no general settlement of the Southern part of Florida ever be effected without first adopting a vast system of drainage to reclaim the country from annual inundations. Such is the nature of the country that for years the principal part of the labor, will be most profitably absorbed in the fisheries, cultivation of fruits and raising of stock. Wherever we have been the people have treated us with kindness; and, if in any case, their hospitality was limited, it was on account of their destitution of means rather than any manifest disposition to embarrass us in the objects of our mission.

Geo. T. Thompson,
Capt. and Bvt. Lt. Co. U.S.V.