

## CHAPTER II.

Graduation—Commissioned Brevet Second Lieutenant, U. S. A.—Ordered to Fort Macon, N. C.—Goldsboro—Journey to Beaufort—Officers at the Fort—Life in a Casemate—Stormy Atlantic—That Oyster Supper—The Wandering Cot—Adieu to Fort Macon—Journey to Washington—Lieuts. George H. Thomas and John Pope—Weldon, N. C.—Go to West Point—Prof. Morse—First Dispatch—Hope Club, Washington—Dinner Given by Surgeon General Lawson—Appointed Aid to Gen. Scott—British Gold—Col. S. Churchill—Integrity of Old Army Officers—Leave Washington for Fort McHenry—Society in Baltimore—Chief Justice Taney.

I BELIEVE it was on the 9th day of June, 1843, the examinations ended, we bade adieu to old Fort Putnam, the Crow's Nest, the Dunderburg, the halls, the lovers' walk, the professors, in short to West Point and all that it contained, and took passage on a steamer on the ever-beautiful Hudson for New York City. A new life was opened to us, the wide world was before us, and we believed we were equal to all environments, and anxious for the strife; and, if I possess a correct power of retrospection, we generally had a higher opinion of ourselves *then* than we have had *since* in the battle of life, amid joy and sorrow, hopes and disappointment, praise and detraction, sordid avarice and the little trust in the sincerity of man. In the course of time we comprehended that "all is not gold that glitters."

In a day or two we began to separate for our homes, and I bade farewell to some whose faces I never saw again. When the assignments to the army were made, in July following, I was notified that I had been commissioned a brevet second lieutenant in the United States army and assigned to Company —, Third Regiment of Artillery, then stationed at Fort Macon, N. C.

I was ordered to report for duty by the first day of October. Bidding good-by to all at home, I started for Beaufort, N. C., Fort Macon being on an island opposite to the town. I traveled by way of Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, and Petersburg to Goldsboro; thence by stagecoach to New Berne and Beaufort.

The journey was made without incident of note. On the train there was a spruce individual from New York City on his way

to Charleston. Some one had alarmed him very much about "malaria," and he cautioned me against rising in the morning until after the sun had dissipated the poisonous vapors of the night. The consequence was I remained in bed at the hotel in Goldsboro, waiting for the mist to rise before I did, until I heard the stage horn calling for passengers, and I came near getting no breakfast. But the driver was one of those happy-go-easy fellows, who said: "I am in no haste; go and get your breakfast."

That New York man had alarmed me to such a degree that when a courtly old gentleman came to the stage door with a large basket of scuppernong grapes and requested me to take charge of them to Beaufort, bidding me partake of them bountifully by the way, I thought death was concealed in that basket as the asp was in the one given to Cleopatra. I was the only passenger. After a while I consulted the driver, who was on the box outside, as to the danger of eating grapes in that bilious country, and he assured me there was none. So timidly I took one and found it "was good for food" like the apple in the garden of Eden, and in spite of fears I partook of them freely.

When I arrived in Beaufort I found there to meet me Lieut. C. Q. Tompkins, and I sailed with him over to the fort. One company constituted the garrison. The officers were Capt. W. Wall, Lieuts. Tompkins and E. O. C. Ord, Dr. Glenn, and Capt. J. H. Trapier, engineer officer. The company was composed of old soldiers and required but little drilling, and so our duties were light. I spent most of my time sailing on the sound and fishing. The waters teemed with fish, and both game and oysters were abundant.

There had been a report that the company would soon be ordered to Fort McHenry, Baltimore, and all were anxious to leave the place, for they had been stationed there over two years.

As time passed on they expected by every mail the order for them to leave, but it came not. However, one evening toward the close of November when we were enjoying a good supper, Mingo, the best of old colored servants, announced the arrival of the day's mail, and placed all the letters before Capt. Wall. Opening a ten-inch buff envelope from the War Department, he took therefrom a letter, and as he glanced over it a smile played over his countenance, observed by all. Ord exclaimed: "That

is the order for Fort McHenry!" Dr. Glenn bet wine with Ord that it was not; and while the bets were being arranged Capt. Wall handed the letter to me. I read it with surprise; it was an order for me to proceed to Washington City and report to the Board preparing the artillery tactics, composed of Maj. John Munroe, Capts. Francis Taylor and Robert Anderson. There was dejection of spirits on the faces of all present; but Ord rose with the occasion, and ordered Mingo to have three bushels of oysters in the shell prepared, and to bring on the accompaniments. I left them late at the table and retired to my casemate room, and I avow to this day that some invisible spirit seemed to move my cot around the room. Round and round it went. I leaned against the table in the middle of the room and enjoyed the circus for a while, but the cot would not grow weary. After some vain attempts I caught it as it passed by, threw myself on it, the light burned dim, and I fell asleep.

But O the vivid recollections of the wild, incoherent dreams of that night, the aching head and quickened pulse. Childish scenes arose. I was at the home of my childhood. I was crossing the Delaware river on the ice, as in days of yore, and was carried away on a floating cake. It was dark, and no one heard me cry for help. Then I was at a hotel, and a girl, once so lovely, on whom I lavished all the love of a child, came in to dine. She was old, ugly, and changed, and I gazed on her in horror. Next I was in command of a fort on the banks of a river, and British ships of war were coming up; they opened fire, and I ordered our guns to reply, and not one could be fired; in vain the gunners worked while the fleet passed by, and I cried in agony of mind. Like a kaleidoscope the vision changed. I became an essence of the Creator of the universe, and the universe was heaven. A spirit robed in white was with me. Gravitation was destroyed, and we moved with the rapidity of thought, past the moon, past the sun, past the stars. Whither I wished we went. Bright suns were on all sides, above and below, rolling in silence in the infinite ethereal spaces which had no center and were without bounds. When I asked what power held all these worlds in a relative position no answer came. I was alone! Phantoms of a burning brain! I was at West Point again, in Kosciusko's garden, walking on the banks of the Hudson. I saw a cave and entered it, and immediately a rock weighing tons

dropped down and closed the entrance. A passage led to another chamber, and again came a vast rock and closed it. I was now in darkness in a vaulted cave, shut in from the world and all the worlds that were shown me. As I sat down on a rock in despair, a ray of light was seen through a crevice in the rocks. Hope came to my relief. The passage was small. After I had got partly through, my body, in fright, began to swell, and I could neither go on nor get back. Breathing had nearly ceased, and I could not cry for help, or move hand or foot.

From this condition I was awakened. The vision bore away, and I found myself lying on my cot, and an old hag that had assumed the form of a peculiar cat was standing on me holding me down on my back. Her body was a part of a broomstick; her legs were rounds of a chair with wire hinges at the joints; her head was like three sticks forming a triangle, with ends projecting for ears. Her countenance was like a cat's. Her forefeet were on my chest pressing it down so that I could scarcely breathe, while her savage eyes glowed with rage in my face. I was awake and remembered that circulation of the blood would relieve me from this horrible nightmare. I gave my body a sudden turn, the blood rushed through my veins, the witch flew through the window, and the day was dawning. My head was swimming like a buoy on the water.

The elixirs of Cagliostro, the preparations of Paracelsus, the use of *hashish* of the Mohammedans, never produced visions or dreams more strange and painful than did that, my first and unwilling trial of old "Monongahela."

I drew a moral from my experience on that occasion, and have never forgotten it. May you draw a good one from it also!

The next morning the officers accompanied me to the landing. Bidding them good-by, I got in the boat and sailed over to Beaufort. My stay at Fort Macon was pleasant, and I was not overjoyed to leave the place. I could lie on that treacherous cot and be lulled to sleep by the ever-murmuring sea, or awakened by the thundering waves of the stormy Atlantic that seemed to make the island tremble at the shock; and I could tell at night by the lightning's "red glare" and the breaker's roar when a storm was moving on over the Gulf Stream.

The casemate used for a magazine adjoined mine, and in it were stored many thousand pounds of powder, and the lightning

rods did not quiet all my fears when those violent thunderstorms passed over the island. Along the shore near Cape Lookout these violent winds had buried large pine forests in sand ridges.

Well, I journeyed back to New Berne alone in the same Concord stagecoach I came in, and remained there all night.

I now began to observe the difference in manners, customs, and deportment of the Southern people from the people in the North. I shall refer to this, perhaps, farther on. I noticed that the outer door to the general lounging room was never shut. The weather was cold; servants piled on the hearth pine wood in abundance, till the flames roared up the chimney; men came in and men went out, and never a door was closed.

After supper the landlord drew up a chair near mine, close by the bright fire, and we entered into a conversation about the people and the surrounding country.

A negro servant came in to replace the fuel and departed, and I availed myself of the occasion to ask the landlord for what purpose doors were made, and he was amazed at my want of information on such common affairs. I think I demonstrated to him that to keep the doors closed would be economy in fuel and comfort to his guests. He must have been convinced, for in the morning I found the servants closed the doors when passing in and out. This custom of open doors prevailed generally in the South. When I boarded the train at Goldsboro, among the passengers were two officers that were at the Academy whilst I was there, George H. Thomas and John Pope. As Thomas was on a visit to his home in Southampton County, Va., on the line of the Weldon and Norfolk railroad, he persuaded Pope and myself to go on with him and take the steamer from Portsmouth to Baltimore instead of the route by Richmond; and so we remained all night in Weldon. The weather was cold and the ground covered with snow, and the accommodations miserable. I little thought then that I would be destined, nineteen years after, to sleep there again with snow on the ground and a tent for shelter, but so it was. On the way to Norfolk the rails were covered with frost and the driving wheels slipped so that we all had to get out the cars and help push the train over a slight ascent to a bridge. There was not much comfort on the trains in those days.

On reaching Washington I reported to the Board of Artillery.

They handed to me the manuscript of work to be published, and directed me to prepare drawings of horses, harness, guns, gun carriages, and all the maneuvers of the battery to be illustrated by plates.

I was engaged in the performance of this duty from the early part of December, 1843, to November 12, 1844. When the drawings were all finished, there were added drawings of all heavy guns, their carriages, implements, etc., and I am pleased to state that the Board, after comparing them with the manuscript, accepted them without the alteration of a line, letter, or dot.

I went to West Point to make the drawings for the horse artillery. During the latter part of my stay there I occupied a room at Mrs. Kinsley's. Lieut. John Newton, W. S. Rosecrans, William Gilham, and W. R. Johnston also had quarters there. They were on duty as assistant professors in the Academy. From West Point I returned to Washington and made the plates of the heavy artillery. Thence in September I went to meet the Board at Old Point Comfort. Gen. John B. Walbach was in command of the post, a gallant old German who entered our army in 1799. A large number of officers were on duty there. The hotel was filled with beauty and fashion; and, as I had nothing special to do, I was free to join in the amusements the locality afforded. From Old Point Comfort I returned to Washington early in November, 1844. During the summer of this year, and whilst the Democratic convention was in session in Baltimore, Prof. Morse invited Lieut. I. F. Quinby and me to ride with him to the capital to test the telegraph line built from Washington to Baltimore by act of Congress. On arriving at the capital the Professor signaled to the operator in Baltimore, and in a short time the following message was received by him:

Convention not in session now. Polk stock in the ascendancy. Douglass now addressing the people.

Or words to that effect; and this was the first telegram ever sent in the United States. I have seen it stated that the first message *announced the nomination*. That must be an error, because the one he received was before the nomination had been made.\*

\*It is also reported that the first message over the line, sent by a young lady, was: "What hath God wrought!" The Professor did not mention this, and this dispatch was sent over the ocean cable years later.

From Washington I was ordered to join my company at Fort McHenry. That order to leave Fort Macon, and about which so much anxiety was manifested when I left there, was afterwards received and the company moved accordingly. Maj. Samuel Ringgold was in command of the post, and among the officers were Randolph Ridgely, W. H. Shover, Abner Doubleday, E. O. C. Ord, and G. W. Ayers, and P. G. T. Beauregard was the engineer officer.

Fort McHenry, at this time, was considered one of the most desirable posts to be stationed at in the whole country.

During the autumn and winter there was a great deal of gayety in Baltimore, and some of the officers of the post were generally at the balls and parties given. The ladies of Baltimore from their ancestors inherited beauty; and from their environments naturally acquired retiring manners, low and sweet voices, gentleness, attractive grace; and, conscious from childhood of their social position, they were sprightly, exhibited hauteur to none, and moved in the mazy dance so courtly, so slow, and "courtesied with a grace that belonged to an age in the long, long ago."

On one occasion a masked and fancy dress ball was given by a gentleman with whom I was not acquainted, to which many of the élite of the city were invited. A description of that ball which was promptly published in the New York *Herald* created much excitement. The writer, not content with describing dresses and characters represented, touched truthfully some tender points peculiar to each individual. There were many accused of the authorship, and all denied it. Rewards were offered for the discovery of the writer. No one thought it could have been done by any person not present at the ball, but so it was. Only two persons could name the writer.

I went with him, about two days after the publication, the round of morning calls, and we had much enjoyment at the criticisms made by the ladies. Many were indignant; others enjoyed it. Some equivocal expressions had been used in reference to one young lady. She first shed tears; then, smiling, said: "Well, I would rather be described as it was written than not to be mentioned at all." The writer was a promising young lawyer, long since in his grave. I have not seen the other confidant since the war. He was in the Confederate army.

One of the most accomplished young ladies in Baltimore was Miss Charlotte R. She belonged to no "circle," but was beloved by all. Among her admirers at that time were Chevalier Hulseman, *Charge d'Affairs* for Austria, Lieut. Ord, and myself. Two years after, on the banks of the Rio Grande, before a battle that was inevitable, I sat by a fire and committed to the flames letters that I did not intend should be read by any one, and, being alone, perchance some were moistened by a tear.

My father was in politics a Whig, and firmly believed Gen. Jackson deserved to be shot for hanging Arburthnot and Ambriester when he took possession of Florida; and he thought Roger B. Taney no better than a robber because he removed the government deposits from the United States Bank. Now among the pleasant families that I visited at this time in Baltimore was that of Chief Justice Taney, a man so kind, gentle in manner, so plain and unpretending at his home, that I wondered to what extent a venal party press would villify a pure and honest man who faithfully interpreted the law.\*

\*In the celebrated Dred-Scott case (see Howard's "Supreme Court Reports," Vol. XIX., page 404) you will find that Justice Taney, in describing the *condition* of the negro more than a hundred years *before* the Declaration of Independence, said: "It is difficult at *this day* (1856) to realize the state of public opinion in relation to that unfortunate race which prevailed in the civilized portions of the world at the time of the Declaration of Independence, and when the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted. . . . They had, for more than a century before, been regarded as a being of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic whenever a profit could be made by it. The opinion was, *at that time*, fixed and universal in the civilized portions of the white race."

The above is merely a historical fact as regards the status of the negro about *two hundred years before* the judge rendered his decision. And now behold! For political party purposes; by the abolitionists; from the pulpit; by college professors; by *all* who have hated the South, it is to this day tortured into a *decision* made by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, which is not true. Furthermore, and before this case was in court, Judge Taney had manumitted his own, inherited, slaves; and as a lawyer had defended a man in court for publicly uttering abolition sentiments. In fact he regarded slavery as an evil, and proclaimed it by deeds. (See "American Authors' Guild Bulletin" for April, 1898.)

While in Washington in 1843 I made my home at the "Hope Club," a club composed mainly of unmarried army officers permanently stationed, or at least on duty there. Gen. George Gibson, Commissary General, was the president of the club. He was one of the best men I ever met; kind and considerate of the feelings of every one, a gentleman of the olden time, a man of patience and unruffled temper. He and Judge Bibb, Secretary of the Treasury, would go to the long bridge and fish all day for a minnow, or even a nibble. Capt. J. C. Casey was the Treasurer. He was a very entertaining man, and had more influence with the Seminole Indians than any one connected with the government. He was a commissary, and they had abiding faith in him because, as they said, "he told them no lies."

One day on taking my seat at dinner I turned up my plate and found under it a note from Surgeon General Thomas Lawton inviting me in the evening to dine with him. As I saw no one else had an invitation, and I was only a lieutenant, I was not inclined to go alone, but Gen. Gibson, Casey, and others told me to go by all means. At this time Lieut. Thomas Williams came in and found an invitation also, and it was decided we would go.

The Doctor had a dinner of thirteen courses, provided by the prince of restaurant caterers. The wines were old and rare. The guests were Gen. Scott, Commander in Chief of the Army; Col. Sylvester Churchill, Inspector General; Lieut. Williams, and myself. Scott, Churchill, and the Doctor discussed the war of 1812 on the Canadian line, and the battles fought there; told how once they had so many prisoners and so few to guard them that they cut the suspenders of the prisoners to prevent their escape so easily, as it required one hand to hold their breeches up. I remember another that shows there must have been a good feeling between the officers on either side. Maj. Lomax, for some purpose, was sent to the British camp; and when he returned he was eagerly asked what news he had. "News! why there is British gold, yes, British gold in this camp." That seemed to imply treason, and an explanation was demanded, and it was given when Lomax from his pockets covered the table with English sovereigns. He had been entertained cordially by the British officers. The dinner did not end until midnight. Gen. Scott drank sherry only, except when sampling some choice wines that

the Doctor bid the butler open. Col. Churchill was in fine humor, and partly

O'er a' the ills o' life victorious.

At last the hour arrived to leave; then Gen. Scott, raising himself to his full height, and either impressed with the importance of the occasion, or thinking perhaps he was again at Lundy's Lane, "ordered his own aid, Lieut. Williams, to conduct Col. Churchill to his home, declaring it was not prudent for him to venture in the streets unprotected." Then turning to me with much dignity, he announced: "And I appoint Lieut. French a special aid to accompany me to my residence."

The streets were deserted and silent, and the walk short. Taking his arm, I went with him to his home, rang the bell, and his servant met him at the door, and there my services as aid terminated. In after days and after years he was ever considerate and kind to me. The conqueror lives, but the man is dead. But O how pleasant the recollection of the times when those pure and knightly men with generous hearts, untouched by avarice, never closed the "door of mercy on mankind." Such men were Gens. Scott, Jesup, Gibson, Towson, Lawson, Totten, Abert, Cooper, and others. Then men served God and their country rather than mammon. The maddening, wild, and frantic rush for wealth was unknown, and life was one of enjoyment without extravagance.