THE NEW YORK HERALD.

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NEWS FROM WASHINGTON.

The Latest Developements Respecting the Mason-Slidell Affair.

Important National Military Railroad Project.

Additional Particulars of the Battle of Dranesville.

CONDITION OF THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS.

Preparations for Celebrating Christmas in the Camps.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL TARIFF BILL, &c., &c., &c.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24, 1861.

THE MASON-SLIDELL AFFAIR.

The negotiations in regard to the Trent business ar still quietly and amicably progressing. There is not the slightest foundation for a silly rumor that has been put in circulation, that the interview yesterday between Lord Lyons and Mr. Seward was excited and ended in high words. I am authorized to say that it was conducted with becoming courtesy, and concluded with the utmost amiability.

Whatever are the demands of the British government in reference to the seizure of Mason and Slidell, it cannot be doubted that they are couched in courteous and considerate language, and are presented with dignity and politeness, without anything in word or manner that can be personally offensive to the American Cabinet.

Whatever speculations may be indulged, there is no ground for the supposition that the recent arrivals brought to the British Minister here any modification of the instructions originally conveyed by Captain Seymour. The question is to be treated here from the beginning. There was no correspondence between Mr. Adams and the British government on the subject. It is known that when the British Cabinet were about to act upon the affair of the Trent, it was proposed to await some explanation or communication from Mr. Adams; but he had received no instructions, and had no explanation to make, consequently instructions were forwarded to the British Minister here, to demand an explanation of conduct which was believed to have been immediately authorized by this government, and which was considered by the legal advisers of the Crown without precedent and unwarrantable by the law of nations.

The impression that the act of Captain Wilkes was directly ordered by our government is really the source, not only of the precipitate action of the British Cabinet, but also of the frenzy of the British people. Before the arrival of the Trent, Secretary Seward's circular in regard to the renovation of our lake and seacoast defences had reached England. It was there regarded as a menace to Great Britain exclusively. At the moment when this impression prevailed, both in and out of the British Cabinet, the news of the arrest of the Trent, and the seizure of four of her passengers came. It was believed that our government had first directed the seizure of Mason and Slidell on board of a British vessel, and then, conscious that it would be a grave offence, gave orders to prepare our lake and seacoast defences for the war that must necessarily ensue.

The conjunction of these two events is certainly unfortunate, but admits of explanation which may somewhat abate the impetuosity, but will certainly not altogether appease the excited ire of the English people. It is known, as is evidenced by communications to distinguished statesmen here from gentlemen in England who have an opportunity of informing themselves accurately as to the temper of the British Ministry, that the Cabinet officers here do not desire to produce a war with this country. But the pressure upon them is almost incredible. It is equalled only by the excitement in regard to the Reform question, thirty years ago.

In the meantime, it is of the utmost importance to know precisely the attitude of France. It is vain and silly for us to talk widly about fighting the whole world on account of a couple of miserable renegade rebels, who were probably glad to escape from the fate they had invoked at home. It is true that all the natural sympathy and historic associations of the French nation would seem to incline them to be our allies; but it is nevertheless true that for months past Napoleon has been urging Great Britain to unite with him in breaking the blockade of the Southern ports. This has hitherto been resisted by the British Cabinet, but it leaves the position of France very doubtful in case of hostilities between our own government and that of England.

The affair is complicated. Time alone can unravel it, and the utmost prudence on the part of the administration will be necessary to avoid a war which may involve us with more than one European Power, while we are engaged in a life and death struggle for the preservation of the Union itself.

IMPORTANT NATIONAL MILITARY RAILROAD SCHEME.

The committees of Congress to whom was referred that portion of the President's Message, relating to the construction of a national military road across the States of Kentucky and Tennessee have, under consideration a plan for the connection by railroad of the great centres of the railroad systems of the North and South. This plan meets the approval of the President, to whom it has been suggested by General Leslie Combs, of Kentucky, with whom it has been a carefully studied hobby for a quarter of a century. It contemplates the connection, by a direct railroad, of Chattanooga, Tenn., with Louisville, Ky., and Cincinnati. To complete this connection it would be necessary to construct about two hundred and twenty miles of railroad over a practicable route. The surveys and estimates have already been made by competent engineers. Chattanooga is the great railroad centre of the south. It is the point of convergence for railroads already constructed from all the principal cities on the lower Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico and the Southern Atlantic, around the whole semicircle from Memphis, Tenn., including Little Rock, Arkansas, Vicksburg, and Jackson, Mississippi, New Orleans, Mobile, Pensacola, Savannah, Charleston, Beaufort, N. C., to Norfolk and Richmond.

As a strategical point it is of immense importance. There is in the immediate neighborhood an abundance of coal, iron and copper. It is argued with much force that the establishment of a national armory at this point, and the maintenance there of a school of practice, like that at Carlisle, Pa., except upon a larger scale, would enable the government effectually to maintain the public peace in all of the Southern States.

The whole of this Southern railroad system has the same gauge, and the extension of it to the Ohio river, within a loyal State, would enable the government at any time to bring to the point of distribution whatever military force should be required.

THE BATTLE AT DRANESVILLE.

It appears that at the Dranesville battle we had only twenty-one hundred men actually engaged against over five thousand of the enemy, all of whom participated in the fight. Out of the "Bucktail" Rifles, and the Sixth and Ninth regiments—the regiments in addition to Easton's battery, which did the fighting—ten companies were detailed as advance scouts, two miles from the scene of action, in the direction of Goose creek, and to keep up a channel of communication with Gen. Reynolds' brigade, near Difficult creek. This statement makes our victory more decisive and brilliant than as heretofore reported.

The bodies of four of those killed in the battle at Dranesville were to-day forwarded to their late homes for interment. Their names were Samuel C. Walter, Company A, Samuel Devlin, Company C—Sixth Pennsylvania regiment; John W. Stockdale, Company F, and John Sexton, Company E—Ninth Pennsylvania regiment. The other three killed, belonging to the "Bucktail Rifles," were buried on Sunday in the burying ground of General McCall's division.

Colonel Ricketts, of the Sixth Pennsylvania regiment which took such gallant part in the Dranesville engagement, sent in to-day his resignation. Protracted ill health is the cause. His men greatly deplore the necessity of his taking this step. He is a graduate of West Point, and has been a most laborious and faithful officer. The command of the regiment will devolve temporarily on Lieutenant Colonel Penrose.

All our Dranesville wounded are doing well. There are only nine at the division hospital. Dr. Shippen, division Surgeon, thinks the wounds of only two of them will prove fatal. In the remaining cases there will have to be two or three amputations. The others, whose wounds are slight, are in charge of the regimental Surgeons. A large number of relatives and friends have obtained passes to visit them.

There are only two wounded rebels in the hospital, namely:—G. W. Brakefield, private in Company E, Sixth South Carolina regiment, and F. J. Park, private in Company H, of the same regiment, shot in the breast; but the balls have been extracted by Dr. Stocker, of the division hospital. It is thought the former will die.

REMOVAL OF DISABLED SOLDIERS TO GEORGETOWN.

Thirty-eight sick and disabled soldiers of General McCall's division, were to-day removed from the hospitals there to the Georgetown hospitals. One object of the transfer was to afford more ample accommodations for those wounded in the Dranesville engagement.

ARREST OF AN ALLEGED SPY.

A man who has a farm near Hunter's chapel, Va., named V. P. Corbitt, was arrested in General McCall's camp yesterday, charged with having communicated with the enemy. He is publisher of a map of the "Seat of War." His loyalty has long been suspected.

REPORTS OF CONTRABANDS.

Three contrabands, two men and a woman, came this morning within General Hancock's lines. One of the men says he was a slave of Jerry Moore, now confined in the prison on Capitol Hill, on a charge of conveying intelligence to the enemy. The other two state that they ran away from the rebels to prevent being taken to Richmond.

EFFECTS OF THE COLD ON THE SOLDIERS.

The soldiers in the army of the Potomac suffered considerably from the sudden change in the weather last night. It was the coldest night we have had this winter. The heavy gale which blew till morning prostrated several tents in most of the encampments. The weather has been milder to-day, but already we have indications that the night will be severe.

INSPECTION OF GENERAL SMITH'S DIVISION.

Major Davis, Assistant Inspector General, commenced to-day an inspection of General Smith's division, beginning with General Hancock's brigade. The inspection is made by regiments. It will take several days to complete the division. Thus far Major Davis expresses himself highly gratified with the appearance, excellent discipline and proficiency in drill of the men. He compliments General Hancock in the highest terms for his untiring industry and vigilance in bringing his troops to their present perfection in soldierly duties.

CONSOLIDATION OF VOLUNTEER CAVALRY.

A special order for the consolidation of cavalry has been issued. All the regiments and companies of volunteer cavalry accepted into the service, whether organized or only partially organized, are ordered to rendezvous, with as little delay as possible, as follows:—

All in Pennsylvania at York, Pa.

All in Ohio at Camp Dennison, Cincinnati.

All in the other Western States, except Missouri, at New Albany, Indiana.

CHRISTMAS FETE OF THE NEW YORK SEVENTEENTH REGIMENT.

The New York Seventeenth regiment gives a grand *fete champetre* this evening at Hall's hill. Their camp is decorated with Chinese lanterns, numberless evergreen arches, festoons, &c. Many other regiments are celebrating Christmas eve.

CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS.

A number of regiments in the Army of the Potoma con both sides of the river have made extensive preparations for the celebration of Christmas, for which every facility consonant with order and discipline has been accorded by the commanding officers.

Unusual liveliness pervades most of the camps on the other side of the Potomac in preparations to spend Christmas. Hosts of turkeys, chickens and other luxuries, the gifts of home friends, went over in the express wagons to-day. The usual brigade and regimental drills are to be omitted, and the soldiers allowed the day to themselves to spend in their own way, the dispensation and use of intoxicating drinks, being however, strictly prohibited.

APPOINTMENTS CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE.

The Senate has confirmed the following appointments of the President:—

Thomas Shankland, of New York, Consul at Port Louis, Isle of France.

Albert J. Bezeyk, of Iowa, Consul at Toronto.

Andrew J. Caruthers, of the District of Columbia, Consul at Martinique.

Robert Haley, of California, Consul at Manzanilla.

William Pickering, of Illinois, Governor of Washington Territory.

Francis A. Ryan, of Wisconsin, Register of Public Lands at Neosho.

George N. Black, Receiver of the Public Moneys at Springfield, Ill.

James B. Mills, Receiver at Otter Trail City, Minnesota.

Asaph Whittlesey, Receiver at Bayfield, Wisconsin.

Robert B. McDougal, Register at Chillicothe, Ohio.

Wm. F. Elkin, Register at Springfield, Ill.

James H. Lane, of Kansas, Brigadier General of Volunteers.

Joseph E. Wilbur, Postmaster of Taunton, and Edwin Shaw, Postmaster at Fall River, Mass.

The Senate, in executive session to-day, confirmed a large number of Surgeons in the regular army. Many of the appointments in that branch of the service were received and referred to the Committee on Military Affairs.

MELANCHOLY CASUALTIES.

A melancholy occurrence took place on the Virginia side of the Potomac this afternoon. Alexander M. Reily, a sergeant in Company M, First New York cavalry, in Gen. Franklin's division, was shot by Patrick Murphy, a private in the same company. It appears that earlier in the afternoon there was some difficulty between two or three members of the company, and he interfered. Murphy afterwards deliberately took out his pistol and shot Reily without provocation, although it seems both were good friends. Murphy was considerably under the influence of liquor at the time. He was put in irons and brought before the Provost Marshal of the division. Reily was from Brooklyn, but after he joined the United States service he sent his wife and two children to Detroit. He was a good soldier, and was about to be promoted. The ball cut the main artery of the heart, and he expired almost instantaneously. Liquor was the cause of the Sergeant's death. In spite of all orders bottles and barrels of it find their way to the camps.

After dark last evening two brothers—Thomas and Peter Branigan, of Company K, Sixty-third New York regiment—went out near the railroad track to collect some boards for their cook house. An engine, of whose approach they were unaware, struck Thomas, dislocating his hip and otherwise injuring him severely. When Peter was picking up his brother the engine reversed and hurt him slightly. Thomas was conveyed in an ambulance to the hospital in Alexandria.

PRESIDENTIAL EXCURSION IN THE STEAMER PENSACOLA.

It is expected that the President and a party of his friends will make an excursion down the river in the Pensacola to-morrow, on her second trial trip.

DEPARTURE OF CONGRESSMEN FOR THEIR HOMES.

Not more than twenty-one Senators were present at the session to day, the majority of them, as well as many members of the House, having left the city to enjoy the holidays at home.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND PRIVATE CLAIMS.

The Attorney General has respectfully declined to give to the Senate his opinion on a private claim, alleging precedent, as well as want of power, as a justification for a non-compliance with the request.

ARRIVAL FROM THE LOWER POTOMAC.

The gunboat Cœur de Lion arrived from the Potomac last night, with four launches in tow.

CONDITION OF GENERAL SUMNER.

General Sumner is still suffering from the effects of his recent injury. Dr. Tripler, Medical Director of the army of the Potomac, and Dr. McCormack, visited him yesterday. A slight improvement in his condition was observed. A few days since, as stated in this correspondence, he requested to be temporarily relieved from his command. To-day his request was granted, and General McClellan ordered General Heintzelman to assume command of General Sumner's division, together with his own. Gen. Sumner is an old and experienced army officer, and the accident which deprives the army of his active services at this important crisis is unfortunate. Gen. Heintzelman is also an experienced officer, having spent thirty-five years of his life in active service. He was slightly wounded in the battle of Bull run.

CONFLAGRATION AT YORKTOWN, VA.

The gunboat Young Rover, which is stationed at the mouth of York river, reports an extensive conflagration in Yorktown about a week since.

DEDICATION OF A CANVASS CHAPEL.

The chapel tent, forty-two by twenty-eight feet, which was sent to the Sixteenth Massachusetts regiment by their friends in Boston, was dedicated yesterday afternoon with services, in which the chaplains of all denominations participated.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS.

FIRST SESSION.

Senate.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24, 1861.

EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES.

Several petitions were presented praying for the emancipation of the slaves of rebels without compensation, and those of loyal masters with compensation.

EXTRAVAGANCE AT THE NAVY YARD.

Mr. GRIMES, (rep.) of Iowa, offered a resolution instructing the Committee on Naval Affairs to inquire into the manner in which war vessels had been fitted out. He had heard rumors of great extravagance at the navy yards in this respect.

The resolution was agreed to.

NAVAL VOLUNTEER OFFICERS.

Mr. HALE, (rep.) of N. H., offered a resolution calling on the Secretary of the Navy for a list of the volunteers, lieutenants, masters, paymasters, &c., in the navy.

Resolution adopted.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

Mr. HALE presented a petition from citizens of Boston, claiming that the freedom of the press had been infringed. Referred.

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW.

Mr. HOWE, (rep.) of Wis., gave notice that he would introduce a bill to amend the Fugitive Slave law.

The Senate then went into executive session.

On the opening of the doors the Senate adjourned until Thursday.

The Supplemental Tariff Bill.

The following is a correct copy of the Tariff bill as passed both houses:—

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled:—

That from and after the date of the passage of this act, in lieu of the duties heretofore imposed by law on articles hereinafter mentioned, there shall be levied, collected and paid on the goods, wares and merchandise herein enumerated and provided for, imported from foreign countries, the following duties and rates of duty; that is to say:—

First.—On all teas, twenty cents per pound.

Second.—Coffee of all kinds, five cents per pound.

Third.—On all raw sugar, commonly called muscovado or brown sugar, and on sugars not advanced above No. 12, Dutch standard, by claying, boiling, clarifying, or other process, and on syrup of sugar, or of sugar cane, and concentrated molasses, or concentrated melado, two cents and a half per pound; on white and clayed sugars when advanced beyond the raw state, above No. 12's, Dutch standard, by clarifying or other process and not yet refined, three cents per pound; on refined sugars, whether loaf, lump or pulverized, five cents per pound; on sugars after being refined, when they are tinctured, colored or in any other way adulterated, and on sugar candy eight cents per pound; on molasses, six cents per gallon—provided that all syrups of sugar or sugar cane, concentrated molasses or concentrated melado, entered under the name of molasses, or any other name than syrup of sugar or of sugar cane, concentrated molasses or concentrated melado, shall be liable to forfeiture to the United States, and the same shall be forfeited.

IMPORTANT FROM MISSOURI.

SUCCESS OF THE EXPEDITION SENT TO LEXINGTON.

ST. LOUIS, Dec. 23, 1861.

Despatches received at headquarters say that the command sent to Lexington by General Pope burned two ferry boats and a foundry at that place, and took two captains, one lieutenant, four men and several horses.

OTTERVILLE, Mo., Dec. 24, 1861.

The cavalry which General Pope sent to Lexington, have returned. In addition to the two ferry boats and the rebel foundry which they burned and the rebel officers and privates captured, previously reported, they killed the notorious Arkansas Robinson and drove every band of rebels from the country for miles on either side of the route. They report the county quiet of the rebels.

CONFUSION IN THE REBEL PRICE'S CAMP.

JEFFERSON CITY, Dec. 24, 1861.

A gentleman who has been with the rebel army several weeks, arrived here to-day, and reports that on Thursday last Price's camp at Osceola was thrown into confusion by the news that the Union troops were upon them. They beat a hasty retreat, and when last heard from were at Hammansville, hurrying South.

ARRIVAL OF A THOUSAND REBEL PRISONERS AT ST. LOUIS.

ST. LOUIS, Dec. 24, 1861.

About a thousand of the rebel prisoners taken by Gen. Pope arrived here late last night, and were allowed to remain in the cars until this morning, when they were escorted by their captures, under Col. Davis, to Dr. McDowell's medical college, where they will be taken care of for the present.

DESTRUCTION OF THE BRIDGE OVER SALT RIVER.

WARRENTON, Mo., Dec. 24, 1861.

By arrivals from Mexico we learn that the bridge over Salt River, which is the largest and most costly on the road, except that at Perrgue, which the rebels previously spared on Friday night, was entirely destroyed on Sunday night. The station house at Jacksonville was also burned, together with four or five cars. The repairs progress rapidly here. The bridge is repaired, and the culverts between here and Jonesburg and the track at that place will be tomorrow, if the men are not interrupted, and the repairs of the telegraph line keep pace with those of the road.

THE DAMAGE TO THE NORTH MISSOURI RAILROAD.

WARRENTOWN, Mo., Dec. 24, 1861.

The damage to the North Missouri Railroad may be summoned up as follows:—Bridges at Sturgeon, Centralia, Mexico, Jeffstown and Warrentown, burned; also one station and perhaps twenty cars, from fifty to sixty culverts, large and small; three or four water stations, 10,000 ties, from 200 to 300 telegraph poles and five miles of iron destroyed, and ten miles of wire rendered useless.

Two trains, one having eight car loads of hogs and several car loads of hemp, and two cars of merchandise are in the possession of the rebels. Four engines are lying where they can be seized by them.

Some of the men who belonged to the trains have arrived here, from whom I learn that the persons who did the damage are yet encamped along the road, about five hundred being at High Hill, and other bodies at or near Martinsburg, Mexico, Centralia, Sturgeon, and Allan. At Centralia they went within half a mile of the Berge Sharpshooters and destroyed a bridge and water station. Two freight trains were captured within four miles of the camp of a detachment of the same force.

At Renick the work was directed by practical railroad men, and the right course was always taken to make the destruction complete. Where the track was taken up, the rails were removed, the ties gathered in piles and set on fire and the rails thrown across the pile, so that when the centre of the rails became heated the weight of the cold ends bent them so as to render them useless.

In destroying the bridges the fires were kindled around the corners where they would soon throw the bridge down, and the trestle guides which spanned the open culverts were burned, as were also the frames on which the water banks stood usually.

The houses of railroad men and of all Union men in the vicinity of the road were surrounded, and the inhabitants assured that no harm was intended them while they remained indoors.

We hear of scarcely any pillage, or any other outrage beyond the destruction of the road and telegraph line.

The damage to the road cannot fall short of $300,000; and at least one month will be required to repair it so that trains can pass.

NEWS FROM KENTUCKY.

CINCINNATI, Dec. 23, 1861.

The *Commercial* has a despatch from Frankfort, Ky., saying that Hon. W. C. Anderson, formerly member of Congress, died to-day.

Governor Magoffin, contrary to expectations, had approved of all the bills presented to him.

There was no further news from Somerset.

THE CHRISTMAS FEAST.

How the Day is to be Observed—The Religious Services at the Churches, &c.

"Christmas comes but once a year,
But when it comes it brings good cheer,"

Is a very old and true saying, peculiarly applicable this season, when it is considered that, notwithstanding the unfortunate domestic troubles into which we have been thrown by the Southern rebellion, our citizens seem not only to be in the full enjoyment of peace and prosperity, but are daily performing those practical works of benevolence toward the poor which betoken well filled purses. The divine virtue of benevolence is one which should be practised at all seasons, but particularly during the Christmas holidays, so as to afford those poor creatures whose lot is that of poverty and want an opportunity of properly observing the day which gave birth to the Saviour of the world. Christmas is an occasion on which all should be cheerful, and it is very encouraging to see the ladies of every denomination working together with such unanimity for the common object of relieving the pressing wants of the poor at this inclement season.

It was feared that we would have a green Christmas; but, true to old habits, it has been ushered in upon us with all the outside gloom of fog and rain, snow, ice and piercing winds, as if to impress upon us the truth that, while some are in the possession of comforts and luxury, there are others who stand in need of our assistance and sympathy.

Last night our streets were crowded with pedestrians, loaded down with poultry for Christmas dinners and toys for the youngsters. The markets, stores and thoroughfares presented the liveliest scenes imaginable. There was the father with a large fat turkey on one arm, and a Christmas tree almost groaning under the weight of toys, bon mots, &c., hurriedly pushing his way through the crowd, with a countenance radiant with joy, to lay before his little ones all that his means could procure for their enjoyment—the mother at home using all the arts at her command to appease the anxiety of her children for the father's return—the lovers making and receiving those generous givings which exercise such pleasant recollections afterwards.

The churches, too, presented all the solemnity which brings to the Christian mind the sentiment of the day—"Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Indeed, we have every reason to feel thankful for the abundance with which we are blessed. But while we are joyous we must not forget that there are many homes saddened by the absence of one or two of its members, fighting for the perpetuation of blessings we enjoy, and pray to the God of Battles to spare them to their families, and enable them to spend many happy Christmases with those they love.

Apropos of this, the officers of the army volunteers now in the city are to hold a meeting at eleven o'clock to-day, at 422 Broome street, for the purpose of raising funds to relieve the Union prisoners now suffering in the rebellious States.

The different places of amusement announce unusual attractions for the theatre going folks for this afternoon and evening. A glance at the advertisements in another column gives all the information necessary.

The customary religious exercises in the various churches prepared for Christmas will take place, and some very interesting novelties in this line are announced for to-day.

At Trinity church a full choral service will come off, beginning at eleven o'clock in the forenoon. The principal music, under the able direction of Mr. Cutler, will be the Episcopal service, "Kempton," in B flat, and selections from Handel's "Messiah." Rev. Dr. Vinton will preach the sermon.

At St. Patrick's Roman Catholic cathedral there will be a grand high mass, and the renowned orator, Dr. Cahill, is announced to deliver the Christmas sermon.

Mr. Charles Wels, who has withdrawn from St. Stephen's Roman Catholic church, and assumed the musical direction at Christ church, Fifth avenue, has prepared the following excellent programme of exercises for today's services at the last mentioned church:—

Organ voluntary, Rossini.....Mr. Chas. Wels.
Venite, Chas. Wels.....Choir.
Gloria Patri, Rink.....Choir.
Te Deum, Chas. Wels—Solos by Mrs. Mozart, soprano; Mrs. Scott, alto; Mr. Mozart, basso.
Jubilate, H. Millard. Solos by Mrs. Mozart, soprano; Mr. Miller, tenor.
The 89th Psalm, Haydn.....Choir.
Pastoral Symphony from "Messiah," Handel. Mr. C. Wels.
Recitative and Chorus from "Messiah," Handel...Mozart and Choir.
The 45th Hymn, W. A. Mozart.....Choir.
Closing Voluntary, Organ Concerto, Rink. Mr. Chas. Wels.

A new grand mass (the second) composed by Mr. Louis Dachauer, organist of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, Twenty-third street, will be sung for the first time at the church, by the Society of St. Cecilia, at half-past ten o'clock A. M.

At St. Paul's chapel the Rev. Mr. Dix, assisted by others, will officiate, the services to commence at half-past ten o'clock A. M. The decorations of the interior are of the most chaste and beautiful character, festoons of evergreens arching the whole ceiling, while wreaths of laurel, fir trees and holly are placed in picturesque positions at intervals. In this old chapel George Washington was wont to worship, and the pew which he occupied is very handsomely trimmed with laurel.

St. Stephen's, St. Francis Xavier's, St. Peter's, St. Mary's, St. Andrew's, St. Boniface's and all the other Roman Catholic churches will have suitable religious and musical exercises. New masses will be sung at each of the above mentioned churches.

At St. John's chapel the Rev. Dr. Weston and Rev. Mr. Young will officiate, at half-past ten o'clock A. M. Selections from the "Messiah" will be cast. On St. John's Day, Friday next, the Christmas festival of the schools of this chapel will be held in the edifice at half-past one o'clock. The Bishop of the diocess and the clergy of the parish are expected to be present. There will be a monster Christmas tree on this occasion at the foot of the chancel steps, which will be laden with gifts for fifteen hundred and thirty children belonging to the various schools of this chapel.

At the Church of the Holy Communion, Twentieth street and Sixth avenue, there will be a very splendid musical display, and the religious services will be conducted by the Rev. Messrs. Lawrence and Muhlenberg. The altar will be beautifully illuminated at half-past six o'clock in the morning.

The Rev. Mr. Gallaudet will hold divine service at St. Ann's church for the deaf mutes, Eighteenth street and Fifth avenue, at ten A. M. The church has been handsomely decorated with a beautiful star, formed of evergreens, on a crimson ground, which overtops the altar, and which will be illuminated with jets of light. The ceiling is festooned with laurel, which is suspended from the corbels, and the altar is ornamented with bouquets of white flowers.

St. Paul's German Lutheran church is tastefully adorned with pine and laurel. The leading features of the ornamentation are four large Christmas trees, formed of jet pipes, and covered with evergreens, which are placed in the nave, near the chancel. The trees are laden with all the gifts supposed to be under the command of Christ-kindchen, and will be divided among five hundred children of the schools of the church. A new hymn, commencing, "Honor to the Lord our God," will be sung at the service, at half-past ten o'clock. The pastor, Rev. Mr. Geissenheimer, will officiate. In the evening the Christmas trees will be illuminated with gas, and the gifts on the trees distributed to the children.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES AT TRINITY CHURCH.

The annual celebration of Christmas Eve took place yesterday afternoon at three o'clock. This is one of the Christian festivals on which Old Trinity prides herself. It is, and for many years past has been, observed in this sacred edifice with all the devotion and respect which the occasion deserves.

The church was decorated in a most beautiful and artistic manner. All the pillars were wreathed with evergreens, and the pulpit was almost entirely shrouded with green leaves and stems. The appearance of the church on entering was extremely fine. There was a softness in the green plants relieving the solid brown columns, sparkling with the light of a hundred tapers, that awakened feelings of devotion in every heart. The stained glass windows at the east end of the church, with all the apostolic figures, shone forth in fine splendor beneath the rays of light, and when the classic music of the church was begun the scene became impressive to the highest degree.

The ordinary evening service of the Protestant Episcopal church, revived by some new hymns composed for the occasion, was performed with all the solemnity and impressiveness of the ritual. The children sang the different pieces with much effect.

Shortly before the close of the service the Rev. Dr. Ogilby ascended the pulpit and delivered a very interesting address to the young folk. He said that, beginning some years ago with something like twelve children, the Sunday scholars had gone on gradually increasing, until now there are upwards of four hundred attending the school. He encouraged the teachers to persevere in the good work, and urged the children to continue faithful to the advice and admonitions of their kind and excellent teachers.

The Christmas tree under the porch is a truly magnificent imitation of nature, with the exception that no natural tree ever yet bore such a variety of rare and beautiful fruit. The ladies who planned and decorated it are entitled to the highest meed of praise—Mrs. Ogilby, the wife of the good Doctor, not being forgotten. They may rest assured that they have the warm and grateful thanks of the troops of gentle creatures who yesterday assembled around their Christmas tree to receive the free will offerings of love and tenderness. Such a brilliant and splendid Christmas tree has rarely been seen, and those who were absent from Trinity church yesterday have really lost a sight which they cannot enjoy again till another Christmas comes.

The distribution of presents was very judiciously managed under the direction of a committee of ladies. They consisted of books, plums, confectionery, fruit and *cadeaux* of various kinds. The bright smiles of the children as they received their presents were in themselves satisfaction enough for all the efforts of the generous ladies.

NEWS FROM FORTRESS MONROE.

Another Skirmish with the Rebels—Arrival of Released Prisoners from Fort Warren, &c., &c.

FORTRESS MONROE, Dec. 23, }
VIA BALTIMORE, Dec. 24, 1861. }

The skirmish yesterday was a slight affair.

Two companies of the Twentieth New York regiment started from Newport News at nine o'clock this morning, and proceeded to Newmarket Bridge to look for a man who had been lost in the woods on the day before.

As we hear, while near the bridge they found themselves surrounded by rebel cavalry and infantry, numbering seven hundred men, but succeeded in cutting their way out without loss.

Reinforcements were sent for to Camp Hamilton, and the remainder of the regiment was sent forward.

The Naval Brigade, under command of Colonel Wardrop, was also under arms and proceeded as far as Hampton Bridge. Four companies of cavalry were also ordered out, but their services were not required.

Six of the Twentieth regiment were slightly wounded. Ten of the enemy are known to have been killed, and a number wounded. Seven dead bodies were found this morning; one was that of an officer, and was taken to Newport News. He wore buttons lettered "A. M. M."—perhaps the Alabama Minute Men—and his name is supposed to have been John Hawkins.

It is reported that a whole company of negroes was engaged, and two of our men are known to have been shot by them.

Gen. Mansfield and Acting Brigadier General Weber highly complimented the troops engaged for their coolness and bravery.

The bark Island City arrived here last night from Boston, with two hundred and forty-nine prisoners of war released from Fort Warren, who are to be exchanged for an equal number of our troops now held at Richmond. The steamboat George Washington took them to Craney Island this afternoon under a flag of truce.

Mrs. Brown, two daughters and servants, of Missouri, and Mrs. Ingersoll, of Michigan, were also passengers for the South.

A large number of letters and several boxes of clothing for our prisoners of war were also sent over. The Richmond prisoners are expected here in a day or two.

IMPORTANT NEWS FROM THE SOUTH.

CHICAGO, Dec. 24, 1861.

The Memphis *Appeal* of the 19th instant has the following:—

A Richmond correspondent says, in addition to the $250,000 appropriated by the Confederate Congress for the relief of the Charleston sufferers, the Legislature of Virginia will appropriate $200,000. Collections also were taken up in all the churches on the 15th inst.

The Georgia Legislature appropriated $100,000 for the relief of the Charleston sufferers.

The correspondent says to such a frightful extent has violence increased in Richmond that the city bids fair to become as infamous as ever Baltimore or Naples was. Shootings and stabbings are every day occurrences.

The Memphis *Appeal* publishes telegraphic reports of the foreign news, and remarks:—"What will be the course of the trembling tyrant at Washington we are unable to say, but presume he and his astute advisers will refuse to take up the gauntlet so fearlessly offered by Great Britain, and thinks that the action of the federal government will engender such a state of sentiment in France and England as to secure the speedy recognition of Southern independence."

The rebel account of the Green river fight places the Union loss at ninety-five killed and one mortally wounded. The same exaggeration characterizes the report of the battle of Camp Alleghany, in Western Virginia. Gen. Milroy is reported killed. The Union loss is set down as 500 killed. The rebels acknowledge 20 killed and 97 wounded.

The *Appeal* rejoices at the movements of the radical abolitionists in Congress; and, speaking of the emancipation schemes of Messrs. Stevens, Bingham, Sherman and others, it says:—"Our people rather like this species of legislation, inasmuch as it gives victories for us which the bayonet and bullet will be paid to achieve."

The Fort Smith *News* of the 12th has discouraging news from the Indian country. The Creeks, Cherokees and Seminoles are deserting the cause, and large numbers have joined Opthleyholo, who is encamped on the Big Bend of the Arkansas, with four thousand Indians, well armed with rifles, revolvers and knives, and naked to the waist. To oppose this force the rebels had a small force under Colonel Cooper, who was clamorous for reinforcements. A battle is daily expected, as the two armies are only a few miles apart.

The Fort Smith *News* of the 12th learns from the telegraph operator at Fayetteville that about one hundred Union men had been arrested in Madison and Carroll counties.

The New Orleans *Delta* of the 12th says that the naval commander of the federal fleet forbade the transmission of General Phelps' proclamation, and threatened to fire into any boat that attempted to carry it.

The Nashville *Union* of the 12th has the gratifying assurance that Lincoln's Message had produced complete revolution among Union men.

Arrival of Government Cotton from Port Royal.

PHILADELPHIA, Dec. 24, 1861.

The brig Ellen P. Stewart arrived here to-day from Port Royal, with 290 bales of Sea Island cotton, belonging to the government.

The Reported Departure of Mason and Slidell for Europe.

BOSTON, Dec. 24, 1861.

Nothing is known in Boston in regard to Messrs. Mason and Slidell's leaving in the Europa to-morrow, and the rumor to that effect is doubtless unfounded.

Personal Intelligence.

VISIT OF THE SWEDES TO THE STEAMER NEW WORLD.

The officers of the Swedish frigate Norrkoping, now lying in these waters, paid a visit to the steamer New World, plying on the Hudson river between this city and Albany, just previous to her last trip from this port. They were shown over this striking specimen of our inland river craft, and were amazed at her size, interior appointments, and the possibility that so enormous a structure could move in the water at all. They stated that they had never conceived of, much less seen, so complete a vessel constructed on so gigantic a scale in every respect. Upon retiring they expressed the great satisfaction the visit had afforded them.

Isaac Jones, of Sheffield, now 102 years old, is probably the oldest man in Western Massachusetts. He is very deaf, totally bald and partially blind, but he still has muscular vigor enough left to saw half a cord of wood per day.

A. Woodman, of Cuba; Captain Haworth, of Washington; Mr. and Mrs. Ambler, of Chicago; Bertram J. Calisher, of Birmingham, England; M. F. McLanahan, of New York; Hon. George Schmabel; Mrs. Packer, of Pa.; C. P. Kimball, of Harrisburg; J. Normand, of England; H. R. Lott, of New Brunswick; Mr. and Mrs. Hall, of Lower Potomac, are stopping at the Everett House.

Express Freight by the Overland Route.

ATCHISON, Dec. 24, 1861.

Orders have been given to the several agents of the Overland Company to take no more express freight from any source until further orders. This is in consequence of the company having been fined by the government for reported neglect of mail matter.

ARRIVAL OF THE AMERICA.

Details of the European News to the 7th of December.

The Preparations for War in England.

Embarkation of Troops for Canada, and Absence of Popular Enthusiasm.

Effect of General Scott's Letter in London and Paris.

Jeff. Davis' Message a "Powerful Aid" to the Designs of Great Britain in the United States and Mexico.

Napoleon's Policy Towards the Contending Powers.

English Naval Reinforcements for North America and Mexico.

The Great Irish Mass Meeting in Dublin, &c., &c., &c

The Cunard mail steamship America, Captain Stone, arrived at this port yesterday morning, at about half-past ten o'clock, from Liverpool, by way of Halifax.

She brings the European mails of the 7th inst., with files of papers to that date.

The America landed thirty-nine passengers and £3,666 14d. in specie.

Her news has been anticipated by her own telegraphic report from Halifax and the later advices of the Arago, Edinburg and Persia.

The America reports:—19th, off Cape Race, saw the press news boat, and threw the news can over.

The very late Queenstown despatches, per America, were not put on board the ship.

Our Paris Correspondence.

PARIS, Dec. 6, 1861.

The Monarchical Conspiracy Against Democracy in America and Freedom in Europe—The Designs of England and France for a War—Coming Recognition of the Rebels—A European Maritime Coalition in the Gulf of Mexico for Future Action Against the United States—Consequences of a War to England—Will France Aid Her? &c., &c.

Now that the Northern States of America are in trouble, England and France seize eagerly upon the slightest pretext to attack them. The hot blood of indignation mounts to the cheeks of loyal Americans here and in London when reading the vile, unmanly threats of the principal organs of both governments. It is useless for me to recapitulate the open menaces made. Your files will afford you ample proof that I do not exaggerate when I say that abuse and threats are heaped upon you. The decision of the juris consults of the English Crown is a farce. The inconsistency of such a conclusion is too glaring not to let the world see that it is England's desire to go to war to save herself from a social crisis that is impending. Mr. Bright's advice to the trades unions, to demand their political rights, if followed out, would virtually kill the power of the aristocracy. The six millions of workingmen could not be threatened or bullied to vote as their lords chose to dictate, and the people would soon rule instead of the aristocracy.

A war with America might for some time avert the storm. Hence the evident desire of England to jump at once into a conflict which she may find, to her cost, not so one-sided as she imagines. She has, I know, been making preparations for months for such an emergency as is afforded by the arrest of the rebels Slidell and Mason, and will no doubt push matters to extremities, urged on as she is by France, unless the people show unmistakeable signs of not permitting the war. This they may do, the more so as John Bright, their apostle, sees through the schemes of the Palmerston Cabinet, and is already busily counteracting them.

Months ago I warned you in my letters that France and England were inimical, that they would surely seize the first opportunity to recognise the Davis government. Recent events prove that I was but too correctly informed. *I may now add that the government has signified to Great Britain its willingness to recognize the rebel government at once, and that in case the Lincoln Cabin