

## Letter from Rev. J. Whitney

WASHINGTON, JAN. 13th, '62

BR. AUSTIN:—Since reaching the city, I have been so disabled by taking cold in a slight injury upon my foot, that I have had but little opportunity for sight-seeing at our National Capital, or anything pertaining to the General Government. I visited Alexandria, however, and witnessed the drilling of troops in that city and vicinity, to some extent, but have not been able to visit any distant encampment. The principal objects of interest which strike the eye on *leaving* Alexandria for this city, is the unfinished dome of the National Capitol and the unfinished column of the Washington Monument. The Potomac, between the two cities is about a mile wide, and several small steamers are constantly running in both directions. I was surprised at the size and appearance of Alexandria. It is old, and somewhat dilapidated, but as large as our own Auburn, and probably a place of as much business. Directly in front of the Hotel in which the fearless and noble Ellsworth was assassinated, I saw a splendid regiment drilling, that was called the “Cameron Guards,” of Pennsylvania, and several companies of Cavalry were moving rapidly about the city, all in high spirits and seeming eager to engaged in some forward movement.

The Capital is literally crammed with civilians and soldiers, so that almost every part of the city is like Broadway in New York. The Military is moving in every direction, and there is no end to the Government wagons. They may be seen at all times drawn by four horses or six mules, in trains of a quarter of a mile, to two miles in length, and they seem to be perpetually concentrating and dispersing at the War Department of Sect. Cameron and the Head Quarters of Gen. McClellan, which are both near the White House, and directly opposite, on the same street.

The President’s public reception on Tuesday evenings, is an interesting feature of life in Washington. I have attended but once, yet this is enough to give a fair idea of the fashion, beauty and talent of this brilliant gathering. Besides Old Abe, who gave us all a hearty shake of the hand, and Secretaries Chase, Cameron and Seward, we saw the French and British ministers and several attachés of foreign Legations. And last, though not least, there were present a large number of Generals, Colonels, &c. of the American Army, and they all seemed to enjoy themselves richly, as they were moving under the glittering chandeliers and in front of the mammoth mirrors of the renowned East Room, in which alone, I estimated about two thousand persons, when every other public room of the mansion was crowded to excess.

Dr. Cheever, at 3 o’clock P.M. yesterday, gave the people of Washington one of his most rabid Abolition discourses, in the splendid Representative Hall of the Capitol. The Hall was densely filled above and below—the most profound attention was given to his burning plea for immediate emancipation by Congress, as both just and necessary in the present exigency of our nation; and at the close of his thrilling speech, which occupied only fifty-five minutes, the audience was moved to tears by a stirring song from the Hutchinson Family, who were present, entitled “The Slave’s Lament and Plea for Freedom.”

I was present, also, at a Concert of this same Family, a few nights since, at the Hall of the Young Men’s Christian Association, at which they gave, with striking effect, several interesting patriotic and Abolition songs, among which was the one sung at the Capitol, and one in praise of John Brown, that was sung by the Massachusetts 12th, as they marched through Boston, New York and Baltimore, on their way to the seat of the war; and no piece was sung during the evening which drew forth louder applause from the apparently delighted audience. What a change has come over the spirit of their dream in this city; for certainly these songs and speeches could not have been given many months ago, without being clamored down by the infuriated populace.

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It was a rich treat to witness the delivery of Mr. Sumner's able speech in the Senate of the United States, on the arrest of the pretended Southern Commissioners, by Capt. Wilkes, and the great question of international law pertaining to the case. As a student of History and a profound jurist, Mr. S. is especially qualified for his position as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, and no man in Congress is probably better fitted to give this Mason and Slidell subject the mature consideration that it deserves. He brought to his aid in this finished speech, an affluence of authority and illustration derived from the broad history of American Diplomacy, to show that the decision of our Government to surrender these traitors, has a firmer and broader foundation to rest upon than that which covers the British reclamation against the act of Capt. Wilkes. He congratulated us that this precedent of our Government has passed into the history of Nations, and that it must attract the attention of the civilized world to the fact that, instead of bowing to British demand, we have simply performed an act rendered necessary by the most solemn considerations of political consistency and justice, and to the permanency and purity of international law.

Yours Truly,  
J. [Rev. Jacob] WHITNEY

*Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 25 Jan 1862*

Transcribed on 26 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY