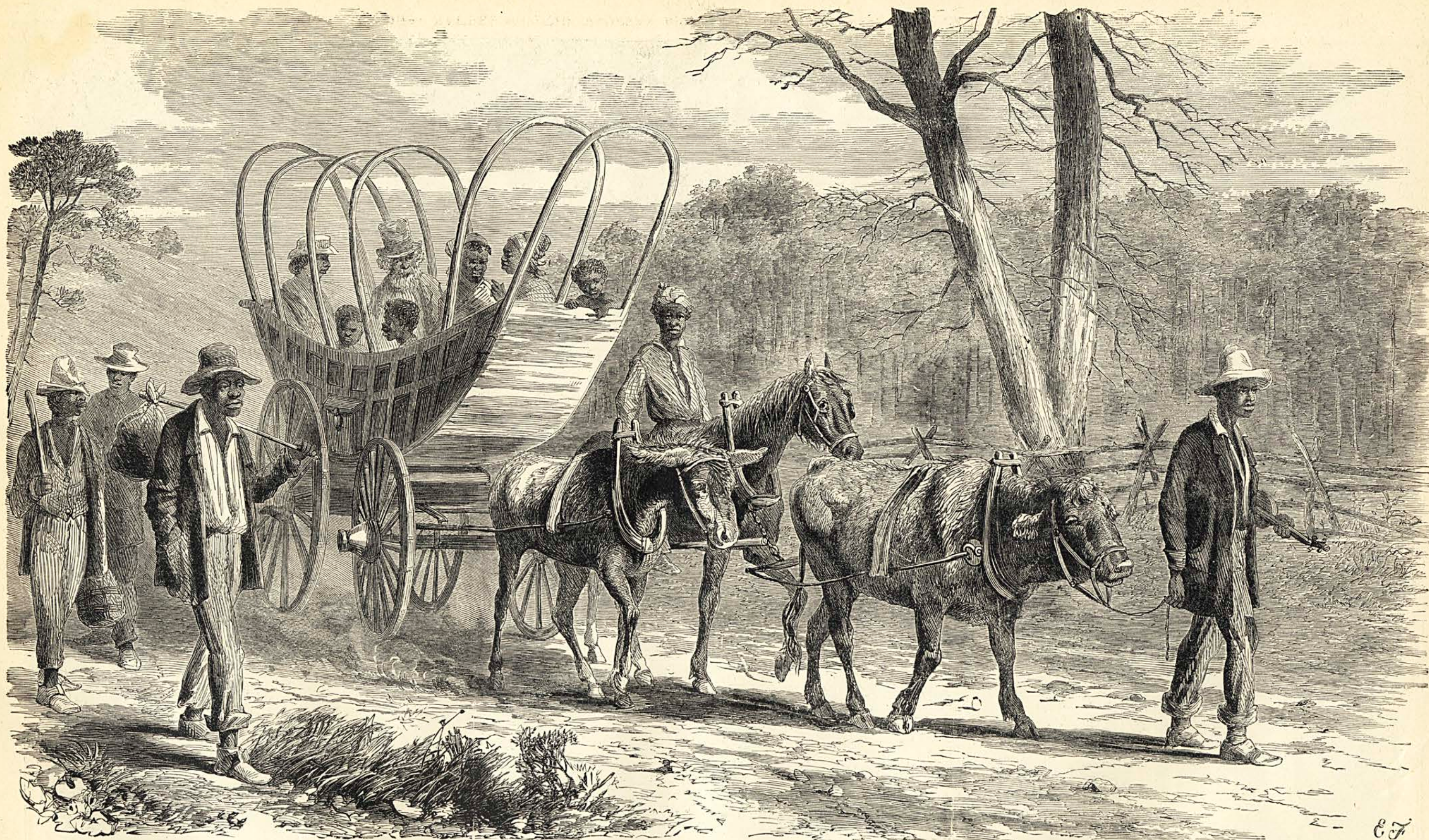




CONTRABANDS COMING INTO THE FEDERAL CAMP IN VIRGINIA.—FROM A SKETCH BY EDWIN FORBES.

One of the most difficult problems that confronted the government during the early period of the war was the question, arising constantly, as to the proper disposition of the refugee slaves that poured into every Union camp. Had the war been undertaken openly to destroy slavery it would not have had the support of many a Northern man. Emphasis was laid on the fact that it was undertaken only to preserve the Union. The handling of the slavery question had to be very gingerly, and commanding officers who undertook to liberate the blacks, as did Fremont and Hunter, got into trouble. General Butler did much toward settling the question by his witty construction of the status of the slave as "contraband of war;" property certainly, but, like any other property of a rebel, subject to confiscation. As late as the middle of 1862 fugitive slaves were employed on Union works, while a careful record of their ownership was kept in order that their masters, if it could be shown they were Union men, might be compensated for their services. But the stream of contraband refugees into Union camps continued, and finally the logic of events enabled President Lincoln to emancipate the slaves as a war measure, thus keeping his faith and satisfying his personal inclination at the same time.