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THE BEERSHEBA DIARY OF L. VIRGINIA FRENCH PART I, SUMMER AND FALL, 1863

Edited by Herschel Gower

Born in Accomac County on the Eastern shore of Virginia in 1825, Lucy Virginia Smith was the daughter of Mease W. and Elizabeth Parker Smith. When his wife died, Mease Smith sent young L. Virginia and her sister, Lide, to Washington, Pennsylvania, to live with his parents. They were first taught at home by their grandmother and later graduated with honors from a local female seminary where L. Virginia was valedictorian.

When Lucy Virginia and Lide returned to Accomac County in 1848, their father had remarried and a new atmosphere prevailed at the old home. Their stepmother apparently resented their presence and their father had not paid their educational expenses at the seminary. The two sisters soon determined to strike out on their own.

As young women of the Victorian era they had but few choices. With recommendations from their seminary master, they traveled to Memphis and found employment as schoolteachers; the sisters also wrote poetry published by newspapers and the *Southern Ladies' Book*. Both shaped their destinies a few years later by marrying men of wealth and position—L. Virginia to John Hopkins French, a wealthy landowner and horsebreeder of McMinnville in 1853 and Lide to Niles Meriwether of Memphis in 1855. Virginia Lewis Peck, L. Virginia's biographer, observed: "It is characteristic of the two girls that neither of them married until they had taught long enough to pay off the cost of their education."¹

Having settled at "Forest Home," the French residence near McMinnville, seat of Warren County in Middle Tennessee, L. Virginia continued to write while her husband superintended the

¹Virginia Lewis Peck, "Life and Works of L. Virginia French," (Ph.D. Dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 1939), 17.

business of the estate. As the wife of an affluent landowner with several servants to direct in the house, kitchen, and garden, she was also recognized as a charming hostess, excellent conversationalist, and intellectual. Even with the birth of Walter Scott French in 1854, Jessie Virginia in 1855, and May Lide in 1857, Virginia continued to write and published a series of legends in verse and a drama *Iztalilxo, the Lady of Tula*. Just before the Civil War she was literary editor of the *Southern Homestead* and the *Georgia Literary and Temperance Crusader*.²

But her ambition as a writer, the birth of three children in four years, the outbreak of civil war, and the invasion of Middle Tennessee in 1862 by Federal forces all took their toll on Mrs. French. Her diaries (1860, 1862-65) recount frequently recurring headaches, spells of nausea, and periods of debilitating depression, afflictions that were never adequately diagnosed or successfully treated before her death at age 56 in 1881.

The diaries are now owned by Mrs. Henry Gilman, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, who has given permission to publish excerpts here. They came to light in 1939 when L. Virginia's granddaughter, Mrs. Fred Frazier, Mrs. Gilman's mother, was searching for family papers in an old trunk at her Hiwassee Island home on the Tennessee River.

L. Virginia kept the first diary in "The Franklin Almanac and Diary for the year 1860," published by B. F. Sanford in Cincinnati at a cost of 25¢. The almanac is inscribed by her husband John Hopkins French: "This is a New Year's present to my industrious and systematic wife, L. Virginia, who will not fail to note down passing events, and keep a correct account of everything she does in the year 1860." Unfortunately the contents are limited to rather mundane jottings about the weather, visits to and from friends, and illnesses.

There is no diary extant for 1861, but those for 1862 through 1865 are quite legible and well-preserved. Written on lined notebook paper, the sheets, varying in size from 7¾ x 10 to 8 x 12 inches, are now deposited at the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville.

The diary for 1862, none of which can be reproduced here because of space limitations, records a business trip taken by the Frenches by carriage to Nashville in January, the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson in February, the occupation of Murfreesboro in March

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and McMinnville in April, and Nathan Bedford Forrest's raid on Murfreesboro in July. Although Mrs. French did not make daily entries, she wrote weekly recapitulations.

This portion of the diaries, which runs 150 pages in double-spaced typescript, is perhaps the most detailed contemporary account of newly-occupied Middle Tennessee outside the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. It is certainly one of the most dramatic recordings of a Tennessee family's domestic tribulations. The pen of Mrs. French alternates between hope and despair, expressing admiration for generals like Forrest and John Hunt Morgan while bitterly criticizing others. It also reveals rabid southern patriotism in the face of Federal occupation.

As editor of the Beersheba diaries, I have attempted a faithful transcription of spelling and punctuation. Because of space limitations, I have selected passages that best reflect the descriptive and narrative flow of Mrs. French's talents.

In the spring of 1863, at the urging of her husband, Mrs. French accepted the invitation of Colonel and Mrs. John Armfield and retired for a period to Beersheba Springs in Grundy County. The springs had become a popular resort after Mrs. Beersheba Porter Sullivan Cain discovered their chalybeate water on the cool plateau during the 1830's and were subsequently developed by her husband, John M. Cain, and others. The Armfields bought out several landowners during the late 1850's, sold lots to prosperous southerners, and rebuilt the tavern as a hotel to accommodate three or four hundred guests. At Beersheba Springs, L. Virginia could try to regain her health and fulfill her aims as a writer while McMinnville braced itself for the summer heat. The Frenches also wondered how long it would be before the crops, orchards, and livestock of "Forest Home" would fall into Yankee hands.

As the first entry in the Beersheba diary indicates, L. Virginia and John French were having, after ten years of marriage, occasional spats, but they agreed that she must search for improved health and a place conducive to creativity. The war had put a strain on two vastly different temperaments and on the marriage itself, but each party considered Beersheba a possible answer.

May 11, 1863 I am here on the misty mountain top—at kind, good Mrs. Armfield's.³ Everything around me is congenial, and conducive

³Martha Franklin (1815-1902) married John Armfield (1797-1871) in 1831. She was the daughter of Dr. John Franklin and niece of Isaac Franklin (1787-1846), Armfield's partner in the lucrative business of slave-trading.

to health. Everybody is extremely kind and attentive, and I think if I do not write here, it is clear that I cannot write at all. — Last Wednesday we came up—it was a chill, half rainy day, and the ride was a melancholy one to me. I had “inner reasons” for sadness—it seems to me I will *never* be understood, or have justice done me. Justice is all I ask—but it is the hardest thing for man to give woman. They will be lenient, affectionate, generous—anything and everything but just. I see this all around me . . . I have written twice to my darling children—heard from Mollie and the Col. twice . . . News came also of the killing of Gen. Van Dorn by a citizen—Dr. Peters.⁴ — Today I commence in earnest on my writing. I am very, very impatient with my progress—it seems so slow. I have some sewing to do for the children, yet I have *never* been so favorably situated for writing since I had children—and I feel the responsibility—deeply—I must make good use of my time—or be committing a grievous wrong.

Thus the first Beersheba entry ends on a note of hope and conscientious determination.

Unfortunately Mrs. French was experiencing a calm sea before a tidal wave. After a few weeks of relative tranquillity, during which her health showed signs of improvement, she and Mr. French decided to bring the three children, her cousin Mollie Smith, and two servants to Beersheba for the summer. The Armfields managed to crowd the Frenches into one wing of the main house, putting two women servants with their own in the dependencies. A certain amount of friction and bickering among the servants was hardly to be avoided.⁵ It was on Sunday, July 26, 1863, that “the sack of Beersheba” took place, and chaos in full force struck the little mountain community. The hotel and the cottages of absentee owners were ransacked and stripped by gangs of bushwhackers and renegades. They were joined by unscrupulous *indigenes*, mountain people who presumed they were justified in taking away furniture, dishes, clothes, and wines to keep them from falling into the undeserving hands of the bushwhackers. Colonel Armfield, already in his sixty-sixth year, was powerless to stop the plunder. Mrs. French noted the situation in her diary: “Mr. Armfield seeing that the place was going, open-

⁴Flamboyant Confederate General Earl Van Dorn (1820-1863) was shot on May 7, 1863 at Spring Hill, Tennessee, by Dr. George B. Peters, whose young wife, Jessie Helen McKissick Peters, was allegedly having an affair with Van Dorn.

⁵The slave census of 1860 lists Armfield as owning twenty-two slaves and French six.

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ed Dr. [Thomas] Harding's and Mr. [John M.] Bass's cottages,⁶ just opposite, and told his negroes [*sic*] to come and remove whatever they wanted. The negroes 'pitched in with a will' and furniture and housekeeping articles changed places rapidly."

From that fateful day in 1863 through the next summer, Mrs. French found very little of the peace that had brought her to the mountain. But her pen was seldom idle, for she spent a great deal of time and effort in keeping a detailed diary. The result is a dramatically moving account of the months she spent at Beersheba during wartime. Further, the entire, unabridged diary is one writer's heroic attempt, against obvious odds, to detail the times in which she lived exactly as they were.

Because space is necessarily limited, the diaries cannot here be reproduced in full. The following are excerpts from midsummer through Christmas, 1863.

Wednesday 29th July 1863

I felt pretty well this morning and learning that Mrs. Cain⁷ was going to leave in an hour or two for McMinnville, I went up with Darlin' to tell her good-bye.⁸ The place was very quiet as we passed along—sun shining out between clouds, and a fresh breeze blowing. We found Mrs. Cain up and ready for her journey—but she was not able to get off this morning on account of a wagon tire being broken—she will leave as soon as it can be repaired. I found that Mrs. [Benjamin J.] Hill had left in the night at 12 o'clock, with the boy, Wylie Purdom, whom [Charlie] Ainsworth and [John] Smartt were hunting yesterday. It was a lovely moonlight night and I suppose they could get down the mountain very well. It will be given out that they have gone to McMinnville, but in reality they will take the Chattanooga road and Mrs. H. expects to meet her husband [Col. Benjamin J. Hill] in Sequatchie Valley somewhere. She has become greatly involved with these people and her position was a dangerous one. It seems that this notorious man Purdom—father of the boy Wylie—was a member of Ben. Hill's regiment—he

⁶John Meredith Bass (1804-1878), attorney, former mayor of Nashville, president of Union Planters Bank, and son-in-law of Felix Grundy. He and Malvina Grundy Bass (1810-1863) had several children; their daughter Margaret married Dr. Thomas J. Harding of Louisiana and occupied the raised cottage of handmade brick next door to the Bass cottage. The Hardings continued to occupy their cottage during summers after the war, but lived in Louisiana in winter. The brochure for Beersheba in 1887 states: "Dr. Thomas J. Harding . . . is a resident here and . . . will prescribe and dispense medicine should occasion arise."

⁷Probably Beersheba Porter Sullivan Cain, widow of John M. Cain. She left Beersheba on July 30 for McMinnville and died shortly thereafter at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Mary Cain Stubblefield, wife of Dr. Hirman Stubblefield, in McMinnville. Jeanette T. Acklin, *Tennessee Records: Tombstone Inscriptions and Manuscripts* (Baltimore, 1967), II, 422.

⁸"Darlin'" was her husband on good days, the Colonel on others, and Mr. F. much of the time; he was born in 1817 and died in 1892.

deserted with others, and went to horse stealing, robbing, etc., on the mountains. He with two others was arrested—taken to the army and ironed—the others escaped, he did not, and it is said he was “lost,” as the saying is, by Ben. Hill’s order.⁹ Be that as it may—the men who escaped are now among the bushwhacking brigands, and vowed eternal vengeance on Hill and all that belong to him. It has been discussed in their camp, the propriety of taking Mrs. Hill prisoner and holding her as a hostage for Purdom. Purdom’s wife, who is said to be a perfect “tigress” and his daughter have threatened to come at night and murder Mrs. Hill. Wylie Purdom, the son, is in Mrs. Hill’s employ, and went over the mountain secretly a few days since to communicate with Ben. Hill, and the opposite party getting wind of it—came on Tuesday to arrest him. This is why both he and Mrs. H. made their escape in the night—both seemed to be in imminent danger. It is odd that Wylie, Mrs. H’s *factotum*, should be the son of the man for whose sake she is now suffering, and the woman who has threatened to murder her. Had Mrs. H. been a young girl, and Purdom her lover instead of her servant, it would have been a very romantic escape . . . —We had been at home perhaps an hour when in dashed a company of Yankees, Wilder’s Cavalry,¹⁰ and we were environed by the “blues” once more. Darlin’ went out immediately—hunted up the Col. [Wilder] and brought him in, and the consequence was we were not “run over” as much as we would have been. A few peaches I believe was all they got—they knew the Col. was here, and were rather shy of the garden, poultry yard, etc. tho’ some did get after the chickens, (which are a ruling passion with Yankees,) and were unsuccessful. Neither did they trouble the kitchen much—but amused themselves with running about that poor Heaven forsaken Hotel—where they broke into everything—outhouses, kitchens, bowling saloons, etc. I suppose they would have rung all the bells in the establishment had not all the bells been pulled down and carried off both from Hotel and cottages. They amused themselves by pulling down chandeliers in the dining room, throwing ink bottles against the wall in the office—setting up bottles of wine upon the long Piazza and rolling nine-pin balls at them—using the bottles for pins, (the Piazza floor was crimsoned with claret,) cutting the green cloth from the elegant billiard tables, one of which they broke to pieces, and divers other capers of like calibre such as distinguish Yankees wherever they go. Letha, one of Mrs. A’s negro women, had a husband who went to the Yanks last summer—he came with this band, for his family, and they all went off—the wife and 8 children, 3 other boys also went. He had one wagon—sufficient to carry about a 4th part of her “traps,” etc. Letha seemed to me bewildered and not well pleased—she bid no one good

⁹Benjamin Jefferson Hill (1825-1880) of McMinnville; later Confederate general. His wife was the former Mary Virginia “Vesta” Smartt of Warren County. Wylie Purdom, from Grundy County, was the son of a Middle Tennessee farmer and laborer. Charlie Ainsworth was an escaped convict and miscreant from Illinois whom Mrs. French used as a minor, evil character in her Civil War novel “Darlingtonia: the Eaters and the Eaten,” published in the *Detroit Free Press* in installments (April 27 to August 17, 1879), but never in book form. John Smartt was a brother of Mrs. Hill, Myra Smartt, and young Richard Smartt.

¹⁰Col. John Thomas Wilder (1830-1917) commanded the 17th Indiana Cavalry. Later, as Brigadier General Wilder, he led a mounted brigade and after the war settled in Rockwood, Tennessee, as a developer of railroads and mines.

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bye. It was amusing to see the Yanks move off—one carried one negro baby behind him and one before him—Letha had about 6 babies. Before they left Mrs. Armfield said to the officers who dined here that she was under great obligations to them for taking off the negros—"Oh!" he replied, "you must not say that, we are not taking them—we don't want them." "Very well you have afforded them an opportunity to leave, and I am greatly obliged to you, they were of no profit to us—only a dead expense, and it is a happy riddance." He said it was unfortunate for them that they should leave such a home as this, as they had no place to keep them, and one half of the children would die before the year was out. Doubtless this was *once* when he told the truth. After dinner they all moved down the mountains—we ladies stood on the rock,¹¹ and wished—that Forrest might get them! The girls counted them; there were 156 exclusive of the negros. Letha went down the mountain carrying her baby—Ann trudging at her heels. Green and two other little boys on one horse. The men and officers waved and bowed and took off their hats to us, but they received no tokens in return. I did not hear that they behaved badly at any of the other cottages. Six dined with Mrs. Blackmore—officers,—I suppose Mr. B. was not at home.¹²

Wednesday 5th August

On Sunday I was very much annoyed all day on finding out that Martha was getting quite "ahead of herself," and into difficulties with Henriette and the servants.¹³ Mrs. Armfield has been so much annoyed by her own servants that I was filled with regret that she should have the slightest trouble with one of mine. She has so great a burden to bear in life, that I wish I could in some way lighten it, instead of anyone having any association with me aiding to it. On Monday I was excited all day. The place was full of people, the "bushwhackers" in force, and very bold. We were told that they intend to search this place—and I expected it all day. They seemed to have a passion, (a sudden one,) for roaming about the cliffs below the house and garden, and I set the girls [daughters Jessie and May] to stand picket on "the rock," because a great many of my valuables—china, silver, and papers, were "out in the bushes" on the hanging cliffs below

¹¹The landmark observation point on the bluff facing northwest, just below the Armfield cottage; it affords a good view of Tarleton Valley and the road down the mountain to McMinnville.

¹²Ann and Green were apparently slave children. George Blackmore was indeed at Beersheba on this occasion, but safely in hiding, as his wife's journal testifies. Mrs. Blackmore wrote: "It was impossible to get boarding—so we were obliged to take a furnished house [William L. Murfree's] & set up to housekeeping on a very limited scale. . . . Mr. [Blackmore] and Mr. Riddle always hid [when Yankees and bushwhackers appeared]. It kept Cousin, Margaret & me always on the alert to hide our two Soldiers & their clothes, horses, etc., & then protect ourselves The Federals too were very attentive to us—they paid 4 visits to the Springs with a force of 100 to 200 [within six weeks] to look for Rebels, but, never *found* any. Cousin & myself hid our rebels always—sometimes in the *black-jacks*, another time in the kitchen loft [of what is now the Adams Cottage]. At that anytime we were entertaining 6 or 7 federal soliders in the house. Oh! The anxiety it gave us." See Sarah Ridley Trimble, "Behind the Lines in Middle Tennessee, 1863-1865: The Journal of Bettie Ridley Blackmore," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XII (1953), 60.

¹³Martha, an eccentric servant, was punished by the Frenches in 1862 for stealing and given no "Christmas" as a result. She continued to give trouble, yet her illness, death, and burial by Mrs. French are movingly recorded in the diary dated March 27, 1865, McMinnville.

us. Fortunately they did not find any of them—but I was in ferment all day lest they should—and in the evening when all became quiet I had them removed. Mr. Madden¹⁴ came up from McMinnville last evening whither he had gone to sell some vegetables. His report is, that the Yanks are very quiet at McMinnville—afraid to stir about much for fear of Forest who is about Rock Island. There was a rumor of a collision at Shell's Ford [now Shellsford in Warren County]—but we do not know if it be true. The Yanks are fortifying McMinnville—hauling rails even from so far as Mr. Scott's¹⁵ to build with. Every rail, etc. is gone from our place. They are pressing all the negro men to work on the fortifications, and I suppose they have Lee [a slave] in service of course. Last night we heard they have got "Flying Cloud." Well good-bye old fellow! I loved you well, but I shall see you no more. He is the last of our fine horses—the especial favorites. We have lost 10,000 dollars in horses alone, since the war begun, Poor Cloud! How proud I used to be of him! But he is gone—ours no more. —The southern boys who are in here now, and to whom we can no longer play the kind hosts,¹⁶ are said to be infantry, at least most of them—40 or 50 of them. They came in by Mr. Morgan's—I suppose up "*Mrs. Hobbs Back-bone*."¹⁷ The "gentleman" will keep quiet while they are here, but after they go—look out for a "conflaggeration" as old Mr. Lankford says.¹⁸ I suppose they will eat us up bodily—swearing we "have been entertaining and communicating with the rebels"—God bless 'em.

Sunday 9th August

Life seems exceedingly unpromising to me today. I could wish I were away in some solitude where man, woman, or child might never find me more. Last Sunday was a day of unusual worry and annoyance to me, and today has been no better. I wish I could be to myself once more, keeping house in my old home, and nobody there but my own family. It is true that Martha is a wild girl but I don't think she deserves all that is put upon her. We now think of going into Mr. Bass' house, as we have within the last few days gotten some furniture from

¹⁴Identified by Mrs. French as an Irishman, he was the hotel gardener. Madden does not appear in the 1860 census.

¹⁵Probably Sam Scott, proprietor of the City Hotel in Nashville in 1860 and owner of properties near McMinnville. He came to Beersheba during part of the war.

¹⁶Armfield, French, and others had finally capitulated to the Federals on July 25, 1863, and had gone to McMinnville to take the oath of allegiance. Thus they could not thereafter provide hospitality to Rebel troops openly.

¹⁷Oliver J. Morgan, of Carroll Parish, Louisiana, was a prosperous businessman and lawyer. Morgan's Steep at Sewanee was so named because of his contribution of \$40,000 to the founding of the University of the South. This route was an obscure way up the mountain and very steep. Seldom used today, it joins the present Grassy Ridge Road.

¹⁸Probably Silas Lankford, who lived with his family in the dense area known to Mrs. French as Boogerland. Mentioned in "Darlingtonia," it remains so designated today and is near Greutli, site of a Swiss colony founded after the war.

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Mr. Morgan and we will have to go into the house to take care of it.¹⁹ I felt some ambition about getting these things some days ago—and as if I really would like to have them. I was particularly anxious to get some fine chamber-sets of china—but failed in doing so—not having Tennessee money. I shall not be able to get them and feel rather disappointed about it. However, it is no matter—as it is a great question whether or not we shall be able to even keep what we have got. I am so worried and annoyed that I feel but little interest in anything. It is impossible that I should get well, being so harried as I am—if not by outsiders, such as bushwhackers, etc., it is something brought up against my servants or children. [Cousin] Mollie [Smith] found her watch injured today,—and though I had Martha and all the children over at Mr. Bass’s all morning, and I with them all the time, of course it was Martha that had broken it. I get very much out of patience at times, and am quite sure that not one of Mollie’s relations would put up with her bad temper as I do, and for the long years that I have. I wish exceedingly that she was well married. I was better in health and spirits—last summer at this time, at home and bound down among the Yankees, than I am at present. As to our political prospects they are in *Status quo*. Tennessee is gone to the Confederacy, I suppose, and in my present frame of mind and state of health, I must confess I feel *unpatriotic* enough not to care a continental about it any way if I could only be well, and quiet for a little while. I feel actually worn out with constant worry which I have lived in for three years. “The constant drop will wear the stone” as somebody’s husband [Col. Armfield] will one day find out to his cost. I who have borne with so much from her [Mollie] and whose pride would not allow me either to complain or to retaliate—to be spoken of as I am told she speaks of me—it is hard indeed to bear. But I will ignore so unpleasant a subject—hoping that the “good time” may one day come when my burden shall be transferred to some one more able to bear it. This is the first time my feelings have escaped strong control and led me to mention this wearing care—I trust it will be the last. Dr. [Alfred] Paine [physician of McMinnville] went down to “take the oath” today—the Col. goes on his bond as security. He goes into Mr. Morgan’s house—the Morgan’s go to Ky., leaving tomorrow. Mr. Morgan himself left on Thursday night with the soldiers for Chattanooga. The Col. let him have a horse to go and took furniture in payment. He also bought an etagere—a small marble topped table and a guitar—giving 50 dollars each “Confederate.” The guitar, which was an elegant one I presented to Mrs. Armfield who desired it for Adele [Franklin, her niece]. I wanted three chamber sets—one for Mrs. A. and two for myself, but was disappointed in getting them. We were

¹⁹John Meredith Bass was the husband of Malvina Grundy, daughter of Felix Grundy, and became a stockholder in the Beersheba Springs Company in 1860. He was president of the Union Bank and owned plantations in Arkansas and Louisiana. Bass decided to rent the cottage to the Frenches shortly after his wife died while visiting relatives in Missouri during July, 1863. The Morgan Cottage (which burned about 1948) was an elegant structure with portico, columns, and belvedere. It was situated near the bluff overlooking Savage Gulf—off present day Grassy Ridge Road. Morgan brought blooded stock to the mountain, built a racetrack facing the house, and erected an octagonal billiard room for the amusement of his family and guests.

told today that all the "rebel girls" in McMinnville have been made to take the oath,—a great triumph for old Armstrong and his crew. Moll Armstrong has procured the Federal uniform—a blue riding dress and rides round with the Yankees, as she used to do with [John Hunt] Morgan's men. I suppose this would be the end of her Southernism—it was too intense to last long!²⁰

Wednesday 12th Aug. 1863

Mr. Bass' cottage, Bersheba

On Sunday last when I wrote in my journal I was sufficiently low-spirited to have satisfied the very Prince of the Blue Devils himself [Lincoln]. I was so low down as to persuade myself I didn't care one jot for the Confederacy or anybody in it—which was a dreadful pass for *me* to come to. About dark I was walking on the gallery—we were all out there, walking, chatting, etc. when 3 horsemen dashed by at full speed—we caught our breath, and "Bushwhackers!" was echoed from lip to lip. The gentlemen walked to the gate—presently a body of 20 men rode up with Capt. Carter at their head.²¹ The old Capt. demanded of Mr. Armfield "where was his corn?" and then dashed up to the cribs and in a few minutes the hungry horses were tethered, and munching their food under the long line of locust-trees in front of the house. While we were enjoying ourselves *after our own fashion* on the gallery,—hardly able to keep ourselves still for joy,—Capt. C. walked down to the kitchen and ordered supper for himself and men. "Be quick girl," he cried to Mary Ann, "jump round and get it up smart, for we're going to have it and soon too. Your master don't want us to have it, but that's nothing to us, it's got to come!" We laughed heartily—Mary Ann was so mad, and what was strange, Mr. Armfield really did not like it, he seemed to be very much hurt that Carter should do so. When the Capt. came in he shook hands with us all—*who hadn't taken the oath*,—and we certainly let him see that we were glad to meet him. In a few moments he said, "Mrs French I wish to speak with you privately." I led the way into the parlor which was lighted. Sitting down on the sofa he told me he had some letters, a picture, and some rings from Maj. to M. and he would not deliver them without my knowledge and consent.²² I thanked him and assured him he could deliver them, with our approval. He gave them into her own hands. A few hurried questions and answers were all that could be given—that secretly. It appeared that he with his scouts had been down very

²⁰Mollie Smith was a poor relative who lived with the Frenches, for whom they felt responsible; she was a teacher, helped with the children, and kept them when their parents traveled. But the strain of wartime Beersheba showed on Mollie as well, and her tantrums and difficulties with the servants are reported in the diary. It seems, however, that Mrs. French did not openly confront her. Ironically, Dr. John Barclay Armstrong (1819-1873), a McMinnville Unionist, married Mariah Ready, whose niece, Martha (Mattie) Ready married Confederate General John Hunt Morgan. Moll was Dr. Armstrong's daughter.

²¹George W. Carter of Chattanooga first commanded a company of cavalry in the Fourth (Murray's) Regiment, then in the First Confederate Cavalry Regiment and finally in the Tennessee Cavalry. He became famous as a mounted scout, with his sons riding with him.

²²The major is not identified, but the context suggests that he was courting Mollie Smith (with Mrs. French's approval) and was engaged in spying behind the Federal lines for the Confederacy.

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near to Nashville—he had seen his wife on Wednesday—she had informed him that the day previous, two divisions of Rosecrans army had returned to Nashville. They (Carter's men) had in returning from this scout passed in five miles of McMinnville—come on and hearing that a party of Federals had gone into Sequatchie, pushed on after them, did not find them and hearing that Beersheba had been sacked they turned and came back to learn the truth of the affair. While the Capt. was at supper, I threw a dark mantle over my light muslin dress, and went out in to the garden with Darlin' to see the men at their bivouac. We went softly along the walk—they were under the locust trees, between us there was the paling, and a row of raspberry bushes—so they could not see us—but we could both see and hear them. We did not wish them to know we were there—they were chatting cheerfully, like a band of brothers, and eating the rations Bob²³ was bringing out in a huge tin pan. I saw William Carter²⁴ down on his knees before the pan. He was very devoted to it and no mistake. Directly here came Mrs. A. and the girls stealing down the walk; they almost ran over us, and uttered suppressed screams at it—we all laughed heartily *to ourselves*. They spoke to the boys for some moments, assuring them how glad we were to see them—then we all hurried away. Early Monday morning I came over to the Bass cottage opposite to make arrangements for moving over. It is a very delightful place—six rooms and kitchen—cistern, etc. I had had it cleaned out on Saturday. I did not feel well, but hung about, superintending, until after dinner—when Col. started over to Mr. Morgan's after the furniture he had purchased. They had not returned with the first load, when walking to the gallery door—I heard a tremendous clattering of hoofs, and the children came running up crying—"the Yankees are coming! The Yankees are coming!" Quick as thought here they dashed in by the Altamont Road—about 75 men—with sabers raised in the sunlight, gleaming and flashing, and pistols cocked. Down to the Hotel they rattled and thundered, making a charge that should have astonished us beyond bounds,—but "nary rebel" did they scare up! They then scurried back again—after the first surprise the first thing I thought of was my clothes—for Puss²⁵ was washing over at Mrs. Armfield's and I hurried Martha over after them. They dashed about considerably—ordered supper for the whole set at Mr. Armfield's—took out corn and fed their stock—very soon other horses were feeding under the locust trees where the rebels had fed the night previous. But few came over here, those who came did so for something to eat, but went away when they found we had nothing to cook and no place to cook on. Mary Ann "flew round like a half sled" as the saying is, and Bob again appeared carrying out rations in the huge tin pan. One Yankee came up and sat on the gallery steps. I was very polite—so was he. He said, (as did some officers at Col. A's) that this expedition was a very foolish one. On the report of two negroes that there were rebels here at Beersheba these men were ordered out of a convalescent camp on broken down horses, to come up and take them. They broke down 13 horses, cost the government 2000 dollars, and captured one small boy, Frank Henderson who was out on the Dan road partridge

²³Mrs. Armfield's servant.

²⁴Son of Capt. George Carter.

²⁵Puss was a maid, often as ill as her mistress, and a constant care and responsibility; she, Cooper, and Duke were the children of Mammy Nancy.

hunting, and whom they released when they came in! Brilliant achievement! They behaved pretty well, frightened the deer nearly to death—and stole the negro chickens, as usual. The one who talked to me said he was a Virginian—used to drive stock to Richmond—had gone to Pittsburg Pa—there enlisted in the war. Was very tired of it—wished he could get out. Had been in service two years—had ten months to stay yet. "Then" said I, "you will enlist again." "No ma'am," he replied emphatically, "I'll quit." Said he hated to see people's property so destroyed—then why did he destroy it? He never did himself,—never except when acting under orders. All very fine talking. The Yanks were about 75 men, badly mounted. Having fed their horses and themselves, they left in body, about dark, going down the mountain, and we have not heard of them since. Tuesday was a quiet day comparatively. We were moving, and arranging things in this cottage. In the morning two of the bushwhackers, Ainsworth and Campbell, were dressed in the finest Yankee uniforms—stolen of course. Campbell had poor Dick Smartt's cap which he had taken out of Myra's trunk—and he went up to see her, and flourish it before her, her dead brother's cap.²⁶ The Yankee officers who were in on Monday evening denounced the sacking of this place as an outrage, and said had they known it they would have prevented it. The bushwhackers pretend to act under Yank authority, and I think those two came in yesterday morning merely to ascertain, if possible, what were the feelings of the "Yanks" towards them. I do not know that they received any information or that any one here would speak upon the subject at all. —

Sunday Aug. 16th

This morning rose bright—but now—11 A.M. we are having a thunder shower. We have had such every day for 3 days. I am now lying in bed having been down all day yesterday. On Thursday I put down a matting in the middle room, (as Puss was not well,) and it has thrown me back very much. Sometimes I am exceedingly low-spirited—feeling that I may never be well any more. I have so much to do, and have as yet accomplished so little that I desire beyond everything to be well and able to take upon my lifework. This morning Mrs. Blackmore wrote me a long letter, desiring me to write a Poem upon the burning of her father's home "Fairmont."²⁷ I have sent her word that I had rather incorporate the incidents into some future work. This is a very pleasant house and I enjoy staying here "mightily"—we have not got a stove yet and having nothing to cook on, take our meals at Col. Armfield's. I trust we will get a stove this week. Miss Myra [Smartt] who has the stove is to leave tomorrow for Chattanooga. She has a new calico that I want also, and shall offer her 40 dollars for it—but almost know she will not take it. Think of 40 dollars offered for a common calico dress pattern, and refused! I would like also to "trade" some clothing to Mrs. Moffet²⁸ for a portion of the Graves furniture, but have no idea she will accommodate me on any reasonable terms. I can but try however and be refused, then content myself with having "made the effort" at least. We wish to go down home "after frost" in October and I would like to have all the housekeeping articles I can col-

²⁶Richard Smartt, dead at this time, was the youngest child of George and Athelia Smartt of McMinnville and a brother of Mrs. Benjamin Hill and Myra Smartt. The bushwhackers have not been identified.

²⁷Details of this act by Federal soldiers are given in Trimble, "Behind the lines," 51.

²⁸Either Minerva Moffit, age 33 in 1860, wife of Russell Moffit, or Frances Moffit, 24 in 1860, wife of Add Moffit. Both appear in the 1860 Census for Grundy County.

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lect here, for I suppose what I have left there will be taken away, or destroyed. [Tom] Ryan and [Ben] Cagle went down a day or two ago and took the oath—every man "on the hill" has taken it now except Mr. Madden, the Irish gardener.²⁹ I think they might be let alone now, as they are "good, loyal citizens" and subjects of King Gorilla the First [Lincoln]! There is a great deal of sickness in McM as I expected—scarlet fever and flu almost epidemic. The town "smells to Heaven"—it is said the nauseous scent can be distinguished to the tan yard more than a mile out on this road!

Sunday 23rd Aug.

For a week past we have been quiet—how long it may continue we do not know. We are housekeeping very comfortably at the Bass Cottage. Were I only well I would enjoy it so much, but my disease is a most pertinacious and baffling one, and I seem to get worse instead of improving. I am now on a regimen of milk and dry toast,—and it always did make me nervous and out of sorts to be compelled to eat what I did not like, I have left off the chalybeate water, which has not benefitted me to all appearances. I become very desponding at times, feeling that in all probability I shall never enjoy good health again. It keeps me depressed, for I feel that there is so much that I ought to be doing. I pray Heaven help me. This week we heard of the death of poor Grandma Cain. I trust she is at rest—she was so feeble when she left the mountain I did not think she could long survive. Oh! this war is so hard upon us all!

Sunday Aug. 30th

During the present week we have had quite cool weather—autumnal weather in fact—and with us here at Beersheba all has been quiet. The "Home Guard," as they style themselves—that is to say the Bushwhackers and Brigands in Yankee uniform ride in occasionally to see that we are all walking loyally and "minding our oaths,"—but they have disturbed no one, except Mr. [Lewis] Handerson at Dan from whom they took a load of green corn, when they went there to get two large chests of articles belonging to Mrs. [John] Waters. They also demanded Mr. [L.D.] Mercer's "household goods" and carried off some of them. In Mrs. W's chests were silver, plates, pictures, ornaments, colored silks, vases, fine bed linen, blankets, etc.—It was piteous Hattie said, to see such people get such beautiful and costly things.³⁰ One fellow picked up an elegant Parian vase and

²⁹Benjamin Cagle, the most active member of John Armfield's staff as millwright, mechanic, and foreman of construction, came from near Irving College in Warren County. He was the masterbuilder at Beersheba and held so high in Armfield's esteem that the colonel left him a legacy in his will. Tom Ryan, an Irishman, does not appear in the Census of 1860 and is not further identified. See Isabel Howell, "John Armfield of Beersheba Springs," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, II (1943), 3-29; III (1944), 46-64, 156-67.

³⁰Lewis Handerson, born 1807 in New York, owned real estate at Beersheba worth \$22,000 according to the census of 1860. He, his wife Prudence (born circa 1806 in New York), and daughter Harriet H. (born in Ohio, 1835) were strong supporters of the Confederacy. They had a fine home—"Dan"—which they left in 1864 to return to more stable conditions in Ohio. Dr. and Mrs. John Waters were from Nashville and owned the cottage behind Dr. Thomas J. Harding, a son-in-law of John M. Bass. Dr. Waters was the brother-in-law of Dr. Felix Robertson, son of James, presumably the first white child born in Nashville. Mrs. Waters was a second wife, the former Ann Rawlings. Lorenzo Dow Mercer was a McMinnville merchant; born in 1810, he was a successful businessman and cosigned an invitation to James K. Polk and Andrew Jackson to a public dinner at Beersheba in 1840. Other names not identified.

asked "what in the thunder that was fer?" Mr. H. replied to him "that it was a vase to hold flowers." He laid it down in the bottom of the wagon among the other plunder, and it was broken before they got half way to Altamont, I do not doubt! This week (on Saturday,) Mrs. [George] Blackmore and [her cousin] Miss Sue White left for Home—the furniture of the [William L.] Murfree cottage was moved to our house to be taken care of—but I should not wonder any hour to see the "Home Guard" making a descent upon us, for the things—and I look also for them to come to me for the articles of Dr. [R.L.] Graves [of New Orleans] which Mrs. Moffet transferred to my care. The whole country is so demoralized we cannot tell what may happen, but must be prepared at all times, and at all points, for the worst. Mr. Handerson will go down to McMinnville to take the oath, tomorrow. Darlin' says he intends going down one day to see if he can get some money to get us all some winter clothing. I do not know how it will be—but I dare not hope that he will be able to collect money or make many purchases. Mr. Sam Scott was up last Friday—he is going to leave his farm, return to Nashville, and board until the war is over. He says there are some of the citizens of McM. and vicinity who are "spotted"—they are not to be allowed anything—they wish to drive them out of the country—he is one of the proscribed, old Mr. Spurlock³¹ is another, and Darlin' is another. These are men of influence and property and the feds and more especially the Unionites are determined to drive them out of the country if possible, and fill their places with men who will vote hereafter as they wish, besides they want to confiscate their property. Mr. Scott says they can't drive him out, and so says the Col. also. But we do not know whether to go down home or spend the winter here. Mr. Scott says provisions are exceedingly scarce and high there, and if we accumulate anything round us so as to be comfortable it will be taken away. Mollie Young says that Bob Cain³² ran round town 3 days hunting up our furniture to set up his Yankee friends with! I don't know if he found any of it or not. The Col. says if Bob Cain touches any of his things he will find himself some of these days with a very strong swimming in his head. Cain is behaving scandalously—even the Yanks it is said are becoming disgusted with him. [Tom] Ryan had promised me a supply of sheets—etc. that is, bed linen and table linen from the Hotel, and yesterday he told the Col. he had determined not to sell them for Confederate money! I was very ill all day, and thus being "properly aroused" made me still more nervous. Mrs. Armfield took him in hand; she says she made him feel very sheepish about it—and she thinks she can get them for me, but I don't know, *nous verrons* [we shall see]. In these days it is emphatically true that "white folks is mighty onsartain and niggers will run away." I feel better today than yesterday—on yesterday I said the war was wearing me out, and I never would live to see the end of it. It may be so indeed—I am weak, nervous and excitable. I do not seem to improve at all either by medicine or by the chalybeate water and so have discarded both, for the time at least. The children are all well and hearty. We live quite comfortably and Mr. and Mrs. Armfield are the kindest people I ever saw. I fear we should not live near so well if we went down home for the country is ex-

³¹James M. Spurlock (born circa 1809 in Virginia), large landowner and McMinnville merchant.

³²Robert D. Cain, a McMinnville businessman and avowed Unionist.

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hausted. Mr. Scott says he did not see a single vegetable on the road from McM to Nashville, and scarcely a fence. Murfreesboro and vicinity is a perfect wilderness.

Sunday Sept. 7th 1863

This has been a warm day, quite a contrast to last Sunday when we had fires, and shawls were in requisition. We had a Sunday School as usual, tho' the attendance was not large. Monday last was a tolerably quiet day with us. Tuesday morning the 2nd, I was quite unwell, and did not rise. About 8 o'clock Darlin' and Mr. Poindexter started for town--their object being to procure goods etc. if any had arrived.³³ It was very shortly after they left that a company of Yankees, on a scout, (alias thieving expedition), arrived in the place. They had procured brandy somewhere in the valley and many of them were exceedingly intoxicated. They broke into [Tom] Ryan's room--the only one occupied in the Hotel, and stole nearly all of his clothing, bed clothes, etc.--took an axe and smashed the clock, (a handsome bronze one), broke the andirons, bowl, pitcher, looking glass, etc. to pieces--carried off the shovel and tongs and divers other items of equal importance to them. Darlin' having taken the bay mare, and left her colt here with the gray and her colt, I had them put into the back yard round where there is a high and close plank fence, to prevent their seeing her. The colt kept fussing after its mother all day, and they (Yanks) hearing horses, two of their number came up to reconnoitre. I could not be up but Mollie went out to meet them. They did not attempt to take the gray, but asked for dinner. We said we would furnish them some, and they sat down to wait while it was preparing. They tried to pass themselves for Southern soldiers but did not deceive M. for a moment, who only remarked to them "if you are not Yankees you had better take down the sign." They replied they were obliged to wear the blue to get thro' this country at all. I sent Bouse³⁴ flying after Mr. Armfield. Mr. A. could not come as they were then coming into his house, but he sent [Ben] Cagle. By the time Cagle arrived I was in a strong nervous chill, and they had come in and sat down to dinner. When he went in and commenced conversation in an off-hand way, M. said they were the worst taken down fellows she ever saw, for Cagle knew one of them--he was a Christian, (by name at least,) and lived near Altamont. Cagle said their countenances fell the instant they saw him, and they appeared very much embarrassed--and doubtless they felt so, if they had any feeling left. After this they wanted to pay for their dinner, but I told them if they would go away and let me be quiet, for I was very ill--they could have their dinner--they insisted on paying but I would take nothing. One of them had a canteen of peach brandy and invited Mollie to drink with them, but she declined. They insisted on Cagle's drinking with them and he had hard work to get off,--it required all his diplomacy to decline successfully! After they left I was still kept in a state of excitement

³³James W. Poindexter (1818-1891) received a literary degree from Yale and a law degree from Harvard. He was an ordained minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. His first wife was Susan Paine of McMinnville, where he taught the classics before holding pulpits at Lebanon, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas. Poindexter may have been a relative of Colonel or Mrs. Armfield, but was not always admired by Mrs. French.

³⁴Nickname for her son, Walter Scott French; age 9.

by the tremendous fuss they kept up down at the Hotel—smashing windows, hallooing, singing, dancing, playing the fiddle, and “cutting up” generally. When the troop left about 3 o’clock P.M. Bouse and Martha went down to the Hotel cistern for water; very soon they came rushing back, saying they saw smoke coming out of Mr. Ryan’s room! Mollie was disposed to treat it as one of “Martha’s big tales,” but I said “M. you had better go down with the children and see, as they said they had orders to burn the Hotel, it may be they have set fire there sure enough.” She threw on her hat and ran down, and truly it was as I expected. They had set fire to papers, etc. under a pile of old boxes, straw etc. in the room next to Ryan’s. The matting was burned thro’ but for want of air the thing was not yet in a blaze. They pulled out the burning papers and Bouse ran to the cistern with a great earthenware spittoon—that would hold about a gallon, the only whole vessel in reach, and brought water to put out the fire, which was done successfully. By this time Ryan who had been off somewhere during the melee, arrived, and moved what was left of his appurtenances away from the doomed Hotel, as we all imagined the enemy would return and burn it that night, but they did not. Cagle slept in our house, as the Col. was absent, and I had been so ill and worried all day that about 10 o’clock I went to sleep, and tho’ expecting to be aroused by the crash of burning buildings—slept like a weary and worn out child until morning. Next day, Wednesday, I was in bed all day—Darlin’ returned at nearly midnight that night. I was rejoiced to see him home with his horse for I had heard the Yanks were in the valley below stealing horses in the evening, and I begun to fear they would take his and leave him and the buggy on the road. I heard the mare neigh down by the Hotel and her colt answer from Mrs. Armfield’s poultry-yard, just on the precipice back of her house,—so I knew the Col. had come and ran out to meet him. It was starlight—the moon had not yet risen—and as he came up under the locust trees I heard the well-known voice—“Is that you darling?” So I knew it was all right. We did not go to bed until very late—tho’ the Col. had not much news. Lide, Niles, and family, (he learned by a letter from Niles to Horace Harrison,) were in Penn. at Grandma’s.⁵⁵ The dear old lady is still living and well. Dr. Paine came to see me—said it was nervous excitement that was the matter with me, and the war was the cause of it—which I knew some time ago. Said I must take *assafoetida* and learn not to care for Yanks, bushwhackers, or anything else. Very good advice, but not so easy to follow. Tonight the Henderson girls came to tell us good-bye. They all go down to town tomorrow,—and appear glad to be leaving Bersheba, which they consider very lonely. I think it would be a most delightful place if we could only be quiet. I cannot tell what we shall do yet—whether go down home or remain here during the winter. We are waiting like Micawber to see if anything will turn up meanwhile.⁵⁶ I must go to sewing etc.—arranging as best I can for the winter, which will come both here and at home, and must be prepared for, wherever we may be.

⁵⁵Her sister Lide and husband Niles Meriwether had not remained in Memphis during the war, but had gone to St. Louis and then east to visit the girls’ paternal grandmother in Washington, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁶Mr. Wilkins Micawber of Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*. He was a shiftless, unsuccessful optimist, always in trouble, but always waiting for good fortune to turn up.

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nt of air the thing was
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I had been so ill and
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answer from Mrs. Arm-
e,—so I knew the Col.
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Sunday night 20th Sept. 1863

Two weeks have elapsed since I have taken any note of the times, during which period we have been left in comparative quiet with the exception of occasional alarms which did not amount to much in the end. On last Sunday evening however, we did have a visitation sure enough—about 4000 E. Tenn. Federal troops were encamped on the hill around us. They were Spears' men—Stokes' cavalry among them.³⁷ Gen. Spears was invited to our house by the Col. and the consequence was that we were saved the great annoyance of being beset and run over by the rabble—for a rabble it was and no mistake. Spears himself behaved in a very gentlemanly manner and seemed to do his best to prevent us and Col. Armfield's family from being annoyed by the men. Mr. A. was quite ill at the time, and Mr. French appealed to the Gen. to have everything quiet, and he did so I think to the very best of his ability. Very late in the evening he was notified that his wife was at the foot of the mountain—I invited him to bring her here—he did so. They seemed like people in the middle walks of life—clever enough in their way—but even the servants remarked that there "was a mighty difference between *this* Gen. and his wife, and Gen. John [Hunt] Morgan and *his* wife." I thought—"true oh! King"—truly a disparity!—Mrs. Spears had a little son with her, and there was a grown youth in uniform in company,—a rather shy and awkward specimen—yet who seemed on very good terms with them all—who I learned afterwards, was a natural son of the General's! The whole command left next morning—the only loss we sustained was that of a child's tin bucket. I hear that Martha's mother is in McM. and that she says "she is going to have Martha." She is welcome to her if I thought she would do a good part by her, but that I am sure will not be the case. Mollie has decided on going down town the first of October and commencing her school, and—we have come to the conclusion that Mas' Braxton [General Bragg] will not soon enough occupy this section, so we must try to live and make the best of it. Mr. and Mrs. Scott came up today, only to remain until tomorrow, however—and tomorrow Mr. Clark³⁸ and family leave for McM. also. All will then have left but Dr. Paine's family, Col. Armfield's, and ours. Mrs. Scott thinks we will all be set upon next, and I must confess I look for nothing else. At present both Mr. A. and Mr. F. appear determined to remain here during the winter.—

Sunday 6th December 1863

On Friday and Saturday 27th and 28th [November] I was quite unwell—but now feel as usual and go about my duties. One of the cows has a new calf, and I sent word to Mammy that she would laugh to see us all go out to the stable

³⁷Brig. Gen. James G. Spears was an East Tennessean commanding a Federal brigade made up of the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Regiments of the East Tennessee Infantry. Whig, Know-Nothing, stock farmer, lawyer, and Republican congressman, William Bickle Stokes (1814-1897), of Alexandria, DeKalb County, served as a colonel in the Fifth Tennessee Cavalry, USA.

³⁸J. P. Clark, teacher, born in New York in 1821; his wife Harriett was born in New Jersey in 1829. Professor Clark was Colonel Armfield's surveyor when lots were laid out at Beersheba in 1856-57. During the winter months, the Clarks ran a boarding school for boys which had been established as early as 1845 at Irving College, eight miles from McMinnville.

"a-milking,"—myself, Bouse, Bee, Tiny, Martha, and Bruno³⁹ and very often the cat also—it required the united ability and influence of the entire delegation to arrive at the satisfactory result, viz.—obtaining a pan of foaming milk, and feeding cow and calf, etc. In the provision line we do well enough as yet, but have many misgivings, surrounded as we are by men who enter any one's house at any hour, and appropriate clothing, provisions, china,—in short everything they choose and you dare not utter a word of protest. That we shall escape, or that I save my housekeeping articles in tact, thro' the winter, I do not for one moment believe or expect. Why should we be exempted more than others? Federal rule is I think preferable to "bushwhackers" rule, and I believe I would feel much safer down in town among the regularly organized soldiery, than here. But how could we get provisions there? There's the rub. Well, we must get on as we can, we must try to do for the best and may Heaven help us thro' it all! Mollie is very angry that they did not get off this morning on their return to McM. Mr. Poindexter was to escort them back, but there was a misunderstanding,—he went off this morning "down in the valley to pray," at a church about 5 miles distant, leaving the girls with the promise that "he would go tomorrow." Mollie "showed her teeth," and made everybody feel uncomfortable, of course. I am afraid she will get her name up as a "perfect termagant"; really I feel mortified very often at her out-breaks.—So underbred—surely she does not remember how very undignified she appears, or she would not act so. I have not had time to keep up the children in the lessons this week, hope to do better next however. Jessie was called in the other evening to play for a company of "*our Protectors*,"—who it seems were quite enthused by her performance, altho' she played and sang the "Bonnie White Flag" with great spirit! We all laughed at Mrs. A. collecting and putting away spoons, knives and forks, etc. before inviting her company in to hear the music!—(An incident I've heard lately. Will Marbury⁴⁰ was carried a prisoner into McM—his mother was dying, he endeavoring to get in to see her was captured,—they would not allow him to go and see her after she was dead unless he would take the oath, this he would not do, and was sent to Camp Chase.)⁴¹

December 27th Sunday

I have not written in my journal for two weeks. During the first nothing particular happened. On Monday night last a party of Federals came up from McMinnville—the officers in command were Captain Bigelow, the Pro Mar., and Maj. Griffin of the 19th Michigan, stationed at the place. They were piloted here by old Wright,⁴² and came to search our house for "Bersheba property"—

³⁹Mammy Nancy remained at "Forest Home" with her sons Cooper and Duke to protect the over-run and depleted estate. From other entries in the diary Mammy Nancy emerges as a commanding figure, always in control, faithful to Colonel and Mrs. French, and able to rise above the times. Bouse, Bee, Tiny, and Martha were servants; Bruno was a dog.

⁴⁰Probably William Marbery (b. 1845) from Warren County as listed in the 1860 Census.

⁴¹Federal prisoner-of-war camp at Columbus, Ohio.

⁴²Not further identified.

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Maria(!) having told them that Mr. Ryan had concealed a large amount of valuable Hotel property in the ceiling over my room!! They came, were very polite, we all equally so, of course, and when they stated their business—our gentlemen told them they knew nothing of any concealed Hotel property but insisted they should come and make the examination. This, however, after questioning everybody and being convinced that they had been duped, they declined doing, and I was very sorry they did so, because of course, as nothing was ever put there, they would not have found anything, and so the matter would have been set at rest. I understand the mountain people say now, that they will come again, for some of them (i.e. the natives.) saw Mr. French one day, putting them in thro' the roof—Darlin' did go up on the house-top one day to fix the roof where it leaked into the dining room and lo! what is made of it! I hope none of us die up here for if we should they will certainly have a post-mortem examination of our stomachs for "Beersheba property." After that poor doomed Hotel has furnished two hospitals and all this country for 20 miles around these mountain people seem still to believe the theme inexhaustible. My opinion is, that they never will rest until they have our house, Dr. Paines', and Col. Armfield's all overhauled and everything taken from us that they can find any pretext to take, or rather everything that they happen to want. I look for a descent to be made upon us any day, and everyday, and should not be surprised to be over-run at any moment, and have everything we possess taken from us, upon some pretext or other. That we will ever get home again with what little we have bought and saved here thus far, I do not for a moment imagine. The Fates seem determined that we shall be stripped of everything we possess. Oh! when I see the ruin around me, and think of our wasted time and home, and know that thousands among us have lost dear ones of the home circle, as well as property, — words cannot express the bitterness of my soul towards those who have plunged our people into this needless and unnatural war. Everyday my whole heart and soul cry out—"will it never, never end?" Wednesday [Dec. 23] very unwell, took an emetic, which relieved my head after 24 hours. Thursday [Dec. 24], however, I was up, for I had to bake cakes etc. for Christmas, and on that evening some candy opportunely arrived from Mollie. With that exception all my Christmas gifts were "home-made," and consisted of hoods, gloves, needle-books, cuffs, etc. etc. with cakes, apples, etc. The children, poor little things, seemed as much delighted with the rude men and women, deer, pigs, rabbits, etc. cut out by Martha and myself, as they used to be in "better days" with the choicest toys and confectionary. Jessie and May were invited to dine at Dr. Paines'—the remainder of us at Mrs. Armfield's. Hattie [Harriet Handerson] was here. I made custard for Mrs. [Lewis] Handerson, who is ill, and we sent a large basket of cakes, etc. over to them. Christmas eve was a lovely, light, cold moonlit night.

Thus ends L. Virginia French's diary for 1863. A second excerpt, "Part II, Winter and Spring, 1864" will be published in the next number. It records the bitter cold of winter at Beersheba, the constant threat of marauders, the fading fortunes of the Confederacy after the Battle of Chickamauga, and concludes with the return of the French family to "Forest Home," McMinnville, in July, 1864.