

CHAPTER II.

PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENSE.

Defeat of Captain Seymour's Expedition on the Ashley.—Mayor Macbeth's Explanation.—Captain Foster's Work on Fort Moultrie. —Governor Gist convenes the South Carolina Legislature.—Creation of a Standing Army.—Arrival of Masons from Baltimore. —Situation of Fort Sumter.—A Dramatic Incident. —Secretary Floyd's Action.—Horace Greeley's Advocacy of the Right of Secession.—The Situation November 18th.

The United States Arsenal in Charleston is situated on the banks of the Ashley River. It looked feasible to go there in a boat without attracting attention, and procure a full supply of cartridges and other articles which were very much needed. Captain Seymour volunteered for the service, and was sent over with a small party, early in the afternoon. Notwithstanding he took every precaution, some spy belonging to a vigilance committee followed him, and reported the facts in the city. Seymour at once found himself beset by an excited mob, and wholly prevented from accomplishing the object of his mission. Colonel Gardner wrote to Mayor Macbeth for an explanation. The latter apologized politely for this unexpected occurrence, and, speaking for himself and other city officials, stated that so long as they staid in the Union they desired to remain faithful to its obligations, and that no further obstacles would be thrown in the way of another expedition. Colonel Gardner, however, did not send out again, thinking, perhaps, the mob might be beyond the control of the mayor.

Since his arrival, Captain Foster had been hard at work on the fort. He had hired laborers from the vicinity of Charleston, and had sent to Baltimore for a large number of masons who had formerly worked for him. In spite of his efforts, we were still in a very weak condition, and unable to defend ourselves. It is true the sand had been removed from the sea-face of the work; but as that front had no flanking defenses, the angles in the wall were torn down to enable the engineers to construct double caponieres there. This left great gaps, through which an assaulting party could penetrate at any moment. Perhaps in one sense it added to our security, for there was no glory to be acquired in capturing a fort

which was wide open and defenseless. Crowds of excited countrymen, wearing secession cockades, constantly came to visit the work; and on the 3d of November they formed in procession and marched around it, but did not offer any violence.

It may not be improper to state that I was the only officer of the command who favored Lincoln's election. As regards my companions, however, there was no difference of opinion in regard to sustaining the new President should he be legally elected, and they were all both willing and anxious to defend the fort confided to their honor.

In view of the probable success of the Republican candidate for the presidency, Governor Gist called the South Carolina Legislature together, to meet on Monday, the 5th of November. In his message he recommended the immediate formation of a standing army of ten thousand men; and that all persons between the ages of eighteen and forty-five be armed for immediate service. In consequence of this recommendation, by the 9th of November the whole State was swarming with minute-men.

The spark came at last which was to set fire to the magazine. The startling news of Lincoln's election reached Charleston on the 7th of November. As this event was sure to lead to secession, the Disunionists were wild with delight. In their exuberance of spirits, they ran through the streets shouting "Hurra for Lincoln!" The United States District Court, which was in session, at once broke up, and its judge, Magrath, sent in his resignation. In the evening of the same day, Edmund Ruffin, who has already been referred to, made a fiery secession speech to an immense audience at the capitol of the State. The Legislature, inflamed by public sentiment, called a convention, to meet on the 17th of the month, to decide the question of secession. Governor Joseph E. Brown, of Georgia, also called a convention there for the same purpose; and the excitement in each State constantly reacted on the other.

In the early part of November, one hundred and fifty masons arrived from Baltimore to work on the forts in the harbor. They were undoubtedly good workmen, but it is much to be regretted that they were not also good Unionists. Captain Foster at this time did not believe that any serious complications would arise from the attitude South Carolina had assumed, and did not, therefore, think it necessary to pay any attention to the politics of his laborers. Had he selected zealous Union men, their arrival would have been a most opportune re-enforcement for the garrison. Unfortunately, most of them sympathized with the South, and their coming was rather a source of weakness than of strength, so far as actual fighting was concerned. They rendered us, however, great and timely assistance by their labor.

The first thing that attracted the eye of the stranger, upon approaching Charleston from the sea, was Fort Sumter. It was built on an artificial island made of large blocks of stone. The walls were of dark brick, and designed for three tiers of guns. The whole structure, as it rose abruptly out of the water, had a gloomy, prison-like appearance. It was situated on the edge of the channel, in the narrowest part of the harbor, between Fort Moultrie and Cummings Point, distant about a mile from the former place, and twelve hundred yards from the latter. The year before, it had been used by us as a temporary place of confinement and security for some negroes that had been brought over from Africa in a slaver captured by one of our naval vessels. The inevitable conflict was very near breaking out at that time; for there was an eager desire on the part of all the people around us to seize these negroes, and distribute them among the plantations; and if the Government had not acted promptly in sending them back to Africa, I think an attempt would have been made to take them from us by force, on the ground that some of them

had violated a State law by landing at Moultrieville.

As Fort Sumter has considerable historic renown, it may not be uninteresting to relate another incident connected with it, although it is not germane to my narrative. In 1859, after the negroes were taken away, the fort remained in charge of an ordnance-sergeant, who lived there alone with his wife and two little children. Supplies were sent to him regularly, but in case of emergency he could only communicate with the shore by means of a small boat. One wild stormy day, when the wind was blowing a gale, he was suddenly struck down with yellow fever. His wife saw that if he did not have immediate medical assistance he would die. She herself could not go, as he required constant attention, and the children were too young to be of any service. A day passed on, and it became evident that he was growing worse. In a frantic state of mind, she rushed up to the top of the fort, waved a sheet backward and forward, and raised and lowered the garrison flag repeatedly, in hopes of attracting the attention of some passing vessel; but although several went by, no one seemed to notice the signals, or, if they did, they would not stop, on account of the tempest, which still continued. She then took the desperate resolution of putting her two little children in the small boat, and trusting to the flood-tide to drift them somewhere in the vicinity of Charleston. She placed a letter in the hand of one of them, to be given to the first person they met, imploring that a physician might be sent to her at once. It was a terrible experiment, for the children might easily have been swept out to sea by the ebb-tide before they could make a landing. They succeeded, however, in reaching the shore near Mount Pleasant. A doctor finally arrived, but too late to be of any service.

Foster wanted forty muskets to arm some of his workmen, as a guard for the powder in Fort Sumter, and for valuable public property in Castle Pinckney. This was approved at Washington; but the moment he obtained the guns from the arsenal, the Secretary of War hastily telegraphed him, in the middle of the night, to send them back again immediately. And yet at this same period two thousand additional United States muskets were forwarded by Floyd's order to South Carolina; and the *Charleston Courier* stated that five thousand more were on their way. This did not look much as if the Administration intended to sustain us. While the honorable secretary was thus supplying our enemies with arms, and leaving the United States Arsenal in Charleston, full of military stores, without a guard, he was very solicitous to ascertain whether our garrison duties were accurately performed, and sent an assistant inspector-general, Major Fitz John Porter, to make a thorough examination. As the secretary intended neither to re-enforce nor withdraw us, and as he made no effort at any time to remedy defects in our armament, this inspection seemed to us to be a mere pretense. It resulted, however, in relieving Colonel Gardner from his command, on Porter's recommendation, Major Robert Anderson being ordered to take his place.

Mr. Greeley was at this time the head of the Republican party, and one of the great leaders of Northern opinion. His immense services in rousing the public mind to the evils of slavery can not be overestimated, but some of his views were too hastily formed and promulgated. In this crisis of our history he injured the cause he afterward so eloquently advocated by publishing an opinion, on the 9th of November, that the South had a perfect right to secede whenever a majority thought proper to do so; and, in another communication, he stated that the Union could not be pinned together with bayonets. General Scott was also at one time in favor of letting the "wayward sisters depart in peace;" and I have heard on good authority that at least one member of the Cabinet and one leading general, appalled by the magnitude of the conflict, were willing to consent to

a separation, provided the Border States would go with the North. Greeley's article went farther than this, for it seemed to favor a simple severance of the North and the South. This was not only a virtual abandonment of the rights of Northern men who had invested their capital in the Southern States, but it amounted to giving up all the sea-coast and magnificent harbors south of New Jersey, including Chesapeake Bay. It was expressing a willingness to surrender the mouth of the Mississippi, the commerce of the great Northwest, and the Capitol at Washington, to the control of a foreign nation, hostile to us from the very nature of its institutions. In fact, it was a proposition to commit national suicide. The new Northern republic would have been three thousand miles long, and only one hundred miles wide, in the vicinity of Wheeling. A country of such a peculiar shape could not, as every military man knows, have been successfully defended, and must inevitably have soon broken up into small confederacies. We objected, with reason, to the formation of a European monarchy in far-off Mexico, but the proposed separation would have created a powerful slave empire, with its northern border within eighteen miles of Philadelphia. Once firmly established there and along the Ohio, the Southern army could have burned Cincinnati from the opposite shore, and have penetrated to Lake Erie by a single successful battle and march, permanently severing the East from the West.

These unexpected views of Mr. Greeley strengthened the hands of the Disunionists. They were everywhere quoted as evidence that no attempt would be made to interfere with or coerce the South. The fearful and wavering were thus induced to join the clamorous majority.

I think, too, that the publication of these sentiments did much to influence the after-conduct of Major Anderson. He was not a Republican himself, and he may very well have thought, if the Republican leaders did not deny the right of secession, there was little use in his sacrificing his small command in a feeble attempt to make South Carolina remain in the Union.

The sky darkened after this, for Georgia voted a million of dollars to raise troops, and it became evident that the other Southern States would follow in the same direction.

By the 18th of November we considered ourselves reasonably secure against a *coup-de-main*. Our guns were up, and loaded with canister, and we had a fair supply of hand-grenades ready for use. With a view to intimidate those who were planning an attack, I occasionally fired toward the sea an eight-inch howitzer, loaded with double canister. The spattering of so many balls in the water looked very destructive, and startled and amazed the gaping crowds around. I also amused myself by making some small mines, which would throw a shell a few feet out of the ground whenever any person accidentally trod upon a concealed plank: of course the shell did not have a bursting charge in it. These experiments had a cooling effect upon the ardor of the militia, who did not fancy storming the fort over a line of torpedoes.