

THREE MONTHS AROUND CHARLESTON BAR; OR THE GREAT SIEGE AS WE SAW IT.

BY ROBERT STEWART DAVIS.

It is the middle of June, 1863. We stand upon the Government pier at Port Royal, South Carolina, watching under a burning sun for the coming of the United States steamer *Arago* from New York. There is every evidence of military life around us. Looking up the pier, we see, clustered almost upon the beach of Hilton Head Island, the little village Port Royal, with its long, low buildings all sporting canvas roofing, which glitters in the sunlight like a canopy of pearls—but it is not.

The pier is crowded with quartermaster, commissary, and ordnance stores; vessels are being loaded and discharged; steamers are arriving and departing, this from Fort Pulaski, that for Folly Island; tugs are screeching through steam-whistles as large as themselves; teams, with "U.S." on them in big black letters, are waiting for their "turn," or rattling down empty to the base of operations, or dragging their slow lengths along under heavy loads of hay, army bread, and empty shell; details of soldiers work *easily* in the broiling heat, or listlessly sit upon box and barrel, waiting for a breeze to spring up; contrabands, bare-headed, their wool glistening with oil, and the whites of their eyes rolling with a comical humor, are indulging in free-labor, interspersing their work with sly shuffles and weird plantation-melodies; officers are shouting orders, and quartermasters riding hither and thither; the harbor is covered with vessels,—every thing from a ship to a sloop is lazily riding at anchor on the scarce-heaving bosom of the tide; men-of-war are not wanting, but, like sullen sea-dogs, slumber in the midst of so much life, always ready, however, for action; above them all towers the "Wabash," the gallant steam-frigate which made yonder fort guarding the harbor-entrance too hot for the rebels some eighteen months ago, and General Drayton fled without regrets from Admiral Dupont; beyond is Beaufort River, and near its mouth lie seething in the sun the monitors, repairing after their April combat with Sumter; we cannot see the village of Beaufort, some six miles up this winding river, so we will content ourselves with distant views of Port Royal, St. Helena, and Paris Islands, as they stretch along the horizon with their white beaches, clustering palmettos, and plantation-houses peeping out from orange and magnolia groves.

This is an interesting view; but it would be more so if the sun were not so hot and the sand-flies hovered less thickly

around your face trickling with perspiration. But look! the soldiers, stevedores, and contrabands have ceased their work, and are gazing seaward. "There she is!" exclaims an old salt, "square-rigged forward and schooner-rigged aft." Yes; it is the Arago, three days from New York, and bringing to us news from a far country. Hope it is a victory of the Army of the Potomac! She is yet beyond the bar, and steaming towards the channel-entrance. The men on the signal-station have long since descried her, and signalled to Fort Pulaski and Beaufort, "The Arago is in sight."

"She carries a flag at her fore," cries an officer, who, seated upon a lofty pile of hay, gazes intently with his marine-glass upon the coming vessel. "A flag at her fore? a general is on board; somebody is to be relieved," sagely remarks a veteran soldier at our elbow. "Anoder ginral," says a contraband. "Gwine take Charleson sure, now." As the vessel slowly steams along the channel and passes the buoys which dot her proper course, we forget the sand-flies, the heat, the ever-present fleas, the thoughts of home and victories, while we wonder who the general can be so unexpectedly appearing in the harbor. We are not long thus wondering. The foot of the pier is suddenly cleared of all encumbrances; the half-discharged vessels are towed away, and drop anchor at a respectful distance; civilians, soldiers, and contrabands cluster upon every conceivable spot for a good view; the paddle-wheels of the approaching steamer move more slowly; lines are thrown from her deck; the bow, breast, and stern lines are made fast; proudly she moves into her berth, the gang-plank is thrown out, and the Arago is with us once again. The mail is carried on shore,—thirty pouches. What an army of educated men we have! Officers, always the preferred race in a military department, rush on board to greet returning friends and get all the news, as well as all the papers, while we privates and civilians ask the strangers who peer over the bulwarks, "What general have you on board?"

Ah! there goes the new general. A young man, thirty-three, perhaps, medium height, stoutly built, dark-bearded and piercing-eyed. How leisurely he walks up the pier, as if he had been here a twelvemonth! A blouse, Kossuth hat, single star, and a few staff-officers. The greatness of this general does not consist, at least, in finery or the flourish of trumpets. But, nevertheless, he is a great general, and, as he winds his way towards head-quarters, some irreverent civilian exclaims, "Who would have thought that was General Gillmore?—the man who reduced Fort Pulaski when fossilized warriors had laughed at his plans." Yes, this is the hero of Tybee Island, who startled Colonel Olmstead, the rebel commandant, by building powerful batteries under the very guns of Pulaski, and breaching it

with rifled cannon a mile distant. He has come down here, so rumor says, to make the same experiment upon Sumter, and prove that there are yet greater heights for nations to attain in the science of artillery, and especially in the reduction of fortifications.

Gillmore has been with us but an hour; yet it is generally understood that he has relieved Hunter and assumed command of the department. When any thing is "generally understood" in a department like this, where we have had so little news for the last two months, it must be true: therefore we were not surprised on the morrow as we read an official order assuming command, signed by Q. A. Gillmore, in a large hand, with a stroke as bold as a lion's.

"But where is General Gillmore?" asks every one, as he tramps through the burning sand, ankle-deep, for a glimpse at the new general. "The Mary Benton went out early this morning with a flag at her fore: must have gone up to Folly Island," replied the officer of the guard. Off so soon to his field of future operations? Soldiers begin to look martial, civilians to guess, correspondents to prophesy, and contrabands nod their heads suspiciously.

Yes, Gillmore means *work*. Wish we could say as much for all our generals. Even before he came here, he had determined upon his plan of operations.

What will be the route to Charleston selected by the young general?—Pocotaligo, or James Island? Neither: both of them have been tried and failed. Moreover, Beauregard is prepared for any advance by these routes. Will Gillmore make an overland expedition against the threatened city? Not at all. In his "mind's eye, Horatio," is the slow and sure progress of a siege, and not the uncertain advance of a small army.

Folly Island is chosen as his base of operations. This island is six miles long by half a mile in width, and is separated from Morris Island, immediately north of it, by Lighthouse Inlet, an elbow of the sea about a quarter of a mile in width. General Hunter's forces, last April, took possession of this island, and it has since been under the command of Brigadier-General Vogdes. No fortifications have been erected except upon its southern extremity, commanding the entrance to Stono Inlet; and, in addition to building a lookout one hundred and fifty feet in height, about a mile from the northern end of the island, nothing has been done by our forces worthy of mention. The rebels are in force upon Morris Island. Their pickets and ours talk familiarly across the inlet, and exchange tobacco and papers for coffee, by means of mimic boats made of boards and drift-wood. Vessels with precious freight! may no officer of the picket-guard, with eagle-eye, spy you outward-bound on

perilous passage, or adverse wind and tide bear you from expectant consignees into the foaming breakers on the distant bar!

Such is the condition of affairs on Folly Island which greets General Gillmore upon his first visit. In one day the scene changes: horses, wagons, shovels, gabions, fascines, and cannon begin to leave Port Royal for Folly Island; and Gillmore himself is seldom seen at Port Royal.

But the forts have fired their parting salutes to General Hunter, and the Arago, freighted with plethoric sutlers, discharged soldiers, and homesick civilians, has borne him northward: therefore, if we wish to be with the "general commanding," we must leave our snug quarters, and, trusting our precious lives to a Government transport, take passage for Folly Island. At Folly Island, then, we find ourselves safely landed,—no thanks to the parties who sold that miserable steamer to the Government. But we have come up here to note the progress of the fourth expedition against Charleston: therefore we will forgive the faithless contractors, and hope that the rebels will give us even as good a chance for escape from evil.

Folly Island! a fit retreat for a misanthrope. Fleas, bred by thousands in the scorching sand, hop upon you at every step; snakes of all sizes and tastes glide before your eyes; alligators suspiciously doze in marshes or on the banks of creeks; wood-ticks anxiously watch their opportunity to drop upon you from every tree and bury themselves in your flesh; sand-flies hover about your face; mosquitos, with fangs like a tailor's bill, bleed you night and day,—as also the sutlers; centipedes and sand-crabs hide themselves in your tent and blanket; and, surrounded by all these irritants, you exclaim, "Mercy! I came here, not to fight the worst forms of animated nature, but the rebels."

The tide is out, and along the hard beach we walk towards the northern end of the island. We walk, I say, because we cannot ride in the army-wagons, though they, empty, rattle by us on their way. General Vogdes has forbidden any one to ride in these wagons. We hail a driver, plead with him for a ride, though it be but a mile; he stubbornly refuses; we tell him that we are men of standing and character, at home at least,—we are covered with perspiration, and the sun beats through our palmettos as if they were the tissue-fabric of a school-girl's head-dress: no sign of remorse sits upon the brow of the easily riding teamster,—no tear of sympathy stands in his eye or trickles down his bronzed cheek like a stream of water on a "brown-stone front:" he is inexorable. Crack goes his whip, the horses make a spasmodic attempt at a gallop, and, as the empty wagon lumbers onward, the teamster cries, "You know I can't; Vogdes has ordered it."

Wondering who this General Vogdes is, we leave the beach,

and, passing yonder palmetto-hammock, reach the Campbell House, his head-quarters. There he is, sitting upon the porch, and reading, as is his wont, some military treatise. Quick-spoken, voice inclined to harshness, full-bearded, bronzed face, small, keen eye, hair slightly gray, forehead well developed, excitable in manner, excessively strict in discipline,—this is General Vogdes. He has been in command of this island since the April expedition, and is probably one of the best-informed generals in the service.

From him, after proving ourselves highly respectable individuals in search of information not contraband, we procure “passes” to go to the front. Leaving the Campbell House, —which, by the way, is the only house on the island, and was formerly owned by a secessionist of that name,—a walk of three miles, through sand, thickets, and woods, brings us to the “Lookout.” It is a tower built of pine-tree trunks, rising above and porperly fastened to each other to the distance of one hundred and forty-five feet. From its top we can see, not only the country for miles around, but we can look into Charleston and over all its forts and sea-coast defenses. Yonder, off the bar, stretches the blockading squadron, with steam up and cable ready to slip whenever a blockade-runner shall heave in sight. Just inside the bar lies the “New Ironsides.” She has held this menacing position since April last. A little over a mile ahead of us is the northern end of this island; you see it skirted by a line of trees and brushwood. Now look across Lighthouse Inlet. That is Morris Island on the lower end of which you see eight immense circular sand-hills extending parallel with the beach about a mile upward. Those hills are certainly natural fortifications; and upon each of them the rebels have mounted a gun traversing two-thirds of the circle, so that they are able to reply to an attack either from the sea or from Folly Island.

General Gillmore has determined to capture those batteries and gain a foothold on Morris Island. How will he do it? It will be done by strategy of the highest order and genius. He has already planned the erection of two lines of siege-batteries behind yonder skirt of woods. “But,” you say, “how can he build batteries under the very guns of the rebels on Morris Island without their discovering it?” Ah! that is the very strategy of which we have been speaking; and if such a work shall be accomplished, we think you will acknowledge that Gillmore possesses strategic powers of greater value than any which have yet been developed by this war.

Look! the work has already been commenced. A secret road has been cut in the night through the woods leading from the rear to the front, where the batteries are to be built. Upon this road has been laid brushwood to a depth of two feet, and

the brushwood covered with dirt, so that there shall be no rumbling of army-wagons and cannon-trucks as they go over it; night is our ready ally, and every thing is done as silently as possible; trees without roots thicken the brushwood in front of the sand-ridges behind which are the battery lines; five hundred men work like beavers in the darkness, none speaking above a whisper, while one hundred men in the day ply their spades beneath the shade of friendly trees; no strangers but the twinkling stars see the materials for the batteries hauled up to the front in wagons with leather washers and axles well greased; the horses of the loaded teams are led, so that they may be silently taken to the place of deposit; the rebels picket the mast of a blockade-runner which lies stranded off the mouth of Lighthouse Inlet, but they are unable to discover any unusual movements on the part of the "Yankees," and, while our men are building battery after battery, poor rebel looks over from Morris Island, and—suspects nothing.

How nobly have our men worked! It is but seventeen days since the first spadeful of dirt was thrown up, yet the batteries are completed, and from their concealment forty-seven guns and mortars frown at the rebel batteries on Morris Island. They are regular siege-batteries, built in two lines, the first of which is by far the longer. Their line of fire forms, with the line of fire of the rebel batteries on Morris Island, an angle of thirty degrees. The first line is twelve hundred yards from the rebel batteries; the second, twenty-two hundred. They are casemated and reveted with gabions, fascines, and sand-bags. The first line has eight batteries and eight magazines, besides a bomb-proof, splinter-proofs, and surgeries. The second line has two batteries, two magazines, and the same complements as the other. Thus there are, in both lines, ten batteries.

Is it not strategy to build such batteries under the very eyes and ears of the enemy? How unconscious of impending danger the enemy are! General Ripley is in command of the rebel forces on Morris Island, and the day after the completion of these batteries, he reviews, from yonder sand-hill, Folly Island with his field-glass. What is his opinion? Listen, while he turns to his aids and says, "The Yankees have no batteries on Folly Island: to-morrow at daybreak take three hundred men, cross the inlet, and drive their pickets down the island." Poor Ripley! could he penetrate with his vision these friendly woods, what would he say to forty-seven guns and mortars in such close proximity to his head-quarters?

But while we have been watching the erection of these batteries, other events, of equal importance, have been transpiring upon this island. To the southward as far as Stono River stretch the long lines of artillery and infantry camps; the army of the Department of the South has been silently gathering here for

the grand combat. It is not a large army, to be sure; but Gillmore will not ask for reinforcements until he establishes a claim to them,—another proof of a good general.

Let us leave the Lookout and revisit the Campbell House; we shall find Gillmore there in consultation with his officers: besides, we wish you to see three generals upon whom he mainly relies for the execution of his plans. There they are, talking together upon the veranda. That young man with sandy moustache, closely-cut hair, well-knit frame, large, restless eye, and genial countenance, is Brigadier-General Strong: he was with General Butler in New Orleans, and is the prototype of our idea of the old hero. A tall man, middle-aged, reserved in manner and conversation, yet quick in all his movements, is now listening attentively to the story of a spy who has just been captured within our lines: that is Brigadier-General Terry, an officer of great executive ability, to whom Gillmore can well intrust any part of the proposed expedition. Brigadier-General Seymour stands near him: he was an artillery officer in Fort Sumter under Major Anderson. It is fitting that he should have a part in the present attempt to repossess it. He is a dashing officer, full of fire and courage.

To-morrow, the 10th of July, is the day appointed for the opening of the grand assault. The magazines of the batteries have been filled, and every thing on land is ready for action, while off the bar is the monitor fleet, which has come up from Port Royal fully repaired and in good order for a trial of its virtues. Admiral Dahlgren has succeeded Dupont in command of this fleet, and several of the monitors have changed their April commanders for others,—no less brave, if not as experienced. General Gillmore has ordered the plan of attack as follows. The batteries are to open upon Morris Island and fire as rapidly as possible; the iron-clad fleet is at the same time to take position in the main ship-channel off Morris Island, and enfilade the rebel batteries; General Strong's brigade are to go up Folly River in launches, and, secreting themselves behind the woods which skirt Lighthouse Inlet on the left, await the opportunity to land on Morris Island and carry the batteries by assault. While Morris Island is thus the real point of attack, General Terry with his division is ordered to proceed up Stono River in transports, and, landing upon James Island, to make a feint against Charleston in that direction.

Such are the orders issued, and the troops prepare to carry them into execution. How thrilling, yet how solemn, is the scene around us! The last day of preparation has ended, and the twilight shades, deepening, cast a strange gloom over the busy camps where men prepare for the death-struggle of the morrow. Nothing interrupts the quiet of the evening hour save the booming of artillery in the direction of James Island, on our left,

which proves that General Terry's forces are already executing their movement. In our camps are the scenes of the night before battle: the soldier cleans his gun, makes sure of its soundness, and packs in his cartridge-box ammunition for the coming death-work. *This*, we thought, is the *prose* of war; the last supper of hard-tack and coffee, the loud laughing and singing of some, the quiet conduct and meditation of others, the writing of letters to loved ones at home, the speculations on the battle's issue, the thoughts of wounds and death which even the veteran cannot drive from his mind, and the Sabbath-stillness of the camps as the shrill bugle echoes through the woods, "Put out the lights, put out the lights," make us feel sad as we think of the brave men so soon to fall. But the men sleep, and the moon, slow-rising, casts her gentle rays upon the silent tent of the warrior, or sparkles upon the sea-waves where ride the iron-clads, skirting like grim sentinels the distant horizon.

The morning comes, and the gray dawn has scarcely streaked the sky, yet the troops are under arms and await impatiently the signal-gun which will announce the opening of our batteries. General Gillmore has long since taken his position in the lookout, from which he can watch every movement. General Vogdes is in command of the batteries, and General Seymour has a general supervision of all the troops.

What are the rebels on Morris Island doing? *Sleeping*; unconscious that within a mile of them the Yankee Gillmore has forty-seven guns and mortars soon to open their death-dealing fire. They have thought that this demonstration against Charleston would be made by the old route, James Island, and, accordingly, have depleted Morris Island of their artillery-men and infantry to meet the advance of General Terry.

But look to the left! Forty launches, containing General Strong's storming-column, are creeping up Folly River so noiselessly, with their muffled oar-locks, that you cannot hear them, though only a quarter of a mile distant; the iron-clad fleet has crossed the bar and taken up its position in the main ship-channel off Morris Island; two hundred axemen suddenly spring from behind our batteries and fell the trees which hide them from rebel view; embrasure after embrasure is laid bare; the rebel pickets on Morris Island are paralyzed at the sight. Forty-seven guns and mortars even under their eyes, and they not know it! how they must have cursed the "mudsills"!

The signal-gun has been fired, and now our batteries shake the island with their rapid fire, and the monitors join in the fearful chorus. In vain the rebels attempt to serve their guns; the men are panic-stricken, and our bursting shells, tearing through their batteries, envelop them in sand. Neither is General Strong wanting. Slowly from their place of concealment come the barges; they are greeted with a volley from the rebel

rifle-pits upon the left; but all attempts to prevent their landing are in vain. Already Strong, in his anxiety to be the first on Morris Island, has jumped into the water over his head, and now, completely soaked, he sits upon the sacred soil and empties the water from his boots while his brigade is landing and forming in column. The enemy are driven from the rifle-pits, and Strong, with boots in one hand and sword in the other, turns to his command, cries, "Come on, boys! I will lead you," and dashes forward; our batteries and monitors cease firing; the troops, with flags flying and at charge-bayonets, run at full speed for the rebel batteries; the first battery is reached and taken; our flag waves from its summit, and now the men rush with wild cheers onward, planting the Stars and Stripes successively upon every battery on the lower end of Morris Island. Glorious sight! to see this insulted flag again defiantly wave in full view of Charleston. Sumter is no longer silent, but as our men are driving the rebels in full flight up the beach, she opens upon the victorious troops a slow fire from her barbette guns. But she is impotent to check the grand advance; Generals Gillmore and Seymour are already upon Morris Island, witnessing from a captured battery the defeat of the enemy; artillery, troops, and ammunition are sent across the inlet from Folly Island; the sun has scarce reached his meridian, yet the rebels have been driven to within eight hundred yards of Fort Wagner, and General Gillmore, thanks to his genius and the bravery of our troops, is in possession of three-fourths of Morris Island. Thus ends the first day's action, and, since Wagner has proved an obstacle to further progress, our troops content themselves with throwing up temporary defensive works, in order that they may not lose in the coming night the advantage gained by such a close approach to Wagner.

There have been many instances of individual bravery and daring to-day. Did you see General Seymour ride boldly past our sharpshooters, and, reining in his horse, calmly sit within range of the enemy's riflemen in front of Wagner and examine that fort? "Crack" go their rifles; the bullets whistle over and around him; he raises himself in his saddle, and, doffing his cap, makes three very polite bows to the Wagner rebels, and contemptuously walks his horse back into our lines.

Have you an eye for the ridiculous? Look at the sailors in the deserted rebel camps. They manned the boat-howitzers accompanying General Strong's brigade, and, having accomplished their part of the expedition, are in search of fun and plunder. One of them catches a mule, and, having improvised a bridle by attaching a long rope to the mule's mouth, he takes his seat upon the animal's rump. While Jack is vainly endeavoring, despite the mule's kicking and rearing, to retain his equilibrium, his superior officer sees him, and says, "Jack, why

don't you ride amidships? You will get along better." Jack draws himself up with all dignity, and, saluting the officer, replies, "Well, this is the first craft I ever commanded, and I think it's a pity if I can't ride on the *quarter-deck!*"

Here come some prisoners down the beach, taken in to-day's action. Let us talk with them; they are a curious set of fellows. Hear them cheer the "old flag." They may be sincere in this,—more likely not. Lieutenant-Colonel Hall, the Provost-Marshal General, is talking with one of them, an Irishman belonging to the regular South Carolina Artillery.

"Pat," said the marshal, "you are a rebel."

"Devil a bit of it," replied Pat; "I'm a Union man, that's what I am,—a Union man."

"Pat, which would you rather have, a parole or exchange?"

"I nather want parool or axchange; but I want to go to Bostin; fur I'm a Union man."

While our Folly Island forces have been thus successful, General Terry's division have also met the enemy in force on James Island, and successfully repulsed an attack made upon them by a large body of rebels near Secessionville. Having succeeded in fully accomplishing his part of the expedition, he will withdraw his forces under cover of night, and before morning they will join their victorious comrades on Morris Island. This engagement on James Island was the maiden fight of the first Northern colored regiment, the 54th Massachusetts. Nobly did they acquit themselves. Meeting, as our advance pickets, the brunt of the enemy's onset, they fought like heroes. Some of these gallant men refused to surrender, and were cut down at their posts, willingly yielding up life to show their devotion to the cause for which they fought. Such was the gallantry and bravery of this regiment, vindicating beyond a doubt the colored man of the North as a man of patriotism and courage.

After the rebels had retreated, a sergeant belonging to this regiment, and very stunted, was seen bringing into our lines a rebel soldier. The rebel was one of those tall specimens of chivalry who seemed to have been originally intended for astronomical observations, while his captor was a stunted negro who could with ease have walked between the legs of his prize. It was a ludicrous sight; the little negro with expanding eyes, large mouth, ivory-glistening, lugging his own gun and that of his prisoner, and beside him was a long-haired, sunken-jawed, sallow-faced specimen of Southern vegetation, humbly following his enterprising colored brother. He may have been a conservative, who thought that "the negro wouldn't fight!"

To-morrow morning General Strong will try to carry Fort Wagner by assault; his brigade are in the front and ready for the trial. But the night creeps on apace; "taps" have been sounded, and the men, wearied with the fierce conflict of the

day, have covered themselves with their blankets and laid down in the sand to sleep. You wonder how one can sleep thus under the fire-flashing guns of Sumter. This, friend, is war. These men two years ago would have been startled from their slumbers by the bark of a house-dog; but now even the howling shell bursting over their camps disturbs not the heavy sleep of the wearied veterans. May their dreams be of glory and promotion! This is our wish as we lay aside the note-book and blow out the light around which hover insects courting death,—fit emblems of the Confederacy!