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WAR AND PREPARATION.

Those who discourage military and naval preparedness bring back to me memories of 1861. I was then a lad of eleven years, quite alert for my years, living in the center of the Secession storm, in the Congressional district represented by James L. Pugh, and next that represented by W. L. Yancey, in Alabama. I heard many speeches and talk without end. For a lad ^{I had} ~~should~~ read much and had ^a ~~had~~ a fair conception of the surface of that troubled pool.

I lived in the country, twelve miles from any town, but the people were well posted, as the average people of any countryside in the South. They took their views largely from Pugh, Yancey and men of that ^{school} ~~kind~~, who were able and ardent. Nearly every man of my acquaintance was a red-hot secessionist. While we know now that the negro was at the bottom of the whole trouble, it was not so considered then by those people. I recall vividly that they ^{then} ~~they~~ spoke of him as "an incident".

In all that countryside there was only one man who had seen service as a soldier. He had gone through the war with Mexico with Scott from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico. But what he did not know would be about ~~at~~ all of it. This we found out later on. There was another man who had attended a military school as a boy. These two were our sources of ^{technical} information.

When Secession was voted and war came, the country was ablaze with military ardor, and military organizations sprang up in every settlement. Men hastened to enlist because, as they said, they feared the war would be over before they got into it. One hot day in June, 1861, a man came past my father's place, alone and

walking rapidly towards Eufaula where there was a railroad. The sweat was running down his face, which was flushed. My father knew him and called to him to know where he was going, why so rapidly and what was the matter. Not stopping to reply the man shot back his reply, that he was going to Virginia to enlist and that he was hurrying for fear the war would be over before he got into it. He got to Virginia, "got into it" before it was over, and four years later came home with his steam all out. He had made a good soldier, but he knew something when he came back that he did not dream of when he went.

The Rebels had constructed Fort Barancas at Pensacola, while the Yanks held Fort Pickens separated from the mainland by a mile or more of water and ^{on} on a sand-island in the Gulf. It was the dream of our people to "take" Fort Pickens and many were the plans surmised and discussed to that end. One Sunday at a country church, before services, I heard an old gentleman, one of the "wise ones" of the neighborhood, lay down the proposition that our people, as he put it, "could storm Pickens more effectually with the common rifle than with cannon". No one in the crowd seemed to see the absurdity of it. I did not, but I remembered it and later on saw it for what it was not worth.

A celebrated lawyer was elected Colonel of a regiment that was sent to Barancas. While there a bombardment between the two forts sprang up one morning before the Colonel had finished his beauty sleep. The heavy boom of the guns aroused him. He sprang from his bed and, dressed only in his embroidered "nighty" and bedroom slippers, and grasping a Deringer single-barrelled pistol, four and a half inches long, and on full cock, he ran down to the

breastworks. The Yanks did not see their danger as they were more than a mile away, and kept on throwing shells. The Colonel did not like their way of fighting and soon resigned.

There was a big, fat preacher about fifty years of age, a "mighty father in Israel" and leader at the "outpouring of the spirit". He was red-hot for war, and for all those reasons he was elected Captain of ^a ~~the~~ company. When this organization started for the front, it marched by my father's house and halted to water up at the "old well" by the road-side. Small boy like, I was for seeing everything going on, and among other things I got into a big wagon, where I found, among other things almost as incongruous, a feather-bed and two feather pillows the Captain was taking to war with him. I had read of Valley Forge and as it occurred to me to be somewhat unmilitary to go to war with a feather-bed, I made inquiry about it, ^{and it was} ~~and~~ thus fixed ~~it~~ in my memory.

In this company were two young fellows who were wild, loved fun especially if mixed with booze, and neither one had any sense of the proprieties of civil, to say nothing of military life. A few nights after reaching Virginia the two slipped out of camp, attended a country dance, got "full" and returned to camp about two o'clock in the morning. They were hungry and ransacked the camp for something to eat, then got a couple of drums and began beating them. Of course this roused the camp and resulted in both being soundly beaten up. They then sought a place to sleep with the soldiers, and finding none to suit, they went to the Captain's tent, which was set apart a few yards from the others, and with clothes, boots and all, got into the bed with the Captain. Imagine the offended military dignity of the Captain when he found two privates, drunk, muddy and

mussed up, in his cherished feather-bed.

It was said that he resigned in chagrin because he could not find any penalty in the army regulations to fit that case.

Another company organized in that section found a lot of large steel files and had a blacksmith make big knives of them, with handles, the whole somewhat like the Roman broadsword. For many days every grindstone in the settlement was kept steadily going, sharpening those knives, and when the Company left for the front, every private carried at his side one of ~~these knives~~ ^{them} ground to a fine edge; and they went off talking of how they would "slice Yankees" with them. An old man stood looking at the company as it filed away down the road and shaking his gray head was heard to murmur to himself, "I tell you, them's dangerous fellows".

Not one of those knives was ever used as intended.

Another old fellow who had been to a one-horse military school when a boy, was, for that reason alone, supposed to be a mighty man of war, and was elected Captain of another Company. He was quite wealthy and public spirited, and his first act was to uniform his company in gray coats, semi-swallow tails, with white duck pants and a cap about a foot high and weighing about ten pounds, with a crimson pon-pon stuck up at the front. He did not have sense enough - nor did anyone else - to know that what was suitable for a May morning parade-ground, would not do in the rain and mud of actual warfare. When they got to the front they were so unmercifully guiled by the old soldiers that the Captain resigned, over half of the company deserted, and the rest were put into other commands.

One day I was allowed to go to town with a neighbor, a man of about forty years of age. In a store we saw many bolts of new goods

recently arrived from the North. He called my attention to the fact that most of them were in stripes, and taking me to one side, in a low tone said, "Jest look ye at that; at them stripes. I jest knowed them Yankees have been bent on war for a long ti me. Them stripes show it".

I was deeply impressed and believed the proof conclusive. A kid of my age can't even blame himself for being such a fool when older persons led the way.

My memory is full of things said and done that demonstrate the fact that those people were profoundly ignorant of war; that all they really knew was that fighting was to result. I recall also how profoundly ignorant they were of how to take care of themselves in camp. When they got to the war they died off from camp diseases with painful rapidity; many more died from sheer ignorance than from bullets. No doubt this was true of the volunteers from the north as well as from the south. Both sections were utterly ignorant of war and what war really meant and how to conserve their resources.

It has been quite the thing for cracker-box soldiers and rotten politicians in the north since that war to assert that the South had been preparing for it for years. A bigger "whopper" could not be invented even by geniuses of that kidney. The truth---the cold, frozen truth is---that neither North nor South had prepared at all; that both were densely ignorant and unprepared and that no people less prepared ever went to war than the North and the South in 1861. And the price paid for that unpreparedness was such as to stagger the imagination and give thinking people an earnest desire to have this nation prepare to meet any fate that may come. Those of our people who oppose preparedness, only a few months ago were loudly declaring that there would be no more war on earth, and they

don't seem to see their folly even now when half the earth is drenched in blood as never before.

With what degree of patience can I, then, listen to the talk of such idiots as Bryan who claim that a call in the morning will find a million of ^{armed} men by night; a million of men, a mob, untrained, unprepared, defenseless; their very numbers an element of weakness. Fifty thousand trained troops could easily overcome that million, and not half try. Bryan is a demagogue or a fool. Which? I am disposed to believe he is both.

If all nations could be gotten to disarm at the same time, it would be practicable whether wise or not. But that is impossible. And so long as one nation of considerable power will arm, all others who do not exist at the mercy of that one. Moral force, a sense of justice, never stayed the hand of men inspired by a lust for power or of conquest. There is not, and from the nature of things there cannot be, ^{other} any power to enforce peace. War only can enforce it. In civil government the Marshall, the Sheriff, the civil instrumentality, whatever it may be called, executes the writ of order and right, but he is able to do so because there is an irresistible force behind him. With nations the only force obeyed is power expressed in war. The war power is the only coercive influence that nations obey. This is axiomatic. Then, why try to rule this old lustful world by dreams?

James W. Oates.

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