

E. Shilby Esq

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

THIRD ANNUAL CONQUEST

OF

FLORIDA.

CAPTAIN LE DIABLE.

"And behold, the whole herd ran violently and
perished." — MATTHEW.

PORT ROYAL, S. C.

1864.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

I. PREFATORY.

THE following pages are the profoundest work that has yet issued from that capacious cavity wherein is fixed my psychological apparatus.

They are not to be comprehended by the masses; even the cultivated require preparation for their proper enjoyment and appreciation. To this end I recommend the following course of reading to be assiduously pursued for three years, after which I think my historical sketch may be taken up with profit:—

1. Jomini's Art of War.
2. Rev. C. L. Robinson on Moral Philosophy.
3. Military Life of Napoleon, by Jomini.
4. Gilmore on Limes, Cements, and Mortars; especially the chapter on 13-inch mortars.
5. Napier's Life of T. C. Stickney, with an Introductory Essay by Lieut.-Colonel Hall, P.M.G.D.S., on the Probable Fate of the Forty Thieves. Colonel Hall thinks he has discovered late living specimens in the transition State of Florida.

The Colonel is a qualified judge.

6. Mahon on Field Works; of which I recommend to particular attention the sections on Hoeing Corn and Cotton Planting.

7. Browne (Spell it with an E), on Abandoned Property, with an American Preface by Buzzard on Carrien.

8. Allsop on the Eighth Commandment, Illustrated by Autobiographical Sketches.

9. Napier's Peninsular War.

10. Robinson's Grand Trunk Operations; showing how it pays to bring many trunks of private baggage to an outpost.

11. Chase on the Succession.

12. Myself on the "Diamond, B."

The following copy of an Order of the War Department illustrates the pressure under which my work was produced; and is my authority for presenting it to the Military Public:—

"S. O. 4681. War Dep. A. G. Office,
"Feb. 30th, 1864.

"CAPTAIN,—The Venerable Secretary of the Navy having read your interesting biography in "Plutarch's Lives," a book of which he is very fond, and becoming thereby familiar with your genius, erudition and integrity,—your extraordinary powers of analysis, and your sensitive benevolence,—has memorialized the Honorable Secretary of War concerning your character, and requested that you be detailed to a special literary and scientific duty.

"You are therefore hereby directed, as the only proper officer in the Department of the South, to prepare a history of the latest Conquest of Florida. You are relieved from your present duties at Headquarters, and will proceed at once to the concoction of the work assigned you.

"As no special appropriation has yet been made to this work, you will draw upon your imagination for the statements necessary to a proper completion of your history, a power you are conceded to possess in ample degree. In reply to your inquiry of the 9th ultimo, I have to say, that stumps of cigars, when found lying in the streets, do come properly under the head of 'abandoned property,' and cannot therefore be taken into possession by officers for their private use. They must be turned over to Mr. A. G. Browne (be careful to spell it with an E), the Treasury Agent, who alone, with the Florida Tax-Commissioners, will be considered as having any right to smoke them in person; except always the officer gives certificates that he requires them for the military service, in which case he will receipt for them to Browne (spell it with an E).

"I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully,

"Your obedient servant,

"(Signed) E. D. TOWNSEND,

"Asst. Adjt.-Gen."

A subsequent order directs that my work shall be of a purely scientific character, to prevent those

evils that naturally flow from the fact of being contemporaneous with the events.

But if there be one trait of my character more admired by Plutarch than any other, and on which I have prided myself ever since I was weaned, it is the power to *lay aside my prejudices in the cause of truth.*

Napier thinks this a characteristic of Stickney: I think so too.

The second volume of this work is prepared, but I shall not publish it at present.

I have not yet completed my drawings of the civil officers of the Department, owing to the difficulty of getting a *good* expression for Browne (spell it with an E).

If, however, he follow my advice, and cultivate a beard that entirely covers the face, I think such improvement will justify his sitting.

Rely on me; if I sketch him, I will do him justice; that's another strong quality of mine.

II. COUNCIL OF STATE.

A PRINCIPAL obstacle in the way of philosophical dissertation upon the geography and morals of any country is the necessity of going back to the creation of the world for a beginning, so that before an author reaches the contemporary age he is ready to die,—

“Fugit irreperabile tempus,”

and his book is not finished.

How fortunate must I account myself in this respect when I come to write about Florida,—country that was not concerned in the original creation,—country of entirely modern construction,—country having no part in the Book of Genesis, or of any other book beyond the memory of man.

“It was n't made, Agassiz says, with Ede;
And therefore did n't fall when Adam ought to;
God knows, of falling it has little need,
'T is low enough already——.”

Thus it has no share in the original sin. “Where no law is there can be no sin.” Exactly so! the State has escaped all those petty restraints of the Ten Commandments and the other decrees of Scripture that try men's souls in other lands.

A result of these facts may be seen in the free and easy life of the country. The Northerner, moving into this blissful State, is adapted quite readily to the new condition of things. Indeed, with his natural inventiveness, the Yankee has improved on the innocent manners of the natives; so that your pocket may be picked and your throat cut in less time and with more pain than in any portion of the Cannibal Islands.

I cannot say that I have found this condition of society the most agreeable for a man of my temperament to live in; but that is a fault of my education, which is Puritanic.

We proceed now to consider the proceedings of the Council of Wisdom which met at Fernandina,

on the night of the 8th February, of the year *two*, of Stickney.

The historian who should pass over this occasion without seizing it, to transmit to posterity a series of portraits of the gentlemen constituting that assemblage, would but half accomplish the purposes of history. The modesty of these statesmen prevents their exposing themselves in too strong a light to the impudent gaze of a too appreciating public. In fact, they left the North to escape distinction; be it my duty to present them to an expectant world in their true colors.¹

The building to be immortalized in history as that in which the grand scheme for the regeneration of Nassau County was developed, stands alone upon a marshy square: on one side skirted by the burnt posts of an old conflagration; on another, by a stagnant ditch, above whose green scum peer the edges and corners of a multitude of rifled pocket-books. To the rear a great dunghill, in whose bowels you discover the cave, the residence of that delightful hermit, author of an "Essay on the Eighth Commandment," which I have desired you to read; about the door of his abode grow the broad leaves of the poison weed, *Stramonium*. The author is not a married hermit, but he is "just as good as married." By the mouth of his cave, among the stramonium bushes, sport several little imps of darkness, who

¹ I fear I may scarcely succeed in this effort, as the Quartermaster notifies me that my requisition for lampblack to accomplish the work, would exhaust the present supply.

call the hermit father! and say mamma to a dusky woman of the dominant race. The edifice that stands among those scenes I can hardly call grand; a more appropriate position, one that would give it dignity, would be the lower end of a backyard in the village, —

"There is no garden before the door,"

but over the front, in letters of Browne (spell it with an E), the mystical title TEA SEAS.

Within are two rooms: one is black and dark; that is the apartment we enter to hear morals and wisdom. There is no window in the side of this room, and the walls are hung with a drapery of black cotton.

In one corner is an open chest, wherein are the tools of locksmiths and certain queer looking wires and chisels; it is marked "T. C. A."

Near this coffer is an old barrel, said to have occupied that place for its present purpose more than a score of years. It is nearly filled with strange looking fragments of ware in various materials, of which brass is prominent; the barrel is labelled, in nearly worn-out letters, "broken hopes" and "T. C. S."

On the night of the council which designed the conquest of Nassau County, the black room was lighted by only two candles (Allsop had charged the Board with four); so that we may listen in a corner without being observed too strongly by the oracles.

Stickney (T. C.) spoke: man with small cunning eyes, thin lips, sharp, clean face; face that says always, "Don't trust me!" lips that say to all men alike, "I'm your special friend."

Stickney spoke! spoke to Allsop and Browne (spell it with an E), and the other Stickney and Robinson, and — God knows who! Says he: "Fellow-thieves, I'm in a strait! If I don't get Gilmore to move, I'm undone. If he moves and is unsuccessful, I'm undone too. I've lied to him about this State of Florida. I've lied to him like the Devil. I *can* lie when I try; I'm hard to beat at it; there's no truth in me." —

Robinson interrupted: "I beg brother Stickney," said he, "to cease this egotistical strain. I beg him not to claim all the virtues of this gang: we have all a share in these brilliant qualities."

"I take nothing from my brother," said Stickney.

"When he is looking," said Allsop.

"But," continues Stickney, "I came not to this country to be simply a TEA SEA. I feel myself competent, as I am willing, to occupy a Senator's chair in the next Congress. I've superior qualifications to represent the Northern population of Florida. I've lied to the President (voices "so have I"); I've lied to Chase ("here, too"). I've been lying and swindling, in fact I've done nothing else, these fifty years. I've never yet accomplished a result, but I'm confident lying is my *forte*, and if I don't succeed this time I never shall. I may as well go under."

"Amen," said brother Robinson.

"There remains now," said Stickney, "to consider a prime move: Nassau County must be at once seized by our troops; the immense population of scared crackers in this district must be prepared to swallow my politics and Robinson's morals. If that scheme fail, I have another; I'm fertile in schemes; I always was given to scheming. It is true, as I before remarked, I have not yet accomplished any apparent result in a half century of scheming; but the end is not yet. I propose then to demand of the Treasury Department to secure my interests. The method is simple to do it up Browne (spell it with an E). Let the General but declare the State "*abandoned*," the supervising agent will at once seize it for the Treasury; I'm hunks with Chase, so I go in."

"Bully for you, Senator!" said Browne (spell it with an E), who arose and proceeded: "Fellow-thieves, my name is Browne (spell it with an E). I am descended from Tubal Cain, the first worker in brass. I came over in the Mayflower, and spell it with an E."

"Spell what?" said brother Robinson.

"Spell Browne (spell it with an E), you fool!"

"I surrender to no man in my ability to lie. I am some on a trade; did n't I come from Boston? Did n't I fail in business? Did n't I try politics, and don't it pay? Is n't it worth something to be a Treasury Agent; to be a boss-robber, and have a monopoly of the smuggling business? O happy

men to be my partners! Make your manners and say something!"

"Amen! Glory to Browne;" (spell it with an E), cried all.

"I have heard brother Stickney's projects for saving the country, and especially that part called Nassau County; I'm here by authority to take up every abandoned thing in the Department of the South."

"Except me!" cried Allsop.

"Let the army abandon Nassau. I shall at once take it up in the name of the Treasury. I'm a candid man, fellow-thieves! I talk much; yes, I talk a great deal. I lie also; oh! how I can lie; but after all, I'm a candid man. When I get possession of Florida, won't Stickney go to the Senate? Eh! won't he though?"

At this point the speaker drew down the lid of his right eye, as if opening the shutter of his candid mind for investigation.

"Of course," he continued, "*Of course* I shall send Stickney to the Senate, and Robinson to the Devil; and, as for Allsop, he will naturally enough fetch up at Auburn."

"Fellow-thieves, I bid you good-night."

When Browne (spell it with an E) had seated himself, up rose brother Robinson; *up* as much as he could, — Robinson the virtuous, — the pious Robinson, — but the consumptive Robinson, who could not get *up* over much. Puny, pale-face Robinson! exhausted by youthful indiscretions, he has given the

little that is left to the Lord; not much to be sure and not a superior quality, but the best he has.

Up rose brother Robinson, the partner of Tax Commissioners, — of Treasury Agents; Robinson, the friend of the poor African, when Sambo has funds to invest; Robinson the virtuous, — the friend of piously inclined schoolmarms; Robinson the eunuch, *au naturel*; harmless Robinson. Robinson — such a Robinson — speaks. Listen!

"Fellow-thieves and brethren, I feel it my duty to bear my cross on this important occasion; I feel myself called upon to bear my heartfelt testimony —"

In short, reader, you know Robinson; you know his speech, — 't was like him: "realizing sense," — "feeling interest," — "my mental exercises," — "as saith the Apostle," — "now I lay me;" and wound up by declaring he went into this thing "tooth and nail," prominent features of his. Just then a flash of lightning, a burst of thunder, an odor of brimstone, in the midst of which the Major and I left, for we had to attend a

III. COUNCIL OF WAR.

THE mighty of the post were gathered there: their sayings are of little weight, however, in these days of Tax Commissioners, vagrant politicians, Treasury Agents, Jew sutlers, and smugglers; nevertheless, soldiers were there, and sailors; and a true official history cannot ignore them, unimportant as they are.

The Colonel, great, genial, and jovial, — the mellow-hearted, double-breasted Colonel. Two Majors; a handsome fellow from Washington, to whom the ladies never say nay; but the lightest rustle of his name brings a neigh from every horse within hearing. The other Major, a great-brained, clear-headed, big-footed man. When he was made, somebody spread himself. *God made a man that time.*

Not that He ever does anything else when He puts His own hand to the job; but if anybody thinks every individual of the order *Bimana* to be divinely created, he is mistaken.

Who do you suppose made the TEA SEAS?

I know who did not.

In the conclave sat "The Captain," a bearish-looking fellow, with a very bare head. Like Elisha, the bear is his guardian-angel and avenger; he descended, doubtless, from that prophet, or some other of the ancient Seers, — double-fisted man, given to making friends and enemies.

A sailor-man! — tarry fellow; brave, gentle, generous. A chap that swings round big ships and walks off with locomotives; man worth knowing — a mighty human fellow — a free-man.

These sat in council, pondering "how to do it."

"I think," said the Captain, "the best thing you can do is to dump the whole cussed State into O-kee-cho-bee, and annex that lake to the Gulf of Mexico."

"That is not in the orders, Captain," said Major Brooks.

"Orders be —," something I did n't catch, from the sailor. The Major thought he was engaged in prayer. I did not, however; sitting where he did, in a dark, retired corner, I could n't see the expression of his face, but I thought he said "damn," or words to that effect.

"We must take the State," said the Major; "that's the order."

"Brooks," said the Captain, "I'd like to see you on the return trip; if there be any truth in Shakespeare, I think your boots will contain a large library of light literature."

"Captain," says the Major, "you're a mighty bright fellow; if your manners were like the top of your head, you'd be a gentleman of elegant polish; in fact, Captain, if the inside of that capital shone like the outside, you'd be a wit."

("Major, you're heavy.")

"Gentlemen," says Major Hay, "do you remember what the Governor of Georgia said to the Governor of Florida at such a time as this?"

"No, Major — what was it?" inquired the Colonel.

"Governor," said he, "'t is a long time between drinks!"

What do you suppose the Colonel said? Not a word. But he went and did what he always does.

However, that's none of your business.

Who said it was?

Who cares what these soldiers and sailors said to

each other? They planned, and the next day carried into execution their plan, for the

IV. INVASION.

NASSAU COUNTY was inundated by a force of three hundred Pennsylvania Yankees.

The order of battle, which they didn't fight, I have chosen to call the Modern Vernacular, (wormy,) and is not described in any work on tactics that I have yet perused, but is nearly as follows:—

The right of the column resting under an aged oak on the flank of Camp Cooper, the left on Amelia Island, nine miles distant: the column was in the form of those zigzag approaches by which Fort Wagner was gained.

This order was designed and adopted as being a favorite with the commanding General of the Department, and best adapted to the phlegm of the heavy infantry of Pennsylvania.

The charge was brilliant and successful,—the enemy's fire having been silenced a week previous to our arrival by an order of the Rebel General to change camp!

Our troops captured a chicken, a box of blue pills, six cur pups, and two cats, together with an old woman of notorious fame; then filed to the left and countermarched in good order towards home; it being stated, on excellent authority, that the entire force of three hundred men reached Fernandina in two hundred and ninety-nine detachments.

The reputation of the old woman being made known to the Major commanding, he directed that she be entered on the return as "abandoned;" to be turned over by the Quartermaster to Browne (spell it with an E). *So she was turned over.*

On the return march, a loyal Rebel was found with a house full of fixed ammunition and fowling-pieces.

The individual professing to be their owner told us how many "cussid Yankees" they had killed, and how bravely they had been handled.

Receiving this statement as a tribute to the bravery of our Southern brethren, who are still Americans, although for a time alienated, we declared that he must not be molested. A general order was at once promulgated, and a file of men set for his protection. Meantime Stickney was sent for, who addressed him:—

"My Southern brethren," said he, "I'm glad to see you once more under that old banner."

"It does look old," said Cornfed.

"Under those Stars and them Stripes; if there's one thing more'n another does me good, it's that. To see my old feller-citizens of Floridy, in all the conglomerate constellation of glory a-burning in his and any other man or corner of the world, and take the liberal and magnanimous Amnesty Procla—"

"See here, stranger," said Cornfed; "if you've got anything to drink, let's have it."

"My friend, with pleasure." Stickney brought

a bottle from his coat-tail and extended it to the loyal Rebel. "Take the oath," said he.

"Take a drink, furst, stranger," said Cornfed, shutting his right eye, and proceeded to empty the bottle, after which he laid down on his door-step.

"Now, my friend," said Stickney, "here 's a proclamation — arise, and let me administer the oath."

"Damned if I do," said Cornfed.

"Gentlemen," says Stickney, "this poor benighted man has been misled by his rulers, and does not yet comprehend nor appreciate the benignant influences of the benignant and glorious administration under which we live under and benignant and — and"

"By the right flank, march!" commanded the Major, leaving Stickney to secure the vote on the door-step.

There being nothing in the country worth stealing, Allsop was directed to return to the bosom of his TEA SEAS.

The official report of the Major commanding is not yet ready for publication. It is delayed by the Engineer officer, who was last seen engaged in taking an astronomical observation through the bottom of a glass; this observation being completed with some drafting, to ascertain the latitude of the right flank. I have understood the Engineer has been heard to remark that the latitude of the movement was considerable.

There can be no doubt of the accuracy of the

observation, as the astronomer was assisted by the field and staff.

V. CONCLUSION.

TREASURY Agents and Tax Commissioners, keep your tempers! You are as good as any of that accursed tribe that has been hanging on the skirts of the Capital during the last twenty-four months.

Hungry dogs all! looking for bones; you quarrel together when a bone is thrown to you, and have no conscience about stealing from your masters.

If Potter doesn't set you straight when he comes down, I'm mistaken in the man. 'Tis my opinion Stickney can't honey-fugle him.

Would you know who is Captain Le Diable? Let me tell you. *He is ninety-nine out of every hundred honest men in this Department.*

Yes! TEA SEAS, ask any officer with whom you may be acquainted what is his opinion of the agents of Mr. Chase, and if he tells you what he truly believes, you'll cut his acquaintance. This is no reflection on Mr. Chase; it is his misfortune to have selected indiscreet and dishonest men.

There is n't a good man here that wants to associate with one of you.

That is the sum of the matter. If you provoke me sufficiently, I will hurry up the second volume. If I publish it, I'll make it glorious.

In the mean time, I subscribe myself the friend of honest men, but not of thieves.

CAPTAIN LE DIABLE.