

From *The Mirror*

(The punctuation and spelling are as they appeared in the original document.)

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THE DESOLATION OF VIRGINIA

FAUQUIER COUNTY, VA. JUNE 17, 1865

A TRIP ON HORSEBACK

through the counties Orange, Culpeper and Fauquier, with a distinguished cavalry officer as my companion, has revealed to me the fact, although terribly scarred and desolate by the movements of large armies backward and forwards for four years of unparalleled warfare, the lands generally have been improved by such a season of rest from cultivation, and now as the eye takes in from some spur of the mountains the broad sea of grass waving, rippling, and undulating over the fertile plains as far as sight can reach, the feeling that we are once more in the land of promise comes back upon us, opening a wide and well marked, though somewhat laborious pathway to that wealth, refinement and wholesome hospitality which have ever been the distinguishing features of this beautiful portion of the Old Dominion.

With the exception of small enclosures of one or two acres, here and there, there is scarcely a fence worthy the name from the Rapidan to Bull Run; and the fields, one the pride of the farmers' hearts and shut in by "ten rails and a rider," are now broad commons with old landmarks obliterated, ditches filled up, quarters, corn-houses and barns in ruins, while the lone and blackened chimneys of the once happy homestead stands like some grim old sentries on guard until the last.

The once majestic forests of oak, hickory, chestnut and pine along the line of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad have disappeared and given place to the rude huts and cabins improvised by the armies of Lee and Meade, and instead of whortleberries, chinquapins and chestnuts, one kicks up old canteens, worn out knapsacks, odd shoes, bread boxes, suggestive of the inevitable "hard tack," bayonet scabbards, with here and there a stand of grape, a ten-pounder Parrott shell, and everywhere almost the hollow base "little Minies," whose whistling tone are so familiar to us all.

The village of Raccoonford is a village no longer. Stevensburg is Stevensburg only on the military maps. Brandy Station is a brandy smash, and all to pieces at that, and all along the route, one sees nothing where man's agency is concerned but utter desolation, while Providence, with lavish hand, has benignly clothed the fields in waving green. The air is soft and balmy, the streams slide smoothly on, regardless of the ruin around, and all earth and Heaven proclaim more forcibly than ever, the hand that made us is divine

THE PEOPLE are returning to their once happy homes, after such hardships a refugee only can know, and are patching up any outbuildings at hand for a temporary residence, until the "great home" can be rebuilt and former comforts collected around them—The negroes are very quiet and very earnest in their desire to earn something to live upon, and in Orange county they can be hired for their food and quarters, but this does not pertain in Culpeper and Fauquier, where labor is scarce and in demand, as nearly every negro—man, woman and child—left home early in the war, with the hope of an improved condition in the crowded streets of Alexandria and Washington. The supply, however, will be equal, and perhaps more than equal, to the demand when the farmers are once more prepared to cultivate their lands, but just now there is a feeling of oppressive uncertainty hanging over every man's head, and until courts are established, magistrates, sheriffs, surveyors, commissioners, etc., are appointed, this feeling will prevail, and tend materially to retard the development of the agricultural resources of the country, and of that desire to do their duty as good and loyal citizens, which is the sincere and hearty wish of nine-tenths of the people of Virginia, not that the terrible struggle is over.