

# THE DUTCH

Office of Frank Leslie's Publications,  
527 Pearl St., near Broadway,  
New York, *1864*

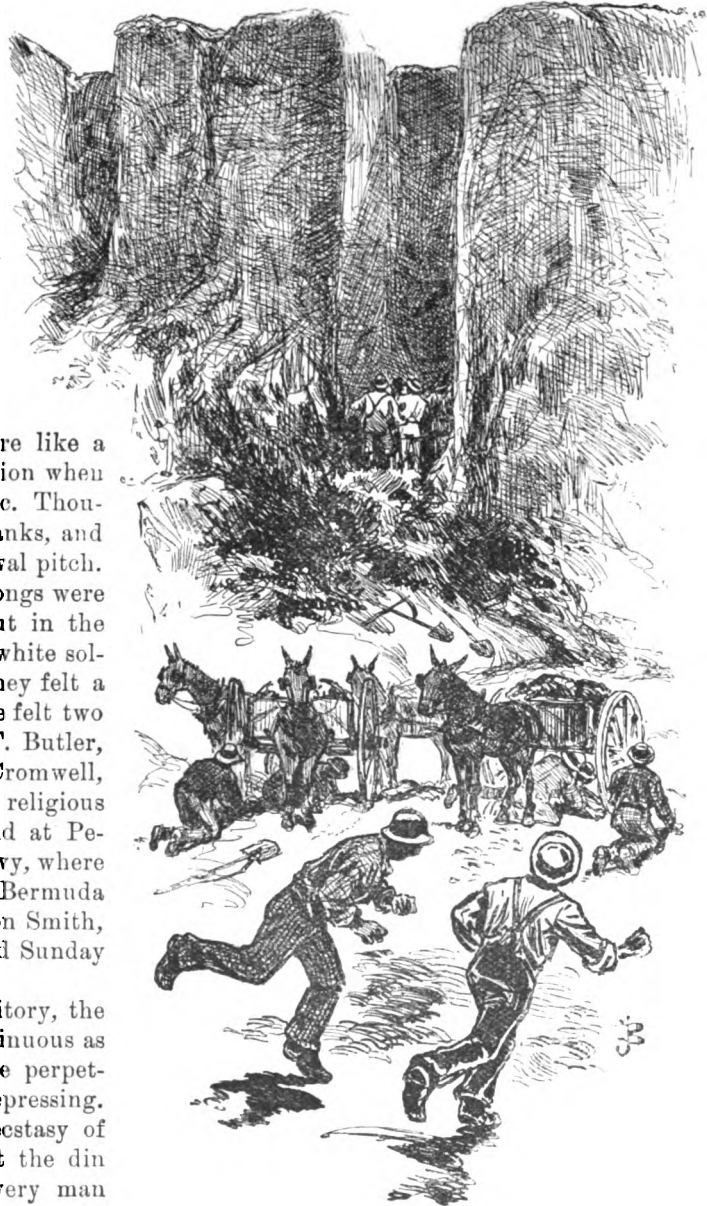


*Dear Sir*  
I understand of drafts  
continuing from your labors  
you can do as you  
please about your own  
business.

Can't you send some  
instance of Dutch paper  
its position - what they  
intend to accomplish  
by making the canal  
the Rebel get to work  
on it under their own feet  
etc

*Yours truly*  
*Wm. Leslie*

BY JOSEPH BECKER, "SPECIAL FOR LESLIE'S."



THE Army of the James seemed more like a camp meeting than a military organization when contrasted with the Army of the Potomac. Thousands of colored troops were in the ranks, and they were all keyed up to a high revival pitch. They were forever singing, and their songs were all of a devotional character, wailed out in the melancholy African way. Many of the white soldiers were from New England, and they felt a little as Cromwell's Ironsides might have felt two centuries before. General Benjamin F. Butler, their commander, was something of a Cromwell, and the combination of effects was a religious fervor never seen in the Wilderness and at Petersburg. This fervor extended to the navy, where on the monitor fleet in the river at Bermuda Hundred, under Commodore Melancthon Smith, Sunday services were the rigid rule, and Sunday school was an established feature.

Scattered as it was over miles of territory, the revival or camp-meeting effect was continuous as one journeyed through the camps. The perpetual crooning of the negro troops was depressing. They sang all the time in a sort of ecstasy of freedom. When rations were served out the din of the revival became deafening. Every man



ON THE WAY TO THE CANAL—FLIGHT OF "COPIOUS" HEATH.

sang or hummed some rude hymn. Each sang what he liked, though sometimes the choruses kept together, while pork and hard tack were shoveled out by the quartermaster's assistants.

The Army of the Potomac fought, bled and died with little musical accompaniment beyond the roar of battle, and in moments of repose played poker and drank whisky like gentlemen who were certain only of to-day and who had quit worrying about to-morrow. Grant and his

glance from the commander in chief of the Army of the James.

My appearance indicated that I was either an artist or a reporter. General Butler hated both, and turned his protuberant eye upon me with a baleful glare that quite overcame me. I had successfully broken the ice surrounding Grant, Meade, Warren and Hancock, but this look dispelled any desire to become acquainted with Butler. I had my general pass, and none

corps commanders were not men to stir up emotions, while Butler was essentially theatrical.

I saw General Butler but once. He was riding at the head of his staff, and their appearance jostled the impression into my mind that they were the head of a circus parade starting out to give a street full of villagers a broad hint as to the merit of the show. On this occasion I managed to get pretty close to the head of the procession, and thereby earned a



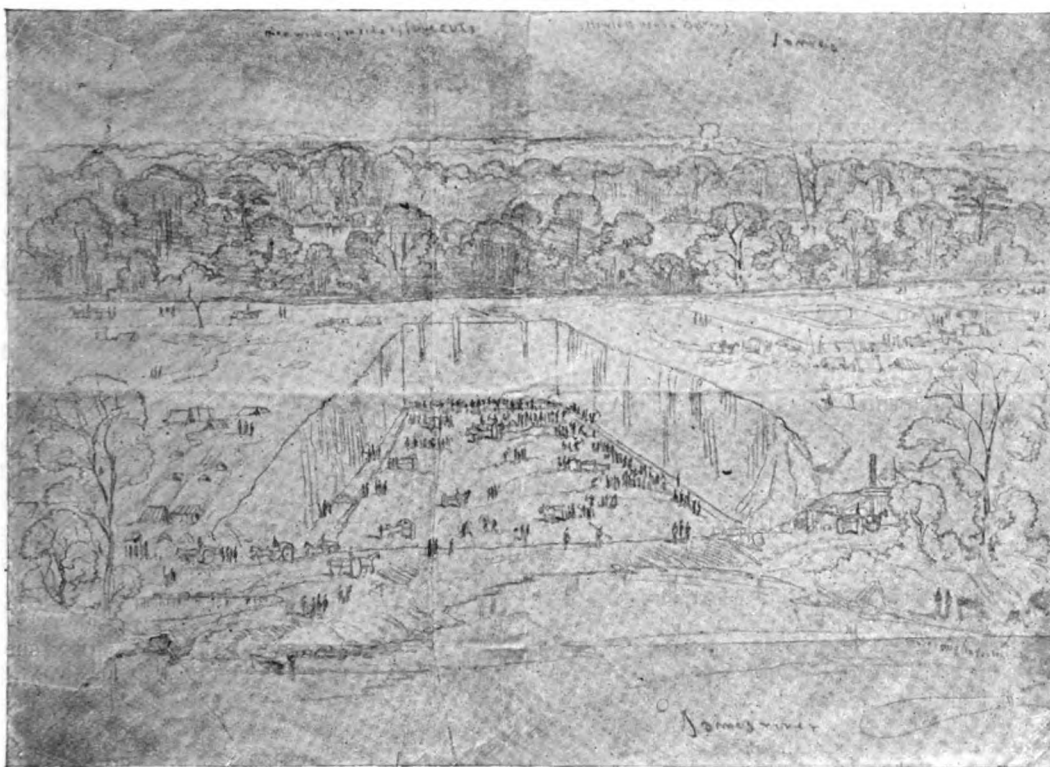
A PLUNGE INTO A "GOPHER HOLE."

was required to visit the operations at the Dutch Gap. Butler did not care to have them written up or sketched, but the dangers of the trip had deterred other artists from visiting the works, and no special pains were taken to keep civilians away. He was much displeased when my pictures came out in *Leslie's*, but I was out of his jurisdiction by that time.

The army lay in straggling lines from City Point to Burmuda Hundred, and the outposts beyond the latter were the nearest the Union troops had yet come to Richmond. Butler was eagerly pushing out to be the first to reach the capital

Butler added to the picturesque confusion of a mongrel town twenty miles long.

I found loitering about Butler's headquarters a newspaper correspondent named Heath, from Cincinnati, who wanted to visit the Dutch Gap, but who lacked the enterprise to go alone. We planned an expedition. He had been a remarkably skillful steel engraver, and one of his feats was to write a name on a visiting card with a silver-pointed pencil in characters so fine as to be barely visible to the naked eye, but which came out in perfect symmetry under a microscope. His experience as a newspaper writer had been limited,



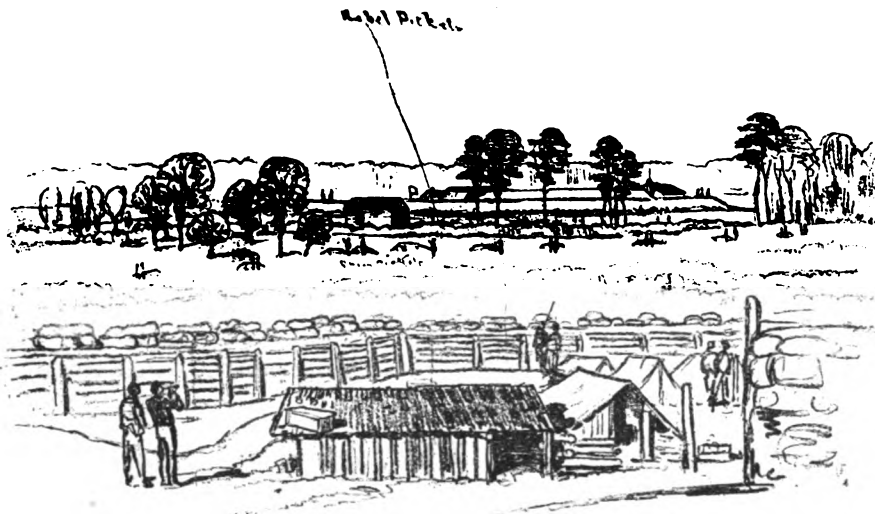
GENERAL VIEW OF THE DUTCH GAP CANAL.—FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL SKETCH.

of the Confederacy, and was certainly moving in a masterly way toward his objective point, while the Army of the Potomac was battering itself to pieces before the breastworks at Petersburg. He held also the base of supplies for the Army of the Potomac, and this gave the banks of the James a strong commercial aspect, as well as affording room for an odd background of the war.

Many of the civilians attached to the quartermaster's department had their wives with them; some of them, whole families. The officers also, forward movements being slow and not often in heavy force, were visited by home folks, while the motley crowd of "contrabands" who flocked to

and among his companions, all of whom were treated with scant courtesy at this time, Butler being under severe newspaper criticism, he excited much amusement from his habit of taking notes. He carried a pocketful of brown-paper sheets, jammed into a wad, which was pulled out and scribbled upon at every chance afforded. This gave him the name of "Copious" Heath among his fellows.

There was but one way to reach the canal, and that was to walk. The walking was not very good, and as the path lay along the river, stray shots from distant batteries in the outer line of Richmond's defenses dropped now and then in a



LOOKING TOWARD THE REBEL LINES FROM FORT HARRISON.  
FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL SKETCH.

very careless manner along the way. As we drew near the Gap this fire became more frequent. The rebels knew what was going on, but were much in the dark as to its progress, as this paragraph from the *Richmond Dispatch*, which I find pinned to the back of my old sketch, where it has been for thirty years, will show, while at the same time telling something about the canal under consideration :

"This work, while in progress, and all concerning it, cannot fail to be of interest. From persons well acquainted with the geography of Dutch Gap, through which the canal is being cut, we have learned some facts which will enable the reader to understand the character and the magnitude of the work Butler has undertaken. The isthmus known as Dutch Gap, which connects 'Farrar's Island' with the mainland, or north bank of the river, is exactly two hundred yards across, being eighty feet high on the western side, and sloping down to the river on the east. The channel of the river runs against the west side, striking it obliquely. Just off the shore on this point the water is from twelve to fifteen feet deep. The channel being on this side will greatly aid Butler, should he ever complete his canal, as, had it been in the middle or on the opposite side of the river, he would have been obliged to construct a huge breakwater to turn the stream into the canal. We learn he is cutting diagonally through the isthmus, beginning a hundred yards below its narrowest point, and designing to come out at the point where the channel strikes the bank. This will give his canal, if ever finished, a length of about three hundred yards. As we have stated on a previous occasion, we have reason to believe that the canal proper has not been begun, the

cut to the water's edge, which is a necessary preliminary, having yet been not more than two-thirds completed."

This uncertainty did not prevent the rebel batterymen from accurately locating the canal and making the neighborhood an unhealthy one to live in. When we struck "Trent Reach," on the river, we were close to a battery. Some rifle shots whistled. We had been very gay, and not caring to appear

frightened, took refuge in the theory that somebody was hunting for game. It did not take long to find out that we were the game. When this fact had settled itself into Heath's mind he bolted for the rear, his "copious" notes falling in a shower behind him. I never laid eyes upon him again.

Thus deserted, I went on alone. Crossing the river to the narrow neck through which years before a speculative German had endeavored to dig a canal, but done nothing more than to give it a name, I saw in the side of the bank numerous little burrows, like the holes of bank swallows, greatly enlarged. I also saw a puff of smoke and heard a distant scream. Experience at Petersburg had taught me to know when a shell was coming. I dived into the first of these miniature



FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL SKETCH.

bombproofs, upsetting in my headlong plunge a white-haired old darky who had been hunched up on a stool mending his tattered coat. The shell fell in the canal, and the squealing of a mule told that it had taken effect.

We became sociable. It was five minutes to eleven o'clock. The darky said the firing came from Howlett's Battery, and that a shot fell every seven or eight minutes, except at noon, when the gunners stopped to eat their lunch of corn pone and boot-leg coffee. I decided to wait until the Confederate gentlemen paused for this repast, and my black host regaled me with a graphic story of his domestic woes. He had "lived," as the slaves

"Dat's jist w'at I did," says he."

He had a pair of new shoes big enough for a mule, and was as proud as if he wore a cape overcoat.

Noon came, and the shells quit screaming. I went into the cut and made the first sketch of the canal. Around the sides niches had been cut, into which the men ran for refuge when the cry of the lookout, "Holes!" told them a shell was coming, and sent them scurrying. Few men were hurt, but mules, which were harder to replace, often suffered.

Buttressed as they were by the fortress at Drury's Bluff, which had successfully repelled a



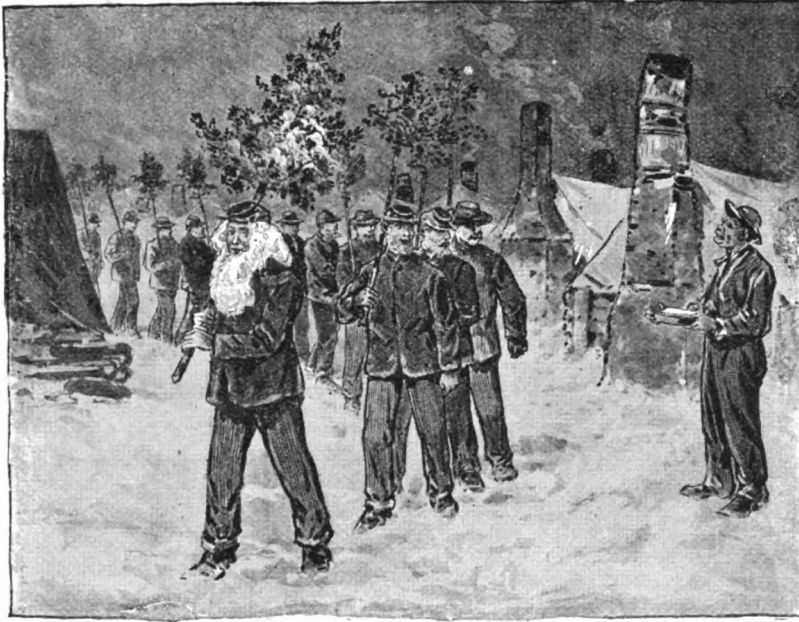
FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL SKETCH.

always put it, on an estate between Petersburg and Richmond, until the Yankees got close enough to make it worth while to run away. His "darter" had married a likely young colored man, and things went along happily until an enchantress came from Richmond and lured him away. He had hunted up his recreant son-in-law and reviled him for his conduct, only to get an answer that had elements of merit in it.

"Look a-heah," said the son-in-law. "Ef you was a-standin' under an apple tree, an' dere shu'd fa' down a ole rotten apple, and den dere should fa' down a nice ripe apple, which w'ud you take?"

"De nice ripe apple," says I, like an ole fool.

fierce attack, and confident in the strength of their light gunboats against the clumsy monitors that could with difficulty be propelled around "Pull-and-be-damned Point," as the river men called it, the rebels showed little awe for the expected advance. When on Christmas Day, long after I had gone, the canal was completed, the cowardice of the naval officer who had temporarily replaced Melancthon Smith caused the fleet to retreat, instead of advancing up the river, and the canal was destined never to serve the purpose for which it had been cut at so great an expenditure of energy, skill and human life. But now it has become the main channel of the James,



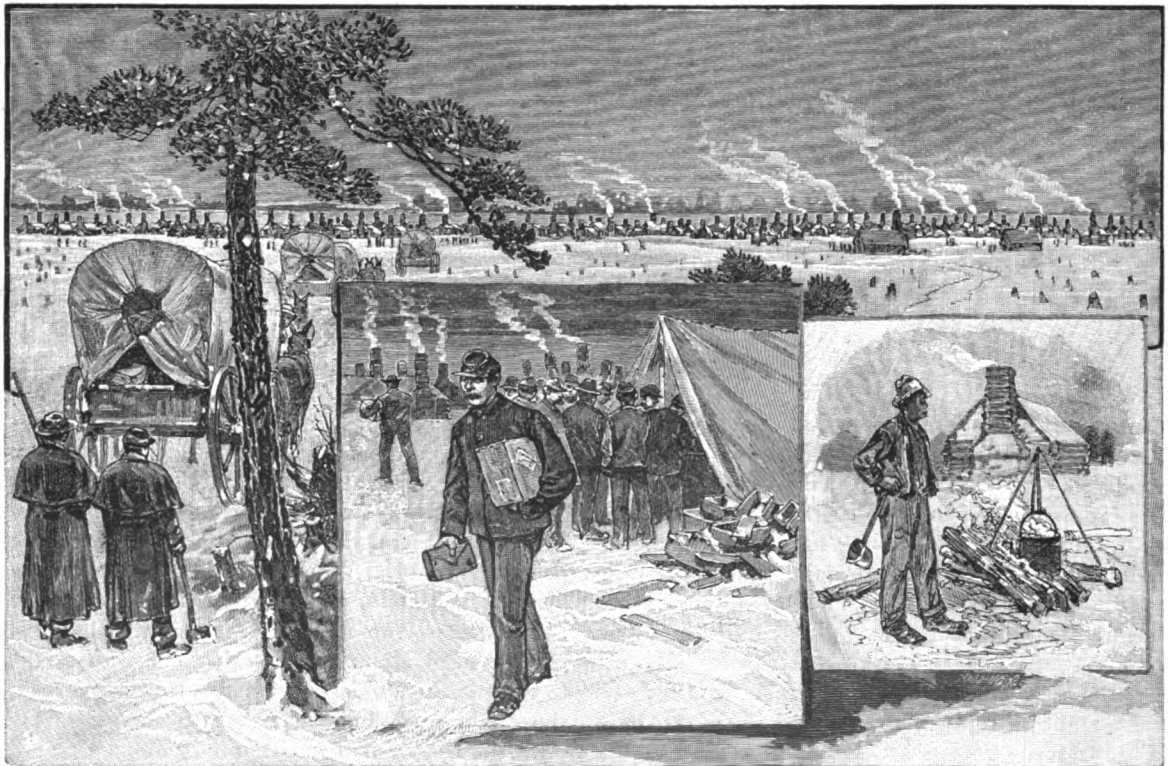
A CHRISTMAS EVE PROCESSION.

sault, a very strong work, Fort Harrison, the mainstay of the outer line on the north bank of the James, behind Chaffee's Bluff. This was the high-water mark of the advance of the Army of the James upon Richmond under General Butler. Drury's Bluff was across the river from Chaffee's, and since the capture of Fort Harrison the Confederates had thrown up a new work not more than 800 yards distant. Here the lines came nearer together than at Fort Damnation and Fort Hell at Petersburg. I walked through the woods from the Gap to Fort Harrison in order to sketch the

through which the vessels reach Richmond from the sea.

Not long before my visit to the canal General E. O. C. Ord had captured, after a gallant as-

closest point to Richmond reached by the advance, and during my stay saw again, with much amusement, the friendly interchange of wares by the outlying pickets, who were but a few yards from



WINTER CAMP.

GOOD CHEER FROM THE NORTH.

CAMP COOK.

each other and had become extremely friendly. They forgot all about the war in their sociability and commercial undertakings, and traded and gossiped like the residents of a country town, quite undisturbed by the fact that at any moment they might be ordered to murder each other. This proximity made heavy-gun work highly exciting. Fort Harrison was supplied with a prodigious bombproof in which a regiment could take refuge, and it had plenty of occupants when the barking began.

Affairs took on a passive turn. Butler had been sent to New York to cope with a rumored conspiracy, and I went back to the Army of the Potomac at Petersburg.

The Indian summer had passed rapidly, and we were upon the edge of winter. It became evident that Petersburg would not surrender before the resources behind it were cut off or exhausted, and the army fell into gloom over the prospect of enduring another Virginia winter in the trenches around Fort Hell. The earthworks had crept up nearer and nearer to those of the Confederacy—so near that zigzag covered ways and counterscarps had to be constructed through which to reach the outer battlements. I had an unpleasant adventure in making my first trip to Fort Hell after my return. The covered way was simply a wall of dirt that had a wide break in it where a stretch of water intervened. This water was little more than ankle deep, but it was within range of the riflemen in the pits about Petersburg. They did not deliberately pick off single soldiers who ran this gantlet, but anything like a general movement received prompt attention. My soldier friend who undertook to guide me to the fort advised that I neither walk nor run, but to move briskly.

The distance from the zigzag of the covered way to the fort was about that of a city block. I started to obey instructions, when the "ping" of a bullet stimulated me into a double-quick, and I splashed pellmell through the water with the balls whistling by me until I came safe but breathless into the shelter of the works, where a column of colored troops smiled broadly at my agility. Everybody said that the Johnny Rebs didn't mean anything harsh by this shooting. It was done simply for the fun of seeing a "Yank" run and of relieving the *ennui* of the siege. Despite this, I dreaded the return trip, which was made under similar conditions, except that one poor fellow who went on ahead fell just on the brink of safety with a bullet in his back.

Thanksgiving time came near, with very little to be thankful for. It grew cold. The work of building a winter camp went on. The second-growth pine trees were hewed down by the thousand and cut into logs, out of which villages of little huts, well banked up with earth, were built,



RELEASED UNION PRISONERS—NEWS FROM THE NORTH.



THE LETTER CARRIER IN CAMP.

and roofed with canvas and boughs. They were of varying sizes, but usually not more than four men lived together, and in many cases but two. There were fifteen miles of these soldier towns. It was a rude existence, more comfortable, of course, than in the field, but monotonous and depressing, especially as the holidays drew near.

But a few days before Thanksgiving came news of prodigious cheer. The steamer *Kensington* had arrived at City Point from the North, laden to the guards with Thanksgiving supplies, the product of an outpouring from the people; tons of turkeys and chickens, cooked and uncooked, armies of mince pies and bushels upon bushels of red-checked Northern apples! The quartermaster's department pushed these supplies forward from City Point. I lodged with the commissary of the Fifth Corps and had a chance to watch the disposition of these good things, as well as to share in the distribution. The officers were apt to get the best because they came first and were better posted, but the passing around was general, and the whole corps had a taste of turkey and pie, with apples to spare. The apples appealed most strongly to the boys. Regiments of them

were country lads lured away to the war in a fever of patriotism, urged on by patriotic sweethearts. Few had any longing for military glory, and many were beginning to wonder what they were fighting for. The apples brought up memories of the old orchards on Northern hillsides, and with them a yearning for home.

But more than the offerings were the letters that came with them. Tucked under a turkey's wing would be a note to the soldier who should receive it. Hundreds of these fell into the hands of the commissary, and were distributed. The war had not refined and improved the soldiers, but nothing could have done more to bring them back to themselves than these letters. They were from old women, young girls, and many from little children, written with a sincerity and pathos that could be born only of so great a national struggle. No literature of patriotism could

equal them. Simple, direct, but unutterably touching, they formed the strongest force for heart strengthening that could have been devised. There were many, too, blotted with tears, from some who had sent husbands and sweethearts away never to come back again!

By Christmas time the roads had become too heavy for the artillery and all operations were at a standstill. The army tried hard to enjoy Christmas. Many boxes came down from the North filled with cooked fowl and other delicacies, and often containing a big plum pudding soaked in rum. Lucky was the mess thus favored! It was hard to keep up one's spirits at such a time. I was not a soldier, and was free to go and come as I liked, but fell into the spirit of my surroundings. On Christmas Eve the troopers formed processions, with a Santa Claus, wigged and bewhiskered with cotton, at the head, and bearing little pine trees, paraded in single file along the company streets, hoarsely singing Christmas carols as well as they could remember them, and drifting off to "John Brown's Body" when everything else gave out.

Thus life lagged along. The bands were kept

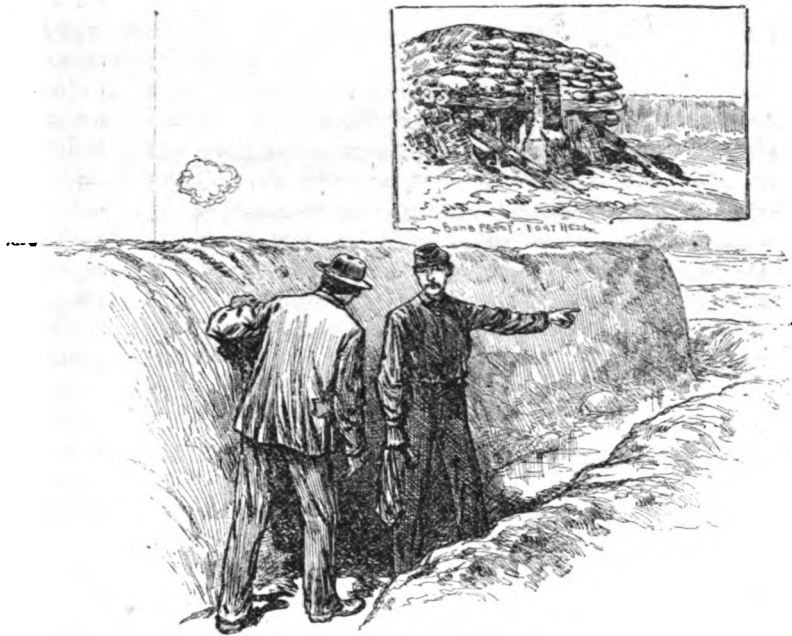


playing, but nobody danced except the officers and the negroes. The men drooped. There was no cheer in the band's playing. Everything was home music and produced nostalgia. In the evening the melody sounded more like the sighing of the wind through a pine forest, tempered as it was by other sounds, than like a stimulant, and made me lonesome.

In Petersburg the Confederates had no other Christmas or Thanksgiving fare than corn bread and bacon. The poultry in the Confederacy had been eaten up a good while before. We had at least enough to eat. They were hungry and despairing—and brave!

Military activities were on in the South, with Wilmington, N. C., as a basis. Butler had failed to take Fort Fisher, and another expedition was under way. I made haste to join it. The amount of illustrative material here provided must carry my adventures over to another article. But one phase of the war, and my first glimpse of it, can be told now. It was the prison side—the gaunt

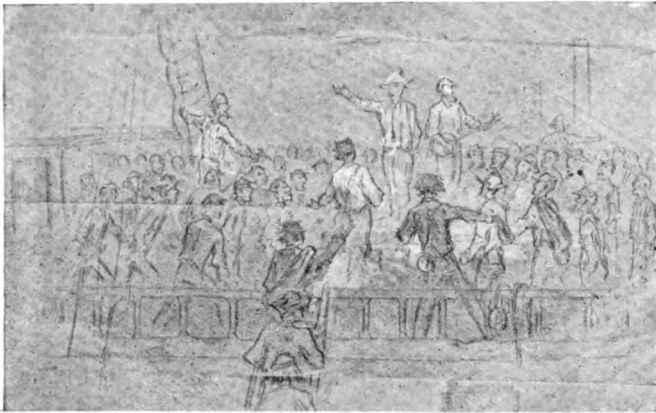
memory of which can never be effaced. I was at Wilmington when a great detachment of men were brought down from the pen at Salisbury, packed into box cars, for exchange, representations to the President having turned Stanton's determination not to trade able-bodied Confederates off for human skeletons. I had, of course, heard stories of the privations of the prisoners of war,



COVERED WAY LEADING TO "FORT HELL."



"EAT NO CAKES."



RELEASED UNION PRISONERS SINGING PATRIOTIC SONGS.  
FAC-SIMILE OF ORIGINAL SKETCH.

but was not prepared for the sight that met my eyes. The men were lodged in cotton warehouses, just off the main street, and were like babies. The few with a little strength feebly tried to care for their companions, but were useful mainly to lean against. A hogshead of weak rum punch well warmed was placed in a handy spot, and those able to walk were given a tin cup and allowed to pass around it and take a drink as their turn came.

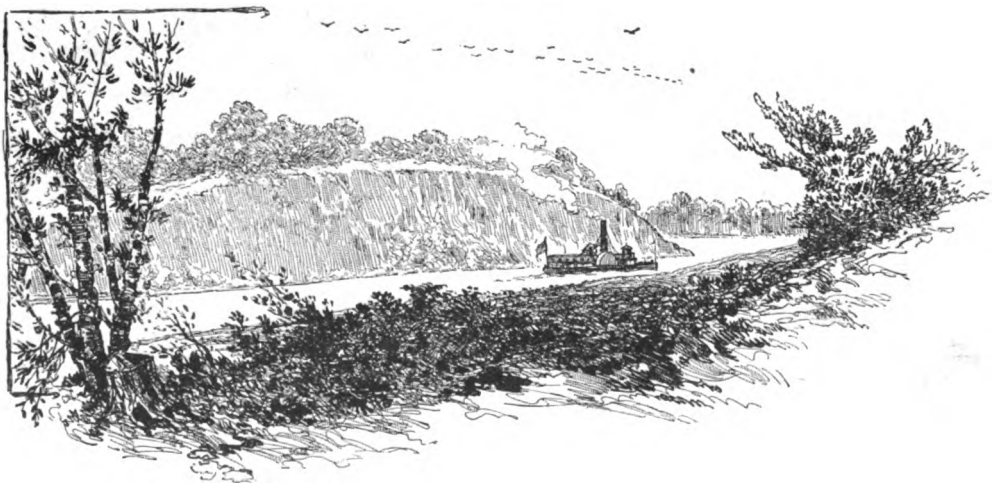
They were so weak as to be feeble-minded in many cases; but as one of them said to me long afterward: "I hadn't much feeling left for home or country, but I saw the flags, our own and the

look in them. The northern lights shone from them—the aurora borealis of Unionism!

I sent a sketch of a sample lot to Mr. Leslie, who toned it down and printed it, sending me a note to ask if I had not exaggerated. I had a wandering photographer take a tintype and mailed it for vindicating purposes. The picture here reproduced has written on its back:

"Released Union prisoners singing the 'Star-spangled Banner' and other national airs, on board of the transport *General Sedgwick*, previous to her departure North. The music could be heard for some distance in Wilmington, and attracted crowds of Secesh to the vicinity of the dock."

(To be continued.)



THE DUTCH GAP CANAL AS IT APPEARS TO-DAY.