

CHAPTER IV.

THE REMOVAL TO FORT SUMTER.

Passage of the Secession Ordinance.—Governor Pickens's Proclamation.—Judge Petigru's Visit to Fort Moultrie.—Floyd's Treachery.—Yancey's Lectures in the North.—The Removal to Fort Sumter.

On the 17th a bill was passed to arm the militia of North Carolina.

On the same day the Charleston Convention met, and chose General D. F. Jamison as their president, and on the 20th of the month the secession ordinance was duly passed, and South Carolina voted out of the Union amidst screams of enthusiasm. Immediately afterward there was great competition for the possession of the immortal pen with which the instrument was signed. At the close of the war, I heard it was for sale at a very low figure.

The new Governor, Francis W. Pickens, signed the ordinance very gladly, and issued his proclamation on the 24th declaring South Carolina to be a free and independent nation. He had served as a member of Congress from 1835 to 1843, and as Minister to Russia in 1858, but he was not considered a man of decided ability. He was very impetuous in his disposition, and, according to a statement made by him in one of his Congressional speeches, which attracted much attention at the time, he was "born insensible to fear."

Soon after the State seceded, that stern old patriot, Judge J. L. Petigru, of South Carolina, came over, with one of his friends, to pay us a final visit, to express the deep sorrow and sympathy he felt for us in our trying position. As he knew that arrangements were being made to drive us out, he bade us farewell with much feeling. The tears rolled down his cheeks as he deplored the folly and the madness of the times. He had been previously asked in the city if he did not intend to join the secession movement. He replied, "*I should think not! South Carolina is too small for a republic, and too large for a lunatic-asylum.*" At a later period of the war, it is said he was called upon to give up the property of his Northern clients for confiscation, under a law which made it treason to refuse. He positively declined to comply with the demand, and said, with much spirit, "*Whenever the*

time comes for me to choose between death and dishonor, I shall have no difficulty in saying which of the two I shall elect.” It is much to be regretted that he did not live to witness the final triumph of the cause which was so dear to him.

Four of Buchanan’s Cabinet—Floyd, Cobb, Toucey, and Thompson—were now open and avowed Disunionists. On the 23d, a defalcation of eight hundred and thirty-three thousand dollars was discovered in the Department of the Interior, while the Secretary, Jacob Thompson, was absent from his post, and acting as a disunion agent, to represent the State of Mississippi. This dallying with treason in the Cabinet was one of the most discouraging signs of the times.

A circumstance now occurred which to my mind was proof positive that Floyd intended to betray us and the Government he represented. I have no doubt it hastened our departure from Fort Moultrie. He directed Captain Foster to have the guns mounted in Fort Sumter immediately. It was plain enough, from demonstrations already made, that the moment this was done the rebels would seize the fort, and turn its powerful armament upon us. There was no one there to resist them. It seems to me that Floyd’s speech to the Secessionists of Richmond, made shortly after his flight from Washington, was a pretty plain acknowledgment that he had violated his oath of office as Secretary of War, in order that he might advance the interests of the Confederacy. He said on that occasion, “I undertook so to dispose of the power in my hands that when the terrific hour came, you, and all of you, and each of you, should say, ‘This man has done his duty.’”

Anderson had been urged by several of us to remove his command to Fort Sumter, but he had invariably replied that he was specially assigned to Fort Moultrie, and had no right to vacate it without orders. Our affairs, however, were becoming critical, and I thought it my duty to speak to him again on the subject. He still apparently adhered to his decision. Nevertheless, he had fully determined to make the change, and was now merely awaiting a favorable opportunity. To deceive the enemy, he still kept at work with unabated zeal on the defenses of Fort Moultrie. This exactly suited the purposes of the rebel leaders, for they knew we could make no effectual defense there, and our preparations would only increase the prestige of their victory. We were not authorized to commence hostilities by burning the adjacent houses, and yet, if they were not leveled, clouds of riflemen could occupy them, and prevent our men from serving the guns. Under any circumstances, it was plain that we must soon succumb from over-exertion and loss of sleep incident to repelling incessant attacks from a host of enemies. The fact that through the provident care of the Secretary of War the guns of Fort Sumter would also be turned upon us, enfilading two sides of Fort Moultrie, and taking another side in reverse, was quite decisive as to the impossibility of our making a lengthened defense.

Up to this time we had hoped, almost against hope, that, even if the Government were base enough to desert us, the loyal spirit of the patriotic North would manifest itself in our favor, inasmuch as our little force represented the supremacy of the Constitution and the laws; but all seemed doubt, apathy, and confusion there. Yancey was delivering lectures in the Northern States, as a representative of the Disunionists, not only without molestation, but with frequent and vociferous applause from the Democratic masses, who could not be made to believe there was any real danger.

In making his arrangements to cross over, Anderson acted with consummate prudence and ability. He only communicated his design to the staff-officers whose co-operation was indispensable, and he waited until the moment of execution before he informed the others of his intention. No one, of course, would deliberately betray a secret of

this kind, but it sometimes happens, under such circumstances, that officers give indications of what is about to take place by sending for their washing, packing their trunks, and making changes in their messing arrangements.

Without knowing positively that any movement had been projected, two circumstances excited my suspicions. Once, while I was walking with the major on the parapet, he turned to me abruptly, and asked me what would be the best course to take to render the gun-carriages unserviceable. I told him there were several methods, but my plan would be to heap pitch-pine knots around them, and burn them up. The question was too suggestive to escape my attention.

On the day previous to our departure, I requested him to allow me to purchase a large quantity of wire, to make an entanglement in front of the part of the work I was assigned to defend. He said, with a quizzical look, "Certainly; you shall have a mile of wire, if you require it." When I proposed to send for it immediately, he smiled, and objected in such a peculiar way that I at once saw that he was no longer interested in our efforts to strengthen Fort Moultrie.

As a preliminary to the proposed movement, he directed the post quartermaster, Lieutenant Hall, to charter three schooners and some barges, for the ostensible purpose of transporting the soldiers' families to old Fort Johnson, on the opposite side of the harbor, where there were some dilapidated public buildings belonging to the United States. The danger of the approaching conflict was a good pretext for the removal of the non-combatants. All this seemed natural enough to the enemy, and no one offered any opposition. In reality, these vessels were loaded with supplies for all the troops, with reference to a prolonged residence in Fort Sumter. Hall was directed to land every thing there as soon as a signal-gun was fired. In the mean time he sailed for Fort Johnson, and lay off and on, waiting for the signal.

Anderson had broken up his own mess, and on the last evening of our stay (December 26th) I left my room to ask him in to take tea with us. The sun was just setting as I ascended the steps leading to the parapet and approached him. He was in the midst of a group of officers, each of whom seemed silent and distraught. As I passed our assistant-surgeon, I remarked, "It is a fine evening, Crawford." He replied in a hesitating and embarrassed manner, showing that his thoughts were elsewhere. I saw plainly that something unusual had occurred. Anderson approached me as I advanced, and said quietly, "I have determined to evacuate this post immediately, for the purpose of occupying Fort Sumter; I can only allow you twenty minutes to form your company and be in readiness to start." I was surprised at this announcement, and realized the gravity of the situation at a glance. We were watched by spies and vigilance-committees, who would undoubtedly open fire upon us as soon as they saw the object of the movement. I was naturally concerned, too, for the safety of my wife, who was the only lady in the fort at that time, and who would necessarily be exposed to considerable danger. Fortunately, I had little or no property to lose, as, in anticipation of a crisis, I had previously sent every thing of value to New York. Some of the other officers did not fare so well. The doctor, not expecting so sudden a *dénouement*, had necessarily left his medical stores unpacked. Foster, who had taken a house outside for his family, was wholly unprepared, and lost heavily.

I made good use of the twenty minutes allowed me. I first went to the barracks, formed my company, inspected it, and saw that each man was properly armed and equipped. This left me ten minutes to spare. I dashed over to my quarters; told my wife to get ready to leave immediately, and as the fighting would probably commence in a few

minutes, I advised her to take refuge with some family outside, and get behind the sand-hills as soon as possible, to avoid the shot. She hastily threw her wearing-apparel into her trunks, and I called two men to put her baggage outside the main gate. I then accompanied her there, and we took a sad and hasty leave of each other, for neither knew when or where we would meet again. As soon as this was accomplished, I strapped on my revolver, tied a blanket across my shoulders, and reported to Major Anderson that my men were in readiness to move.

In the mean time Lieutenant Jefferson C. Davis, of my company, who had been detailed to command the rear guard, aimed the guns, which were already loaded, to bear upon the passage to Fort Sumter, and Captain Foster and Assistant-surgeon Crawford, with two sergeants and three privates, remained with him, and took post at five columbiads, in readiness to carry out Major Anderson's design, which was to sink the guard-boats, should they attempt to fire into us or run us down while *en route*. Certainly the major showed no lack of determination or energy on this occasion.

If we were successful in crossing, Davis was to follow with the remainder of the men. Foster and Mr. Moale agreed to remain behind until morning. They also volunteered to place themselves at the guns, and cover the retreat of the rear guard under Davis, in case an attempt was made to intercept them.

The chaplain, the Rev. Matthias Harris, being a non-combatant, and having his family in the village, was not notified. Neither was Surgeon Simons, of the army, who was living in a house adjoining the fort, and directly in line with our guns. When he saw the movement in progress, he hastened out with his family, to shelter them behind the sand-hills as soon as possible.

Every thing being in readiness, we passed out of the main gates, and silently made our way for about a quarter of a mile to a spot where the boats were hidden behind an irregular pile of rocks, which originally formed part of the sea-wall. There was not a single human being in sight as we marched to the rendezvous, and we had the extraordinary good luck to be wholly unobserved. We found several boats awaiting us, under charge of two engineer officers, Lieutenants Snyder and Meade. They and their crews were crouched down behind the rocks, to escape observation. In a low tone they pointed out to me the boats intended for my company, and then pushed out rapidly to return to the fort. Noticing that one of the guard-boats was approaching, they made a wide circuit to avoid it. I hoped there would be time for my party to cross before the steamer could overhaul us; but as among my men there were a number of unskillful oarsmen, we made but slow progress, and it soon became evident that we would be over-taken in mid-channel. It was after sunset, and the twilight had deepened, so that there was a fair chance for us to escape. While the steamer was yet afar off, I took off my cap, and threw open my coat to conceal the buttons. I also made the men take off their coats, and use them to cover up their muskets, which were lying alongside the rowlocks. I hoped in this way that we might pass for a party of laborers re-turning to the fort. The paddle-wheels stopped with-in about a hundred yards of us; but, to our great relief, after a slight scrutiny, the steamer kept on its way. In the mean-time our men redoubled their efforts, and we soon arrived at our destination. As we ascended the steps of the wharf, crowds of workmen rushed out to meet us, most of them wearing secession emblems. One or two Union men among them cheered lustily, but the majority called out angrily, "What are these soldiers doing here?" I at once formed my men, charged bayonets, drove the tumultuous mass inside the fort, and seized the guard-room, which commanded the main entrance. I then placed sentinels to prevent

the crowd from encroaching on us. As soon as we had disembarked, the boats were sent back for Seymour's company. The major landed soon after in one of the engineer boats, which had coasted along to avoid the steamer. Seymour's men arrived in safety, followed soon after by the remaining detachments, which had been left behind as a rear-guard. The latter, however, ran a good deal of risk, for in the dark it passed almost under the bow of the guard-boat *Niña*. The whole movement was successful beyond our most sanguine expectations, and we were highly elated. The signal-gun was fired, and Hall at once sailed over, and landed the soldiers' families and supplies. As soon as the schooners were unloaded, the disloyal workmen were placed on board and shipped off to the mainland. Only a few of the best and most reliable were retained.

Upon leaving me, my wife took refuge temporarily in the residence of Dan Sinclair, the sutler of the post, a most excellent man, and one to whom we were indebted for many kindnesses. Finding that the people of Moultrieville were not yet aware of the change that had taken place, and that every thing was tranquil, she ventured back to the fort, and finished the removal of all our effects. After this, in company with the chaplain's family, she walked up and down the beach the greater part of the night, looking anxiously toward Fort Sumter to see if there were any indications of trouble or disturbance there. In the morning she took up her residence at the chaplain's house. As for the other ladies, both Mrs. Simons and Mrs. Foster fled to the city at the first intimation of danger, and Mrs. Seymour was already there.