

COLUMBIA PHOENIX.

"Let our just censure
Attend the true event."—*Shakespeare.*

BY J. A. SELBY. COLUMBIA, S. C., SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 1865. VOL. 1—NO. 3.

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CAPTURE, SACK and DESTRUCTION OF THE City of Columbia

Throughout the whole of this terrible scene, the plunderers sought their prey as greedily as after spoil. The houses were searched and soon gutted of their contents. Trunks of iron safes, war chests, and valuables of all kinds, were carried off to the vaults. They were sent up on ladders and then, proceeding in some cases, very largely on the hands, money and bonds, boxes of gold and silver, jewelry and plate of all kinds, were carried off. Men could be seen galloping on with baggage, wares, trunks, boxes, &c. to the river, and carts, wagons and sleds of various kinds, all of solid silver, gold and steel, were seen. Men were appropriated—the rest left to burn, or tossed out into the flames. Lovers were drunk with such avidity as to neglect the velvet, baubles, trunks of Columbia, nor of the papers and distinguishing marks of the State at all. There was no more discrimination in the matter of loot, and they passed, without change of visage, from the vulgar liquor, which Judge Burke used to say always provoked within him "an inordinate propensity to abuse," to the choicest red wines of the ancient cellars. In one vault on Main street, seventeen casks of wine were stored away, which, an eye-witness tells us, barely sufficed, once broken into, for the draught of a single hour—such were the appetites at work and the numbers in possession of them. Rye, corn, claret, and Madeira all found their way into the same channels, and we are not to wonder, when we find that no less than 150 of the drunken wretches perished miserably among the flames kindled by their own conduct, and from which they were unable to escape. The estimate will not be thought extravagant by those who saw the condition of hundreds after 2 o'clock a. m.

By others, however, the estimate is reduced to thirty; but the number will never be known. Sherman's officers themselves are reported to have said that they lost more men in the sack and burning of the city (including certain explosions) than in all their fights while approaching it. It is also suggested that the orders which Sherman issued at daylight, on Saturday morning, for the arrest of the fire, were issued in consequence of the loss of men which he had thus sustained. One or more of his men were shot, by parties unknown, in some dark passages or alleys—it is supposed in consequence of some attempted outrage, which humanity would not endure; the assassin taking advantage of the obscurity of the situation, and noisily tambling with the crowd without, and while these scenes were at their worst—while the flames were at their highest and most extensively raging—groups of these demagogues might be seen at the several corners of the streets, uttering, railing, raging, revelling—singing the air with blasphemies—while the floods and acclamations were playing their popular airs among them. They executed all sorts of antics—some of them leaping upon the rooftops, and feasting and singing like the red men, around the burning pyres of their victims; brandishing knife or pistol, and in maudlin affection pawing and embracing one another, and not infrequently the passer-by. And while these scenes were in progress, over and among the ruins already made, the torches and fire-balls were busily plied in districts which had thus far escaped the flames. There was no cessation of the work till 5 a. m. on Saturday; for if one band was too drunk to play the incendiary, there were yet thousands sufficiently sober to exhibit all the skill, dexterity, agility and method which distinguishes the experts in city crime. It was between 4 and 5 in the morning, when some of the finest buildings on the East side of Main street were given to the flames.

XIV.

A single thought will suffice to show that the owners or lodgers in the houses thus sacrificed were not silent or quiet spectators of a conflagration which threw them naked and homeless under the skies of night. The male population, consisting wholly of aged men, invalids, decrepits, women and children, were not capable of very active or powerful exertions; but they did not succumb to the fate without struggles and stridings. Old men and women and children were to be seen, even

while the flames were rolling and raging around them, while walls were cracking and rafters tottering and tumbling, in the endeavor to save their clothing and some of their most valuable effects. Many are given that they were suffered to succeed. They were driven out headlong; pistols clapped at their heads, violent blows laid upon their heads and collar, and the ruffians seemed to make but little distinction in their treatment of man or woman. Ladies were hustled from their chambers, under the strong arm, or with the menacing pistol at their breasts—their ornaments plucked from their persons, their trunks from their hands. It was in vain that the mother appealed for the fragments of her children. They were torn from her grasp, and torn to pieces, or hurled into the flames. The young girl striving to save a single brock, had it cast to flies in her grasp. Men and women, bearing off their trunks were seized, despoiled, in a moment the trunk burst open, and the stroke of axe or gun-butt, the contents laid open, filled of all the objects of desire, and the residue ruthlessly sacrificed to the fire; while the wretches, menaced, coupled with the foulest oaths, exhibited a desperate ferocity, such as left no hope of mercy to prayer, entreaty and the most earnest solicitation. The wretches would lie in wait at the entrance of the house, would snuff the owner to bring forth his trunk, satisfied that no would emerge with that which was most valuable; then tear it from his grasp, with wild shouts of exultation, scarcely one in a hundred succeeded in bearing off the poor remains of property which he had risked his life to recover. You might see the ruined owner, standing we begone, aghast, gazing at his tumbling dwelling, his scattered property, with a dumb agony on his face that was inexpressible touching. Others you might hear, as we did, with wild blasphemies assailing the justice of heaven, or invoking, with fitted and clenched hands, the fiery wrath of the avenger. But the fires plundered on, and the savage fired, and drank, and raged, and danced, and sang, and the moon sailed over all with as serene an aspect as when she first sailed upon the ark resting against the slopes of Ararat.

XV.

It was the spectacle for hours on the Main street of Columbia. In less than elsewhere, the spectacle was not less terrible in other portions of the city, East and West of this great centre. What thousands of