

# CAPTURE, SACK and DESTRUCTION OF THE City of Columbia

## XVI.

Within the dwellings, the scenes were of more harsh and tragical character, rarely softened by any ludicrous aspects. There, as it were, secured by the privacy of the apartments, with but few eyes to witness, the robbers were more brutal, more unscrupulous, less heedful of decency, reserve or humanity. The pistol to the bosom or the head of woman, the patient mother, the trembling daughter, was the ordinary introduction to the demands of the robbers. "Your gold, silver, watch, jewels." They gave no time, allowed no pause or hesitation. It was in vain that the woman offered her keys, or proceeded to open drawer, or wardrobe, or cabinet, or trunk. It was dashed to pieces by axe or gun butt, with the cry, "We have a shorter way than that!" It was in vain that she pleaded to spare her furniture, and she would give up all its contents. She prayed to wretches utterly heartless in humanity, and hardened to every crime and against every human feeling. "All the precious things of a family, such as the heart loves to pore on in quiet hours when alone with memory—the dear miniature, the photograph, the portrait—these were dashed to pieces, crushed under foot, and the more the trembler pleaded, for the object so precious, the more violent the rage which destroyed it. Nothing was sacred in their eyes, save the gold and silver which they bore away. Nor were these acts those of common soldiers. Commissioned officers, of rank so high as that of a colonel, were frequently among the most active in spoliation, and not always the most tender or considerate in the manner and acting of their crimes. And with fiendish malignity, refining upon hate and malice, the plunderers, after glutting themselves with spoil, would utter the foulest speeches in their ears, coupled with oaths as condiment, dealing in what they assumed, besides, to be bitter sarcasms upon their cause and country.

"And what do you think of the Yankees now?" was a frequent question. "Do you not fear us now?" "What do you think of secession?" &c., &c. "We mean to wipe you out. We'll burn the very stones of South Carolina." Even General Howard, who is said to have been once a pious person, is reported to have made this reply to a citizen who had expostulated with him on the monstrous crime of which his army had been guilty: "It is only what the country deserves. It is her fit punishment; and if this does not quiet rebellion, and we have to return, we will do this work thoroughly. We will not leave woman or child."

This was in the very spirit of the savage Puritan, reviving all the brutalities of the time of Cromwell and his sinister, psalm-singing hypocrites. The Mormonism into which New

England has passed, from Puritanism, has changed none of the essential characteristics of the race.

Almost universally, the women of Columbia behaved themselves nobly under the insults of the ruffians. They preserved that patient, calm demeanor, that simple, almost masculine, firmness, which so becomes humanity in the hour of trial, when nothing can be opposed to the tempest but the virtue of inflexible endurance. They rarely replied to these insults; but looking coldly into the faces of the assailants, heard them in silence and with unblenching cheeks. When forced to answer, they did so in monosyllables only, or in brief, stern language, avowed their confidence in the cause of their country, the principles and rights for which their brothers and sons fought, and their faith in the ultimate favor and protection of God. One or two of many of these dialogues—if they may be called such, where one of the parties can urge his speech with all the agencies of power for its enforcement, and with all his instruments of terror in sight—while the other stands exposed to the worst terrors which maddened passions, insolent in the consciousness of strength—may suffice as a sample of many:

"Well, what do you think of the Yankees now?"

"Do you expect a favorable opinion?"

"No! d—n it! But you fear us, and that's enough."

"No—we do not fear you."

"What! not yet?"

"Not yet!"

"But you shall fear us."

"Never!"

"We'll make you."

"You may inflict, we can endure; but fear—never! Anything but that!"

"We'll make you fear us!" clapping a revolver to the lady's head.

Her eye never faltered. Her cheek never changed its color. Her lips were firmly compressed. Her arms folded on her bosom. The eye of the assassin glared into her own. She met the encounter without flinching, and he lowered the implement of murder, with an oath: "D—n it! You have pluck enough for a whole regiment!"

The "pluck" of our women was especially a subject of acknowledgment with these wretches. They could admire a quality with which they had not soul to sympathize—or rather the paramount passion in their souls for greed and plunder kept in subjection all other qualities, without absolutely extinguishing them from their minds and thoughts. To inspire terror in the weak, strange to say, seemed to these creatures a sort of heroism. To extort fear and awe appeared to their monstrous vanity a tribute more grateful than any other, and a curious conflict was sometimes carried on in their minds between their vanity and cupidity. Occasionally they gazed with one hand, while they robbed with another. Several serious

instances of this nature took place, one of which must suffice. A certain Yankee officer happened to hear that an old acquaintance of his, whom he had known intimately at West Point and Louisiana, was residing in Columbia. He went to see him after the fire, and ascertained that his losses had been very heavy, exceeding two hundred thousand dollars. The parties had not separated for an hour, when a messenger came from the Yankee, bringing a box, which contained \$100,000 in Confederate notes. This the Yankee begged his Southern friend to accept, as helping to make up his losses. The latter declined the gift, not being altogether satisfied in conscience that he could heal his own hurts of fortune by the use of stolen money. In many cases, Confederate money by the handful was bestowed by the officers and soldiers upon parties from whom they had robbed the last particles of clothing, and even Gen. Sherman could give to parties whom he knew, the flour and bacon which he had stolen from thousands of starving widows and orphans. So, he left with the people of Columbia a hundred old worthless muskets for their protection, while emptying their arsenals of a choice collection of beautiful Esfield rifles. And so the starving citizens of Columbia owe to him a few hundred starving cattle, of which he had robbed the starving people of Beaufort, Barnwell, Orangeburg and Lexington—cattle left without food, and for which food could not be found, and dying of exhaustion at the rate of fifteen to twenty head per diem. And what a monstrous mockery of benevolence is the ostentatious contribution from navy and army, in Charleston, for the relief of those people whom their armies have so wantonly and methodically brought to ruin. They first cut our throats, then send us an adhesive plaster. The cunning of this ostentatious charity, in which they use stolen property and money, is, if possible, to persuade the world that the incendiarism which destroys all in its path is unpremeditated and purely accidental. But to return.

## XVII.

In this connection and this action, in which we need to devote so much of our space to the cruel and brutal treatment of our women, we think it proper to include a communication from the venerable Dr. Sill, one of the most esteemed and well known citizens of Columbia. It is from his own pen, and the facts occurred under his own eyes. We give this as one of a thousand like cases, witnessed by a thousand eyes, and taking place at the same time in every quarter of the city, almost from the hour of the enemy's arrival to that of his departure. He writes as follows:

"On Thursday, the day before the evacuation of the city by the Confederate forces, I invited a very poor French lady, (Madame Pelletier,) with her child, refugees from Charleston, to take shelter in my house, where they might, at least, have such protection as I could give her, shelter and food for herself and child. She was