

HEAD QUARTERS, 1st MILITARY DISTRICT,
Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Charleston, August 24th. 1863.

My dear Mr. Hope,

You see my promises are not like that traditionaly pie-crust for lo! here is the letter. My time has been so entirely taken up by my duties since I reported here, that I have scarcely had time for writing to any one. However, I did not care to write until I had visited all the Batteries, & seen "the situation". The day after my arrival, I ran the gauntlet to Sumpter, the principal point of attack, & beheld ^{saw} one of the most interesting sights I ever beheld. The fire of 200 pdr. shot & shell was rather severe, but our boat was unhurt. It was one of three that ran over, & the other two were struck & sunk. The gunnery of the Yankees is superb. Nearly every shot takes effect, & "Sumpter" has been struck 2,500+ times. To give you an idea of the immense force of one of these 200 pdr. iron bolts, I was standing in "Sumpter" talking to the Ord. Officer, when hearing a louder noise than usual, I looked up, & after the fall of a mass of masonry, over came a 32 pdr. carriage & all, knocked entirely off the parapet down into the parade. Within the fortress it is a gallant sight: timbers are crashing, great arches of masonry falling, but the officers are seen coolly walking the parapet, & the men laughing, chatting, & singing, except when some poor fellow is brought by on a stretcher. The discipline is that of the regular army, & the officers the first gentlemen in Carolina. The flag was shot away, but the men rushed out, although in the line of fire, & quickly raised it again. The north & south faces were badly breached then, all the guns on them being dismounted or so disabled as to be unfit for service. The sea-face is, however, very little hurt. On yesterday evening, I ran over again, carrying dispatches to Col. Rhett. The fire was heavier than ever, but no one in our boat was hurt. The whole of the north facing is almost entirely gone. I think the whole north wall will fall either to-day or to-morrow, and there is scarcely a gun in the fortress that can harm the enemy. As my guns have not

arrived from Richmond, Genl. Ripley has placed me upon his staff as Actg. A. A. Genl., so, of course, I see & hear a great deal, which it won't do to talk about, except to you, "a gent'l'm as how talks very little". I have also visited Ft. Johnston, Shell Pt. Battery, Battery Gregg, & Battery Wagner. I saw Col. Keitt at the latter post, who inquired very particularly about you. This battery is the strongest position I have seen, but the enemy are 600 yds. in front, sapping & mining, pushing their parallels vigorously, & approaching slowly but surely. The fire upon this post is terrific, the "Ironsides", Monitors, & land Parrott batteries hammering away mercilessly all the time. Sumpter was meant to sweep the front of this work, but, of course, it has not been able to do anything. Nothing but an assault every night, at a terrible loss of life, can stop the enemy's working parties. It is my impression that "Sumpter" will fall by Sunday or Monday, & this will necessitate the evacuation of both "Gregg" & "Wagner", & the falling back to our second line of defence. The "Ironsides", Monitors will then probably try to run in, past "Moultrie", & "Johnston", & shell the city. As I have never before seen any "big" gun practice, it is, of course, very interesting for me to go over to our batteries & see our mortars & 10 in. Dahlgrens firing. We have no weight of metal, however, that can compare with that of the enemy. Getting "knocked over" by a shell is looked upon as very much a matter of course. We are all very hopeful of the final issue, & every one is for fighting the city to the last. The enormous (12 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.) Blakeley guns are to be brought here from Wilmington, having just run the blockade into that port, but on account of their immense weight, it will take some time to get them here. These guns are 13 ft. around the breech, 16 ft. long, & shoot a wrought-iron bolt weighing 800 lbs. The guns weigh 22 tons. There are only two of them, & a flat will have to be built to bring them

over the R.R.

So far, I find my position very agreeable, & the officers here are very kind to me in every way.

I have made the acquaintance of Timrod, who expressed himself highly gratified that you should have thought well of his prize poem. I find that he & I agree exactly as to Thompson's capacities. Poor fellow, he is the local editor of "The Mercury", the "res angustae domi" having compelled him to take the position.

Sumpter's flag has just been shot away for the sixth time, & the guns on the sea-face are badly used up, but the red-cross banner is floating now as proudly as ever from its shattered battlements. As Mr. Thomas Sayers would remark: "slightly disfigured, but still in the ring."

Genl. Ripley commands all the defences of Charleston, occupying the position of Major-General. He looks very much like "Count Fosco", except his face, which is as honest & hearty as an old Tom Brown's. I like to hear his bluff, jovial voice, as he gives his orders with the rapidity & accuracy of an old soldier. Beauregard looks very much worn, & the light in his eyes rather dim. I hope the fire is only sleeping, biding its time. . . . I think that, when we fall back to our second line, there will be a great battle fought on James' Island. We must hold that, we must whip them there, or Charleston must be lost. I am, however, very hopeful as to the final result. I send you Genl. Beauregard's order, in regard to the observance of to-day.

Direct, "Care of Genl. Ripley, Comdg. 1st. Mil. Dist."

God bless you, my dear friend, & keep you well & happy.

Sincerely & affectionately your friend,
W. Gordon McCabe.