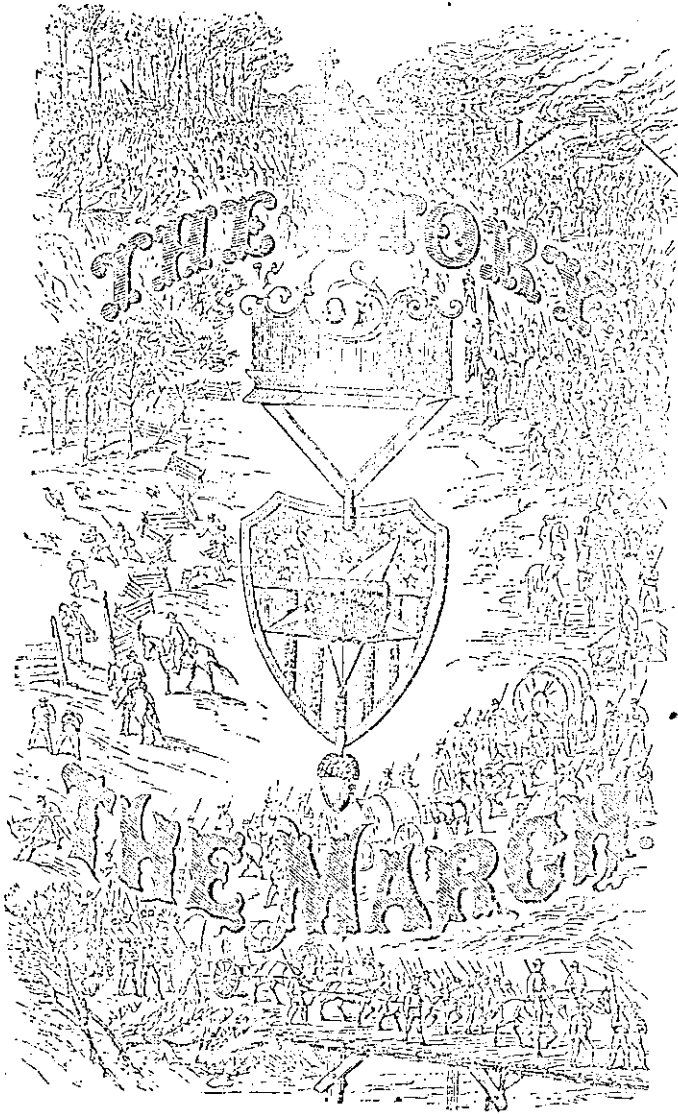


Burning of Columbia  
Saluda factory girls



On the 14th the head of the Fifteenth Corps, Charles R. Woods's division, approached the Little Congaree, a broad, deep stream, tributary to the Main Congaree, six or eight miles below Columbia. On the opposite side of this stream was a newly-constructed fort, and on our side a wide extent of old cotton-fields, which had been overflowed, and was covered with a deep slime. General Woods had deployed his leading brigade, which was skirmishing forward, but he reported that the bridge was gone, and that a considerable force of the enemy was on the other side. I directed General Howard or Logan to send a brigade by a circuit to the left, to see if this stream could not be crossed higher up, but at the same time knew that General Slocum's route would bring him to Columbia behind this stream, and that his approach would uncover it. Therefore, there was no need of exposing much life. The brigade, however, found means to cross the Little Congaree, and thus uncovered the passage by the main road, so that General Woods's skirmishers at once passed over, and a party was set to work to repair the bridge, which occupied less than an hour, when I passed over with my whole staff. I found the new fort unfinished and unoccupied, but from its parapet could see over some old fields bounded to the north and west by hills skirted with timber. There was a plantation to our left, about half a mile, and on the edge of the timber was drawn up a force of rebel cavalry of about a regiment, which advanced, and charged upon some of our foragers, who were plundering the plantation; my aide, Colonel Audenried, who had ridden forward, came back somewhat hurt and bruised, for, observing this charge of cavalry, he had turned for us, and his horse fell with him in attempting to leap a ditch. General Woods's skirmish-line met this charge of cavalry, and drove it back into the woods and beyond. We remained on that ground during the night of the 15th, and I camped on the nearest dry ground behind the Little Congaree, where on the next morning were made the written orders for the government of the troops while occupying Columbia. These are dated February 16, 1865, in these words:

General Howard will cross the Saluda and Broad Rivers as near their mouths as possible, occupy Columbia, destroy the public buildings, railroad property, manufacturing and machine shops; but will spare libraries, asylums, and private dwellings. He will then move to Winnsboro', destroying *en route* utterly that section of the railroad. He will also cause all bridges, trestles, water-tanks, and depots on the railroad back to the Wateree to be burned, switches broken, and such other destruction as he can find time to accomplish consistent with proper celerity.

These instructions were embraced in General Order No. 26,

far as Fayetteville, North Carolina, and is conclusive that I then regarded Columbia as simply one point on our general route of march, and not as an important conquest.

During the 16th of February the Fifteenth Corps reached the point opposite Columbia, and pushed on for the Saluda Factory three miles above, crossed that stream, and the head of column reached Broad River just in time to find its bridge in flames, Butler's cavalry having just passed over into Columbia. The head of Slocum's column also reached the point opposite Columbia the same morning, but the bulk of his army was back at Lexington. I reached this place early in the morning of the 16th, met General Slocum there, and explained to him the purport of General Order No. 26, which contemplated the passage of his army across Broad River at Alston, fifteen miles above Columbia. Riding down to the river-bank, I saw the wreck of the large bridge which had been burned by the enemy, with its many stone piers still standing, but the superstructure gone. Across the Congaree River lay the city of Columbia, in plain, easy view. I could see the unfinished State House, a handsome granite structure, and the ruins of the railroad depot, which were still smouldering. Occasionally a few citizens or cavalry could be seen running across the streets, and quite a number of negroes were seemingly busy in carrying off bags of grain or meal, which were piled up near the burned depot.

Captain De Gres had a section of his twenty-pound Parrott guns unlimbered, firing into the town. I asked him what he was firing for; he said he could see some rebel cavalry occasionally at the intersections of the streets, and he had an idea that there was a large force of infantry concealed on the opposite bank, lying low, in case we should attempt to cross over directly into the town. I instructed him not to fire any more into the town, but consented to his bursting a few shells near the depot, to scare away the negroes who were appropriating the bags of corn and meal which we wanted, also to fire three shots at the unoccupied State-House. I stood by and saw these fired, and then all firing ceased. Although this matter of firing into Columbia has been the subject of much abuse and investigation, I have yet to hear of any single person having been killed in Columbia by our cannon. On the other hand, the night before, when Woods's division was in camp in the open fields at Little Congaree, it was shelled all night by a rebel battery from the other side of the river. This provoked me much at the time, for it was wanton mischief, as Generals Beauregard and Hampton must have been convinced that they could not prevent our entrance into Columbia. I have always contended that I

The night of the 16th I camped near an old prison bivouac opposite Columbia, known to our prisoners of war as "Camp Sorghum," where remained the mud-hovels and holes in the ground which our prisoners had made to shelter themselves from the winter's cold and the summer's heat. The Fifteenth Corps was then ahead, reaching to Broad River, about four miles above Columbia; the Seventeenth Corps was behind, on the river-bank opposite Columbia; and the left wing and cavalry had turned north toward Alston.

The next morning, viz., February 17th, I rode to the head of General Howard's column, and found that during the night he had ferried Stone's brigade of Woods's division of the Fifteenth Corps across by rafts made of the pontoons, and that brigade was then deployed on the opposite bank to cover the construction of a pontoon-bridge nearly finished.

I sat with General Howard on a log, watching the men lay this bridge; and about 9 or 10 A. M. a messenger came from Colonel Stone on the other side, saying that the Mayor of Columbia had come out of the city to surrender the place, and asking for orders. I simply remarked to General Howard that he had his orders, to let Colonel Stone go on into the city, and that we would follow as soon as the bridge was ready. By this same messenger I received a note in pencil from the Lady Superioress of a convent or school in Columbia, in which she claimed to have been a teacher in a convent in Brown County, Ohio, at the

# THE STORY

OF

# THE GREAT MARCH.

FROM THE

## DIARY OF A STAFF OFFICER.

BY

BREVET MAJOR GEORGE WARD NICHOLS,

AID-DE-CAMP TO GENERAL SHERMAN.

*On the State Road, eight miles from Columbia, February 15th.*—We are gradually approaching Columbia, but not without a determined opposition. The Rebels successfully defended their strong line of works on the north side of Congaree Creek until about four o'clock this afternoon, when it was carried by our troops without much loss of life or limb. It was supposed that the enemy would make a determined stand at this point; but I think General Sherman trusted to the flank movement of General Slocum to force its evacuation, but that, for some reason not within our knowledge, Slocum has not come up in time. In fact, we have not heard from him or his column for three days past. The Rebels still hold a high hill three miles from the creek, which is crowned by an embrasured fort, with curtains leading off to the right and left into the woods. Tomorrow we shall probably test the strength of this position.

Day before yesterday a brigade of the 17th Corps drove a force of the enemy up the Charleston and Columbia Railroad to the bridge crossing the Congaree, which was destroyed by the Rebels. As this was the chief object of the expedition, the party returned in good time.

We continue to find ample supplies of forage. In truth, there has not been a day of want since we started. Our experience in this campaign, like that of Georgia, proves the utter futility of attempting to force the inhabitants of a country to destroy supplies on what is supposed will be the line of march of an invading army. The people reason that the troops may not march over their roads; or if they pass that way and find forage destroyed, vengeance would be visited upon the offenders; and again, *all* might not be taken, but something be left for their sustenance. And this reasoning is true. Although pretty clean work is made by our army, yet the people are generally allowed to carry into their houses a sufficient supply of corn, potatoes, etc., to keep them from starving.

A great many negroes have joined our columns, but it has been from no lack of caution upon the part of the masters. Anticipating the approach of the Union army, the slaveholders have driven off their horses, and, when they were able, their negroes, to some safe place. The latter, however, when they could do so, have hidden in the swamps, coming out to join us as we passed along. As usual, they are our best friends, giving invaluable information of the roads and the movements of the enemy. They are always our safest guides, and their fidelity is never questioned.

*In View of Columbia, February 16th.*—The point where I am writing is in full view of the capital of South Carolina. Persons on foot and on horseback are visible, passing to and fro in one of the main streets of the city. The only hinderance to absolute occupation is the Congaree River, which flows between our army and the city. Yesterday afternoon, after serious fighting, our soldiers drove the Rebels from an admirably entrenched position, two divisions of the 15th Corps going into camp upon the ground held by the enemy during the afternoon. About midnight the Rebels commenced shelling the camp, guided by the fires which covered hillside and plain. This mean kind of warfare they kept up until the morning, killing and wounding several, and disturbing the rest of all. At early dawn our troops were again on the move, and before nine in the morning the whole southern bank of the river was in our possession. We have not taken advantage of our position, by which we could shell the city in every quarter, except to test the range of our guns, and to drive away persons who were removing stores from the dépôts. In these instances the result was comical to us, the lookers on, although it must have been any thing but agreeable to those aimed at, who scattered in every direction.

Our attempts to cross the river below the city have met with earnest opposition. These efforts, however, were feints to withdraw attention from the real point of attack, which was at Saluda Factory, three miles above. We here found the bridges crossing the Saluda burned. After sharp skirmishing, we managed to get a few men across the river in boats. I never saw more spirited, determined fighting than that of those few hundred brave fellows. Usually our foragers have the advance, but in this instance the skirmishers had all the fun to themselves. Gaining the shelter of a rail fence thirty yards from the river, they formed a line, and at a given signal clambered over, and with inspiring cries ran across the open field for the woods, in which the Rebels were posted, and out of which the well-aimed shots of our soldiers instantly drove them. In two hours from that moment a pontoon had been stretched across the stream, and a division had driven the Rebels across the peninsula to Broad River, which it is necessary to bridge before we can enter Columbia. General Logan promises he will have a brigade across Broad River and bridge the stream before morning.

General John A. Logan, a man who always fulfills his engagements, is well known throughout the land. His speech in Congress, when he declared that if the Rebels attempted to close the Mississippi River "the men of the Northwest

would hew their way to the Gulf with their swords," will never be forgotten so long as the history of this war is read. Nor is any one likely to forget the General's personal appearance who has ever had an opportunity of seeing him. That lithe, active figure; that finely-cut face, with its heavy black mustache overhanging a sensitive mouth; that black piercing eye, that open brow, shaded by the long black hair—all make up a striking figure. Logan, too, is equally at home on the rostrum, leading the minds of men, or in the saddle, rallying his brave soldiers for a charge upon the foe. He possesses that mysterious magnetic power which calls forth the sublimest enthusiasm in men. On many of the battle-fields of this war he has ridden along the lines regardless of the storms of Rebel shell and bullets beating around him. He is a splendid representative of the Western men who have risen to high distinction by their energy, talents, and perseverance. He is a firm friend, a good hater, and an open fighter, and the pride of the famous fighting and marching 15th Corps.

The Saluda Factory, which is situated a few hundred yards above the pontoon bridge, is considered a place of sufficient note to be laid down on all the maps, new and old. The road leading to the factory buildings winds along the bank of the stream, which is prettily bordered with trees. When I visited the factory our skirmishers occupied the windows facing the river, and were exchanging shots with the Rebels, who lay concealed among the bushes and timber on the other side. This circumstance, however, did not hinder the operatives, all of whom were women, from hurrying through the building, tearing the cloth from the looms, and filling bags with bales of yarn, to be "toted" home, as they phrase it.

It must not be imagined that these Southern factory operatives are of the same class with the lively and intelligent workers of New-England. I remember that while reading descriptions of Saluda Factory, and discussing the probabilities of finding it in our line of march through South Carolina, many of our officers drew fanciful sketches of pretty, bright-eyed damsels, neatly clad, with a wealth of flowing ringlets, and engaging manners. Such factory-girls were visible in the great mills of Lowell, and the enthusiastic Northerners doomed to fight on Southern soil were excusable for drawing mental pictures of them. But when we came to see the reality at Saluda Factory, sensations of disgust and mirthfulness struggled for the mastery—disgust at the repulsive figures whom we encountered, and amusement at the chopfallen air of the gallant young staff-officers—who were eager to pay their court to beauty and virtue. It

would be difficult to find elsewhere than at this place a collection of two hundred and fifty women so unkempt, frowzy, ragged, dirty, and altogether ignorant and wretched. Some of them were chewing tobacco; others, more elegant in their tastes, smoked. Another set indulged in the practice of "dipping." Sights like these soon put to flight our rosy ideals.

The residences of these people accorded with their personal appearance. Dirty wooden shanties, built on the river bank a few hundred feet above the factory, were the places called homes—homes where doors hung shabbily by a single hinge, or were destitute of panels; where rotten steps led to foul and close passage-ways, filled with broken crockery, dirty pots and pans, and other accumulations of rubbish; where stagnant pools of water bred disease; where half a dozen persons occupied the same bed-chamber; where old women and ragged children lolled lazily in the sunshine; where even the gaunt fowls that went disconsolately about the premises partook of the prevailing character of misery and dirt. These were the operatives, and these the homes produced by the boasted civilization of the South.

The factory is a large stone building, filled with machinery for the manufacture of yarn and the variety of coarse cotton cloth known as Osnaburgs. The looms were dirty and rusty; the spindles were worn out by misuse; the spools appeared conscious that they had fulfilled their mission; the engine was out of joint and dirty. Filth and ignorance reigned over the entire business. As I left the premises and rode away down the glen, I passed a group of the degraded and unfortunate women already described toiling up the hill with back-loads of plunder. Some of our soldiers were helping them to carry their cloth and yarn.

In the old times it was a favorite argument of the slaveholders that their "peculiar institution" was a blessing to the negroes, and it was their habit to make comparisons between the condition of their slaves and that of our well-bred, intelligent factory operatives, asserting that the slaves were the higher and happier class of the two. We have seen what the slaves are; but here is a shocking exhibition of the disgrace and degradation which is visited upon white labor in the South. The visits we are paying our Southern brethren expose not a few of the shameless falsehoods and villanies of the slave oligarchy.