

SOUTHERN LETTERS.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

LOUISVILLE, KY., April 10, 1881.

It was here at Louisville, in the hot July days of 1865, that my regiment, the poor old much-marched and little-glorified "Sixteenth," ended "officially" its connection with the volunteer army of the United States. Here the men learned that their term of enlistment was over, here they signed the last muster-roll, and a few days later at Springfield, Illinois, they received their last pay, and dispersed to their homes, no more to rally at the sound of the drum.

What a long tramp it had been since those pleasant, soul-stirring days in May, 1861, when, under the budding trees and the gleaming blue of the sky, full of hope and eagerness to meet any foe at any odds; fearful, almost, that the Rebellion would be over before it could try its hand, the young regiment had sworn with uplifted hands to bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America. Many of the men lived to see the last day of a term of four years and two months expire, and one of them was the writer of this chronicle. The story of this regiment was, compared with that of many other commands, an uneventful one. It fired, in an obscure skirmish in Missouri, some of the first shots of the war; it fired its last volley at Bentonville, North Carolina, the last pitched battle of the long struggle. But between those events it took part in none of the great historic conflicts. It was its fate to be within hearing of Stone river and Chickamauga, and the great battles about Atlanta, and yet not to be in at the harvest of death. Yet what a long round was that which

ended at Louisville! All over the prairies and woods of North Missouri; among the swamps around New Madrid; down the swollen Mississippi to Osceola, Arkansas; in the flash-in-the-pan movement on Fort Pillow; up the river to the God-forsaken wilderness around Corinth, where dunderpated old Halleck made "reconnoissance in force;" then to Tusculumbia; then to Athens, and on the great Buell-Bragg "swing-around" to Nashville, to be there blockaded; then to the South again, to hear the guns at Mission Ridge and Lookout; then on the long march to the sea with Sherman; then to Washington and the great review, and then to Louisville, Springfield, and home.

Never in a great battle, seldom mentioned in the dispatches, never gilded by any chance rays of glory—never uttering that word; never the "pet" regiment of any city, county or State, though one of the first in the field; ignored by Sanitary Commission, Christian Commission, and even by the home sewing societies, the regiment yet did its duty. How many miles it marched, going into every Confederate State except Florida, Louisiana and Texas; how many miles of corduroy it laid; how many boxes of hard-tack it "packed" at Kelly's Ferry; how many lines of breastworks it threw up in the Atlanta campaign;—and all this time how many men it furnished for every arm of the service. They commenced detailing at the first of the war, and they never got through till the war was done—men for the artillery, men for the gunboats, for the pioneers, even for the irregular cavalry, and officers for batteries and for other regiments, white and colored. It seemed that a full regiment must have graduated from its ranks. Never slaughtered in great battles, it yet left its dead all along its winding path from the Missouri to Savannah, and north and west again until they came to Louisville, as soldiers to "die no more." How well I remember the last muster-rolls—how they worked all the hot July night at them, and yet there was not much excitement about it. Everything had become a matter of course; the regiment, collectively, had become as stolid as an overworked mule. The men seemed to mind little more about being mustered out than again hearing little Captain Rowe rushing about Company C's quarters at four o'clock in the morning,

ordering them to get up and get ready to march immediately with four days' rations. They marched to the Louisville ferry as if they were going South instead of North.

"Home." How many times every man in that regiment had uttered that word in every accent! One would have thought some little town or farm-house in Illinois was heaven itself, to hear them speak of it. How they talked about the girls there—but they were not girls then—they were "angels ever bright and fair." How they talked about the commonest articles of food which they were going to eat when they got "home." It was "home" in every heart and on every tongue for four years, and now to those of us who had no wives or babies to go home to—and the married were in the minority in the regiment—it was not what we expected—this going "home."

The day came, each man took his discharge, the parchment with the spread eagle at the top; some bought their muskets and "traps" of the Government. One morning the sergeants called the roll; the next morning there were no sergeants; no "orderly book," no men—the regiment had gone "home."

There was a noticeable difference between 1861 and 1865, between the going and coming volunteer. No fluttering handkerchiefs greeted the return of our regiment, no cannon shouted, no committees of invitation or reception met the veterans at the depots. The land was full of discharged soldiers then. By ones and twos and threes the disbanded scattered about the country. I remember that when I parted with some of them, they sang out, "Send us your newspaper, old fellow." With their prophetic eyes they saw my future doom.

And so the regiment went "home." I say "home," but while some were met with clasping arms and the joyful clamor of greeting voices, many more wandered about for a time in unutterable loneliness. The "cocks's shrill clarion" heard across the country in the gray of morn sounded melancholy enough to ears accustomed for years to the reveille. The struggle for work, for bread, came hard enough; for many it has been hard enough ever since; and when once in awhile I meet one of the old regiment, something in the sunken lines of his face, in his whitening hair, in the

stoop of his shoulders, tells me that the years of peace have broken him more than all the marches and vigils of the war.

I have written thus because all these reflections have come since I came here to Louisville, and because I have never in my reading seen what seemed to me a true picture of the "soldier's return."

Louisville, in the sixteen years that have rolled by since I saw it last, has changed for the better, as it should. It was full of all sorts of human refuse in 1865, and was villainously dirty. The heart of the city has been finely built up, though the style of business architecture is rather sombre. There is nothing to remind you that you are in the South, and but little to remind you that you are in Kentucky, except the frequent recurrence of the sign, "Kentucky Whiskies." I had hitherto supposed that old Bourbon, like virtue, was its own reward; but it appears that a premium is required here to get people to drink it. I saw a sign at one ruin factory, "An oyster with each drink," while another enterprising vendor offered the temptation of "an oyster and a hard-boiled egg" with each drink—thus insuring the sufferer a lively turn of nightmare, even if he escaped the jim-jams.

The season I found no further advanced than at Atchison. There was an hour, however, on Sunday morning, when it was spring. It was just as the church bells were ringing and the town clocks were striking; and the scene was on that fine street, Broadway. A burst of yellow sunshine lit the wide street, the stately houses framed in green grass-plots, and glorified the throngs of gaily-dressed ladies and children on their way to the churches. It seemed as if the dark-limbed trees would in an instant burst into leaf in honor of Palm Sunday, which festival it was. But the gleam was transient, as most beautiful things are, and soon the sky grew gray and dull, and the cold which had been with us so long came back again.

In the afternoon I visited Cave Hill, for many years the great cemetery of Louisville. It is divided into two parts, an old-time "graveyard" and a modern cemetery. The latter derives

its beauty from the inequality of its surface, being broken often by circular, bowl-like depressions; all is in the brightest sod, and no ornamentation has been attempted except in the construction of a drive and in the planting of most magnificent evergreens. At the extreme end of the grounds farthest from the entrance is the National cemetery, where nearly four thousand soldiers are buried. The Union dead lie in long ranks on a hillside, row on row, as if they were formed in column to charge the crest. On the summit there is another detachment, while on the farthest slope, as if retiring, are the ranks of the Confederates, each grave marked with a neat head-stone. I noticed on one, "Elizabeth Temms, from Calhoun, Ga.," with the added lines, "bury me with my people;" and one Confederate soldier's grave had been made with his comrades as late as 1872. I doubt not such marks of attachment to the "lost cause" will continue in the South for years, as in Scotland the old Jacobites continued to drink the health of "him that's awa'" long after the cloud of irremediable ruin had settled upon the house of Stuart.

I looked in vain for the monument of George D. Prentice. People I met were positive that such a monument existed, and gave directions as to its probable locality, but while I found the graves of his family, including his ill-fated son, Courtland, killed in the Confederate service, there was nothing to mark the resting-place of the man whose fame had made Louisville famous. I thought of his own pathetic lines on the lone, unmarked grave of a little child in the wilds of Arkansas.

There was something strange in the surroundings of the place. Separated from it only by the fence, and a little grove, rise the gloomy, castellated walls of the workhouse. The prisoners looking through the grated windows see the peaceful slopes of "God's acre," and I thought how many a weary-hearted outcast, not yet lost to memory or to shame, must have gazed from the gloom of this prison-house, and thought how better the dreamless sleep of those resting thousands than life with a hopeless burden and an enduring stain. Near the entrance of the grounds I heard the continued and boisterous laughter of children at play. I found

that it proceeded from the grounds of an orphanage near by. The little fatherless and motherless made the air ring with their shouts of glee, all unconscious of what their near neighbor, Death, had done to them.

I had never visited any sort of school exclusively supported and conducted by colored people, and I gratified my curiosity, late in the afternoon, by a visit to the Normal and Theological Institute, on Kentucky street, which is supported by the colored Baptist churches. The surroundings, as I found them, were not inviting. The building had once been a stylish family residence in the center of a large inclosure filled with trees and shrubbery, but it had been suffered to fall into decay; the front gates were off their hinges, and the grounds looked disheveled and dirty. On entering the big, empty, dirty hall, I pursued my investigations till I finally found myself seated in the chapel, where the boarding pupils, some thirty boys, girls, young men and young women, were at service. The room had been a double parlor at some time, and a handsome marble fire-place was still visible, but rough benches and blackboards had transformed it. The room was lighted with smoking kerosene lamps, the windows were thick with dirt, and the establishment had a black look all around. The principal of the school, a smart, portly, wordy yellow person, with a moustache like John A. Logan's, delivered an energetic exposition of the story of the widow and her two mites. The duty exemplified, was, of course, that of giving—in worldly parlance, "whacking up;" and I have yet to attend a colored religious service where the contribution did not seem the most important feature. The congregation was sleepy and listless, until a hymn was given out, and then you heard it. Such voices, though all untrained, you would not find in one white congregation in twenty. A prayer by a young student, which seemed to me full of reverence, closed the exercises.

I had some talk with the principal, who, though a man of education, did not please me. He wore a dressing gown, and seemed bumptious. I had, however, another talk with a Mr. Marrs, a man of unmixed blood, a school teacher by profession, which was more satisfactory. I forgot about the dirt and the

dressing gown and the grotesqueness of the surroundings, in hearing how these poor people had shouldered a debt of thirteen thousand dollars in buying the building; how they had kept up the running expenses of the school without encroaching on what they had "laid down" for the payment of the property; how they had organized a band of "jubilee singers" to lift at the wheel, and so on. I could not learn that the white people had done much for the school, but Mr. Marrs acknowledged their help in other matters, and spoke especially of the efforts of Rev. Dr. Stuart Robinson, of Louisville, in behalf of the colored orphan asylum. Dr. Robinson I had always regarded as the high priest of Bourbonism, but, like many another good man, his practice is better than his theories.

The lamps were shining in the streets when I took my leave of Mr. Marrs in the dingy yard of the Normal and Theological Institute, and here I will take leave of Louisville.