

Bravery of Colored Troops. Colored Soldiers and Sailors Vindicated.

[From the Newark Daily Journal.]

However we may differ on the question of negro suffrage (I am in favor of the Fifteenth Amendment,) I feel certain you will not permit your widely circulating paper to be the medium, intentionally, of injustice to officers and soldiers who fought for the perpetuity of the Republic in the late war, whether those officers and soldiers were white or black men.

I charge Messrs. Abbett and Valentine, members of the New Jersey House of Assembly—I trust not intentionally, but rather ignorantly and accidentally, with having done great injustice to a very large body of colored men, amounting to nearly 200,000, who served faithfully, bravely and well in the Union Army and Navy during that war. I make this allegation, less in anger than in sorrow, that two gentlemen at this day, occupying such honorable official positions, deemed it necessary or pertinent, in the late debate in the New Jersey Legislature on the Fifteenth Amendment, to appeal to prejudice against simply the accident of color or skin, and endeavored to fortify that prejudice in their own minds and the minds of their followers by such wholly untenable positions as the following.

I quote from the report of Speaker Abbett's remarks in your issue of February 2, 1870. He says: "The fact is, there was no evidence of the bravery or fighting of the colored troops. They were generally confined to garrisons. They did not show bravely in a single instance."

It was my good fortune on many occasions during my service in the late war, from its commencement to its close at Appomattox Court House, to have certainly a better opportunity of judging on the question thus so carelessly and negatively answered by Messrs. Abbett and Valentine (they wish being probably father to the thought, in their cases) than either of those gentlemen, and I respectfully offer my positive testimony of experience with colored soldiers and sailors, against both of them; and unhesitatingly say that they have done the colored officers, soldiers and sailors who wore the blue in the United States Army and Navy great injustice.

I confidently assert as a fact that on many occasions on ship and shore, and on many battlefields, black men proved themselves most courageous and loyal, and it is left to those who were not in the army or navy to stultify themselves; for no true soldier or sailor can be found to make such charges as those gentlemen uttered in their late speeches.

I incur the risk of being laughed at by my fellow soldiers for wasting time in refuting such charges, and I should not ask of you, Mr. Editor, this favor, the position of Messrs. Abbett and Valentine as representative men of a party which claims to occupy the Democratic position upon all political questions. These gentlemen should with better judgment and fairness accept the changed state of affairs incident to the defeat of the rebellion.

The remarks of Mr. Valentine are even more unreasonable than those of his colleague, Mr. Abbett. He says "there was not a single regiment that could find a colored commander, and where is the colored man that has made his mark or distinguished himself in the late rebellion?"

Cases rapidly occur to my mind too numerous to mention, and the incidents would make my communication too long. I will, however, recall the black

man known as Captain Small, in Charleston harbor, who brought away from the rebels a steamer of which he had control, he having been intelligent enough to be therewith entrusted by the Southerners. This steamer he remained in charge of, and did most excellent service for the Union cause to the end of the war, respected by all men.

At the capture of Fort Pillow the Union Flag was not captured or found by the soldiers, but was concealed by a negro soldier and taken from his body when wounded, in the hospital. That this incident was not noticed more at the time is due to a prejudice which for a long time too much prevailed among white troops, officers and men, of the Union army.

Permit me in all good feeling to enlighten both these gentlemen a little on the subject of prejudice by a brief statement of facts which are historical, showing very easily why "there was not a single regiment that could find a colored commander." Perhaps by seeing the unjust length to which prejudice carried even Union officers high in command, which they will no doubt condemn; they will take the note out of their own eye.

Soon after the rebellion broke out there was organized in New Orleans a colored battalion, and if these gentlemen will take the trouble to look in files of New Orleans papers of 1861 they will see a glowing account of a military review of all the rebel forces in that city by General Lovell, and among them is mentioned, with high commendation, this body of colored officers and men.

The citizens of New Orleans had not forgotten the services of colored men on the 8th of January, 1815, under Old Hickory. Gen. Jackson thanked them, in general orders, after his victory.

When General B. F. Butler entered New Orleans in 1862 Lovell and his white troops decamped. Not so the black battalion. Butler, finding them and all colored men willing and anxious to fight for the Union and freedom, organized three regiments of black troops each one of them having some negro officers therein. These regiments were named the First, Second and Third Louisiana Native Guards. There were negro captains and lieutenants in each—a fair proportion; and the Second regiment had for its Major, Dumas, a negro, the same gentleman—I use this last word with full knowledge of its significance here, knowing, as I do, Major Dumas well, and respect him as a gallant soldier, an educated, refined gentleman. President Grant did himself the credit to nominate as U. S. Minister to Liberia.

Gen. Butler was fully up to the emergency of that day, and knew better than most men how to deal with the enemy. I know of what I write, for I served nearly two years in Louisiana while that department was commanded by N. P. Banks, who signalized his facility for adopting Southern views and prejudices—and in this will no doubt receive the hearty approval of Messrs. A. and V. and all of their way of thinking—by advising the negro officers to resign; and had he dared, I think he would have disbanded the black regiments. His advice was adopted to some extent, but thanks to Colonels Stafford and Nelson, of the first and Third, not altogether; for, at the long siege of Port Hudson (49 days), where these two colored regiments did splendid fighting, negro officers, as well as soldiers, gained, justly, great credit.

Colonel Cullum, commanding a Mississippi regiment and stationed all through the siege at that position of the breast works opposite these negro regiments, in answer to my question

to him when paroling him and his regiment. "What he thought of negro troops?" he answered me: "We soon learned to respect them as soldiers."

I was of a long time Assistant Adjutant General to that fine body of negro troops, the Corps d'Afrique, and unhesitatingly say they were good soldiers, and the negro officers equal in all respects to the average standard of the white officers.

I can recall many of them by name, viz: Major Dumas and Captain Pinchback, of the second regiment; Captains A. Callioux [who was killed May 27th, 1863, at the first assault on Port Hudson, while bravely leading his men to an attack which reflected no credit on Gen. Banks], James Lewis, Follin, James H. Ingraham, L. A. Snear, Benjeun; Lieutenants Moss, Orillion and others. The last named was captured by the rebels at Jackson, Louisiana, in a fair fight between a body of colored troops and rebels, and hanged instead of being treated as a prisoner of war. Banks, unlike Butler, was too lily-livered to protect his colored troops, or the officers commanding them, from rebel outrages when prisoners of war. I speak rather of moral than physical courage in N. P. B.

I have no timidity in saying, from long and intimate acquaintance and observation of this fine, intelligent and brave body of colored officers that there was material there, of every essential quality, from which to select regimental commanders, and but for that accursed prejudice which too much prevailed then, colored regiments during the war would have been commanded by colored officers.

I recall with great pleasure and satisfaction the example which I constantly gave to my fellow white officers during my tour of duty as A. A. G. to the Corps d'Afrique, of making no invidious distinction between officers or men on account of caste or color. I made the first call for two colored clerks in my office that was made during the war, and had it easily answered from the First Louisiana Native Guard regiment in the persons of two privates, who proved in every respect satisfactory. I recall with pleasure and pride, the fact, that on the 25th day of December, 1863, at Port Hudson, where there was much prejudice and feeling on the part of the majority of the white officers against the few colored officers yet remaining attached to colored regiments, I entertained at my quarters at a Christmas dinner all the colored officers, and 'tis but even and exact justice to them to say that in all the amenities of social life I could distinguish no difference between these, my colored guests, and white officers of the same or even higher grade, who visited my house from time to time.

To my intense disgust the prejudice against "nigger officers," as they were vulgarly called, by whites not entitled to claim any superiority as officers or gentlemen over these colored officers, ultimately induced the resignation of the latter, to the great regret of many who dared to speak of a man as they found him, irrespective of the accident of color.

The mills of the gods grind on, though slowly. Revolutions seldom go backwards. What poetic justice! Senator Revel, a negro, takes his seat in the United States Senate from Mississippi (and Saulsbury does not resign or object,) and more loyally fills it than did Jeff. Davis.

If that aristocratic institution—West Point—survives a hard shock it received during the war, when it graduates took such precedence without always meriting it, only boasting their A B C theoretical military superiority over

better fighters from civil life. . . . if, I say, West Point remains, Mr. Valentine is young enough to see colored cadets under the same advantages given to white cadets, providing their equals in all points which go to make a soldier.

Port Hudson, Olustec, Fort Wagner, Fort Pillow, Petersburg, Appomattox Court House and many other battle fields can never be truthfully painted by pencil or pen without fully illustrating the presence, courage and loyalty of black men during the war; and on the sea I can easily recall the bombardment and capture of the forts at Hatteras Inlet, August 28th, and 29th, 1861. I then and there had the honor of serving as secretary to Flag Officer Stringham. Besides the fact that on every ship then engaged there were some black men [and in a sea fight there is no such powder boy to command, that does not share the danger and should have proportionate commendations,] on the flag ship Minnesota. . . . I speak what I witnessed myself. . . under the immediate eye of that brave and patriotic officer, Admiral Stringham, one gun on her spar deck, in the battery commanded by Master's Mate Cusbing, was manned and worked entirely by contrabands, who, less than two months before, were Virginia slaves; and viewing often during those two days bombardment every portion of that ship's decks, spar and berth, and seeing all the crew in battle, I do not hesitate to give my testimony that the contrabands gun was as gallantly fought as any. I will remember the words of commendation which Admiral S. gave to them.

I hope, Mr. Editor, Messrs. Abbett and Valentine, and others, in future in arguing constitutional or other questions will not deem it pertinent to their argument to do injustice to true manhood under whatever color it may present itself. I assure them in all kindness that the positions they took in the heat of debate against the late negro soldiers can not for a moment be sustained against the contrary which any true history of the late war will give.

"Let justice prevail though the Heavens fall."

GEORGE A. HALSTER.
NEWARK, Feb. 5, 1870.