

CHAPTER VIII.

A RESORT TO DIPLOMACY.

Major Anderson's Proposed Diplomatic Negotiations. — Defensive Preparations.— Changes in the Cabinet.—Meade's Defection.—Anecdote of Governor Pickens.—Battery at Cummings Point.—Soldiers' Families removed.—A Threatening Letter.—Confederate Visitors to the Fort.—Organization of the Confederate Government.

And now the Charleston statesmen concocted a plan to take away from us all hope of succor, so that we might be induced to surrender. To this end they determined to fill up the entrance of the harbor by depositing stone there. Whether they really intended to do this, or made a pretense of doing it, I never knew; but they certainly did obtain some old hulks from Savannah, and sunk them in the channel. Either these hulks were deposited in the wrong places, or else the tide drifted them into deep water, for it is certain they never formed any impediment to navigation afterward. Perhaps it was a mere *coup de théâtre*, to intimidate us, and prevent re-enforcements from attempting to come in; at all events, it was a preliminary to a grand effort to negotiate us out of Fort Sumter. For this purpose two representative men came over from the city on the 11th, in the little steamer *Antelope*, under a white flag. The party consisted of the late United States district judge, A. G. Magrath, now Secretary of State for South Carolina, and General D. F. Jamison, their new Secretary of War. The judge, who was the champion orator of the State, made a long and eloquent speech, the purport of which was that South Carolina was determined to have Fort Sumter at all hazards; that they would pull it down with their fingernails, if they could not get it in any other way; that the other Southern States were becoming excited on the subject; that President Buchanan was in his dotage; that the government in Washington was breaking up; that all was confusion, despair, and disorder there; and that it was full time for us to look out for our own safety, for if we refused to give up the fort nothing could prevent the Southern troops from exterminating us. He ended this tragical statement by saying, "May God Almighty enable you to come to a just decision!"

Anderson seemed deeply affected at the prospect of hostilities. He asked them why they did not first attempt diplomacy, instead of war. He said if they would send a commis-

sioner to lay their claims before the authorities at Washington, he would send another to represent the condition of the fort ; and the Government could then form its own judgment, and come to some decision. Judge Magrath replied that he would report the proposition to Governor Pickens for his action. He and his companion then took a solemn leave of us, and returned to Charleston.

Upon reporting the facts to the governor, it was at once decided to accept Anderson's proposition. They gained an immense advantage in so doing; for the agreement tied the hands of the United States for an indefinite period of time, and prevented the arrival of any war vessels until South Carolina was fully prepared to receive them. The delay gave the State time to complete and man its batteries, and to obtain an unlimited number of guns and quantities of shot and shell from the cannon foundry at Richmond, Virginia, known as the Tredegar Iron Works. Thus, while our supplies would be running out, theirs would be coming in. Every day's delay would weaken us and strengthen them. I was strongly opposed to this fatal measure, which ultimately cost us the loss of Fort Sumter; but as it had simply emanated from Anderson himself, by virtue of his powers as commanding officer, and had not been submitted to a council of war, there was no opportunity for protest. He was at this time at the height of his popularity, and everything he did was sure to be sustained at Washington.

In this embassy, Colonel Isaac W. Hayne, an eminent lawyer of Charleston, was chosen as the commissioner from South Carolina, and Lieutenant Norman J. Hall was sent as a representative of Fort Sumter.

After this event everything went on, for a while, as usual.

By the 15th of January we had secured the main gates against an assault, by building a wall of stone and mortar behind them, leaving merely what is called a man-hole, for the entrance of one person at a time. Even this was covered by a twenty-four-pounder howitzer, loaded with canister.

By the 11th the money appropriated by the South Carolina Legislature for war purposes amounted to \$1,450,000, and was soon after increased to \$1,800,000. There was not a dollar in the treasury, and nothing but the bank of the State to draw upon.

On the same day the financial condition of the United States was much improved by the appointment of John A. Dix as Secretary of the Treasury. This gave great confidence to the moneyed men of New York, who immediately rallied to the support of the Government.

To all appearance, about six hundred negroes were now at work, night and day, in perfecting the defenses of Fort Moultrie. The enemy continued their hostile preparations with the utmost energy and zeal, in spite of the tacit truce which was supposed to exist, and which prevented the President from sending men-of-war to aid or to re-enforce us. I think Anderson might well have remonstrated against the landing of additional heavy guns and mortars on Sullivan's Island, and the erection of new batteries, to be used against us. He should at once have reported this increased activity to Washington, in order that the agreement might be terminated, or at least limited to a certain number of days.

On the 17th, Judge Holt was nominated as Secretary of War, and was soon after confirmed by the Senate. We were very glad to have an energetic and patriotic man at the head of this department.

On the 18th, Lieutenant Meade left us for his home in Richmond, Virginia, in consequence of a dispatch which stated that his mother was at the point of death. I never knew whether this telegram was founded on fact, or was a strategic move to force poor

Meade into the ranks of the Confederacy, by detaching him temporarily from us, and taking him where tremendous political and social influences could be brought to bear upon him. He had previously been overwhelmed with letters on the subject. He was already much troubled in mind ; and some months after the bombardment of Fort Sumter the pressure of family ties induced him (very reluctantly, as I heard) to join the Disunionists. It was stated that he never was a happy man afterward, and that before a year had passed death put an end to his sorrow and regret. He was the son of Meade, our minister to Brazil.

The troops opposite to us were now regularly receiving supplies and reinforcements, and drilling daily, while all the necessities of life were constantly diminishing with us. We were already out of sugar, soap, and candles.

On the 19th, Lieutenant Talbot returned from his visit to Washington, where, it will be remembered, he had been sent to explain the *Star of the West* affair, and ask for specific instructions, which would relieve Anderson from the responsibility, and throw it upon the Administration. The orders he brought back were to the effect that they had the utmost confidence in Major Anderson, and that they left every thing to his judgment. This was throwing the responsibility all back upon him. It was very complimentary, but far from satisfactory.

Talbot stated that he had great difficulty in making a safe transit through Charleston; for while the leaders seemed to be more pacific than ever, the populace had become more violent. It was even thought necessary to send an officer with him to secure his personal safety. He brought me the pleasant information that the mob were howling for my head, as that of the only Republican, or, as they called it, "Black Republican," in the fort.

Many unfavorable comments having been made, even in the Southern States, more particularly in Kentucky, in relation to Governor Pickens's treatment of us, he relaxed his severity, and on the 21st sent us over some fresh beef and vegetables ; as if we would consent to be fed by the charity of South Carolina. Anderson showed a good deal of proper spirit on this occasion. He declined to receive the provisions, but notified the governor that, if we were not interfered with, we would purchase our own supplies in Charleston market. The governor consented to this; but nothing came of it. There seemed to be a combination among the market-men not to sell us any food. Indeed, this action of the governor made him very unpopular with the Rhett faction. Rhett rushed over to inform him that the people demanded that Fort Sumter should be taken without any further procrastination or delay. The governor made a very shrewd reply. He said, "Certainly, Mr. Rhett; I have no objection! I will furnish you with some men, and you can storm the work yourself." Rhett drew back and replied, "But, sir, I am not a military man!" "Nor I either," said the governor, "and therefore I take the advice of those that are!" After this, there was no further talk of an immediate assault. The action of the governor in this case almost gained him the reputation of a wit among the officers of his command.

Lieutenant Hall being absent on diplomatic duty, and Dr. Crawford being temporarily, and Lieutenant Talbot permanently, on the sick-list, the rest of us were utterly worn out with the labor that devolved upon us. Guard duty was especially severe, as increased vigilance became necessary, in consequence of certain threatening preparations made by the enemy. The leaders in Charleston soon saw that the joint mission of Hall and Hayne could not possibly result in any thing decisive; but as every day added to their strength and resources, they did not choose to recall their commissioner. They left him to continue his arguments in relation to the "right of eminent domain," while they prepared for war. In

the hope that some day they might take us by surprise, they had the guard-boats, which still patrolled the harbor, painted black, and all the lights and fires carefully screened from view. They probably intended to choose a dark night to drop down noiselessly with the tide, and take advantage of a sleepy sentinel, or some other favorable circumstance, to land a party on the rocks at the base of the wall, and seize the main entrance, or make their way in through one of the embrasures.

On the 24th, New York City, speaking through its mayor, Fernando Wood, seemed to offer the right hand of fellowship to the Secessionists. Certain arms which had been purchased by Georgia, to be used against the General Government, were detained in New York, and Ex-Senator Toombs telegraphed to Wood for an explanation. The latter characterized the detention as an outrage for which he was not responsible, and for which he would inflict summary punishment, if he had the power.

Lieutenant Meade returned faithfully on the 25th, but brought no news of importance.

On the 26th, Anderson applied for the code of naval signals, so that if a fleet at any time should cross the bar, he might communicate with it at a distance.

Up to the 30th we had not been able to procure any thing to eat from the city; but through the influence of Mr. Gourdin, who seemed to have a special mission to smooth over all difficulties, a new arrangement was made, by which our provisions were ostensibly purchased for Fort Johnson, and were forwarded to us from there.

The nearest land to us was called Cummings Point. It was nearly opposite the gorge, which was the weakest side of Fort Sumter, the wall there being thinner than in any other part. The enemy now began to build the most formidable of all their batteries on the point referred to. It was constructed of strong timber, plated with railroad iron, and partially covered with sand. When finished, it was regarded as almost impregnable. Steamers from the city passed within a stone's throw of us daily, loaded with the materials used in its construction, without opposition and without remonstrance.

As it seemed settled that we were to wait until Hayne was through with his law-points, and as our food, in the mean time, was rapidly giving out, Anderson, on the 21st, directed me to make arrangements with the authorities of Charleston to enable us to send off the soldiers' families to Fort Hamilton. This was done; and the women and children were shipped off to Charleston on the 30th, and transferred to the steamer *Marion*, which left for New York on the 3d of February. As they passed the fort outward-bound, the men gave them repeated cheers as a farewell, and displayed much feeling; for they thought it very probable they might not meet them again for a long period, if ever¹⁴.

On the arrival of these families at Fort Hamilton, New York, they found themselves in straitened circumstances, because, owing to our isolation, the men had not been paid off for a long time, and therefore had no money to give their wives. Plymouth Church, however, interested itself in their behalf, and soon made them comparatively

¹⁴ Among these children was a little waif, called Dick Rowley, afterward known as "Sumter Dick." He had been abandoned by his mother, and thus thrown out on the world. For a time he was sent, after his arrival in New York, to the house of Dr. Stewart, who was a family connection of mine. After supper he reminded the ladies that he had not heard tattoo yet, and wished to know at what hour they beat the reveille. He evidently thought every well-regulated family kept a drummer and fifer on hand, to sound the calls. He was very unhappy until he had procured a small stick and a miniature flag. Every morning at sunrise he hoisted the flag, and carefully lowered it and put it away at sunset. He is now a cabinet-maker at Marion, Ohio, and recently gained a prize for his excellent workmanship.

comfortable.

Had our Government been really disposed, at this period, to act with ordinary energy, it might have opened a communication with us, and cleared the Morris Island channel without much difficulty. There were only about three hundred Charleston militia guarding the batteries on that island; and it would have been easy for a small force of mariners and soldiers to land there in the night, take the batteries in reverse, and drive the troops out, or capture them. This once accomplished, re-enforcements and supplies could have been sent us to any amount. Buchanan's administration, however, was drawing to a close; and his only desire seemed to be to get through his term of office without a collision, leaving the difficulties and perplexities of his position as a legacy to his successor.

On the 30th, I received an insulting letter from Charleston, informing me that, if I were ever caught in the city, an arrangement had been made to tar and feather me as an Abolitionist.

February had now arrived. The 4th of the month was made memorable by the meeting of the Peace Congress at Washington, and by a convention to represent the Southern States at Montgomery, Alabama.

On the 6th, the new Secretary of War, Judge Holt, wrote to South Carolina that the President did not intend to inaugurate any aggressive measures; and if the State government attacked Fort Sumter, they would incur a fearful responsibility.

On the 8th, some photographic artists were allowed to come over and take our portraits in a group. I think it proved a profitable speculation, for the sale was quite large. One of the party proved afterward to be a lieutenant of a Charleston company. It seems he came as a spy, and, no doubt, thought he had done a very clever thing; but inasmuch as Mr. Gourdin and other Secessionists, including several military and naval officers, were permitted to roam through the fort at will, there was very little use in taking precautions against spies. Indeed, on one occasion, another Major Anderson, a namesake of our commander, came down to Charleston with a freight train loaded with shot, shell, heavy guns, and mortars for South Carolina, to be used in the batteries against us. He was the owner of the celebrated Tredegar Iron Works, of Richmond, Virginia, already referred to, and had been enriched by the patronage of the United States. I thought it decidedly cool in him, under the circumstances, to come over to call on our Major Anderson. He made no attempt at concealment, but stated without reserve the object of his trip to the South. To my surprise, instead of being summarily expelled, he met with a most cordial reception, was invited to stay to dinner, and when he left he was dismissed with a "Goodbye! God bless you! You haven't such a thing as a late newspaper about you, have you?"

On the 9th of February, the enemy's batteries were completed, manned and ready for action. On the same day the Confederate Government was duly organized by the election of Jefferson Davis, of Mississippi, as President, and Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia, as Vice-president. The Cabinet consisted of Robert Toombs, of Georgia, Secretary of State; L. Pope Walker, of Alabama, Secretary of War; and Charles G. Memminger, of South Carolina, Secretary of the Treasury. Afterward, Judah P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, was appointed Attorney-general; Stephen M. Mallory, of Florida, Secretary of the Navy; and John H. Reagan, of Texas, Postmaster-general. Peter Gustave T. Beauregard, of Louisiana, was made Brigadier-general to command the provisional army.

By this time we had finished most of our preparations, and were busily engaged in constructing a mine at the extremity of the wharf, for the benefit of any hostile party that might land there.

Lieutenant Hall returned on the 10th. He had had a very pleasant time in Washington, and had been petted a good deal by the loyal people of the North, but his mission proved of no real benefit to the United States, and we had missed him a great deal, for we had been very shorthanded.

He brought nothing definite from the Administration. All the latter desired was to have a peaceable deathbed, leaving its burdens for Mr. Lincoln's shoulders.

As Hall passed through Charleston, one of the young men there told him there was quite a revulsion of feeling with regard to attacking Fort Sumter. Hall inquired the reason. The reply was, that a schooner which had just come in had been in great danger from one of our infernal machines, which had exploded and whitened the water for three hundred yards around. It seems that Seymour, who is very ingenious, had fastened a cannon cartridge in the centre of a barrel of paving-stones, so arranged that when the barrel was rolled off the parapet, the powder would explode about five feet from the base of the wall. I was trying the experiment one day as the schooner passed, and the explosion did look very destructive, as the paving-stones dashed up the water for a distance of fifty feet from the fort.

On the 14th, we had two more mines ready for any storming party that might desire to land.

About this time Captain Edward M^cCready, of Charleston, who had formerly been very intimate with the officers of the garrison, wrote a letter urging them to throw off their allegiance to the United States, and enter into the Confederate service. No one took the trouble to answer it.