

COLUMBIA PHOENIX.

"Give each his due—both friends and foes;
And sketch the world just as it goes"

BY J. A. SELBY.

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CAPTURE, SACK and DESTRUCTION OF THE City of Columbia

I.

It has pleased God, in that Providence which is so inscrutable to man, to visit our beautiful city with the most cruel fate which can ever befall States or cities. He has permitted the cruel and malignant enemy to penetrate our country almost without impediment; to pollute our homes with his presence; to rob and ravage our dwellings, and to commit three-fifths of our city to the flames. Eighty-four squares, out of one hundred and twenty-four (!) which the city contains, have been destroyed, with scarcely the exception of a single house. The ancient capitol building of the State—that venerable structure which, for seventy years, has echoed with the eloquence and wisdom of the most famous statesmen—is laid in ashes; six temples of the Most High God have shared the same fate; eleven banking establishments, the schools of learning, the shops of art and trade, of invention and manufacture; shrines equally of religion, benevolence and industry; are all buried together in one ghastly ruin. Humiliation spreads her dunes over our homes and garments, and the universal wreck exhibits only one common aspect of despair. It is for us, as succinctly but as fully as possible, and in the simplest language, to endeavor to make the melancholy record of our wretchedness, so that our sons may always remember, and the whole Christian world everywhere may read.

II.

When, by a crime, no less than blunder, Gen.

Johnston was removed from the command of our armies in Georgia, which he had conducted with such signal ability, there were not a few of our citizens who felt the impending danger, and trembled at the disastrous consequences which they partly foresaw. The removal of a General so fully in the confidence of his troops, who had so long baffled the conquests, if he could not arrest the march of the enemy, was of itself a proceeding to startle the thoughtful mind. The enemy loudly declared his satisfaction at the event, and on repeated occasions since has expressed himself to the same effect. He was emboldened by the change, and almost instantly after, his successes became rapid and of the most decided character.

Gen. Johnston was by nature, no less than training and education, the very best of our generals to be opposed to Gen. Sherman. To the nerve sanguine temperament, eager and impetuous of the latter, he opposed a moral and physical nature—calm, sedate, circumspect, cool, vigilant and wary—always patient and watchful of his moment—never rash or precipitate, but ever firm and decisive—his resources all regulated by a self-possessed will, and a mind in full possession of that military *coup d'œil* which, grasping the remotest relations of the field, is, probably, the very first essential to a general having the control of a large and various army.

The error which took Hood into the colder regions of Tennessee, at the beginning of winter, was one which the Yankee General was slow to imitate, especially as, in so moving, Hood necessarily left all the doors wide open which conducted to the seaboard. It required no effort of genius—nay, did not need even the suggestions of ordinary talent—to prompt the former to take the pathways which were thus laid open to him. Even had he not already conceived the propriety of forcing his way to the Atlantic coast, and to a junction with his shipping, the policy of then doing so would have been forced upon him by the proceeding of his rival, and by the patent fact that there were no impediments to such a progress. We had neither army nor general ready to impede his march. It suggested itself. The facility of such a progress was clear enough, and with that quickness of decision which distinguishes the temperament of Sherman, he at once rushed into the open pathway.

The hasty levies of regular troops, collected by Hardee, and the clans of scattered militia,

gathered with great difficulty and untanned to service, or calculated to provoke his enterprise, to impede his march; and, laying waste the country, went, after a series of small and unimportant skirmishes, he made his way to the coast, made himself master of Savannah, and, from the banks of that river, beheld, opened before him, all the avenues into and through South Carolina. It is understood that Hardee had in hand, to oppose this progress, something less than 10,000 men, while the force of Sherman was, in round numbers, something like 60,000, of which 33,000 consisted of infantry—the rest of artillery and cavalry.

III.

The destruction of Atlanta, the pillaging and burning of other towns of Georgia, and the subsequent devastation along the march of the enemy through Georgia, gave sufficient earnest of the treatment to be anticipated by South Carolina, should the same commander be permitted to make a like progress in our State. The Northern press furnished him with the *cri de guerre*; to be sounded when he should cross our borders. "Vae victis!"—wo to the conquered!—woe unmitigated, unqualified, remorseless—in the case of a people which had been the first to sound the bugles of resistance to the encroachments of the Northern tyrant and usurper! The howl of delight (such was the language of the Northern press) sent up by Sherman's legions, when they looked across the Savannah to the shores of Carolina, was the sure forerunner of the terrible fate which threatened our people, should the demonic furies be once let loose upon our lands. Our people felt all the danger. They felt that it required the first abilities, the most strenuous exertions, the most prompt and efficient reinforcements, to prevent the threatening catastrophe.

South Carolina had, for a long season, been made a sort of nursery for sick generals, and a sort of pasture ground for incompetences and ineffectualities. Hence, though of acknowledged ability, and considered able as the leader of a corps, was not the man to grasp the business of a large army. All eyes looked to Gen. Johnston as the one man, next to Lee, to whom the duty should be confided and the trust. It was confidently hoped and believed that he would be restored to the command, and that adequate reinforcements would be furnished, to enable him, not only to meet the enemy, but to take the initiative of beating him from the ground.