

COLUMBIA PHOENIX.

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

BY J. A. SELBY. COLUMBIA, S. C., THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 1865. VOL. 1.—NO. 2.

THE COLUMBIA PHOENIX

IS PUBLISHED

Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday,

BY
JULIAN A. SELBY.

Single copies \$1.

Advertisements inserted at \$5 per square (ten lines) for each insertion.

CAPTURE, SACK and DESTRUCTION OF THE City of Columbia.

IX.

At about 11 o'clock, the head of the column, following the deputation—the flag of the United States surmounting the carriage—reached Market trail, on Main street, while that of the corps was carried in the rear. On their way to the city, the advance was fired upon by some scattered troopers of Wheeler's command, and Col. Stone said to the Mayor, "We shall hold you responsible for this outrage." We are particular in mentioning this fact, as we believe that, subsequently, the incident has been urged by some of the enemy as a justification of the sack and burning of the city. The Mayor made a suitable apology, and pointed to the fact, which was obvious enough, that the act was that of some unauthorized stragglers, lingering in the rear of our army.

Hardly had the troop reached the head of Main street, when the work of pillage was begun. Stores were broken open in the presence of thousands within the first hour after their arrival. The contents, when too cumbersome for the plunderers, were cast into the streets. Gold and silver, jewels and liquors, were eagerly sought. No attempt was made to arrest the burglars. The authorities, officers, soldiers, all, seemed to consider it a matter of course. And wo to him who carried a watch with gold chain pendant, or who wore a choice hat, or overcoat, or boots or shoes. He was stripped by ready experts in the twinkling of an eye. It is computed that, from first to last, twelve hundred watches were transferred from the pockets of their owners to those of the robbers. Purses shared the same fate; nor was Confederate currency repudiated. But of all these things hereafter, in more detail.

At about 12 o'clock, the jail was discovered to be on fire from within. This building was

immediately in the rear of the Market, or City Hall, and in a densely built portion of the city. It had held a large body of prisoners, who had been seasonably removed several days before, along with others at the Asylum—some 1,500, of them having been gotten off from the city successfully, by extraordinary exertions on the part of Capt. Sharpe, the chief of transportation. The fire of the jail had been preceded by that of some cotton piled in the streets. Both fires were soon subdued by the firemen. At about 1 1/2 p. m., that of the jail was rekindled, and was again extinguished. Some of the prisoners, by-the-way, had made their escape, in some instances, a few days before, and were secreted and protected by citizens. A person named Morris, charged with a most deliberate and cruel murder of a man named Hicks, was one of those who escaped at the last moment; and he, it is said, showed himself active in pointing out to the enemy, as proper objects of odium, all persons to whom he himself was hostile, including others who were held to be proper objects of punishment or plunder.

The experience of the firemen in putting out the fires in the cotton and jail building were of a sort to discourage their farther efforts. They were thwarted and embarrassed by the continued interference of the soldiery. Finally, their hose was chopped with swords and axes, or pierced with bayonets, so as to be rendered useless. The engines were in some cases demolished also. And so the miserable day wore on, in pillage, insult, and constant confusion and alarm. No one could persuade himself to feel the security which had been promised to person and property. No one felt safe in his own dwelling; and in the faith that, as Gen. Sherman was a Catholic, and would, no doubt, spare the convent of his church, especially as the Mother Superior had, years before, been the teacher of his own children, numbers of young ladies were confided to the care of that lady, and even trunks of clothes and treasure were sent thither, in full confidence that they would find safety. Vain illusions! *The Irish Catholic troops, it appears, were not brought into the city at all; were kept on the other side of the river, and were thus relieved from the odium of the crimes which followed, as well as denied the privilege of succoring the people of their own faith.* But a few Catholics were collected among the corps which occupied the city, and of the conduct of these, a favorable account is given. One of them received a silver goblet of

the church, used as a drinking cup by a soldier, and restored it to the Rev. Dr. O'Connell. This priest, by-the-way, was knocked down and severely handled by the soldiers. Such, also, was the torture of the Rev. Mr. Shand, of Trinity (the Episcopal) Church; who sought in vain to save a tank containing the sacred vessels of his church. It was violently wrested from his keeping, and his struggle to save it only provoked the rougher usage. We are since told that, on reaching Camden, General Sherman restored these vessels to Bishop Davis; an act which betrayed his thorough acquaintance with the general robbery and his sanction of it. This sack and firing seem equally reduced to system.

X.

And here it may be well to mention, as suggestive of many clues, an incident which presented a sad commentary on that confidence in the security of the convent, which was entertained by the great portion of the people. This establishment, under the charge of the sister of the Right Rev. Bishop Lyden, was no once a convent and an academy of the highest class. Hither were sent for education the daughters of Protestants, of the most wealthy classes throughout the State; and these, with the nuns and those young ladies sent thither on the emergency, probably exceeded one hundred. The Lady Superior herself entertained the fullest confidence in the immunities of the establishment. But her confidence was clouded, after she had enjoyed a conference with a certain major of the Yankee army, who described himself as an editor from Detroit. He visited her at an early hour in the day, and announced his friendly sympathies with the Lady Superior and the sisterhood; professed his anxiety for their safety—his purpose to do all that he could to insure it—declared that he would instantly go to Sherman and secure a chosen guard, and, altogether, made such professions of love and service as to disarm these suspicions, which had looms and had banners, inflated speech and pompous carriage, and otherwise have provoked. The lady, with such a change of circumstances, was glad to welcome all advances, and to give support, and express her gratitude. He appeared, and soon after reappeared, and with him no less than eight or ten more of them, as he admitted, being Catholics. He had some specious argument to show that, perhaps, her guard had better be one of Protestants. This suggestion staggered the lady a

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