



"Morning Star"

Southern Missionary Steamer.

J. E. WHITE, MASTER.

Bliss Landing, Yazoo River, Dec. 27, 1896.

Eld. Geo. A. Irwin,

Chattanooga, Tenn.

Dear Brother:--

As I know the interest you took in this strip of country on the Yazoo, between Vicksburg and Yazoo City, I thought I would now let you know the result of our first effort here. I think you remember the place, for it was where there was a large pile of wood on the bank, and I expected to buy it on my return, which I did. It was where there was the large tract of land so heavily timbered, where we saw such fine timber as we sailed by it. You remember there was scarcely a house in view for miles. Well, there is a peculiar providence in our being here, and I am just simple enough to see the hand of the Lord in it. We started from Vicksburg last Thursday morning early, intending to go leisurely up the river, looking at the country as we went, looking for a favorable opening, but intended to get through to Yazoo City Friday afternoon. We towed my barge with us, so that I could bring back a load of wood on the way back to Vicksburg. Our sprocket chain that transmits the power from the engine to the paddle wheels had never given us any particular trouble before, and we had stemmed the terribly swift current of the Mississippi time and again, towing a barge, and had no trouble, but when we started on this trip, we were breaking links and were hindered all the way. It did not stop with breaking one at a time, but would break three or four at one time. At last we got out of extra links, although we had ten extra ones on our start. In our last break we were abt to replace only the worst of them, and some that were cracked we were obliged to let go. We did not dare to go on to Yazoo City in such a condition, and we were 27 miles from Vicksburg. (No we were 37 miles from Vicksburg.) But there was a country telegraph office and express office two miles from us and we sent a man back to telegraph to the Link-Belt Co., of Chicago. We ordered links sent by express, and then decided we would not try to make Yazoo City till the new links came, and in the meantime try to get up to Bliss Landing, 17 miles higher up. Friday morning we started to make this run, expecting every moment that some of the cracked links would gibe out, but there was never a whimper, and we jogged along about as fast as before. We therefore tied up here, and spent the Sabbath here, and Sunday, and will have to remain over Monday till we can send down a skiff to get the links. Tuesday we hope to start on for Yazoo City but leave all for the Lord to guide.

Sabbath I began to think of the project of holding a meeting on the boat Sunday. There were no people to speak of in sight, but I mentioned the matter to Mr. Bliss, and he said it would be an excellent idea but that it was too late to get the notice around much. I said we would be compelled to remain, and if only half a dozen came out I would be satisfied. And so we left the matter. This, of course was a meeting for the white people. But later in the day Albert Green, our colored deck hand came to me and asked if he could invite some of his people. I did not know what to say. Our chapel on the boat is not finished, and I had decided to clear out my sitting room and office on the upper deck and use those rooms. But I then made up my mind that if the whites would not object I would clear out my bedroom also, and use that for the colored

people. I ascertained that there would be no trouble if I had a separate room for them, and so I allowed him to invite his people to be present. As you know, this is a risky experiment under ordinary circumstances. But I felt the Lord was leading, and I let the matter work.

As the hour for meeting came the colored people began to flock in, and so as not to prejudice the white people I had them take a seat in the lower cabin of the boat till meeting time. Well, the result was we had about fifty people present, about half whites and about half colored. I spoke to them on the love of God to man, and there was good attention paid by both classes, and there was not the least possible friction in the whole matter. At the close I proposed that these meetings be continued each Sunday, if the people desired it. There were white people there who had not been to church for fifteen years, but all spoke up as being very desirous that the meetings continue. The colored people were delighted, and you can know something of the situation when I tell you there is not a colored or white church within a radius of ten miles from this place. To think that such an audience as this can be brought together in the very short time we had for it, and in such a wilderness country as this. They say that by next week there will be a crowd on the boat. I hardly know what to do. But I have been talking the matter over with Capt. Orton, and have decided to get cloth in Yazoo City that can, later on, be used for something else, such as making sheets, and sew it together and make walls for the after part of the upper cabin of the boat. Then put in a good heating stove, and make it go till some funds come along to finish it with as it ought to be. In this way we can seat about 150 people. The boat is now getting into its legitimate work, for which it was planned and built. The people who come to the meeting many of them live along the banks of the river, some miles away from where we are and shall hold the meeting. I have decided to steam up the boat and gather up the people, and then take them back when the meeting is over. There is something novel about a church on a boat, and the white people put up with the colored attendance as I think they would not have done in a church. But the precedent has been established, and when the time comes for a church they will be where they cannot back out. Of ~~course~~ course we shall put up a log church when the interest demands it, but while they are all willing to turn in and help roll up the logs, I propose to control the church.

Of course we are rejoicing over the success of the experiment, and feel that the Lord has especially opened the way here, but we also realise that there is steady careful work to be done here, and we pray for wisdom that we may be guided in all points aright.

I am sorry that I have not been able to return to Yazoo City, before this, but it has been impossible. I now expect to make weekly trips there, and through to Vicksburg. Will be in Vicksburg over Sabbath, at close of Sabbath start up the Yazoo to this point where we will spend Sunday and as much more time as necessary, and then on to Yazoo City, to help Bro. Carey. In coming from Vicksburg each time we bring up the empty barge and on return trip take it back loaded with wood, and this will meet the expenses of the trip, officers and all.

Pray for us that we may be given great wisdom at this time that our moves may all be in harmony with the will of God.

I wish I had \$50.00 more to spare on the boat so that the after upper deck of the steamer might be finished off in a complete manner, as it ought to be, but I will have to leave this too with the Lord. I am at present carrying all the load I am able.

We are all suffering with very serious colds, accompanied with chills and fever, but are getting a little better, and hope soon to be free from this affliction.

Your brother in the work,

J. E. White