

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE CRISIS AT HAND.

South Carolina's Grievances.—Inauguration of President Lincoln.—Determination to Re-enforce Sumter.—An Audacious Proposal.—The Shannon.—New Rebel Batteries Unmasked.—Formal Notice of Bombardment.

We saw advertisements now in the Northern papers showing that dramas founded on our occupation of Fort Sumter, and confinement there, were being acted both in Boston and New York. It was quite amusing to see our names in the playbills, and to find that persons were acting our parts and spouting mock heroics on the stage.

On the 15th, several Southern senators at Washington wrote to Governor Pickens, recommending that we be allowed fresh provisions, fuel, and other necessities, at the same time expressing their sympathy with South Carolina. After this the governor became more polite and considerate, and allowed our officers to send to purchase oil and groceries in Charleston. Rhea's paper, *The Mercury*, of course, bitterly opposed this concession. We now learned that the whole question of Fort Sumter had been turned over to the new Southern Confederacy for solution.

At this period grievous complaints were made by the merchants of the city of the utter stagnation of trade. All the business had fled to Savannah. Foreign vessels would not attempt to enter a harbor where civil war was raging, especially as it was reported that obstructions had been sunk in the channel. The Charleston people said they now fully understood and appreciated the kindness of the people of Savannah in furnishing them with old hulks to destroy the harbor of Charleston.

When the organization of the new government was complete, the original Secessionists of the Palmetto State were exceedingly angry to find themselves ignored. The President, Vice-president, and all the prominent members of the Cabinet, with the single exception of the Secretary of the Treasury, were from other States. Henceforward, instead of pretentious leadership, the position of South Carolina was to be that of humble obedience to the new *régime*. Nor was this their only grievance. Free trade was not proclaimed; and no ordinance was passed to reopen the African slave-trade, inasmuch as it would de-

stroy the domestic slave-trade and the profits of slave-breeding in Virginia. It was soon seen that the associated States differed widely on a great many vital points. One of these related to Indian incursions into Texas. The Border States, owing to the withdrawal of the United States forces, desired large appropriations in money, for the purpose of organizing troops to guard the settlements from Indian incursions. The people of South Carolina, whose burdens were already very great, and who were advertising in vain for a loan, were very unwilling to be taxed for the benefit of Texas and Arkansas. In their anger at these untoward events, the proposition was freely discussed whether it would not be the best course to secede from the Confederacy altogether, and place themselves under a British protectorate. The only difficulty in the way seemed to be the unwillingness of Great Britain to act as step-father to such a spoiled child as South Carolina.

Virginia had not yet seceded. She still professed neutrality, but allowed a brisk trade in cannon and ammunition to be carried on with the South, knowing they were to be used against the General Government.

Anderson now expressed himself as openly opposed to coercion. He was in favor of surrendering all the forts to the States in which they were located. This course would simply be an acknowledgment that the sovereignty did not vest in the United States, and would have led to nothing but disorder and disunion. He said if his native State, Kentucky, seceded, he should throw up his commission and go to Europe. The fact is, as I have stated, he was a strong pro-slavery man, and felt bitterly toward the North for not carrying out the Fugitive Slave Law. He contended that slavery was right in principle, and expressly sanctioned by the Bible. One day, while we were conversing on the subject, I called his attention to the fact that slavery in ancient times was not founded on color; and if white slavery was right, I saw no reason why some one might not make a slave of him, and read texts of Scripture to him to keep him quiet. He was unable to answer this argument.<sup>15</sup>

On the 1st of March, he informed the General Government that he had no doubt we would soon be attacked. The communication, however, led to no comment and no immediate action.

From certain circumstances, I saw that South Carolina not only intended to build iron-clad batteries, but was thinking of iron-clad ships, to sink our wooden navy, and at some future time capture our Northern harbors.

I was so much impressed with the importance of this subject that I felt it my duty to call attention to it, in letters to Mr. Curtis, of Missouri, and other members of Congress; but no one at the North seemed to give the matter a second thought, or imagine there was any danger to be apprehended in the future. It was not so with our enemies. They were fully alive to the aggressive power it would give them, and they commenced to experiment by building an iron-clad floating battery, which was to be plated deep enough to resist our heaviest metal. When finished, it was to be anchored off the gorge of Fort Sumter, so that it could beat down our main gates, and make wide breaches in the walls for an assaulting party to enter. This battery was completed on the 3d of March; but the State militia had a great prejudice against it, and could not be induced to man it. They christened it "The Slaughter Pen," and felt certain it would go to the bottom the moment we opened

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<sup>15</sup> It is due to the major to state that, in a speech made before the Board of Brokers in New York, on the 13th of May, he asserted that if the question lay between the preservation of the Union or the preservation of slavery, slavery must be sacrificed.

fire upon it. Out of deference to public opinion, it was tied up to the wharf in Moultrieville, and took part from that position in the final bombardment of Fort Sumter.

The eventful 4th of March had now arrived, and with it a new President, representing the patriotism and vigor of the great Northwest. We looked for an immediate change of policy; but it was some weeks before any definite action was taken with regard to us. This is not to be wondered at, when we consider that a large proportion of the employees of the previous Administration were disloyal and treacherous, while the new appointments could not be made hastily, on account of the tremendous pressure for office, and the difficulty of canvassing the claims of so many rival and influential candidates. If Mr. Lincoln wrote a private dispatch, it was sure to be betrayed to the enemy. The defection in the civil service, in the army, and navy, was so great that, if he gave an order, he was always in doubt whether it would be faithfully carried out. General Cooper, who was Adjutant-general of the army, and the mouth-piece of the Secretary of War and of the Commander-in-chief, was himself a rebel at heart, and soon resigned to join the Confederacy.

Enough, however, was already known of the policy of the Administration to cause great uneasiness in Charleston. The feeling there was very gloomy at the prospect of real war; for almost every one had persuaded himself that the new President would not attempt coercion, but would simply submit to the dismemberment of the country, and make the best terms he could. They now knew they would be obliged to face the storm they had raised, and they already foresaw great sufferings and sacrifices in the future.

On the 5th Anderson wrote to Washington that he needed no re-enforcement. The fact is, he did not want it, because its arrival would be sure to bring on a collision, and that was the one thing he wished to avoid.

Mr. Lincoln soon after appointed Simon Cameron as the new Secretary of War.

On the 7th, an accidental shot, fired from the battery opposite, struck near our wharf. The enemy sent a boat over at once to make an explanation.

Our men were dissatisfied that the affair ended in nothing. They were becoming thoroughly angry and disgusted at their long confinement, and at the supervision South Carolina exercised over them. One and all desired to fight it out as soon as possible.

After consultation with Major Anderson, it was deemed impossible at Washington to succor us without sending a force of at least twenty thousand men to storm the batteries on Morris Island. There was a time when these works could have been easily captured; but now, with the North full of spies, any attempt to take them by force would have called out all the available strength of South Carolina, assisted by volunteers from other States. On the 10th, it was everywhere published that the Administration intended to withdraw us; but no admission of the kind could be obtained from Mr. Lincoln.<sup>16</sup>

Learning that we had nothing but pork and hard biscuit to eat, Mr. Haight, a wealthy gentleman of New York, sent us several boxes of delicacies. The governor, under the impression we were soon to be withdrawn, allowed them to come over. They were fully appreciated.

The great tobacconist, John Anderson, of New York, also sent a large supply of the best quality of tobacco, having learned that the men felt the loss of their smoking more than any thing else.

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<sup>16</sup> About this time, my wife, who was in Washington, was very much surprised at receiving a call from the President. He came quietly to request her to show him my letters from Fort Sumter, so that he might form a better opinion as to the condition of affairs there, more particularly in regard to our resources.

By this time the South Carolina treasury was in a state of collapse. A loan for six hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars was freely advertised, but no one desired to invest. The city trade, however, began to be quite brisk again, from the immense influx of sympathizing strangers that poured into the city to see the preparations for war. Goods, too, began to come in from all quarters, and there was a gleam of prosperity.

On the 20th, G. W. Lay, one of General Scott's aids, who had resigned on the 2d of the month, came down to offer his services to Governor Pickens. He must have had in his possession much valuable military and diplomatic information, to which his late confidential position had given him access.

On the 21st, another messenger, Captain G. V. Fox, United States Navy, came over to see us. Captain Hartstein, who was an ex-officer of our navy, and an old friend of Fox's, was sent with him, to be within ear-shot, and see that he did no harm to the Confederacy. Fox had an excellent plan of his own in reference to us, and came to reconnoitre, and ascertain whether it was practicable to carry it out; for the President had now fully determined not to withdraw us, or surrender Fort Sumter without an effort to hold and re-enforce it. Indeed, there came up an indignant roar from the great Northwest, and many parts of the North, that could not be disregarded with impunity. To have done so would almost have created a revolution.

I was struck by one modest question which Hartstein put to me on this occasion. He asked if I thought Anderson would object to his anchoring the iron-plated floating, battery within a hundred yards of our main gates. Upon my expressing my surprise at such an audacious proposal, he replied, "Anderson has allowed these batteries to be built around him, and has permitted so many things to be done, that I don't see why he should not go a step farther and allow this."

On the 22d, we learned that Beauregard had assigned command of the forces opposite to us. As he had just left our army, where he had been highly trusted and honored, it is said he displayed a good deal of feeling at finding himself opposed to the flag under which he had served so long. He expressed much sympathy for his old friend, Anderson, who, he stated, was merely fulfilling his duty as a soldier in fighting for his own Government, and asserted that he would not attack us, even if we withdrew all our sentinels, but would force us to surrender by cutting off our supplies.

On the 23d, we had but two days' regular fuel left, but we had contrived to secure and utilize a number of floating logs as they passed the fort, and these increased the amount on hand to some extent.

Anderson now had no doubt that we would be withdrawn, and the papers all gave out the same idea. Under these circumstances, as we were out of fuel, and had a large number of surplus gun-carriages on hand which we could not possibly use, and which would inevitably fall into the hands of the enemy when we left, I suggested that it would be good policy to use them for firewood, especially as many of them were decayed and worthless. He would not, however, consent to this. Perhaps he thought fuel at six hundred dollars a cord was rather dear. The result was that they were finally all turned over to the Confederacy, with the other public property on hand.

On the 25th, Colonel Ward C. Lamon, the former law-partner of Mr. Lincoln, came over to visit us under charge of Colonel Duryea, of Charleston. It was given out that he was sent as an agent of the General Government to see Governor Pickens in relation to post-office matters; but in reality he came to confer with Anderson, and ascertain the amount of provisions on hand. He took with him the important information that our food

would be out by the middle of April.

On the 28th, Beauregard sent a message of some kind to Anderson. I do not know its purport. The latter stated to us that he expected decisive orders from Washington on the 29th, but none came.

The 1st of April arrived, and as the heavy work of mounting guns, etc., was completed, our commander thought it would be a good idea to send off the hired laborers, and he intrusted Captain Foster to ask permission of the rebel authorities to allow them to land. The request was granted, and all left with the exception of a few, who desired to remain with us and share our fortunes. Among them was Mr. William O. Lyman, the principal overseer of the masons, a brave and reliable man.

On the 3d of April, another affair occurred similar to that of the *Star of the West*. The schooner *R. H. Shannon*, of Boston, under Captain Mounts, en route for Savannah with a cargo of ice, sailed into the harbor of Charleston on account of a fog. As the captain did not read the papers, he did not know that any thing unusual was going on. A battery on Morris Island fired a shot across the bow of his vessel to bring her to. Very much astonished at this proceeding, he ran up the Stars and Stripes to show that he was all right. This was regarded as a direct defiance, and a heavy cannonade was at once opened on the vessel. Very much puzzled to account for this hostility, he lowered his flag, and the firing ceased. A boat's crew now put off from the shore to ascertain his character and purpose in entering the harbor. While this was going on, we were formed at our guns, in readiness to fire, but were not allowed to do so, although there was every probability that the vessel would be sunk before our eyes. It is true we could not have reached the particular battery that was doing the mischief; but the other works of the enemy were all under our guns, and, not expecting immediate action, were in a measure unprepared. Anderson, however, contented himself with sending Seymour and Snyder over in a boat with a white flag to ask for an explanation, with the usual result Lieutenant Talbot and Lieutenant Snyder were then sent over to have an interview with the governor in relation to this matter. This being far from satisfactory, Lieutenant Snyder returned to Fort Sumter, and Lieutenant Talbot kept on his way to Washington with dispatches.

Although this affair attracted very little attention or comment at the North, I was convinced, from the major's depression of spirits, that it acted a great deal upon his mind. He evidently feared it might be considered as a betrayal of his trust, and he was very sensitive to every thing that affected his honor.

I have already stated the reasons for his inaction. In amplifying his instructions not to provoke a collision into instructions not to fight at all, I have no doubt he thought he was rendering a real service to the country. He knew the first shot fired by us would light the flames of a civil war that would convulse the world, and tried to put off the evil day as long as possible. Yet a better analysis of the situation might have taught him that the contest had already commenced, and could no longer be avoided. The leaders of the South at this period would hardly have been satisfied with the most abject submission of the anti-slavery party to all their behests. In fact, every concession made to their wishes seemed to them to be dictated by the weakness of the Government, and its fears of internal dissensions and civil war in all the great cities of the North. They needed blood and the prestige of a victory to rouse the enthusiasm of their followers, and cement the rising Confederacy. They wanted a new and powerful slave empire, extending to the Isthmus of Panama, and for this a direct issue must be made with the free States. In vain did a member of Congress, who afterward became a distinguished Union general, offer in Richmond to raise an

army of twenty thousand men in the North to fight the abolitionists, if the South would consent to remain in the Union. Even this was not deemed sufficient or satisfactory. Slavery had so long dominated every thing with a rod of iron, that its votaries deemed it was born to universal dominion. All the pathways to political power, all the avenues of promotion in the army and navy, lay in that direction. General Scott was accustomed to say that "with Virginia officers and Yankee troops he could conquer the world," and this implied that slave-holders, in his opinion, were the only men fitted to command.

Washington was too full of spies for the rebel leaders to remain in ignorance of Lincoln's intention to re-enforce us. On the 6th of April, Beauregard restricted our marketing to two days in the week. On the 7th, it was wholly cut off, and we noticed gangs of negroes hard at work strengthening the defenses on Morris Island. Every thing betokened that the conflict would soon take place. Anderson was greatly troubled at the failure of all his plans to keep the place. The rebels knew, and perhaps he knew, that on the 6th and 7th of April a number of naval vessels had left New York and Norfolk under sealed orders. Their destination could hardly be doubted. Lieutenant Talbot reached Washington on the 6th, but was immediately sent back with a message from the President to Governor Pickens, notifying the latter that the Government intended to provision Fort Sumter at all hazards. This formal notice was given by the President, probably because he considered himself bound to do so before putting an end to the semi-pacific code which had governed Anderson's intercourse with the forces around him ever since the departure of Hall and Hayne for Washington.

Talbot delivered his message on the 8th. Beauregard immediately telegraphed the information to the rebel Secretary of War, at Montgomery, Alabama, and received orders on the 10th to open fire at once upon Fort Sumter.

I think it was on the 9th that the official letter came, notifying Anderson that a naval expedition had been sent to our relief, and that he must cooperate with it to the best of his ability. He communicated this information to us on the 10th, but desired it should be kept secret. The preparations we were obliged to make told the men plainly enough, however, that the fighting was about to commence. The news acted like magic upon them. They had previously been drooping and dejected; but they now sprung to their work with the greatest alacrity, laughing, singing, whistling, and full of glee. They were overjoyed to learn that their long imprisonment in the fort would soon be at an end. They had felt themselves humiliated by the open supervision which South Carolina exercised over us, and our tame submission to it. It was very galling to them to see the revenue-cutter, which had been stolen from the United States, anchored within a stone's cast of our walls, to watch our movements and overhaul everything coming to or going from the fort, including our mail-boat.

On the 10th, Beauregard announced his personal staff to consist of Colonels Wigfall, Chestnut, Means, M'Gowan, Manning, and Boyleston.

On the same day, a house directly opposite to us in Moultrieville, at the nearest point, was suddenly removed, disclosing a formidable masked battery, which effectually enfiladed two rows of our upper tier of guns in barbette, and took a third tier in reverse. It was a sad surprise to us, for we had our heaviest metal there. I set to work immediately to construct sand-bag traverses; but it was difficult to make much progress, as we had no bags, and were obliged to tear up sheets for the purpose, and have the pieces sewed together. This labor, however, was entirely thrown away, for Anderson ordered us to abandon all the guns on the parapet. This, of course, was much less dangerous for the men, but

it deprived us of the most powerful and effective part of our armament.

About 3 P.m. of the same day, a boat came over with Colonel James Chestnut, Ex-United States Senator, and Captain Stephen D. Lee, both aids of Beauregard. They bore a demand for the surrender of the fort. Anderson politely declined to accede to this request, but stated in conversation he would soon be starved out. This gratuitous information ought never to have been given to the enemy, in view of the fact that a naval expedition was on its way to us. It was at once supposed that Anderson desired to surrender without fighting; and about 11 P.M. another boat came over, containing Colonel Chestnut, Colonel Pryor, and Captain Lee, to inquire upon what day he would be willing to evacuate the work in case he was not attacked. The answer was, on the 15th at noon, provided he did not receive fresh instructions, or was not relieved before that time. As we had pork enough on hand to last for two weeks longer, there was no necessity for fixing so early a day. It left too little margin for naval operations, as, in all probability, the vessels, in case of any accident or detention, would arrive too late to be of service. This proved to be the case.

The enemy's batteries on Sullivan's Island were so placed as to fire directly into the officers' quarters at Fort Sumter; and as our rooms would necessarily become untenable, we vacated them, and chose points that were more secure. I moved my bed into a magazine which was directly opposite to Cummings Point, and which was nearly empty. As I was sensible that the next three days would call for great physical exertion and constant wakefulness, I endeavored to get all the sleep I could on the night of the 11th. About 4 A.M. on the 12th, I was awakened by some one groping about my room in the dark and calling out my name. It proved to be Anderson, who came to announce to me that he had just received a dispatch from Beauregard, dated 3.20 A.M., to the effect that he should open fire upon us in an hour. Finding it was determined not to return the fire until after breakfast, I remained in bed. As we had no lights, we could in fact do nothing before that time, except to wander around in the darkness, and fire without an accurate view of the enemy's works.