

## CHAPTER IX.

### **THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE—THE ELECTION—THE MILITARY JOINS THE ISSUE.**

#### THE WISDOM OF THE CONVENTION.

Touching the work of the Convention, the *Intelligencer* of the 18th made this comment:

The Committee in their final report struck exactly the happy medium that always lies between two extremes, and accomplished, in our judgment, all that it was either prudent or possible for them to accomplish. Many of the members were firmly persuaded that an immediate severance of the loyal Northwest from the disloyal portions of the State was the only effectual way to stop the contagion of rebellion; in other words what the surgeons call a heroic policy. And this policy had some good reasons; but it had also its insuperable objections. \* \* \* The one crowning feature is the Central Committee that it provides for; and that committee has been made a power and a life by the kind of men who have been placed on it. All that could have been wisely accomplished by the Convention remaining in session for a month has been done in the resolutions and the organization of the Central Committee.

#### THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE EXHORT.

The Central Committee went vigorously to work to get into communication with the county organizations and prepare the machinery for bringing out the full anti-secession vote on the 23d. They printed in the newspapers on the 21st and scattered broadcast in pamphlet an address to the

people of Northwestern Virginia on the crisis. This document was more an exhortation than an argument. It conjured the people to enter at once upon the work of preparing their friends and neighbors for the stand to be taken against the usurpation at Richmond. They should not permit themselves to be dragged into a rebellion inaugurated by heartless and ambitious men banded together to destroy the government. Secession had been consummated in secret conclave by reckless men in contempt of the expressed will of the people; it meant bankruptcy, ruin, Civil War ending in military despotism. Business of every description was already paralyzed, all credit prostrate. Secession in a word was war. It had been preceded and precipitated by acts of war, and the war was now upon them. It was their first duty to repudiate the tyrannical rule the Richmond Convention was attempting to impose on them, and to resist the usurpation of the powers of the Commonwealth; and to make resistance available, they were urged to act in the spirit of the resolutions adopted by the May Convention and accompanying this address. The Convention to assemble June 11th was looked to to organize their action; and they should take immediate steps to be represented in that body by their most resolute, temperate and wisest men. It was no time to stop and count costs when self-preservation was in issue. If they hesitated all would be lost. The paper did not attempt to argue the question of secession, but simply recognized the emergency already upon them which must be met at once. It was written by Mr. Carlile, in his most fervid tone of appeal, adapted to the then excited state of popular feeling.

## AND THEN ARGUE.

Six days later, the committee issued another and more lengthy address, devoted chiefly to a discussion of the legality of secession; concerning which the popular apprehension was not then so clear as it became afterwards. As this matter has already been fully traversed in a preceding chapter, we will not follow the argument here, except to note that the committee laid emphasis on the fact that the Richmond Convention in their alliance with the Confederate States, without waiting for the ratification of the act of secession by the people of Virginia, had not only violated the terms of the act of Assembly under which the Convention had been brought together, but had violated also two articles of the Virginia bill of rights, one of which declared that "the people have a right to a uniform government, and therefore no government separate from or independent of the government of Virginia ought to be erected or established within the limits thereof." The Convention had undertaken to give the President of the Confederate States full and instant control of all power and operations, civil and military, in the Commonwealth. It had thus transferred to a foreign power, so far as force could accomplish it, control over even the suffrage of the people of Virginia, and could thus force the ratification of secession against their obvious will.

## THE MAY ELECTION.

The general elections, including the vote on ratifying the ordinance of secession, occurred on the 23d. In the immediate Northwest, the vote on the ordinance was

nearly all one way. In the four Panhandle counties the majority against ratification was 6,397; in Ohio County alone 3,300; in twenty-five counties 13,378. In the remoter southwestern counties the vote against ratification was light. It was dangerous to cast such a vote. The conditions in that region are illustrated by a statement made in the Constitutional Convention which sat in Wheeling in the winter of 1861-62, by Robert Hagar, member from Boone County. The Convention was discussing the manner of voting, by ballot or viva voce:

#### UNION VOTERS COERCED.

In my own county, said Mr. Hagar, from personal acquaintance with nearly all the people in the county, I am convinced that if the mode of voting had been by ballot there would have been 100 to 150 votes against ratifying the ordinance of secession. At the court-house, only one vote was so cast, and the man who cast it had great difficulty to get away with his life. It had been given out by the Secessionists before the election that any man who voted against secession should be hung forthwith. The Union men had agreed that some 40 or 50 of them would go to the polls at the court-house together and vote against ratification; but when they got there they found a drunkca secession mob and their hearts failed them. At Big Coal River, in Kanawha, in February the vote was nearly unanimous for the Union candidates. In May, fully one-third of it was for secession, through the influence of one of the leading Secessionists named William Thompson. At Chapmanville, in Logan County, only one man out of fifty Union men present had the courage to cast his vote, and he saved his life only by canceling the vote and having his name erased.

It will be recalled that Virginia's method of voting was viva voce. Mr. Hagar's statement shows how it operated to reduce the vote against the ratification of the ordinance even where there was no Confederate soldiery; so

that whatever the vote actually cast, there was a large suppression of it on one side, and the result was not an expression of the will of the people of Virginia even in the West. The secession authorities at Richmond gave out the entire vote against ratification as only 32,134, most of that cast in the Northwest—the only part of the State where the people were in any degree free to vote their sentiments.

In an address issued by the June Convention, after its adjournment over to August, is the following statement regarding the conduct of this election :

Threats of personal injury and other intimidations \* \* \* were used by the adherents of the conspirators in every county in the State. Judges charged the grand juries that opposition to disunion would be punished as treason against the Commonwealth; and the armed partisans of the conspirators in various places arrested, plundered and exiled peaceable citizens for no other crime than their adherence to the Union. \* \* \* We are not apprised by any official announcement of the vote taken under such circumstances; but whatever the result may be, we denounce it as unfair and unjust and as affording no evidence of the will of the people on the subject actually presented for their suffrages, and much less of their consent to their transfer to the self-constituted oligarchy of the South. \* \* \* The men justly termed conspirators and usurpers because they cannot show you warrant for their acts, were when this Convention met practically in full possession of their branch of the government, and still claim the right to exercise their usurped powers.

#### THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS.

Congressmen were voted for in the two districts in the Northwest, despite the order of the Richmond Convention forbidding it. In Ohio County, one Alexander M. Jacob, one of the justices of the county court, entered a protest

against the action of the court in ordering books to be opened for the election of congressmen. Therein it must be admitted Mr. Jacob showed courage in adhering to the Southern Confederacy in the face of the very large adverse majority around him; and this we are at liberty to admire in the abstract, whatever we may think of his patriotism or his judgment.

#### SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY ARRIVES.

On the day of the election Confederate troops to the number of about one thousand arrived at Webster from the South on their way to Grafton to rendezvous—"to defend the place," one of them said to a Wheeling gentleman who was at Webster, "against Northern aggression." Already there was a force of two hundred at Fetterman, including William P. Thompson's "Marion Guards;" and there in the evening of May 22d was shed probably

#### THE FIRST BLOOD OF THE REBELLION.

About 9 P. M., T. Bailey Brown was killed by W. S. Knight. Knight was one of the Confederate pickets stationed on the line of the railroad at the eastern end of the town. Brown, in company with Daniel Wilson, who afterwards became a captain in Colonel Latham's regiment, was returning from Pruntytown, where they had been organizing a Union company. They were commanded by the picket to halt, and thereupon ensued a dispute; and Brown, drawing his revolver, fired at the sentry and slipped his ear. Knight, who had an old-fashioned smooth-bore musket loaded with slugs, returned the fire. One of

the slugs pierced Brown's heart and killed him instantly. Wilson turned and ran; and, not unlike Achilles, received a shot in the heel of his boot.

Ellsworth was killed at Alexandria early on the morning of the 24th; so that Brown's death preceded his by some thirty hours.

#### CONFEDERATES OCCUPY GRAFTON.

Sunday morning, May 26th, the troops at Fetterman moved up to Grafton, concurrently with the arrival of the troops coming from the South; and they took possession of the town, driving people out of their houses in some cases to make billet for themselves. The Southern soldiers were from Augusta, Fauquier, Pocahontas, Highland and Barbour Counties.

#### UNION TROOPS GO FORWARD.

On the morning of May 27th, part of a regiment which had been organizing at Camp Carlile, on Wheeling Island, under command of Col. B. F. Kelley, took cars at the Baltimore & Ohio station for Grafton; and at noon the Sixteenth Ohio crossed the river at Benwood, and during the afternoon proceeded eastward for the same destination. About the same time, Ohio and Indiana troops left Parkersburg for Grafton; but on both lines of road the troops were stopped and delayed by the burning of the railroad bridges by resident Secessionists. Thursday, 30th, the advance of Kelley's force reached Grafton to the great joy of the inhabitants. The Confederate occu-

pation had lasted only two days, but it was enough to give the town a keen appreciation of Southern rule, which they were destined never to enjoy again.

#### CONFEDERATES DO NOT WAIT.

The Confederates stood not on the order of their going when they got warning of the advance of Union troops from two directions. The burning of the railroad bridges by their friends had given them ample time to secure their retreat. Nevertheless, they seem to have been in some haste to depart. The register of the railroad hotel bore the names of a number of prominent Western Virginian Secessionists, opposite some of which the landlord had penciled "Not paid," among them "W. P. Thompson, Provisional Army." Thompson died in New York a year or so ago reputed worth twenty million dollars. One cannot but wonder whether he ever settled that hotel bill.

#### GENERAL M'CLELLAN PROCLAIMS.

On the morning of the 27th appeared in the public prints two proclamations from General McClellan, in command of the military department, issued from Cincinnati, one addressed to "the Union men of Western Virginia;" the other to the troops under his command, ordering them to "Cross the frontier and enter the soil of Virginia." In view of developments in 1862, when it appeared that instead of being a great general McClellan was only a Democratic politician, paralyzing the largest army the United States had in the field while its commander instructed President Lincoln how to manage the

political administration of the war,—seeking to promote his chance of being elected President by the “peace-at-any-price” party in the North—one cannot but note the peculiar phrasing of this proclamation. There were no “frontiers” in the United States except where our territory bordered Canada and Mexico. The boundaries between States were no more frontiers than those between counties and townships. Had General McClellan already accepted the theory that the Southern Confederacy was a foreign power and Virginia a part of it? The soil of Virginia was simply the soil of a subordinate division of the United States. The Young Napoleon, like many others, had not at that time perhaps realized this truth.

The concentration of Union troops at Grafton, the rout of Porterfield at Phillippa, the summer campaign under Rosencranz which followed—the killing of Garnett and the expulsion of his army from the Northwest—are part of the military history of the time.

#### COMEDY AT FAIRMONT.

The scenes attending the advance of the troops under Kelley over the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, as described in the local prints of the time, make entertaining reading. At Fairmont, especially, which was the home of several active and influential Secessionists, who had been threatening their Union neighbors, the consternation was ludicrous. Dr. Zadok Kidwell, the politician; James Neeson, lawyer; Jonathan Haymond, merchant; Alpheus F. Haymond, lawyer and member of the Richmond Convention; Drinkard, editor of the secession paper (the *Virginian*),

and McDonald, his jolly old Irish assistant,—all ran away in most undignified haste, confessing thereby their consciousness of guilt and casting their fortunes with the Confederacy. Neeson was captured by Burdett's friends at Pruntytown, but released by a troop of rebel cavalry fleeing from Grafton; before whom, in turn, Burdett had to run away from Pruntytown and make his way to Grafton for haven. Alph Haymond's part in the exodus may have been due to his anxiety to get back to Richmond to look after Western interests in the matter of ad valorem taxation! After the war he came back, a returning prodigal who had been consorting with the swine of the Confederacy, and throwing himself upon the magnanimity of the West Virginia Legislature was allowed to resume his old place at the bar; and although he had declared in some of his penitent letters to members of the Legislature that he would never seek public position again, he became under the ex-Confederate regime, which came in ten years later, a judge of the State Supreme Court.

Concerning the hegira at Fairmont, the *Intelligencer*, summarizing the reports of its correspondents, said editorially:

Poor Kidwell almost went off in the costume of the Georgia major, viz: "a pair of specs and a pair of spurs." He even left his trunk in the street after he had got in his buggy. And the way he got through his stable into the alley! It was too bad. We cannot tell all a correspondent has told us.

As for Neeson, he left in the guise of a doctor; took a pair of saddle-bags with him and when stopped at one of the out-posts got through by his urgent professional representations. Somebody was at the point of death and Neeson was their family physician riding post-haste to their relief. When last

heard from he had been arrested at Pruntytown by the Union men but was likely to get away again through the appearance of some secession forces.

Alph Haymond left neither in a buggy nor went off on horse back. He took a few clean shirts, stuffed them in a carpet bag and struck out across a cornfield at a fast gait.

#### A COLLISION AT CLARKSBURG.

An incident at Clarksburg, as illustrative of conditions just before this movement of troops, may be put down here. It is related that at that place on the 20th of May some sixty or seventy recruits for the Confederate army to rendezvous at Grafton, marched into town from Romine's and other neighborhoods. They were armed with squirrel rifles. They united and marched through the streets, making a rather formidable appearance to unaccustomed eyes. They were under command of Uriel M. Turner, a brother-in-law of Col. Ben. Wilson; Norval Lewis, brother of Hon. Charles S. Lewis; Hugh H. Lee, son of Judge George H. Lee, and William P. Cooper, editor of *Cooper's Clarksburg Register*. The Union men of the town were not dismayed. They rang the tocsin with the court-house bell, and in a few minutes the two Union companies under Capt. A. C. Moore and Capt. John C. Vance formed in line, with what guns they could lay hands on, ready for action. The display they made frightened the rebel recruits, who withdrew and sent word that if not attacked they would surrender their arms. The proposal was accepted, the arms surrendered, Union sentries posted to guard the town, and the unarmed recruits left for a more salubrious climate, which it is presumed they found at Grafton, Phillipa and farther South. This is the story as told by a correspondent at the time.

## THE RIGHTER TRAGEDY.

In the same connection may be related a tragic incident which occurred on the border of Marion and Harrison a month later, which has not found a place in the military records of the times. Peter B. Righter, a wealthy farmer and grazier, lived in a handsome residence on Koon's Run, some two miles from the West Fork of the Monongahela and four miles northeast from Shinnston. He was a hot Secessionist and made his place a rendezvous for the Secessionists in the surrounding country, among whom his son was organizing a company for the Confederate service. Some of the Union neighbors became alarmed at the numbers and demonstrations of these nightly gatherings, especially after the owner of an adjoining farm, Henry R. McCord, who afterwards became lieutenant in the Twelfth Union Regiment, had been shot at by some of them. Complaint was made to the Union commandant at Clarksburg. What happened there is described in a letter written from Shinnston June 22, 1861, to one of the Harrison County members in the June Convention then sitting at Wheeling:

Yesterday, a detachment under Captain Cable, of Company I, Twentieth Ohio, arrived here from Mannington via Hessville and Lumberport, at which places they took several prisoners. Shortly after nightfall, Cable detached a squad to go down to Righter's under guidance of two of our citizens. On arriving at Righter's house, Cable left his men in the yard and advanced to the door but could not get admittance. In a few moments a signal was heard at the back of the house and instantly seventy or eighty rebels who had been collected and concealed by Righter rushed around the corner of the house and fired on Cable and

his men, wounding one in the breast, another in the arm, and wounding John Nay (one of the guides) very badly in the groin. On this attack the troops fired and dispersed, leaving Nay and the man wounded in the breast lying on the ground. They were afterwards carried to the house of Nay's father about a half mile from Righter's. The man wounded in the arm is at your house; the one wounded in the breast has since died. The ball has been extracted from Nay's wound and it is thought he will recover.

Before daylight this morning, Cable despatched messengers to Clarksburg and went himself to Fairmont. He returned about noon to-day with about 250 men and went on to Righter's, great numbers of our citizens accompanying. They found the premises deserted. The troops entered the house and appropriated everything that they thought would be useful. Then they set fire to the house (which you know is one of the finest in this section of country), to the stables, barns and all the out-buildings, and they were consumed in one general conflagration. I was present and witnessed it. Then they took all the horses on the farm and several wagons and buggies, loaded the wounded men into them and moved to Mannington. \* \* \* One incident occurred at Righter's at the sacking of their premises which I must not omit. Our troops had prisoner one Banks Corbin. While they were guarding him, he being on horseback started off as if to escape. They commanded him to halt twice, but he paid no attention. They again told him to stop or they would shoot him from his horse. Instead of complying he put spurs to his horse and attempted to escape. The Captain ordered his men to fire. About a hundred obeyed, at least fifty balls striking him in the back and nearly cutting him in two. He fell from his horse lifeless, not knowing what hurt him.

Captain Cable subsequently published a statement of this affair. As explaining his reasons for destroying the house he says it showed "undoubted evidence of having been recently arranged for military purposes." Four of his men had been severely wounded, and he claims four

rebels were killed—three certain—and four to six wounded. The only property taken, he says, was beds, blankets and teams with which to remove the wounded.

#### AN EDITOR RETIRES.

On the 27th of May, the *Wheeling Union*, edited by Philip Henry Moore, who had kept standing at the head of his editorial columns this declaration of principles: "We owe obedience to the Federal government only because Virginia has commanded us to obey its laws; therefore whenever Virginia shall release us from this obligation, we will acknowledge the binding authority of that government no longer," ceased publication and the editor left for the South by river steamer. The time was opportune, in view of the mobilizing of the troops on Wheeling Island. The Unionists were far more tolerant than the Secessionists. If a Union paper with as strong a declaration on that side had attempted to maintain itself at Richmond, the editor would long before have been in prison if not murdered by a mob. But the time for tolerance of open rebellion was about at an end in the Northwest. The temperature of belligerence was rapidly rising, until the collision at Phillippa instantly fused all divergent thought and purpose on each side in the welding heat of war. Then came the instant recognition of the fact that the issue was joined; and the time for temporizing, or for toleration of differences on the deadly issue, was past.

The timely movement of troops to Grafton, the routing and driving out of the rebel forces gathered at Phillippa, the later defeat of Pegram at Rich Mountain, the pursuit

of Garnett's retreating army and the death of its commander at Cheat River, cleared the field for the Union men of the Northwest, and gave cohesion and vitality to their plans. From this time forward, the work of restoring civil government proceeded without apprehension and without a hitch. Never was the argument of force more opportunely applied, never with happier effect.