

A WOMAN'S WARTIME JOURNAL

JANUARY 1, 1864.

A new year is ushered in, but peace comes not with it. Scarcely a family but has given some of its members to the bloody war that is still decimating our nation. Oh, that its ravages may soon be stopped! Will another year find us among carnage and bloodshed? Shall we be a nation or shall we be annihilated? . . . The prices of everything are very high. Corn seven dollars a bushel, calico ten dollars a yard, salt, sixty dollars a hundred, cotton from sixty to eighty cents a pound, everything in like ratio.

JULY 22, 1864.

[The day of the battle of Atlanta]

We have heard the loud booming of cannon all day... Suddenly I saw the servants running to the palings, and I walked to the door, when I saw such a stampede as I never witnessed before. The road was full of carriages, wagons, men on horseback, all riding at full speed. Judge Floyd stopped, saying: "Mrs. Burge, the Yankees are coming. They have got my family, and here is all I have upon earth. Hide your mules and carriages and whatever valuables you have."

Sadai [Mrs. Burge's nine-year-old daughter] said: "Oh, Mama, what shall we do?" "Never mind, Sadai," I said. "They won't hurt you, and you must help me hide my things." I went to the smoke-house, divided out the meat to the servants, and bid them hide it. Julia [a slave] took a jar of lard and buried it. In the meantime Sadai was taking down and picking up our clothes, which she was giving to the servants to hide in their cabins; silk dresses, challis, muslins, and merinos, linens, and hosiery, all found their way into the chests of the women and under their beds; china and silver were buried underground, and Sadai bid Mary [a slave] hide a bit of soap under some bricks, that mama might have a little left. Then she came to me with a part of a loaf of bread, asking if she had not better put it in her pocket, that we might have something to eat that night. And, verily, we had cause to fear that we might be homeless, for on every side we could see smoke arising from burning buildings and bridges... The woods are full of refugees.

SUNDAY, JULY 24, 1864.

No church. Our preacher's horse stolen by the Yankees. This raid is headed by Guerrard and is for the purpose of destroying our railroads. They cruelly shot a George Daniel and a Mr. Jones of Covington, destroyed a great deal of private property, and took many citizens prisoners.

JULY 29, 1864.

Sleepless nights. The report is that the Yankees have left Covington for Macon, headed by Stoneman, to release prisoners held there. They robbed every house on the road of its provisions, sometimes taking every piece of meat, blankets and wearing apparel, silver and arms of every description. They would take silk dresses and put them under their saddles, and many other things for which they had no use. Is this the way to make us love them and their Union? Let the poor people answer whom they have deprived of every mouthful of meat and of their livestock to make any! Our mills, too, they have burned, destroying an immense amount of property.

NOVEMBER 12, 1864.

Warped and put in dresses for the loom. Oh, this blockade gives us work to do for all hands!

NOVEMBER 17, 1864.

Have been uneasy all day. At night some of the neighbors who had been to town called. They said it was a large force moving very slowly. What shall I do ? Where go?

NOVEMBER 18, 1864.

Slept very little last night. Went out doors several times and could see large fires like burning buildings. Am I not in the hands of a merciful God who has promised to take care of the widow and orphan? Sent off two of my mules in the night. Mr. Ward and Frank [a slave] took them away and hid them. In the morning took a barrel of salt, which had cost me two hundred dollars, into one of the black women's gardens, put a paper over it, and then on the top of that leached ashes. Fixed it on a board as a leach tub, daubing it with ashes [the old-fashioned way of making lye for soap]. Had some few pieces of meat taken from my smoke-house carried to the Old Place [a distant part of the plantation] and hidden under some fodder. Bid them hide the wagon and gear and then go on plowing. Went to packing up mine and Sadai's clothes...

NOVEMBER 19, 1864.

Slept in my clothes last night, as I heard that the Yankees went to neighbor Montgomery's on Thursday night at one o'clock, searched his house, drank his wine, and took his money and valuables...Oh God, the time of trial has come! A man passed on his way to Covington. I halloed to him, asking him if he did not know the Yankees were coming...I walked to the gate. There they came filing up.

I hastened back to my frightened servants and told them that they had better hide, and then went back to the gate to claim protection and a guard. But like demons they rush in! My yards are full. To my smoke-house, my dairy, pantry, kitchen, and cellar, like famished wolves they come, breaking locks and whatever is in their way. The thousand pounds of meat in my smoke-house is gone in a twinkling, my flour, my meat, my lard, butter, eggs, pickles of various kinds - both in vinegar and brine - wine, jars, and jugs are all gone. My eighteen fat turkeys, my hens, chickens, and fowls, my young pigs, are shot down in my yard and hunted as if they were rebels themselves. Utterly powerless I ran out and appealed to the guard. "I cannot help you, Madam; it is orders."

As I stood there, from my lot I saw driven, first, old Dutch, my dear old buggy horse, who has carried my beloved husband so many miles, and who would so quietly wait at the block for him to mount and dismount, and who at last drew him to his grave; then came old Mary, my brood mare, who for years had been too old and stiff for work, with her three-year-old colt, my two-year-old mule, and her last little baby colt. There they go! There go my mules, my sheep, and, worse than all, my boys [slaves]!

Alas! little did I think while trying to save my house from plunder and fire that they were forcing my boys from home at the point of the bayonet...My poor boys! My poor boys ! What unknown trials are before you! How you have clung to your mistress and assisted her in every way you knew...

Sherman himself and a greater portion of his army passed my house that day. All day, as the sad moments rolled on, were they passing not only in front of my house, but from behind; they tore down my garden palings, made a road through my back-yard and lot field, driving

their stock and riding through, tearing down my fences and desolating my home - wantonly doing it when there was no necessity for it...

Such a day, if I live to the age of Methuselah, may God spare me from ever seeing again! As night drew its sable curtains around us, the heavens from every point were lit up with flames from burning buildings. Dinnerless and supperless as we were, it was nothing in comparison with the fear of being driven out homeless to the dreary woods. Nothing to eat!

NOVEMBER 20, 1864.

This is the blessed Sabbath, the day upon which He who came to bring peace and good will upon earth rose from His tomb and ascended to intercede for us poor fallen creatures. But how unlike this day to any that have preceded it in my once quiet home. I had watched all night, and the dawn found me watching for the moving of the soldiery that was encamped about us. Oh, how I dreaded those that were to pass, as I supposed they would straggle and complete the ruin that the others had commenced, for I had been repeatedly told that they would burn everything as they passed...

About ten o'clock they had all passed save one, who came in and wanted coffee made, which was done, and he, too, went on. A few minutes elapsed, and two couriers riding rapidly passed back. Then, presently, more soldiers came by, and this ended the passing of Sherman's army by my place, leaving me poorer by thirty thousand dollars than I was yesterday morning. And a much stronger Rebel!

NOVEMBER 22, 1864.

After breakfast this morning I went over to my grave-yard to see what had befallen that. To my joy, I found it had not been disturbed. As I stood by my dead, I felt rejoiced that they were at rest. Never have I felt so perfectly reconciled to the death of my husband as I do to-day, while looking upon the ruin of his lifelong labor. How it would have grieved him to see such destruction! Yes, theirs is the lot to be envied. At rest, rest from care, rest from heartaches, from trouble. . . .

DECEMBER 23, 1864.

...Nothing new! It is confidently believed that Savannah has been evacuated. I hear nothing from my boys. Poor fellows, how I miss them!

DECEMBER 24, 1864.

This has usually been a very busy day with me, preparing for Christmas not only for my own tables, but for gifts for my servants. Now how changed! No confectionery, cakes, or pies can I have. We are all sad; no loud, jovial laugh from our boys is heard. Christmas Eve, which has ever been gaily celebrated here, which has witnessed the popping of fire-crackers [the Southern custom of celebrating Christmas with fireworks] and the hanging up of stockings, is an occasion now of sadness and gloom. I have nothing even to put in Sadai's stocking, which hangs so invitingly for Santa Claus. How disappointed she will be in the morning, though I have explained to her why he cannot come. Poor children! Why must the innocent suffer with the guilty?

DECEMBER 25, 1864.

Sadai jumped out of bed very early this morning to feel in her stocking. She could not believe but that there would be something in it. Finding nothing, she crept back into bed, pulled the cover over her face, and I soon heard her sobbing. The little negroes all came in: "Christmas gift, mist'ess! Christmas gift, mist'ess!" I pulled the cover over my face and was soon mingling my tears with Sadai's.

APRIL 29, 1865.

Boys plowing in old house field. We are needing rain. Everything looks pleasant, but the state of our country is very gloomy. General Lee has surrendered to the victorious Grant. Well, if it will only hasten the conclusion of this war, I am satisfied. There has been something very strange in the whole affair to me, and I can attribute it to nothing but the hand of Providence working out some problem that has not yet been revealed to us poor, erring mortals. At the beginning of the struggle the minds of men, their wills, their self-control, seemed to be all taken from them in a passionate antagonism to the coming-in President, Abraham Lincoln.

Our leaders, to whom the people looked for wisdom, led us into this, perhaps the greatest error of the age. "We will not have this man to rule over us!" was their cry. For years it has been stirring in the hearts of Southern politicians that the North was enriched and built up by Southern labor and wealth. Men's pockets were always appealed to and appealed to so constantly that an antagonism was excited which it has been impossible to allay. They did not believe that the North would fight. Said Robert Toombs: "I will drink every drop of blood they will shed." Oh, blinded men! Rivers deep and strong have been shed, and where are we now? - a ruined, subjugated people! What will be our future? is the question which now rests heavily upon the hearts of all.

This has been a month never to be forgotten. Two armies have surrendered. The President of the United States has been assassinated, Richmond evacuated, and Davis, President of the Confederacy, put to grief, to flight. The old flag has been raised again upon Sumter and an armistice accepted.

Full Excerpts at: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/burge/lunt.html>