

NEW ORLEANS BEFORE THE CAPTURE.

In the spring of 1862 we boys of Race, Orange, Magazine, Camp, Constance, Annunciation, Prytania, and other streets had no game. Nothing was "in"; none of the old playground sports that commonly fill the school-boy's calendar. We were even tired of drilling. Not one of us between seven and seventeen but could beat the drum, knew every bugle-call, and could go through the manual of arms and the facings like a drill-sergeant. We were *blasé* old soldiers—military critics.

Who could tell us anything? I recall but one trivial admission of ignorance on the part of any lad. On a certain day of grand review, when the city's entire defensive force was marching through Canal street, there came along among the endless variety of good and bad uniforms a stately body of tall, stalwart Germans, clad from head to foot in velveteen of a peculiarly vociferous fragrance, and a boy, spelling out their name upon their banner, said:

"H-u-s-s-a-r-s; what's them?"

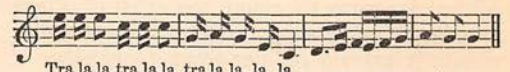
"Aw, you fool!" cried a dozen urchins at once, "them's the Hoosiers; don't you smell 'em?"

But that was earlier. The day of grand reviews was past. Hussars, Zouaves, and numberless other bodies of outlandish name had gone to the front in Tennessee and Virginia. Our cultivated eyes were satisfied now with one uniform that we saw daily. Every afternoon found us around in Coliseum Place, standing or lying on the grass watching the dress parade of the "Confederate Guards." Most of us had fathers or uncles in the long, spotless, gray, white-gloved ranks that stretched in such faultless alignment down the hard, harsh turf of our old ball-ground.

This was the flower of the home guard. The merchants, bankers, underwriters, judges, real-estate owners, and capitalists of the Anglo-American part of the city were "all present or accounted for" in that long line. Gray heads, hoar heads, high heads, bald heads. Hands flashed to breast and waist with a martinet's precision at the command of "Present arms,"—hands that had ruled by the pen—the pen and the dollar—since long before any of us young spectators was born, and had done no harder muscular work than carve roasts and turkeys these twenty, thirty, forty years. Here and there among them were individuals who, unaided, had clothed and

armed companies, squadrons, battalions, and sent them to the Cumberland and the Potomac. A good three-fourths of them had sons on distant battle-fields, some living, some dead.

We boys saw nothing pathetic in this array of old men. To us there was only rich enjoyment in the scene. If there was anything solemn about it, why did the band play polkas? Why was the strain every day the same gay



Away down to the far end of the line and back again, the short, stout German drum-major—holding his gaudy office in this case by virtue of his girth, not height (as he had himself explained)—flourished his big stick majestically, bursting with rage at us for casually reiterating at short intervals in his hearing that "he kot it mit his size."

In those beautiful spring afternoons there was scarcely a man to be found, anywhere, out of uniform. Down on the steamboat landing, our famous Levee, a superb body of Creoles drilled and paraded in dark-blue uniform. The orders were given in French; the manual was French; the movements were quick, short, nery. Their "about march" was four sharp stamps of their neatly shod feet—*un, deux, trois, quatre*—that brought them face about and sent them back, tramp, tramp, tramp, over the smooth white pavement of powdered oyster-shells. Ah! the nakedness of that once crowded and roaring mart.

And there was a "Foreign Legion." Of course, the city had always been full of foreigners; but now it was a subject of amazement, not unmixed with satire, to see how many whom every one had supposed to be Americans or "citizens of Louisiana" bloomed out as British, or French, or Spanish subjects. But even so, the tremendous pressure of popular sentiment crowded them into the ranks and forced them to make every show of readiness to "hurl back the foe," as we used to call it. And they really served for much. Merely as a gendarmerie they relieved just as many Confederate soldiers of police duty in a city under martial law, and enabled them to man forts and breastworks at short notice, whenever that call should come.

That call, the gray heads knew, was coming. They confessed the conviction softly to

one another in the counting-rooms and idle stove-fronts when they thought no one was listening. I used to hear them—standing with my back turned, pretending to be looking at something down street, but with both ears turned backward and stretched wide. They said under their breath that there was not a single measure of defense that was not behindhand. And they spoke truly. In family councils a new domestic art began to be studied and discussed—the art of hiding valuables.

There had come a great silence upon trade. Long ago the custom warehouses had first begun to show a growing roominess, then emptiness, and then had remained shut, and the iron bolts and cross-bars of their doors were gray with cobwebs. One of them, where I had earned my first wages as a self-supporting lad, had been turned into a sword-bayonet factory, and I had been turned out. For some time later the Levee had kept busy; but its stir and noise had gradually declined, faltered, turned into the commerce of war and the clatter of calkers and ship-carpenters, and faded out. Both receipts and orders from the interior country had shrunk and shrunk, and the brave, steady fellows, who at entry and shipping and cash and account desks could no longer keep up a show of occupation, had laid down the pen, taken up the sword and musket, and followed after the earlier and more eager volunteers. There had been one new, tremendous sport for moneyed men for a while, with spoils to make it interesting. The seagoing tow-boats of New Orleans were long, slender side-wheelers, all naked power and speed, without either freight or passenger room, each with a single, tall, slim chimney and hurrying walking-beam, their low, taper hulls trailing behind scarcely above the water, and perpetually drenched with the yeast of the wheels. Some merchants of the more audacious sort, restless under the strange new quiet of Tchoupitoulas street, had got letters of mark and reprisal, and let slip these sharp-nosed deerhounds upon the tardy, unsuspecting ships that came sailing up to the Passes unaware of any declaration of war. But that game too was up. The blockade had closed in like a prison gate; the lighter tow-boats, draped with tarpaulins, were huddled together under Slaughterhouse Point, with their cold boilers and motionless machinery yielding to rust; the more powerful ones had been moored at the long wharf vacated by Morgan's Texas steamships; there had been a great hammering, and making of chips, and clatter of railroad iron, turning these tow-boats into iron-clad cotton gun-boats, and these had crawled away, some up and some down the river, to be seen

in that harbor no more. At length only the foundries, the dry-docks across the river, and the ship-yard in suburb Jefferson, where the great ram *Mississippi* was being too slowly built, were active, and the queen of Southern commerce, the city that had once believed it was to be the greatest in the world, was absolutely out of employment.

There was, true, some movement of the sugar and rice crops into the hands of merchants who had advanced the money to grow them; and the cotton-presses and cotton-yards were full of cotton, but there it all stuck; and when one counts in a feeble exchange of city for country supplies, there was nothing more. Except—yes—that the merchants had turned upon each other, and were now engaged in a mere passing back and forth among themselves in speculation the daily diminishing supply of goods and food. Some were too noble to take part in this, and dealt only with consumers. I remember one odd little old man, an extensive wholesale grocer, who used to get tipsy all by himself every day, and go home so, but who would not speculate on the food of a distressed city. He had not got down to that.

Gold and silver had long ago disappeared. Confederate money was the currency; and not merely was the price of food and raiment rising, the value of the money was going down. The State, too, had a paper issue, and the city had another. Yet with all these there was first a famine of small change, and then a deluge of "shinplasters." Pah! What a mess it was! The boss butchers and the keepers of drinking-houses actually took the lead in issuing "money." The current joke was that you could pass the label of an olive-oil bottle, because it was greasy, smelt bad, and bore an autograph—Plagniol Frères, if I remember rightly. I did my first work as a cashier in those days, and I can remember the smell of my cash drawer yet. Instead of five-cent pieces we had car-tickets. How the grimy little things used to stick together! They would pass and pass until they were so soft and illegible with grocers' and butchers' handling that you could tell only by some faint show of their original color what company had issued them. Rogues did a lively business in "split tickets," literally splitting them and making one ticket serve for two.

Decay had come in. In that warm, moist climate it is always hungry, and, wherever it is allowed to feed, eats with a greed that is strange to see. With the wharves, always expensive and difficult to maintain, it made havoc. The occasional idle, weather-stained

ship moored beside them, and resting on the water almost as light and void as an empty peascod, could hardly find a place to fasten to. The streets fell into sad neglect, but the litter of commerce was not in them, and some of their round-stone pavements after a shower would have the melancholy cleanness of weather-bleached bones. How quiet and lonely the harbor grew! The big dry-docks against the farther shore were all empty. Now and then a tug fussed about, with the yellow river all to itself; and one or two steamboats came and went each day, but they moved drowsily, and, across on the other side of the river, a whole fleet of their dingy white sisters lay tied up to the bank, *sine die*. My favorite of all the sea-steamers, the little *Habana*, that had been wont to arrive twice a month from Cuba, disgorge her Spanish-American cargo, and bustle away again, and that I had watched the shipwrights, at their very elbows, razee and fit with three big, raking masts in place of her two small ones, had long ago slipped down the river and through the blockaders, and was now no longer the *Habana*, but the far-famed and dreaded *Sunter*.

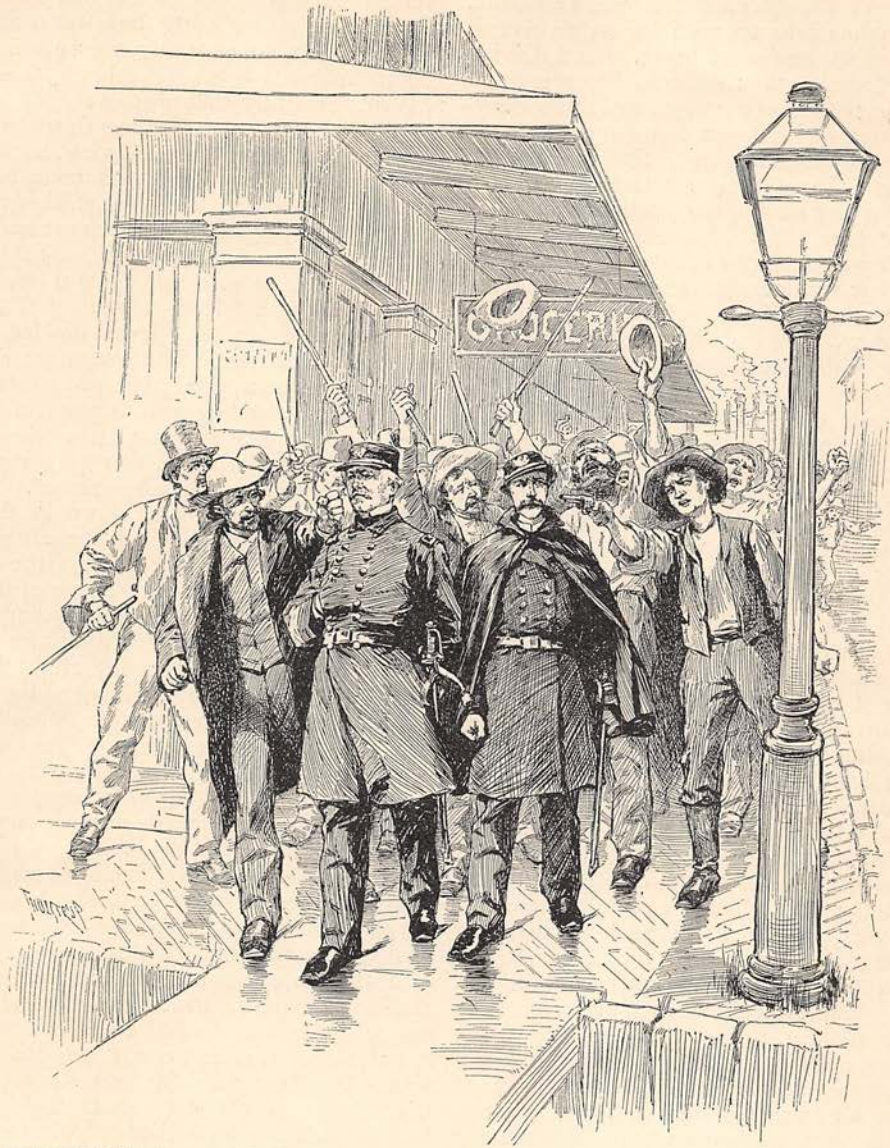
The movements of military and naval defense lent some stir. The old revenue-cutter *Washington*, a graceful craft, all wings, no steam, came and went from the foot of Canal. She was lying there the morning Farragut's topmasts hove in sight across the low land at English Turn. Near by, on her starboard side, lay a gun-boat, moored near the spot where the "lower coast" packet landed daily; to which spot the crowd used to rush sometimes to see the commanding officer, Major-General Mansfield Lovell, ride aboard, bound down the river to the forts. Lovell was a lithe, brown-haired man of forty-odd, a very attractive figure, giving the eye, at first glance, a promise of much activity. He was a showy horseman, visibly fond of his horse. He rode with so long a stirrup-leather that he simply stood astride the saddle, as straight as a spear; and the idlers of the landing loved to see him keep the saddle and pass from the wharf to the steamboat's deck on her long, narrow stage-plank without dismounting.

Such petty breaks in the dreariness got to be scarce and precious toward the last. Not that the town seemed so desolate then as it does now, as one tells of it; but the times were grim. Opposite the rear of the store where I was now employed—for it fronted in Common street and stretched through to Canal—the huge, unfinished custom-house reared its lofty granite walls, and I used to go to its top now and then to cast my eye over the broad city and harbor below. When

I did so, I looked down upon a town that had never been really glad again after the awful day of Shiloh. She had sent so many gallant fellows to help Beauregard, and some of them so young,—her last gleaning,—that when, on the day of their departure, they marched with solid column and firm-set, unsmiling mouths down the long gray lane made by the open ranks of those old Confederate guards, and their escort broke into cheers and tears and waved their gray shakoes on the tops of their bayonets and seized the dear lads' hands as they passed in mute self-devotion and steady tread, while the trumpets sang "Listen to the Mocking-bird," that was the last time; the town never cheered with elation afterward; and when the people next uncovered it was in silence, to let the body of Albert Sidney Johnston, their great chevalier, pass slowly up St. Charles street behind the muffled drums, while on their quivering hearts was written with a knife the death-roll of that lost battle. One of those who had brought that precious body—a former school-mate of mine—walked beside the bier, with the stains of camp and battle on him from head to foot. The war was coming very near.

Many of the town's old forms and habits of peace held fast. The city, I have said, was under martial law; yet the city management still went through its old routines. The volunteer fire department was as voluntary and as redundantly riotous as ever. The police courts, too, were as cheerful as of old. The public schools had merely substituted "Dixie," the "Marseillaise," and the "Bonnie Blue Flag" for "Hail Columbia" and the "Star-Spangled Banner," and were running straight along. There was one thing besides, of which many of us knew nothing at the time,—a system of espionage, secret, diligent, and fierce, that marked down every man suspected of sympathy with the enemy in a book whose name was too vile to find place on any page. This was not the military secret service,—that is to be expected wherever there is war,—nor any authorized police, but the scheme of some of the worst of the villains who had ruled New Orleans with the rod of terror for many years—the "Thugs."

But the public mind was at a transparent heat. Everybody wanted to know of everybody else, "Why don't you go to the front?" Even the gentle maidens demanded tartly, one of another, why each other's brothers or lovers had not gone long ago. Whereas, in truth, the laggards were few indeed. The very children were fierce. For now even we, the uninformed, the lads and women, knew the enemy was closing down upon us. Of course we confronted the fact very valorously,



CAPTAIN THEODORUS BAILEY AND LIEUTENANT GEORGE H. PERKINS ON THEIR WAY TO DEMAND THE SURRENDER OF NEW ORLEANS.

we boys and mothers and sisters—and the newspapers. Had we not inspected the fortifications ourselves? Was not every man in town ready to rush into them at the twelve taps of the fire-alarm bells? Were we not ready to man them if the men gave out? Nothing afloat could pass the forts. Nothing that walked could get through our swamps. The *Mississippi*—and, in fact, she was a majestically terrible structure, only let us complete her—would sweep the river clean!

But there was little laughter. Food was dear; the destitute poor were multiplying terribly; the market men and women, mainly

Germans, Gascon-French, and Sicilians, had lately refused to take the shiplaster currency, and the city authority had forced them to accept it. There was little to laugh at. The Mississippi was gnawing its levees and threatening to plunge in upon us. The city was believed to be full of spies.

I shall not try to describe the day the alarm-bells told us the city was in danger and called every man to his mustering-point. The children poured out from the school gates and ran crying to their homes, meeting their sobbing mothers at their thresholds. The men fell into ranks. I was left entirely alone in

charge of the store where I was employed. Late in the afternoon, receiving orders to close it, I did so, and went home. But I did not stay. I went to the river-side. There until far into the night I saw hundreds of drays carrying cotton out of the presses and yards to the wharves, where it was fired. The glare of those sinuous miles of flame set men and women weeping and wailing thirty miles away on the farther shore of Lake Pontchartrain. But the next day was the day of terrors. During the night fear, wrath, and sense of betrayal had run through the people as the fire had run through the cotton. You have seen, perhaps, a family fleeing with lamentations and wringing of hands out of a burning house; multiply it by thousands upon thousands: that was New Orleans, though the houses were not burning. The firemen were out; but they cast fire on the waters, putting the torch to the empty ships and cutting them loose to float down the river.

Whoever could go was going. The great mass, that had no place to go to or means to go with, was beside itself. "Betrayed! betrayed!" it cried, and ran in throngs from street to street, seeking some vent, some victim for its wrath. I saw a crowd catch a poor fellow at the corner of Magazine and Common streets, whose crime was that he looked like a stranger and might be a spy. He was the palest living man I ever saw. They swung him to a neighboring lamp-post, but the Foreign Legion was patrolling the town in strong squads, and one of its lieutenants, all green and gold, leaped with drawn sword, cut the rope, and saved the man. This was one occurrence; there were many like it. I stood in the rear door of our store, Canal street, soon after reopening it. The junior of the firm was within. I called him to look toward the river. The masts of the cutter *Washington* were slowly tipping, declining, sinking—down she went. The gun-boat moored next her began to smoke all over and then to blaze. My employers lifted up their heels and left the city—left their goods and their affairs in the hands of one mere lad—no stranger would have thought I had reached fourteen—and one big German porter. I closed the doors, sent the porter to his place in the Foreign Legion, and ran to the levee to see the sights.

What a gathering! The riff-raff of the wharves, the town, the gutters. Such women—such wrecks of women! And all the juvenile rag-tag. The lower steamboat landing, well covered with sugar, rice, and molasses, was being rifled. The men smashed; the women scooped up the smashings. The river was overflowing the top of the levee. A rain-storm began to threaten. "Are the Yankee ships in sight?" I asked of an idler. He

pointed out the tops of their naked masts as they showed up across the huge bend of the river. They were engaging the batteries at Camp Chalmette—the old field of Jackson's renown. Presently that was over. Ah, me! I see them now as they come slowly round Slaughterhouse Point into full view, silent, so grim, and terrible; black with men, heavy with deadly portent; the long-banished Stars and Stripes flying against the frowning sky. Oh, for the *Mississippi!* the *Mississippi!* Just then here she came down upon them. But how? Drifting helplessly, a mass of flames.

The crowds on the levee howled and screamed with rage. The swarming decks answered never a word; but one old tar on the *Hartford*, standing with lanyard in hand beside a great pivot-gun, so plain to view that you could see him smile, silently patted its big black breech and blandly grinned.

And now the rain came down in sheets. About one or two o'clock in the afternoon (as I remember), I being again in the store with but one door ajar, came a roar of shoutings and imprecations and crowding feet down Common street. "Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Shoot them! Kill them! Hang them!" I locked the door on the outside and ran to the front of the mob, bawling with the rest, "Hurrah for Jeff Davis!" About every third man there had a weapon out. Two officers of the United States Navy were walking abreast, unguarded and alone, looking not to right or left, never frowning, never flinching, while the mob screamed in their ears, shook cocked pistols in their faces, cursed and crowded and gnashed upon them. So through the gates of death those two men walked to the City Hall to demand the town's surrender. It was one of the bravest deeds I ever saw done.

Later events, except one, I leave to other pens. An officer from the fleet stood on the City Hall roof about to lower the flag of Louisiana. In the street beneath gleamed the bayonets of a body of marines. A howitzer pointed up and another down the street. All around swarmed the mob. Just then Mayor Monroe—lest the officer above should be fired upon and the howitzers open upon the crowd—came out alone and stood just before one of the howitzers, tall, slender, with folded arms, eyeing the gunner. Down sank the flag. Captain Bell, tall and stiff, marched off with the flag rolled under his arm and the howitzers clanking behind. Then cheer after cheer rang out for Monroe. And now, I daresay, every one is well pleased that, after all, New Orleans never lowered her colors with her own hands.

George W. Cable.