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Letter Group

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(Sewed together)

Dear Mother:--

About three weeks ago we returned to our field of labor here in Vicksburg. When we started North last August we did not expect to be absent more than six weeks. But the work we had to do took so much longer than anticipated that we were gone almost four months.

It has always been said that the colored people of the South could not be depended upon, and that they would accept the truth readily, but as soon as your back was turned they would forget all about it, and when one would come to them again they would have no idea of what had been said to them. We hoped that this would not be the case with the company at Vicksburg, for we had become very much attached to them, and desired that the work might be permanent. When we left Bro. Halladay remained to look after the interests of the work while we were gone. He proved to be an excellent worker, and our absence developed him as nothing else could have done. He kept up the Sabbath-school and the meetings, and attended faithfully to the interest of the Bible Readings that had been started before we left. He has developed into an excellent worker. When he came with us he came as a simple canvasser for Gospel Primer. We found him at Ottawa, Illinois, and has been with the work ever since. He is now recognized by the General Conference as one of its Bible workers, and is in the employ of that body.

Well, we were very glad to find on our return that nothing had been lost to the work, unless we might mention two who had not been at all firm when we left, and their position is unsettled as yet. The others we found very soon had been growing, and had advanced all the time we were gone. They have followed the Sabbath-school lessons with interest and profit, and in their lives have been gaining in purity and in steadfast principle. It was a great pleasure to meet them on our return in a much better condition spiritually than when we left them. From this experience I am led to think that this fickleness as reported is due much to the one who attempted to bring the truth to them. They are not an educated, studious people, and their life schooling has been in debasing channels. The first work to be done with them is to give them line upon line as to what true godliness is, till they begin to see there is something in religion more than feeling and shout. They must be educated in a deep reverence for the Word of God, and must learn that His commands mean something to them. I have so often been met with the statement, "O, God is a good God, He is forgiving, of tender mercy, and he will not hold these things against me." They take license from the mercy of God to go on in a course of disobedience. Our first line of work is to teach the stability of the Word, and that when the Word speaks to us it is God speaking, and that when the Word of God speaks to us, all we can do is to say, "It is so." And the next thing to do is to obey in every particular. Well, our work here began on these lines. We were studying the Word, and kindred lines, that brought in Christian work and Christian duties for weeks before any special point of our truth was brought



to their notice. We had long studies on the life of Christ, and considered carefully the lessons there was in this life for us. We took up the bad habits that people were addicted to, and showed how they were not in harmony with the life of Christ. We considered how He was our pattern in all things, and that if we received the final reward we must follow the pattern in all things. The result was that when they came into the truth they gave up their tobacco, snuff, and whiskey, and were ready for the other reforms that were to come to them. It resulted in a true conversion and not merely a change of church.

Now, these people who report the people to be so fickle could not have pursued this kind of a course with them, for if they had they would have either convinced the fickle ones that they did not want that religion, or given to the truly honest ones an insight into something that was worth their efforts, and they would not have forgotten it. In our work we have not brought in the inferior disipated class, or the real ignorant class. And I believe where the work is carried on in this way, as we have done it, there will be a class come out that will be as firm as any white class you ever saw.

Since returning we have seen special evidences of the blessing of God in the work. The week of prayer has been of special benefit, and has indicated that the pockets of the people have been converted. I called their attention to the contributions to be taken up the 29th of Dec., and handed out envelopes for that purpose. The collection amounted to only 25 cts less than \$15.00. Since returning there has been brought to me voluntarily over \$12.00 in tithes, and this in connection with the fact that they have donated in the same time about ~~\$11.50~~ \$11.50 to pay for ceiling our church overhead. All this was very surprising to us, for we know how hard it is for many of these people to earn the little money they have. But from "their deep poverty" they have come up nobly to the work, and we have never urged them to give a cent. We have simply stated the situation to them and then left them free to act as they saw fit.

The church is now very neat. It is also warm and comfortable, and all that could be desired for the purpose. We have begun a series of Sunday afternoon meetings, at 3 o'clock. The first half hour we devote to a song service, and then I speak for about ~~half~~ an hour. We have a colored man come with his cornet and play with the organ, and it adds greatly to the attraction of the meeting. The man who plays is a Mr. Shipp. His wife has accepted the truth. He is favorable, but is a worldling, and plays for all kinds of popular entertainments. He gives his services free, and by having him to play for us we get him to attend the meetings, and he is becoming deeply interested. How it will end I do not know. All are working to get an attendance to these Sunday meetings, but there is such a church influence I do not know how it will turn out. But we shall keep right on, for it is the work our own people need. Several outsiders attend each time, and there is prospect of an increasing interest. I think that when our night school starts we can have an influence with the people that will bring them out. But it is a slow work in such a field, and we have to work as we can, and leave the result with the Lord. Next week our night school will be opened. This will be a free school, and after it is well running we hope to be able to open a day school.

Last Sabbath a white sister came to church, and will probably attend regularly. Bro. Cleveland awakened an interest with her as he was canvassing for the Primer, and when we went north she was considerably interested, but had not taken her stand fully. Bro. Halladay has been carrying on a course of readings with her all summer, and now she has taken her stand for the truth fully. At the dedication she came out, but the array of colored people startled her, and I feared she would not come again. She had not been to church again till last Sabbath. She



is an intelligent, nice appearing woman, and seems in earnest. I see she has overcome her difficulty about the colored people, as she took pains last Sabbath to go to some of them and have a friendly chat with them before meeting. This is the second ~~ka~~ white person who has accepted the truth here, the other being the Baptist missionary, Sister Osborn who is now attending the Bible school at Battle to prepare for the work down here.

Another item of encouragement is that of a young man by the name of Lane. He is a college student, and has an excellent education. He is colored and would be of great help to his own people. Last summer before leaving for the north I learned that he was at home sick. I called on him, and had a chat with him, the conversation turning on our truth. I saw that he wanted to bolster himself up in his own belief, so I did not say much at that time, but asked him to call at my rooms and see me. This he did. I found out in the meantime that he was bolstering himself up on the example of Christ and the apostles. I had just prepared a reading on that subject, and the result of the reading is the tract, New Testament Sabbath that has recently come out. Well, he was convinced on this subject, but went away and tried to run away from it as he wrote to me, but could not. He already had ministerial license from the Congregational people, but he has recently given up the struggle, has returned the license, and is now preparing to go to Battle Creek to get all the truth so he can work for his people.

Last Sunday a Mr. Grimes, who had been the classmate of Mr. Lane called to see me. He said he had become convinced that we were right, and he wants to take part in the work. But I cannot go into particulars further. There was never a time to work here as there is now. Many are interested, and many are convinced. But many of them will not take the truth because they fear their church people. But some will take their stand and will be faithful. I am looking with much interest to the time when the school will be started next week. I hope much from the influence of it, and believe that it will do much good.

But I must close as I have much more to write. I have been so busy since returning that I have neglected my correspondence, and so far this week I have done little else than write letters. I have much yet not attended to.

Your son,

J.R.White.