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Suggested Citation:

The Beersheba Diary of L. Virginia French, Part II, Winter, Spring, and Summer, 1864." The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications 54 & 55 (1982-83): 3-25.

THE BEERSHEBA DIARY OF L. VIRGINIA FRENCH  
Part II, Winter, Spring, and Summer, 1864

*Edited by Herschel Gower*

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Sunday night Jan. 10th 1864

As yet in the New Year I have done nothing. The weather has been and is, intensely cold, reminding me of winters spent in old Pennsylvania and Va. I have seen nothing like it since I came to Tenn. On New Year's morning the thermometer stood at Zero at Dan—here it was 6°. <sup>1</sup> Since that time we have had snow and the trees, etc. covered thickly with frost, the mountains were beautiful, there was a cold blue mist or haze that "lent enchantment to the view," and I wanted to go right at painting some one of the views in a "snow piece." For three days the whole mountaintop was like a fairy land *to look at*, but so dead cold that no fairy could live in it; I did not even see a snow-bird.

I am *so* anxious, so very anxious that *something* should happen which will allow us to go home in the Spring. Darlin' appears to contemplate remaining during next summer but I am very much opposed to it indeed, I want to get home once more and get what little I have left, (that is if I have anything left,) gathered under my own roof-tree broken and wasted, as it is. If I am ever to be better in health any more, I think I shall gain it at home. Our friends here are as kind as ever, but "enough's enough" of anything and I would do any way rather than trespass on the kindness of any one. I trust that our friends will get on more amicably among themselves this year than they have ever done. They have lived together 29 years, much of it in domestic strife and suffering. <sup>2</sup> I feel strongly drawn to Mrs. A. and desire greatly her domestic happiness. She often importuned me to tell her what I would do were I in her place—so for the N. Year I wrote her one night a long letter telling her candidly what I *would* do. I would not give it to her without first reading it to Darlin'—he said it was an

<sup>1</sup>" . . . from Dan even to Beersheba." In ancient Palestine the town Dan was in the far north and Beersheba in the far south. See *Judges* II, xx, 1. Thus the length of Palestine lay between Dan and Beersheba. There is humor in the fact that Dan in Grundy County is only about a country mile south of Beersheba Springs proper. As a place name, Dan is still used and marks the head of Backbone Road.

<sup>2</sup>She is referring to Col. and Mrs. John Armfield.



*L. Virginia French*

Lucy Virginia French. Courtesy the author

excellent letter and if Mrs. A. would follow the course therein pointed out she would save at least one half of her troubles. I hesitated to hand her the letter even after I had written it, but she begged me to do so, and I did it. She has thanked me for it very much, says she will go to it whenever she "feels ugly," and that Jane<sup>3</sup> and she have been digesting it, and she hopes they will both learn many good lessons from it. This gratifies me for I love her dearly and *would* do her good, *if I knew how*.

Sunday—1864

Feb. 1st—Two weeks have passed since I wrote in my weekly (and

<sup>3</sup>Jane Franklin, niece of Mrs. Armfield and Colonel Armfield's ward.

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often *weakly*) "record of current events." The most notable affair that has happened during that time was a "rebel raid" into Altamont and Tracy. On the morning of the 20th Jan. I was quite unwell indeed—had taken an anodyne and was making myself a little comfortable down before the fire when Martha in the adjoining room exclaimed—"Oh! Miss Jennie—do come and see the Yankees." I rose reluctantly—looking out I saw about 40 cavalry passing up the avenue by Dr. [John] Waters'. I merely noticed that they were well mounted—a few wore blue overcoats—but the most of them wore black coats, looked well-dressed and I was told afterwards each man carried two guns, besides his pistols. I was sick and merely saying "Bushwhackers," went back to my resting-place. Soon after the Col. came and inquired if I had seen the rebels? I was surprised. He stated that one of the Coggins had been going down into the valley after corn—they met him on the mountainside, and his negro had come flying back to tell that the "rebels" had the Coggins and 200 of them were in the valley below. Very soon a man came from Altamont after Dr. [Alfred] Paine. He was wanted to attend a man—[Stephen P.] Tipton who had been shot by the rebels—the Dr. did not go. Tipton was the man who had got up a company of "Home Guards" and had been "pressing" and stealing provisions, forage, etc. from people in the valley. They also shot down an old man, [David] Franklin, who belonged to Tipton's Company.<sup>4</sup> Both men died and were "waked" that night, and it is said the women nearly came to blows in the house where the corpses were. Some of them were cursing the rebels for robbing etc., while they were wearing at the time clothing, which their husbands and friends had stolen from "Secesh" on Hickory Cr. where they had murdered the men, robbed the women, and burned the houses over their heads.<sup>5</sup> The rebels proved not to be such true rebels—they were, it is said, Geo. Caster's [unidentified] men—a guerilla party—bent on paying off some scores upon these "bushwhackers" on the other side, that have been ruling and ruining everything here all summer, and then doing what damage they could at Tracy. They had a small fight out there—a Yankee Captain and Lt.—they say were killed—the depot fired etc. but no great amount

<sup>4</sup>Franklin was a private in Tipton's Co. E of the 1st Alabama and Tennessee Vedette Cavalry, U.S.A., occupying Grundy County at that time. For an account of Tipton's leadership of this group of Unionists and scalawags, including the infamous Calvin Brixey, see James L. Nicholson, *Grundy County* (Memphis, 1982), 47-49.

<sup>5</sup>The headwaters of Hickory Creek rise at Summitville; the stream flows north from Viola to McMinnville.

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of damage done. When a reinforcement was sent up from Cowan—the “rebs” were off. Great excitement is said to have existed among these mountaineers for some time—indeed it seems not to be quieted yet. A Yankee Capt. is said to have been placed over Tipton’s men—who will carry them where they will see some service. Many of the men who were instrumental in the sacking of this place last July, have met their reward. One of them used to dash about here wearing little Minnie Kenner’s hat,<sup>6</sup> was cut so by one of his compeers at a frolic for “talkin’ ondecnt talk to his wife”—that he died soon after of his wounds.

Today Mrs. A., Jane, the Col., and myself took quite a long walk, (for me) visiting among other things Bishop Otey’s dismantled cottage. Good old man! he has gone to God’s rest! It was he who married us, and I have ever the kindest feelings for him.<sup>7</sup>

Feb. 14th 1864

We have had lovely sunshiny weather for near a fortnight—all hands and the cook have been at work over at Mrs. A’s getting the garden and yard ready for spring—fixing up walks, fencing, etc. I see it going on and feel greatly interested in it, yet the interest is mingled with sorrow when I think what a wreck my own pleasant home is now lying—and ask myself *when* will it ever be righted again? Will it ever? I very much doubt it—we have lost nearly all there—and what we gained here we will not be allowed to keep. Our future is gloomy enough.

I cannot be too grateful for the good heart that seems still to animate the Col.<sup>8</sup> He says he *will not* be depressed by his reverses—but is ready to commence again as soon as an opening occurs. I think I would feel so too, if I thought I would live long enough afterwards to see something of the fruit of my labors—blessing my children and making my home comfortable. But I cannot think this. I fear that in a few years I shall have passed away—leaving no mark behind which shall say I lived to any purpose. I who have from childhood yearned to *be* something, longed to do something good and great and memorable, shall have tried and struggled with *Circumstances* thro’ life and “died and made no sign.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Minnie, daughter of Minor Kenner, a wealthy landowner of Kenner, Louisiana. The hat was looted from the Kenner cottage which stands today off Grassy Ridge Road.

<sup>7</sup>James Hervey Otey (1800-1863), first Episcopal Bishop of Tennessee and co-founder, with Bishop Leonidas Polk, of the University of the South at Sewanee in 1860.

<sup>8</sup>She is referring, in a formal way, to her husband John Hopkins French.

<sup>9</sup>The editor suggests that the time and dedication she gave to her diary from 1860 to 1865, written

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Sunday 28th Feb. 1864

A cloudy day with a little rain, but not cold—the atmosphere, thick with smoke for the mountains have been on fire all around us. The weather has been windy and dry, the valley full of smoke—the sun and moon looking at their rising and setting like globes of blood. Last night the fires were in lines clear across one or two mountains—these running up to the summit—looking like the lines of the army.

A son of a Mr. Walker [unidentified] who came in last week—having been taken prisoner—says he is just from the Southern Army—that it is stronger in effective men than ever before, that they will fight 30 years, that they have the greater abundance both of food and clothing. That prices are high, but people have the greatest quantity of money, and do not mind it. I see from some accounts that flour is in Ga. \$280 per barrel. Meal \$15 to \$20 per bushel. Sweet potatoes \$8 to \$10. Butter \$4 to \$5 per pound. Calico \$6 to \$8 per yard etc. etc. In Richmond prices about the same.—There are a great many rumors afloat. It seems to be pretty well settled that Longstreet has Knoxville. Some say he is even now pushing into Ky. by way of Cumberland Gap. There are but few troops now at McMinnville—they having dropped work on fortifications and bridges etc. suddenly and gone off to “some other seaport.” The guerillas are very saucy too—dashing all about McM—shooting scouts, robbing Union men, etc. We heard a short time since that Champ Ferguson had been captured—it turned out to be a mistake however.<sup>10</sup>

Sunday 6th March 1864

Mrs. A. and Jane [Franklin] came over, and sat all the morning—then Mrs. A., the children, and myself all took a long stroll away out to the Phillips, Garret, and Kenner Cottages, and along the rocks in that direction—gathering ferns, mosses, and having a very pleasant time.<sup>11</sup> We have been over to Mrs. [Lewis] Handerson's twice this

against great odds and uncertainties, is a fulfillment of her wish to leave behind something for later generations to remember her by.

<sup>10</sup>Champ Ferguson (1821-1865), Confederate guerrilla and sometime scout for Gen. John Hunt Morgan. Feared because of his ruthlessness, he finally was captured by the Federal Military Commission in Nashville on May 29, 1865, tried, and executed on October 20, 1865, for killing 53 persons in cold blood, many of them Yankee prisoners. He boasted that the number was closer to 100. See Thurman Sensing, *Champ Ferguson* (Nashville, 1942).

<sup>11</sup>They followed a scenic path that meandered from the hotel in an easterly direction along the bluff running more or less parallel to present-day Grassy Ridge Road. First, Charles W. Phillips of New Orleans bought 7 and 7/100 acres from John Armfield in 1859. His house faced the hotel, not the bluff, later known as the Hege-Hunerwadle place, it burned in 1911 and was replaced by the present Willis house. In September, 1859, Armfield sold the adjacent 21 acres on the bluff to Isaiah Garrett, Ouachita Parish, Louisiana. Garrett's place is now known as Lover's Leap, present house dating from 1909. Minor

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week—they are selling off all their household effects, preparatory to leaving for the North. Mrs. A. and all hands, have been trying to do all we can to assist them. The house is in confusion—very foreign to its usual quiet and orderly appearance—people coming and going buying out the “household goods.” We brought over quite a quantity of roses, bulbs, etc. and set out over at Mrs. A’s some for her—some for me. It makes me feel sad to see such a pretty place left to these unappreciative mountaineers—but I suppose it is better for Mr. and Mrs. H. to go where they can live without the privations they must suffer here.

Tuesday 15th March 1864

The Handersons have succeeded in disposing of very nearly all their effects, and will leave, I think, this week or first of next. We have all been uneasy about them—such an isolated position—so helpless a family—and taking in money. We want them to get off speedily as possible, lest harm should happen. Hattie was with us on Sunday. Last Wednesday Mrs. A and myself went over. I took them some keepsakes in beautiful silk embroidery which I had prepared for them.

I have hustled about and taken much active exercise, giving Puss the sewing to do. I teach the children 2 or 3 hours per day, besides hearing Miss Jane recite lessons in Grammar and Botany.

Sunday evening March 20, 1864

On Thursday evening about 60 Rebels dashed thro’ this place—two stopping a few moments at Mr. A’s—one of them was Luke Ridley, a son of the Judges! They encamped in a little grove near Mr. Dugan’s at the base of the opposite mt. where their camp-fires shone all night long.<sup>12</sup> About dawn this place was full of Yankees—flourishing their pistols and in hot haste after the Rebs. Their number about 3 times that of the rebels—they were principally [Gen. William B.] Stokes’ men—the rebs said they were Col. Hughes’ men and belonged to Carter’s command. It seems they had been down to Decherd—destroyed a train, (containing only hay and forage,) and were getting back to Sparta. I don’t know where the Yanks came from—at all events they got down the mountain unseen—and surprised the rebels at breakfast—who took off pell-mell up the opposite mt. Looking at its rugged face and rocky brow from here, as it lies

Kenner, Belle Grove Plantation, Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, bought 40 3/4 acres from Armfield in 1857. Kenner’s house still stands, has a fine view, and is a good example of simple Victorian Gothic.

<sup>12</sup>They were probably in Pepper Hollow (near Tarlton) at the foot of Tother Mountain.

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nearly opposite to us one wonders how they *could* scale that height on horseback, but they *did*. As they came out on the top of the mt. they made a little stand—one Yankee was wounded and has since died in McM. The rebels lost some of their saddles, blankets etc. in the *melée*, and one man. He was a wounded man, had been shot somewhere thro' the body at the R.R. and it is supposed gave out as he reached the top of the mt. and was shot down after he surrendered. He was shot through the head. Mr. Dugan found him on Friday, they brought him down to the valley and buried him. He was a youth, apparently about 18 years of age—none knew who he was. Will not *some* mother's heart watch for him who shall come no more, and ache with its lonely watching? The Yankees returned soon from the pursuit—and went on to town—making a great story of the affair by the time they reached there. Dr. Paine came up from town this evening. He brings news that France *has* recognized the Confederacy—says it is in the Northern journals as a fact. (I have my doubts by the by.)

Sunday evening March 27th [1864]

I went over to Mrs. A's—(she had called me from the gallery,) and we walked all round thro' the green house, garden, yard etc. The garden is all made—peas up, hot-beds looking very well—gooseberry bushes green, lilacs and early shrubs budding fast, and all the yard, walks etc., cleaned for the spring. Mrs. A. set aside for me a great many greenhouse plants. I came home, heard the children's lessons, gave them apples and pictures—taught them a Bible lesson—then read them some stories. After dinner the little girls went over to see Henriette and Mrs. A. and myself, with Walter and Bruno as protectors, took a long walk, round by the mill and across the woods nearly to Dan.<sup>13</sup> The Handerson family got off on Wednesday last, we went over on that morning to bid them good-bye—Mrs. H. was very feeble, kept up only by the excitement consequent upon the change. I felt much sympathy with Miss Hattie, she did not wish to go North—her whole heart and soul are on the other side (as is most natural, having both a brother and a lover in the Southern service.) Yet she yielded to the demands of Duty and went with apparent cheerfulness, while all her heart's sympathies were drawing her to Dixie. I told her in parting that I felt I was not saying good-bye forever, that I should see her again

<sup>13</sup>In the ravine west of the Armfield house, there was a tanyard, traces of which can still be found in the property of Alfred Adams, Jr., and a new saw mill run by Ben Cagle, who owned the bluff property at this time and was Armfield's construction foreman.



and she eagerly exclaimed, with eyes full of tears "Oh! yes. I shall be back—the South is my home."

It was reported a day or so since that Carter's men (the same who had the skirmish at Dugan's in the valley) enticed Stokes men into an ambush at Rocky River and killed 60 of them.<sup>14</sup> If so the two poor fellows whom they acknowledge they shot down after they surrendered, on the mountain opposite us, were well avenged.

Wednesday 30th March 1864

—A dull, bleak, leaden, cold day, with a gray snow, and a keen, creeping wind. The mountains are black-blue, as if with cold, and the rocks that crop out all along their brows, look grim, savage, and desolate. On the top edge of the opposite mountain men are disintering one of the "dead rebels," killed in the fight there. Mr. Dugan found him and buried him, there, but without a coffin or anything of the kind—two of his brothers arrived on day before yesterday and they procured a coffin, and were to disinter him this morning and bring him down to the valley, where they will bury him by the other victim who fell on that morning. The Yankees themselves acknowledged in town, that their Captain ordered some negroes who were with them to shoot down these two rebels like dogs, *after they had surrendered*. One of them was wounded some days before at Decherd, and could not get away—they shot him thro' the head. The brothers who came to see after this last one, seemed to be greatly distressed. [Tom] Ryan [caretaker at the hotel] and 2 of the negro men went down this morning at daylight to assist them.

Yesterday's news was that France has *certainly* recognized the South; Charleston has really been abandoned by the Federals in despair, Grant has been ordered to supersede Meade in Va., to try his hand against the greatest man of the times—*Gen. Robert E. Lee*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Rocky River rises along the county line dividing Warren and Van Buren counties and empties into the Caney Fork River. This area remained in Confederate hands and was never occupied by Federal troops, according to James Dillon, Warren County historian.

<sup>15</sup>Although there was much sympathy for the South in France and England, they did not recognize the Confederacy.

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Sunday evening April 2nd [1864]

The Col. and Mr. [Ben] Cagle went to Altamont today to learn something of the cause of the cannonading we heard all day on the 31st—but they have returned with no news. Some of the mountain “brethering” reported yesterday that Morgan and Forrest had been ordered down to re-inforce to meet them—others say the continuous firing which was heard all day was the Yanks firing salutes *because peace was made!!* If that last don't beat them all. Of all the rumors that is the wildest I've heard—the brethering must indeed be running short of ammunition from which to manufacture their reports.

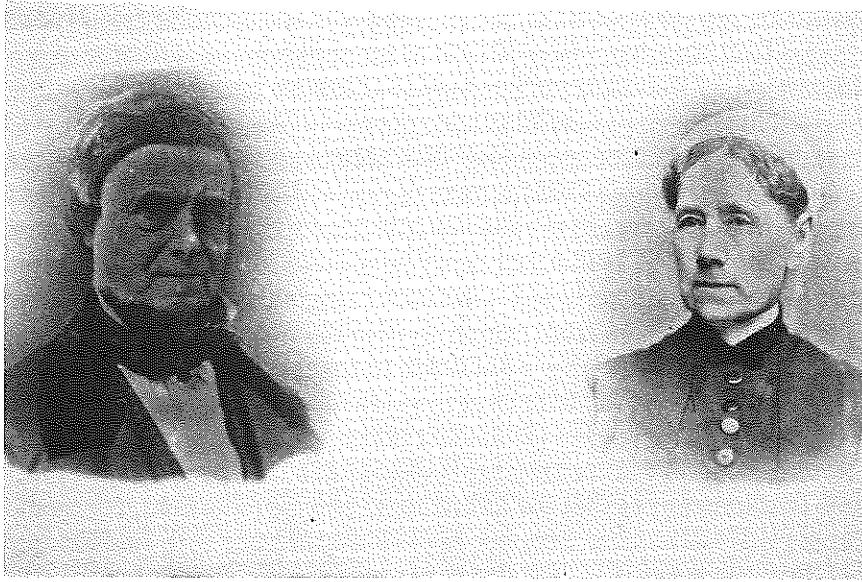
The Col. and Dr. Paine went down to town yesterday and returned this evening. There is no news of importance. I do not know when the Col. will go down again, as his last horse was stolen from a stable a few nights ago by some of [Hard] Hampton's men; (as is supposed,) and I have no hopes that the animal will ever be recovered. It was the “Bay Filly”—the Col. kept her as poor as poverty's self, just to keep her from being stolen, but she is off at last notwithstanding. Every week almost we lost something of the little that is left—soon, I suppose there will be nothing more left.

Sunday April 17th 1864

It was on the 21st of last April that the “*Wilder raid*” took us by storm at home, but on Wednesday, the 13th a still *wilder raid* overwhelmed us here—a *woman's raid*. Col. [Henry C.] Gilbert, Com. of Post at McM,<sup>16</sup> came up, whether on military business or not—no one here knows—he had an escort of some 30 men and 5 girls, of the “Union element” of McM. I have given an account of this elsewhere—so shall say nothing of it here except to wonder for the hundredth time, what in the name of common sense and common decency, the *mothers* of those girls could be thinking of?

I don't see how those girls could help seeing that their conduct seemed to us very improper—and I should not wonder if they visit it on us sometime. The P's [Poindexters] condemned the affair and thro' them the raid will get hold of our opinion. Well I can't help it. I *did* feel horrified—and I would tell Mrs. [Mariah Ready] Armstrong any time, if necessary, that I considered it a great impropriety—that I was sorry to see the girls in it—and sorrier still that she allowed it. What is to come of it? *nous verrons* [we shall see].

<sup>16</sup>Identified in the *War of the Rebellion, Second Series, Official Records*. See Index.



Colonel and Mrs. John Armfield. Courtesy the author

Sunday 1st of May 1864

The mountain sides are veiled, not as yet clothed, in their robes of delicate green. The woods are filled with a profusion of wild flowers, and very much indeed do the children enjoy them, and *so do I*. The gardens are beautifully fresh and green—and we have luxuriant lettuce, pie-plant, asparagus etc. in abundance. The dogwoods and red-buds that drape the mountain ledges below us, are in bloom in great profusion, and every day the children come with their aprons full of purple wake-robin and snowy sanguinaria. Mrs. A. and myself were all “about and about” on yesterday—setting out mignonette, petunias, etc. in the borders, and taking the plants from the greenhouse into the open ground. I am as fond of flowers as ever—it is one trait of civilization left after the hardening, barbarizing influence of this horrid war.

The 19th Michigan left—a Missouri regiment came in. The streets of McM. are said to have presented a sorry sight the morning they left. The Union feminine element which had so frantically thrown itself entirely away into Abraham’s bosom, was dissolved, melted, and steeped in briny tears,—and while it took its long-lingering farewell of the shoulder straps, the darkey feminine element in the streets hung like clouds about the necks and brows of “Uncle Sam’s boys” in the ranks and made the air melodious with their lamenta-



May 1st of May 1864  
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tions. The hard-heart of rebellion looked on unmoved by all this panorama of despair. The feminine “secesh” element was centred upon finding out how the “union element” conducted itself at Bersheba. The Col. would say but little—indeed there was but little need since they, themselves had trumpeted their own doings as soon as they returned. It seems they were much “cut” by not being invited to Mrs. A’s and made a good deal of “to-do” over it—tho’ some did aver that they cared nothing for the attentions of Mrs. A. or Miss Franklin; they only wanted the use of their parlor and piano, to entertain their beaux! One of the rebel sisters remarked that “Those girls never had been able to get into respectable society, and they imagined they could now make an entree with *an armed force*, but they were mistaken.” It seems that the Yankee beaux tried first to get the rebel ladies to accompany them but when they politely declined—the Union feminines were taken as a “dernier resort!” Funny doings.

Sunday 8th May [1864]

A very warm and lovely day—still bright and summery. All the mountains clothed in the gray green of early spring—I think vegetation is not so far advanced as on this day last year. I came up here on the 10th of last May—will have been here a year on Tuesday. On Monday last Mr. and Mrs. A. started for Nashville—but the carriage broke down at the foot of the mt. and they returned in a chilly shower. On Tuesday however they set forth again, and this time with success. The weather has been deliciously fine and warm, since Monday, so that they have had a good time going down. They expected to go up to Sumner Co. today, and it is their intention to bring home with them Adele Franklin and Mrs. Scott.<sup>17</sup> Ever since they left we have been busy sewing—Jane and I want to accomplish the remainder of the spring sewing and have both houses “cleansed and purified” by the time they return. We work all day and go out in the evening in the woods—the mountain sides are full of flowers some of them very beautiful—others curious. I have taken up a great many by the roots to carry home with me.

The horse-thieves have all been set at liberty again—Mr. A. got back his mule, but our poor “bay filly” was so ridden down and

<sup>17</sup>Armfield had owned extensive properties in Sumner County since the 1840’s. Adele Franklin was Mrs. Armfield’s niece, who married George van Bibber of Maryland at Beersheba in 1869. Mrs. Sam Scott’s husband has been previously identified (Part I, p. 96) and they were probably relatives of the Armfields.

starved that she died. Darlin' walked *40 miles* yesterday week to carry her something to eat—when he arrived she was dead. Every now and then we hear of some citizen who is shot down by the Yankees—such is the “protection” of the “best government the world ever saw!”

Thursday 20th of May [1864]

My “Bouser Boy” [son Walter Scott French] completes his first lustrum today. Ten Years! This morning 10 years ago, at 4 o'clock, and just before the day dawned, he came to us at our dear old Forest Home. What a great, healthy boy he is now! Brimful of life—running over with exuberant vitality! And he is a good boy too,—obedient, kind, and manly, fond of working in the garden, delighted to follow his Pa on a squirrel hunt,—and *great on speech-making!* I love the noble little fellow—*how* dearly—who can say? All my mother's heart goes out to him in love and pride, and hope for his future. God bless my boy—and make him a good son and a Christian gentleman!

Monday 16th May [1864]

One item which J.[ohn] Paine brought—gave us much concern,—the death of poor Cooper. Puss is very, very much distressed indeed—and I greatly feel for her, and especially for poor Mammy. I will write to Mollie tonight and will enclose a note to the poor old woman. After Mr. and Mrs. A. return I will try my best to go down to see her. It is not strange that I feel bitterly towards these invaders of our country. To think how we have been harrassed, and robbed and torn to pieces—scattered—almost ruined. To think that while poor Mammy had one son lying at the point of death, the other should be marched off, before her eyes, and in spite of his opposition, and her entreaties, at the point of the bayonet! I did hope that if the war should end this year we could gather up the scattered remains of what we had left, and all the members of our little family—but it may not be. Poor Cooper—he was persuaded to his ruin—to his grave. I taught him to spell and read myself,—he was bright and anxious to learn—I used to teach him every Sunday when the children came to hear their Bible stories. I taught him how to form letters on their blackboards—and was teaching him to write. Lee seemed to have no “turn” for any such thing—neither does Puss. Ah! well, I suppose it is all right—“all for the best.” We must believe so—else it had not been. The children are “speech-making” at such a rate around me, I can scarcely write.

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10th of May [1864]  
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16th May [1864]  
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Sunday 22nd May [1864]

The locust trees are in full bloom and in the evenings and mornings fill the air with their rich and heavy fragrance. There are long lines of them all along the street between us and Mrs. Armfield's—and round the Hotel—the court too is full of them. Bersheba is very, very beautiful now—everything is so free, fresh, and luxuriant. I was glad everything was looking so beautiful, to welcome home our friends. They returned on Thursday last—bringing with them Miss Adele Franklin and on Friday Mr. and Mrs. Scott and their children came. All will spend the summer, except Mr. S.—who will vibrate between this point and Nashville. Everybody seemed as much delighted to get back to Bersheba, as we were to see them—the accounts they give of life in Nashville are stifling—suffocating. They had however, good weather, met with kind friends, got all they wanted to bring out, were very politely treated by the Yankee authorities, and in short had a safe, speedy, and successful trip; for which we are all deeply thankful. They brought out presents for old and young, and both Mr. and Mrs. A. have been exceedingly liberal in dividing with us medicines, and other supplies. Mr. A. persuaded me to commence taking “Hostetters' Bitters”—says he found it of great service to himself so he brought a supply for me also. I hope it or *something* will brace me up so that I can go to writing some soon. Mrs. Scott is very feeble indeed—says she could not possibly have lived thro' the summer in N—but hopes to be enabled here to gain strength to resist her disease. Her lungs are affected, her breathing is labored, she expectorates much, and has had some night-sweats. Yet she is cheerful, talks and laughs and her will and energy to be well may save her—I do most sincerely hope so. She is worse than I—yet I think not so depressed in spirits; I get ashamed of myself when I see her. Oh! that we could both be restored to vigorous health, and spared to our little families! I enclose with this Mollie's letter concerning Cooper's death. The physicians pronounced his disease a rapid consumption induced by exposure. Poor Mammy! I feel for her. The Col. says he will go down this week and take Puss with him to see her mother—I wanted to go very much myself—but he is not willing that we should go alone, and I think it may do Mammy more good to see her own child than to see me—so I will remain at home *as usual*.

The Col. has promised to take charge of the children—hearing them two lessons per day in spelling and reading, beside their

speeches. I am anxious to see if he will fulfill his promise with any sort of system or regularity. If he will, it will take just that much labor—sedentary labor off me—which time I can devote to my writing. Oh! I long to get at it once more! To feel that I am doing something that may hereafter “tell”, and perhaps, if well managed, “pay.” If I could have dear Auntie to stay with me, I think I could accomplish something worth while, and also regain my health.<sup>18</sup>

Wednesday morning 25th May [1864]

I saw no one from the other house yesterday—on Monday evening I was over. A constraint seemed to be upon all, which I did not understand until just as I was coming away. Mrs. A. told me she was in much trouble, but could not tell me the cause just then, except that “C- and R-” [Ben Cagle and Tom Ryan] had been telling tales to Mr. A. I do not understand it at all, and will not until she informs me. I feel very much for her and was extremely sad yesterday—and am so still. I feel depressed and apprehensive of evil, I scarce know why. Mrs. A. asked me to pray for her, I have done so, most fervently, she has so much to bear. Oh! I would that my petition could do her some good. I am glad she has Mrs. Scott with her;—she understands, and is a true friend.<sup>19</sup>

Sunday June [16] [1864]

I am *so-so* anxious to get back to my old home—wreck and ruin as it is. The times are so uncertain—the risks of our all being sick from going home are great—but then, I want to go. The desire possesses me, with so much intensity that I seem to think of nothing else—my mind runs upon it—waking or sleeping, to the exclusion of all other ideas. I wanted to go in March—oh! would that we had gone then! McMinnville is in a state of great uncertainty—some are of the opinion that it will be evacuated by the Federals in a short time—some are of the opinion that it will still be occupied as an outpost.

That which worries me most now is the difficulty of getting transportation for our “household goods” down home. I know it *is* difficult yet it does seem to me, that the Col. is not so energetic about it as *I* would be if I were a man. I would “leave no stone unturned” to get away from this mountain—in two weeks, by “hook or by crook” I

<sup>18</sup>She is probably referring to one of her father's several sisters as “dear auntie.” See Virginia Lewis Peck, “Life and Works of L. Virginia French,” *passim*.

<sup>19</sup>Even though L. V. F. is not specific, she continues to sympathize with Mrs. Armfield. The entry for July 31 reveals her very decided dislike of Armfield's factotum Ben Cagle.

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Sunday June [16] [1864]  
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would be in my own home. Perhaps it is wrong in me—this great anxiety to be once more at home—we may suffer there I know—but I cannot help it. And I cannot but feel heart-sick with “hope deferred,” when I think how many days, nay, perhaps weeks, may elapse ere my desire is granted. I cannot but dread that there will be delay after delay—which in my present state of health and spirits is harassing to the last degree.

Sunday morning June 26th [1864]

Only 4 more days and June will be ended, and we still are here. I had so hoped to be at home by the first of July. I know that we risk sickness in going down in the summer, and that we will lose Martha in returning before the place is evacuated by Yankees, but these are risks we must be prepared to run—we *ought to be at home*. The *moral* atmosphere of this place is such, that any malaria which is to effect physical health only, is of secondary estimation with me. The Col. is down at town now,—went on Friday—seeking to perfect arrangements by which we can be removed. I fear much he will return without having accomplished anything. [Adrian] Hobbes took down a load on Friday—but we have so much “plunder” to move. Mr. [William L.] Murfree has written us desiring that we take down *his* also, as well as our own! I suppose we will try to do so—if it is not *too* inconvenient. I have been doing some packing every morning for a week or 10 days, hoping to get off ere this—and I will still hope. The weather is very warm—I have on the gallery a beautiful collection of plants in pots which grow luxuriantly, and are blooming profusely. Geraniums, fuschias, arbutus, hydrangeas, etc. I want to carry all down with me if I can. The children are well, having entirely recovered from the *chicken-pox* they had some 2 weeks since, Puss is well for her—but Martha, tho’ she complains but little is thin and not very efficient on account of a swelling under her right ear, which I have been “doctoring” for 3 months.

Last Monday evening just at dusk, the Col. and I were returning from the Chalybeate spring—when the Dr. and “Victim” came pattering up behind us, so full of news and out of breath that they could scarcely articulate. . . . the most original item he [Dr. Paine] had to communicate was that Leyden Brown—a “hickory” divine down in the valley had had a vision—by “the second sight,” he and all his family had seen an immense column of Yankees, 8 deep, marching northward—pursued by “no end” of rebels! This column was march-



ing thro' the air—the Yanks for once as “baseless” as was the “fabric” of Leyden’s vision.<sup>20</sup>

We have heard that the cavalry have left McM, but the place it seems is not to be evacuated—it is held now by a few companies of Dutch and Irish—new levies—the new “hundred days” men. We are told that they are pretty quiet, and as orderly as can be expected under the circumstances.

Sunday morning 3d July [1864]

Don’t know how folks are getting on at town now—Stokes cavalry killed “Old Wright” the other day.<sup>21</sup> He had one hundred dollars and 5 of them shot him for it—20 dollars apiece! He was a very wrong man, notwithstanding his name—one of those who carried off wagon loads of furniture, etc. from here last July—and he instigated Bigelow to come here to search our house last winter. He and Bigelow have both now gone to their account.<sup>22</sup>

Monday morning 4th July [1864]

Wheeler is reported to have lately fallen in upon Sherman’s rear, and captured 2 trains—17 cars, of ammunition, provisions, etc. It is amusing to note the altered tone of the mountaineers—all are becoming *intensely Southern*—since as they say “that the rebels have been whippin’ *everything* for the las’ 3 months.” One loss we mourn in the South—the death of Lt. Gen. Polk—who was killed by a shell on the 15th of June. The projectile entered by his left arm—passing thro’ and carrying away his right arm; so it is stated. He is greatly lamented.<sup>23</sup>

Sunday morning July 10th 1864

Mrs. A. and Mrs. S. had quite a disagreement and some “high words” a day or two ago, and Mrs. S. told me that in consequence of it, she would leave the beginning of this week, if Mr. S. did not come, and wish to remain. I think she would have done so, but as Mr. S. has arrived, I take it for granted they will all remain, at least for some time yet. I would give anything to be out of this atmosphere of contention. I endeavor to be very quiet, take no sides, but being made the

<sup>20</sup>Spelled Leaden Brown in the Grundy County Census, 1860, District 4, p. 18, age 32 then.

<sup>21</sup>Alexander Wright, 56, and his wife Maria lived on the Beersheba Road in Warren County and were strong Unionists, according to James Dillon, Warren County historian.

<sup>22</sup>Bigelow not definitely identified.

<sup>23</sup>Bishop-General Leonidas Polk (1806-1864), missionary Episcopal bishop of the Southwest, cousin of James K. Polk, co-founder of the University of the South, and original owner and occupant of the Howell Cottage at Beersheba.

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The people South of the army lines have abundance of provisions and *roll in money*. They pay 300 dollars for a pair of boots. This gentleman's wife lately paid 1400 dollars for a common carpet. Augusta is full of goods—ditto Charleston, etc. The blockade runners running successfully in 9 out of every 10 cases. Quite a wonderful case of *management* is related by Mrs. S. of how Mrs. Acklin got out her cotton, paid her debts—amounting to some 250 thousand dollars, and went to New York with the remainder, selling it there for 300 thousand in gold, which she invested in Europe at 4 percent. Capt. Duffield was her man of business, Mrs. Carter her coadjutor—they had just returned from N. Y., looking well and in great spirits at their success.<sup>24</sup>

Sunday evening, July 24th 1864

The house is nearly empty, and very quiet—nobody here but May and myself. Bouse, with Joe and Frank Scott gone to "Stone Door"—Jessie and "Marth" walked to the spring—the Col. down at town—Pussy went home on Tuesday last.<sup>25</sup> Since that time myself and Martha have done all the work of the household, except that kind Mrs. A. has sent so much "ready-made" viands that we have had but little cooking to do. What an *indefatigably* kind woman she is! I have never seen any one so entirely and consistently and thoroughly so! And

<sup>24</sup>Not without an overtone of sour grapes, L. V. F. is referring to Adelia Hayes Acklen (1819-1887), first the wife of John Armfield's partner Isaac Franklin; after his death she married Joseph A. S. Acklen in 1849. They built "Belmont" in the early 1850's. The Acklens owned extensive lands at Angola Plantation, Louisiana, where Acklen died in 1863 after an accident. Mrs. Acklen and her cousin, Mrs. Joseph Winlock Carter (1826-1912), the former Sarah Ewing, set out for Angola, to rescue the cotton from the Confederates, who were about to burn it so it would not fall into Yankee hands. With the help of Capt. B. Duffield (not Duffield), a riverboat captain from Franklin County, Tennessee, they were successful in getting the cotton to New Orleans. Duffield was 52 at the time and received \$10,000 from Mrs. Acklen for his help. There is good reason to assume that Mrs. Acklen was richer after the war than before. She took her four children to Europe, traveled in royal style, and was received by the Emperor and Empress of France. The historian A. W. Putnam wrote in 1866: "Mrs. Acklin [sic] comes to church as a Dutchess [sic] . . . with French driver on a carriage box in livery and with cockade—and on last Sabbath was in most elegant dress I ever saw—at least in church." Often the object of envy in an impoverished Nashville, Mrs. Acklen married, third, Dr. William A. Cheatham in 1867. The union was not compatible and she sold "Belmont," lived in Washington, and died in 1887 in New York City. See the George Shields letters in "Acklen Papers," Historic Belmont Association. Also see the cousin's account after she became Mrs. John Gaut (Sarah Ewing Gaut) in Nashville *American* (Supplement), Sept. 13, 1907. See Louise Davis, Nashville *Tennessean*, December 30, 1984. Putnam published *History of Tennessee*, or *The Life and Times of James Robertson* in 1859. See Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *The Belmont Mansion: The Home of Joseph and Adelia Acklen* (Nashville, 1981).

<sup>25</sup>Incorrectly identified in Part I, note 39, Bouse was her son Walter Scott French; Ting and Bee were nicknames for her daughters Jessie and May; Martha and Puss were unpredictable maids. "Stone Door" remains a favorite hike for sightseers today and is now part of the Savage Gulf Natural area.

how it pains me—her friend, truly her friend, to find her life irremediably unhappy. May Heaven bless and keep her!

On Friday the Col. traversed this region for miles, hunting conveyances—by dint of unearthly exertions got 2—On Friday night we were up until 12—packing these wagons, and arose again at 3—to get breakfast for the men and get them off. After they left a great deal of cleaning, etc. was to be done, we got thro' with it—Martha and I. It has been a busy week—Pussy did the washing Monday—Tuesday the Col. took her down, with 2 loads—then Martha and I did the ironing—cleaning etc. all ourselves.

Look for the Col. this evening[;] he went down with the wagons yesterday—I feel in suspense until he comes so that I can *know* if there may be a certain hope of our getting off tomorrow.

Nothing new from either army—Grant is in front of Petersburg—Sherman in front of Atlanta.

Sunday July 31st 1864

*At home.*<sup>26</sup> On last Monday we left Bersheba<sup>27</sup>—two men were engaged to come with their wagons to take away the last two loads—one of them came with a *one horse* team—the other who was to have been there by daylight, arrived about 9 o'clock—having had 2 days to prepare for the trip, found upon getting up his oxen on Monday morning that the yoke was 2 miles off at some neighbors! Give me these mountain people as specimens of reliability and energy!! Well—by 11 o'clock the wagons were started—the Bass Cottage was cleared—we said good-bye to our kind friends and took up our line of march down the mountain—I driving one buggy—and Walter the other, Martha, Elvis, Clark, and a boy who had been hired to drive the cow and calf down, all after these animals, and all could not get them along until the Col. came up and got them started. Got down to the Chalybeate Spring and found our wagon “broke down” or nearly so, and the man refusing to budge a step until part of the load was taken off! Right there in the road it had to be done—chairs, and walnut safe, tables etc. all landed in the road—we drove on and left them to fix it how they would. We had not gone a hundred yards when the cow and

<sup>26</sup>The French estate “Forest Home” was on the old Nashville Pike west of McMinnville, one mile from the square.

<sup>27</sup>Along with her contemporaries she insists on this spelling. However, in the novel “Darlingtonia,” published serially in the *Detroit Free Press*, 1879, it is spelled Beersheba as in the King James Bible. Today it is still pronounced Bersheba, however, with the accent on the first syllable.

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Sunday July 31st 1864  
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calf, eluding their driver, came tearing back up the hill, thro’ the thick undergrowth and the Col. had to leave us in charge of Uncle Clark, and rush back after the bovine portion of the “flittin’.” It was a good hour before they got that unruly cow in the road again and on the right track. Meanwhile with Elvis at Walter’s horse’s head and Clark leading mine, we had gone about half way down the Mt. and over just such roads as I never did see before, and never want to see again. We met [Ben] Cagle coming up, and I threw all the scorn I could into my face, and looked him square in the eyes as I passed. We stopped our buggies about the second turn—to let old [Thomas] Thompson get by, who was coming up with a load of wheat, and soon the cow and her driver came up—both in a panting and perspiring state.<sup>28</sup> I asked where is Mr. French? “Stopped up there talkin’ to Cagle.” I pricked up my ears at this—if he was talking to Cagle—he was telling him a “piece of his mind” for sure! By and by here he came—I saw that he had been “raking down” somebody by his very face—but he said nothing about it then, nor did I. He told us we had forgotten the dog—and so we had—poor Bruno was left behind! Walter and Martha were dispatched back up the mt. thro’ the heat, (for it was now noon,) after the dog! The Col. gathered the cowboy, the cow and the calf and conveyed them in safety to the foot of the mt. then returned for us—Clark and Elvis accompanying, we got down safely—fed the horses, refreshed the children with a little lunch—paid the negros and sent them back—then waited for Walter, Martha and the dog. In the course of half an hour they all made their appearance—hot and tired, and the journey only as yet begun. We rumbled and tumbled, (*and grumbled* some,) over the rocks and stocks and blocks in that “Dry Wash,”<sup>29</sup> and finally came out into the valley road, where all mounted into the buggies except the Col. and the *not* omnipotent cow-boy, who walked on ahead seeming to be impressed with the idea that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” in regard to cows as well as men and that nothing less than that would secure the perspective milk and butter of “Forest Home.” We jogged on in this way thro’ the hot sun until it began to tell on me in the shape of a headache—which continued

<sup>28</sup>Her dislike of Ben Cagle apparently stemmed from his and Tom Ryan’s remarks about Mrs. Armfield, the specifics of which are not recorded. Thomas Thompson, farmer, was born in 1808 and got his mail at Beersheba.

<sup>29</sup>Dry Wash is a stretch in the Collins River, Tarlton Valley. Smooth, rounded stones fill the riverbed. Except in seasons of heavy rain, it is dry and can be seen from certain points in Beersheba. The French party took to the Dry Wash either because the valley road was muddy or because they would not likely encounter Federal troops or “irregulars.”

until about 4 P.M., when we stopped at a fine spring and opened our well-filled lunch basket—dealing about buttered biscuit, broiled chicken, ham, crackers, and June apples. After the lunch, and the afternoon beginning to grow cooler my head was much relieved. We were in a hurry from this time on, to get to the river before dark, because of the pickets were *out* and would not let us *in* after dark. So the Col. who had paid the boy to drive his cow, drove her at last himself—walking every step of the way. I asked him when we got home if he was not tired—he said “not at all.” We reached the river just at dusk—found no pickets—drove on up into town—found nobody on guard anywhere, it was quite dark as we passed thro’ town and I could not tell how the old place looked except that I had a general impression that it had a *peeled* and *scaly* appearance. We came in by the bluff road, and I recognized no place, altho’ I knew where we were, until we reached the steps. It was the first place that reminded me I had reached *home*. There was a light at the front of the house, but no one knew we were in the yard until we knocked at the door. Mammy and Puss were here and Miss Mollie [Smith] had come out expecting us to get in before dark but gave us up when night set in, because they thought we would not know there were no pickets out, and would stay somewhere on the other side of the river. They were just preparing for bed when we came in—and I need not say there was joy on all hands at our reaching home once more. Exclamations were made on the growth of the children, and they in turn seemed to regard “Lee-boy” as a perfect show, Good old Mammy seemed overjoyed and hugged the children over and over again. I was very tired—worn out in fact—yet I could not but realize how good a thing it was to *be at home*.

We have worked hard all week, and indeed there never was a place needed labor more. It was *too* dirty for any use—but Mammy says “Why Ginnie! it’s *clean* now to what it has been—I wish you’d seen it when I came home first!” We have worked 5 days hard, with Mollie to assist us, and have got the place swept, scoured, the matting and carpets down, furniture placed in some rooms, but I think there’s a month’s work on hand yet. The house is so much abused—so dirtied up—walls, chimneys etc. defaced—so that I don’t believe that with all we can do it will look at all like I wished it to do, before I had it cleaned up. The furniture we brought tho’ nice, don’t [sic] seem to “show off” much—but I hope we can be comfortable. The portico being torn away appeared very badly; the hardy shrubbery has grown

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up, and run wild, making the yard appear like a wilderness, while all the tinder growth has died, from neglect. Weeds are everywhere—burdocks cluster beneath the windows, and mullein grows beside my finest roses, ah me! how careful I was of these flowers once! Stanley brought my plants down on Friday—they were very much abused and looked badly—not a bloom on one of them. Dugan's wagon, (the one that broke down,) came on Wednesday with its half load, the things they had put out in the road Mrs. Armfield had Nathan and Clark carry to Stanley's—the Col. was out of all patience with Dugan, had to pay him more for his ½ load than any of the rest beside, for a whole one and an extra 2 dollars for Clark and Nathan carrying back what they left in the road. There is a load, or more at Stanley's yet. I find that Pussy has been very successful with the blackberries, she and Mollie have put up for me some 30 jars and bottles of berries, cordial etc., also 6 bottles of huckleberries. Mrs. A. gave me 2 nice bottles of Cordial before I left the mountain and I have them now, all safe. There is a good promise of fruit—Mammy has been drying some—and the garden is good, notwithstanding the dry weather. The grove has been much cut, yet there are enough trees left yet for beauty—on the bluff the timber is cut quite bare in many places, and the high road now runs right by our gate. I dislike this oh! very much. If the Col. could get his porches up on both sides of the house (as he proposes doing this fall, if they will allow us to remain quietly here,) it would add very much to the comfort of the house. But I do not expect him either to do that; or to bring home our furniture from town, if people will keep it for us. Indeed, times are so uncertain that I shall not ask him to do it. Mammy's house looks quite comfortable with its new furnishings, new bed-steads, bureau, wash-stand, table, ward-robe, looking-glasses, and various etceteras—I have her a good rocking-chair too. We are trying to stow away the Murfree things—I don't expect we shall be able to sell any of them—people seem to be, like ourselves, very short of "greenbacks."

Tuesday August 9th 1864

We have been so busy since coming home that I have had no time to do anything except arrange "the things." I have received two letters from Mrs. Armfield and replied to them—sent one off this morning. Her first I have stitched in with my journal. Her last is a sad letter—Mr. and Mrs. Scott are soon to leave the Mt. and then the girls [Adele and Jane Franklin] will also leave in a few weeks—so that she will be alone. I feel very much for her. Things go on as usual up at the mt. We

have not got more than half arranged here yet, and I am still turning things around, and feeling unsettled. The Col. has promised me to commence fixing up the out-houses, porches etc. this week—yet I see no signs of anything being done in that way yet. The kitchen and smokehouse, are entirely too bad to be used—but we are obliged to use the former as we have no place else to cook. Duke [former servant] used the smokehouse as a *stable*, and the poultry have now entire possession, as there is no place else to put them. I have not yet got sufficiently under way to attend to the children's lessons, and they are running wild again, of course. Only a portion of our furniture etc. has been brought out as yet, I do not know when the Col. will be "moved" to get the remainder out—the rooms have been ready for it for a week. I feel much obliged to those friends who have been so kind as to take care of my things for me, and it renders me ready and willing to care for the things belonging to others.

There is a rumor of the death of Gen. [Joseph] Wheeler, but as both he and [Gen. Nathan Bedford] Forrest are either mortally wounded or "substantially" killed about every 2 months, the rumor "requires confirmation."

#### Afterword

As Virginia Lewis Peck points out in her biography of L. Virginia French, cited earlier in Part I, the years after the return to McMinnville were painfully difficult and often desperate ones for Mrs. French. The last page of the diary, written on Sunday, August 20, 1865, is a long, bitter reflection of her disillusionment and broken spirit four months after Appomattox. "I am not heartless as the word is now used," she wrote, "for that pre-supposes that one has something instead of a heart which makes one cruel and trifling—but mine is simply no heart—a negation."

In spite of this period of withdrawal from and hopeless outlook on affairs in the Reconstruction South, she saw to the children's lessons, tried to keep "Forest Home" habitable, and somehow managed to go on with her writing. With family finances strained, she put her pen to work for money: columns for periodicals, journalistic sketches, and editorial work for several short-lived magazines. In 1868 she published a novel, *Kernwood*, at her own expense with the hope of profit. Another novel, *My Roses*, was published in 1872. She finished the manuscript of "Darlingtonia: The Eaters and the Eaten" in 1878 and, after several attempts, was not successful in interesting a publisher.

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Because the money was needed by the family, she sold "Darlingtonia" to the *Detroit Free Press* for \$300 and it was published in weekly installments from April 27 to August 17, 1879.

Because "Forest Home" was rapidly deteriorating, the Frenches abandoned it and moved in 1879 to "Nestledown," a more comfortable house nearby. Yet at the same time L. Virginia's health was on the wane and she died on March 31, 1881 with her family at her bedside. She is buried in Riverside Cemetery, McMinnville, and the simple inscription reads "Yours sincerely, L. Virginia French."

Her voluminous diaries remain her finest and most lasting memorial.