

THE
SIEGE OF
WASHINGTON, D.C.
A TRUE AND AUTHENTIC STORY,

WRITTEN EXPRESSLY FOR LITTLE PEOPLE.

BY
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Preface

My publisher gives it as his opinion that a great many persons will be offended at what I have said in this work. He thinks, also, that "quite a number" of our great generals will be seriously disturbed in their dignity on seeing what liberties my artist has taken with them. Such opinions as these are rather too common with publishers in this country, who generally take very narrow views as to what public men think and do. This work was not written to offend, but to amuse and instruct little people. I have too much respect for our great generals to believe that they will feel offended at what I have said of them. Some of our little generals may perhaps take exception to the positions my artist has assigned them, and feel disposed to make war on him. But there will be nothing new in this, inasmuch as any close observer of the war must have seen that these little generals were always more fierce in making war on writers and artists than courageous in facing the enemy. That the Siege of Washington was the most remarkable military event history has any account of, is very well understood among those who participated in it. I must beg the reader, then, not to place false judgment on the pleasantries introduced here and there, since I have recorded, with great care and correctness, all the military movements, that took place during that memorable occasion.

F. Colburn Adams.

Washington, D.C., January 15, 1867.

CHAPTER I.

Washington as a Remarkable City.

You, my son, have heard, and perhaps read, how Rome was once saved by a goose. There were, as you know, my son, a great many geese abroad during the siege of Washington; but it was not through any act of theirs that the city was saved. As I love you dearly, my son, so is it my first desire to instruct you correctly on all subjects in which the good of our great country is concerned. Before concluding my history of this remarkable siege, I shall prove to your satisfaction that Washington was saved, and the fate of the nation determined, by a barrel of whisky.

Let me say to you, my son, that the siege of Washington, however much people abroad may laugh at it, was one of the most extraordinary events in the history of modern warfare. It took place in the year of our Lord, 1864; and there is no other event in the war of the great rebellion to compare with it. You will, therefore, my son, understand why it is that the history of an event of so much importance should be written only by an impartial historian — one who has courage enough to tell the truth, and no official friends to serve at the expense of honor. I must tell you, also, my son, that the great military problem of this siege has afforded a subject of deep study for our engineers, from General Delafield downward, who have puzzled their wits over it without finding a solution.

Should we be unfortunate enough to have another great war, and the nation again be compelled to give itself up to

the profession of arms, the conduct of this siege would afford us an excellent example, as well as a profitable key to the art of war, as understood by our War Department in the said year of our Lord, 1864. This, then, is another reason why this great military event should be faithfully rendered. I will also add, my son, that though I may fail to instruct you after the manner and style of the most profound historian of our day, I will at least make my account of this great siege so plain and simple that you will comprehend it in all its multiplicity of parts.

But first let me tell you a few things about Washington, the capital city of this great nation. You, my son, may have seen one hundred other cities, and yet it will remind you of none of them. It is very elongated, and spreads over a great deal of ground, apparently for personal inconvenience. Indeed, my son, it has the appearance of having been dropped down late of a Saturday night by some eccentric gentleman who had a large quantity of architectural odds and ends on hand, and had no other use for them. It has been famous always for its acute angles and broad avenues. The former, I have heard more than one person say, were skillfully arranged by a very accommodating French engineer, for the special benefit of persons who went home late of nights and were liable to get confused on the way. The population is rather a curious one, and may be classified as the distinct and indistinct, the settled and unsettled. The census report, a remarkably unreliable account, has it that they number "some" sixty thousand. A large proportion of this settled and unsettled population is of such variety of color as to render it almost impossible to define the nice proportions of blood it is so strongly mixed with. On this point, my son, you must not be too particular, but accept it as your father does, as a proof that the races, whom we are told can never be got to live in harmony together, have, to say the least, gone very extensively into a system which gives strength to the belief that it could be done. The French call this the commingling system,

and their philosophers argue from it, and with much force, that it is impossible to establish the question as to what kind of blood the best society is based upon. For myself, I feel that we can with safety accept these French philosophers as good authority in such matters. You will also find among the population of Washington natives of nearly every country on the face of the globe. These speak no end of tongues, follow all manner of professions and occupations, and what is most valuable, preserve that delightful diversity for which what is called the "old society" has always been famous. Picturesque hills encircle the city at a distance, and a beautiful river flows past on its way to the sea. The city has many fathers and few friends. These fathers, while in an ornamental mood, built a grand canal into the very bowels of the city, after the manner of Venice, that commerce might be encouraged, and such persons as had a passion for moonlight and gondolas could gratify it. But the people were not given to sailing in gondolas, so this famous canal was diverted from the object for which it was originally intended. It is now used as a tomb where deceased animals of a domestic nature are carefully deposited. The old inhabitants regard this tomb with a reverence I never could understand clearly, even though I had sought for a cause in their instinctive opposition to all and every manner of reform. Indeed, the fathers of the city regard this grand canal as performing a very humane part, inasmuch as it supplies an excellent and very convenient burial-place for their domestic animals, and increases the practice of a large number of doctors. The city fathers, I am informed, find some consolation in the fact that other canals have performed equally humane services.

And it came to pass, my son, that there was a great war in all the land; and greater than was ever known before in any other land. Thus Washington became the centre of our anxieties and our thoughts. The people of the North, and the people of the West, and the people of the South, who constituted the people of one great nation, had long held different

opinions as to the right of making merchandise of men, of women, and of little children. Yes, my son, it was at last claimed to be in accordance with Christianity to doom these people to a life at once hopeless and miserable. As you grow up, my son, and begin to think and act for yourself, you will think it very strange that such a great national crime as this should have existed in a land so blessed with the fruits of a ripe civilization. And it will be a cause of wonder to you that a society based upon such an abomination did not sooner break down under the burden of its wrongs. And yet you must always bear in mind, my son, that men do not view great crimes alike, and that even good and great men differ as to what constitutes national rights and national wrongs. It is said that great nations have gone to decline because their people became blind with pride, and refused to think right. A nation is always safe while its people think right; but you must teach the children right before you can have the people think right. Education and association had much to do in training the thoughts of men in the South into wrong channels. Taking this view of the subject you may find much to forgive in a political system that seems wrong in your eyes and right in the eyes of its supporters. Indeed, my son, I would enjoin you to treat with a reasonable amount of deference the arguments advanced by those who differ with you on questions of public policy, and also to remember that right and reason are your strongest weapons. Never get angry with your opponent, never use language that will cause you a regret; and if you cannot convince by the moral force of your argument, abandon the undertaking. And whatever else you do to advance your material prosperity, never let it be said of you that you advocated a great political wrong merely because it was popular and brought you the applause of the unthinking. You cannot do so with a clear conscience; and what is life without it?

I have, unwittingly, my son, wandered away from my subject. The people of the South forgot all the great principles

which govern humanity for humanity's good; they were betrayed into wrong doing by false friends, and made blind by their own prosperity. And they even forgot that God was their truest and best guardian, and to Him they must look for that care and protection which shall last forever. But, my son, I would enjoin you to bear these people no ill will, and remember how much better it is in the sight of God to deal with the erring in the spirit of forgiveness. They were a brave and a gallant people, who fought in the belief that they were right, and with a heroism worthy of a good cause. It is only the meanest nature that has no respect for the courage and gallantry of an enemy—that cannot find in it something to admire. It was the selfishness, my son, which slavery begat in these people, that perverted their natures, and caused them to forget God.

Yes, my son, it was the curse of slavery that corrupted the hearts and turned the heads of these people; that found them requesting the race they had made suffer so long in bondage, to be thankful that their sufferings were no worse. I never could, my son, see why any human being, who had been made the victim of the greatest outrage against his rights, should be thankful. The Church might, and did, attempt to sanctify this greatest of crimes; but that did not change the character of the cruelty and injustice. It will, no doubt, seem strange to you that ministers of the Gospel should be found the defenders of crime. And yet slavery found its ablest defenders in the pulpit of the South. I am afraid it always will be so, for even now we see ministers of the Gospel more ready to hang out false lights to lead their people into darkness, than to give them that truth and instruction they so much need. But you must not let the thought of this lessen your respect for the Church. Examine with great care until you have found out in what true Christianity consists; and when you have, practice accordingly to the extent of your ability. Never forget that it was the preaching of popular errors that cost the nation so much blood and treasure, so much sorrow

and distress. That bishops should put aside their lawn, and gird on the sword—that they should lead men to war and death, instead of the baptismal, and all to perpetuate the sorrows of an oppressed race, is, my son, only another proof that error may gain a victory over truth in the hearts and feelings of the best of us.

CHAPTER II.

We Go to War to Settle Our Differences.

HERE let me present you, my son, with an exact portrait of the distinguished general who is commonly accepted as striking the first blow of this war. He was kindly educated at the expense of the nation, and was first among its enemies. For a time his fame ran high enough, and timid people were inclined to give him the character of a monster. But it turned out in time that he was a very peaceable gentleman, and not so much of a terrible warrior, after all.

But I want to tell you, my son, how it was that the people of this great nation took to swords and cannon, to settle their differences of opinion.

The people of the great North, and the people of the great West, were educated to a very different way of thinking on the question of slavery; and differed with the people of the South as to what constituted a national blessing. They were willing, for the sake of peace, to tolerate slavery, as a great evil it were dangerous to attempt to remove; but it was too much to ask them to accept it as a great national blessing. These people were energetic, thrifty, lovers of right and justice, and had grown rich and powerful by their own industry. They could not see why the whole people of so great a nation as ours should be required to bow down and worship what the rest of the civilized world had stigmatized as the greatest scourge of mankind. Seeing the power

this great wrong was obtaining over the nation, as well as the danger it was causing us by corrupting the minds of the people, they consulted together and elected a President after their own way of thinking. And this so offended the people of the South, who were a brave people, and quick to anger, that they gathered together from all parts of their country, gave up their peaceful pursuits, and went to war for what they called their independence. But I always found, my son, that independence was an abused phrase, much on the tongues of these people. Indeed their idea of independence extended only to giving one class the full and exclusive right to enslave the other. The Southern idea of independence was so shaped as to contain the very worst features of a despotism. But you must look with forgiveness on these people, my son, and seek to forget many of those acts of vindictiveness which characterized them during the war.

At the same time, my son, you must not lose sight of the lesson which the result of this war teaches. Let it be a guide to your own actions that these people went to war to tear down what they could not build up, to destroy a Government the world had come to respect and admire, and under which they had found a safe refuge and a tolerance for their institution of slavery. But the edifice they sought to build up crumbled to the ground, and they are now left without even a safe refuge for their pride. Yes, my son, these people scorned the example of the Christian world, went to war in defense of a great crime, and ceased only when they had destroyed themselves.

I have been thus serious while instructing you as to how the war began, because I am aware that a very large number of writers will tell you that it began in a very different manner. If the account I may hereafter give of what took place at the siege may be less serious, you must charge it to my love for the truth of history. Indeed much that occurred during that remarkable military event, was not of so serious a nature

as is generally conceded by an intelligent public. Unless, then, it be written down as it occurred, we shall not convey a faithful picture of it to the public.

Now that the war spirit was full to the brim, the people of the South gathered in great numbers on the plains of Manassas. They were earnest, serious, and even savage in their intentions; and they brought with them their powder and shot-guns, and a large quantity of whisky. They also brought with them a great number of negroes, who were to build the forts, and do all work it would not become a gentleman to do. And while this work was progressing, the "gentlemen" soldiers of the South were to talk very loudly and courageously, and invite all the Yankees round about to come out and get whipped. These people resolved themselves into a great and powerful army, with Peter Beauregard, the French gentleman of whom I have before spoken, for its commander. This gentleman was somewhat eccentric, and much given to saying things, the true meaning of which he did not understand. A waggish friend of mine once told me that this Mr. Beauregard was educated for an apothecary at West Point, a place where young gentlemen are instructed in the various ways of getting a living honestly. Being very skillful in the use of mortars, he was held by Mr. Davis as a most proper person to command a southern army, inasmuch as he could give the Yankees all the physic they wanted in the shortest time. And as it is always expected that a great general will say a great many things that are neither sensible nor wise, and which afford politicians an excellent opportunity of picking them to pieces, he is a wise general who issues his orders and keeps his lips sealed on politics. I say this, my son, because it is popularly understood that a general who knows his business bears the same relations to a politician that pepper does to the stomach.

And it came to pass that the people of the North and the people of the West became seriously alarmed at the capers Mr. Beauregard and his men were cutting at Manassas. In-

deed, many false reports were circulated concerning the great power of this Mr. Beauregard; and our people began to give way to their fears, and to declare that he might enter the capital any dark night and capture or send the Government on a traveling expedition. The aged gentlemen at the head of our Government shook their heads discouragingly, and declared there was no safety in going to bed at night while Mr. Beauregard was so near a neighbor. The honest farmers in the country round about were also very much alarmed at the unruly conduct of Mr. Beauregard's men, who carried off their pigs and chickens, and eat up all their vegetables. They also made a great noise, and planted guns on all the adjacent hills, a proceeding the honest farmers did not fully comprehend. Then these unruly men became very defiant, felt like fighting the world, and, in the honest belief that they could do it, invited all the rest of the nation to come out and get whipped. Yes, my son, and to show what confidence they had in themselves, they said we might bring "five for one;" and for that matter, all Germany and all Ireland. It was considered wisdom with them to say nothing about England and France. Those two peaceably inclined nations might, at some future day, be disposed to step in and help them out—in a quiet way. It was not so much humanity as a matter of profitable trade with these two great nations, and if things should take a successful turn, they might see the confederacy in a strong light, and give it material as well as moral help, notwithstanding it had slavery for its foundation. In short, these Southern gentlemen acted on the wise axiom, that it will not do to make enemies in a direction where you may need friends and assistance.

Now, my son, the eccentric French gentleman, of whom I have spoken as capable of administering physic enough to settle the question with the Yankees, soon became an object of great admiration with his noisy people. And this so pleased him, that he came in time to admire himself, and to firmly believe in his own mind that the world had no greater war-

rior. Self-confidence, my son, is one of the most necessary things in war. I have sometimes thought that this element of an army's strength was not fully understood. It was at least not understood by us when the war began. If it had been, a much less number of our people would have shared Mr. Beauregard's opinion of himself. As it was, our timid people so magnified his proportions as to see danger in his very shadow. But then, my son, we were very innocent of the practical part of war when the great rebellion began; and this innocence led us into the very grave error of giving our adversary more than his proper dimensions. It was this that led the Northern mind to over-measure Mr. Beauregard.

I have always had a good deal of sympathy for Mr. Beauregard, and never believed him anything but a pleasant, harmless gentleman, who got into bad company by mere accident. Nor do I believe he ever had any more serious design on the capital of the nation than to look at it longingly from a distance, and perhaps a desire now and then to enjoy the hospitality of some old friend. That he would have played the ruthless invader, if he had got into the city, no reflecting mind ever believed. But then there were people ready enough to believe anything in those days—even to believe that there was truth to be found in the stories told by Mr. Detective Baker.

It was natural enough that Mr. Beauregard should amuse his soldiers by telling them romantic stories of the pleasant days he had spent in Washington, as well as the great value of what it contained. It was necessary also that he should ascertain how far the Government at Washington could be frightened, and what were the best means to that end. You must know, my son, that a Frenchman regards it as one of the first principles in war to find out how far you can frighten your adversary before proceeding to fight him. This will account for a good deal that Mr. Beauregard said and did while at Manassas, and which, at the time, was somewhat unintelligible.

As we were not sure, however, as to what the real intentions of Mr. Beauregard and his master were, it was concluded that we could better preserve our respect for them, as well as the peace of mind of our own people, by applying the proper means to keep them at a respectful distance outside. Indeed the capital contained a great many things which would be extremely useful to an ambitious gentleman resolved on setting up a government of his own, and with the machinery all working according to his own way of thinking. And as the honest intentions of these ambitious men (I refer to Mr. Beauregard and his master) were no more to be trusted than their loyalty, we set our engineers to work building a cordon of forts, such as the world had never seen before, and supposed to be strong enough to keep all our enemies out. And these forts were mounted with such reasoning powers as the largest cannon in the world were capable of.

Among the things in Washington so very desirable to a gentleman about to set up a government of his own was the White House. Mr. Davis had long regarded this pleasant looking old mansion as a desirable residence for a gentleman born to rule over a people. Once comfortably seated in this pleasant mansion, a wonderful change would be worked in the political opinions of those whose minds were in doubt. Considered as master of the situation, his friends in the North would increase fourfold. And there was no knowing the turn respect for him abroad might take. A gentleman quietly settled down in the White House, if only for four years, is sure to have a large increase in the number of his friends, all ready either to accept his favors or sound his virtues. Even slavery, that had scourged mankind for so many generations, would have found a great increase of friends and admirers if Mr. Davis had made a home in the White House; so prone is weak human nature to bow to power. Indeed, I am not so sure that, with such a turn in our political affairs, those preachers who had been asserting the divine origin of slavery would not then have proclaimed that God himself was its great protector—a blasphemy the Christian Church will some day be ashamed of.

In addition to the White House being a desirable residence for Mr. Davis, there were those fine public buildings so much admired by strangers. They were just what Mr. Davis and his friends wanted in starting a new government, and would come in very handy. With Washington in his possession, and our worthy President and his Cabinet locked up in the arsenal, or sent on a traveling expedition into a colder climate for the benefit of their health, Mr. Davis's new enterprise would become a fixture in the history of nations. And there was a time when Mr. Davis could, with the means in his power, have accomplished all these things.

The arsenal, too, was full of gunpowder, of great guns, of valuable military stores and equipments. And these were just such things as a gentleman resolved to be a ruler and have a government according to his own way of thinking would stand most in need of. In short, the powder and big guns might be needed as a means of convincing those who differed with him that his opinions must be respected. This is a queer world, my son, and man is the strangest and most uncontrollable animal in it. Mr. Davis understood this as well as any gentleman within my knowledge. And if he had kept as keen an eye on his finances as he had on his political fortune, it would have been much better for him. He knew that if he could show to the world that his new government was sound financially, and likely to continue so, his prospects would be bright indeed. And with Washington, and what Washington contained, in his possession, he could set up his claim to the confidence of the financial world with more than ordinary pretensions.

It was indeed said (but I think in a strain of slander) that Mr. Beauregard looked with an air of great condescension on our noble Treasury building, and promised his fighting followers a share of its contents as soon as it came into his master's possession. Indeed it was said that Mr. Beauregard promised his men that when they got Washington they should have luxuries for rations, and fight with their pockets filled