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INTRODUCTION.

The story of the part taken by Vermont in the great civil strife of 1861-5, if it can be fully and fairly told, will need little garnish for its facts, in order to command attention and respect. It is the war record of a small and rural commonwealth, heavily drained of its able-bodied men by emigration, without large towns or floating population, and having thus much less than the average proportion of the material out of which modern armies are made—but which nevertheless sent to the war ten men for every one hundred of its population, and out of a total enrollment of thirty-seven thousand men liable to do military duty, stood credited at last with nearly thirty-four thousand volunteers. The Vermonters were eminently men of peace; but they won honorable distinction as soldiers. The history of the war cannot be written without frequent and honorable mention of them. A Vermont regiment was the first to throw up the sacred soil of Virginia into Union intrenchments. Vermont troops made the first assault upon a Confederate fortification. In almost every great battle fought in the succeeding years by the Army of the Potomac, Vermonters took an honorable part. In the turning point of the turning struggle of the war on the red and slippery slopes of Gettysburg, in the

dark jungle of the Wilderness, and in the final piercing of the defences of Richmond, they took a decisive part. Vermonters led the blue column which bore the stars and stripes through the blazing streets of the Confederate Capitol, in the closing scenes of the bloody drama, and Vermont soldiers were in motion upon the last charge of the war, at Appomattox, when it was arrested by the surrender of Lee. The war ended, and the enemies of the Union could point to the colors of no Vermont organization that had been yielded to them in action, while the troops of no other State could claim more rebel colors taken in battle, in proportion to their total numbers, than stood credited to the troops of Vermont. Vermont had more of her sons killed in battle than any other Northern State, and gave to the cause of the Union more lives lost from all causes than any other State.

It is the task of the writer of these pages to set down the portion of this noteworthy record which relates especially to the service of the Vermont troops in the field. As preliminary to this it will be well to note some connected facts which form a part of the general history of the States and of the period.

Chapter I.

North and South on the eve of War—The Early Days of 1861—Reluctance of the Vermonters to believe in the possibility of War—Governor Fairbanks's Apprehensions—A Warning from Governor Andrew—Salutes to the Union—Governor Fairbanks pledges the Support of Vermont to the Government.

To one who looks back to the events preceding the first call of President Lincoln for volunteers, nothing seems stranger than the unwillingness of the men of the Northern States to believe in the possibility of civil war. Leading men of the South had mediated and threatened secession for years. In furtherance of their purpose of rebellion, which as one of the chief actors in the secession of South Carolina avowed, "had been gathering head for thirty years, " the military spirit had been kept alive in the South, while it had languished and well nigh disappeared in the North. The most ominous signs of the coming trouble failed to alarm the people of the Northern States. The rumble of the wagons which took 130,000 stand of arms from the United States Arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts, on their way to Southern depots, had resounded day after day in the streets of that city, and no one had lifted voice or finger to stop the transfer. South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas adopted ordinances of secession, and their Senators and Representatives withdrew from the national Congress. Actual war was levied upon the United States Government by the seizure

of forts and arsenals by Southern State militiamen. A provisional Confederate Congress of the seceding States assembled, and a Confederate Government was organized-and still the people of Vermont, like those of other Northern States, believed that there was to be no fighting and did nothing to prepare for it. This inaction was not the apathy of fear or stupidity. It was owing rather to a devotion to the Union, so absolute that those who held it could not bring themselves to believe that any large share of the people of the United States did not share it; to a belief that the better impulses of the Southern masses would yet counteract the schemes of the traitors and hotheads among them; and in part also to the advice of optimists at Washington and elsewhere, who insisted that the storm was going to blow over, and deprecated all preparations and demonstrations looking towards forcible support of the national authority, as tending to stir up strife and defeat a peaceable solution of the difficulty.

At the opening of the year 1861, Erastus Fairbanks, of St. Johnsbury, was Governor of Vermont. A staid and stable citizen, a successful man of business, a dignified and courteous Christian gentleman, he was also an upright and faithful public servant and a true patriot. Levi Underwood, of Burlington, a leading lawyer, a man of marked independence and ability, was Lieutenant Governor; Solomon Foot and Jacob Collamer, trusted and honored by all, represented Vermont in the United States Senate; Justin S. Morrill, Eliakim P. Walton and Homer E. Royce, were her worthy representatives in the lower House of Congress.

The early days of 1861, were anxious days for public men, and evidence is not wanting that the authorities of Vermont appreciated to some extent the national emergency. On the 5th of January, 1861, Fairbanks wrote to Governor Buckingham of Connecticut as follows: "I am desirous to learn your views as to the expediency of legis-

lation in the Free States at the present time touching the affairs of the General Government and the action of certain Southern States. * * * Should the plans of the Secessionists in South Carolina and other cotton States be persevered in and culminate in the design to seize upon the National Capital, will it be prudent to delay a demonstration on the part of the Free States assuring the General Government of their united co-operation in putting down rebellion and sustaining the constitution and the dignity of the United States Government?" Before he had closed this letter he received a startling message from another New England governor, who had passed the point of doubt as to the designs of the secessionists, and reached the point of action.

John A. Andrew was inaugurated as Governor of Massachusetts, Saturday, January 5th, and that very evening he despatched messengers to the governors of the other New England States, bearing letters in which he informed them that he had information which satisfied him that the secessionists had determined to take Washington before the 4th of March, and perhaps within 30 days, and that he was about to put a portion of the Massachusetts militia in readiness for active service, and urged them to make similar preparation for defence of the National Capital. The messenger despatched to Governor Fairbanks was a Colonel Wardrop, of New Bedford, commanding the Third Regiment of Massachusetts Militia. He went first to Montpelier, supposing that he would find the Governor at the State Capital; arrived there Sunday morning, and thence drove across to St. Johnsbury, which town he reached that evening. He was a pretty leaky vessel to hold communications of such importance, and made little secret of his errand. The consequence was the appearance of paragraphs in the Montpelier, St. Johnsbury and New Bedford papers, announcing that Colonel Wardrop was the bearer of de-

spatches from Governor Andrew to the Governor of Vermont, urging the enlistment and equipment of the militia in anticipation of a requisition from the President. These reports caused no little stir, and it was deemed expedient to contradict them. A Boston paper accordingly denied that there was any truth in them. The denial was generally accepted, and the matter passed out of the public attention for the time being. The statements, however, were true.

Governor Andrew added, in his message to the governors, the suggestion that the 8th of January, being the anniversary of General Jackson's victory at New Orleans in 1815, should be made an occasion for demonstrations of loyalty by the firing of national salutes in the cities and larger towns. The idea of this came, as it is now known, from Hon. Charles Francis Adams, then a Representative of Massachusetts in Congress. The suggestion was adopted by Governor Fairbanks. He despatched telegrams and messengers to Montpelier, Burlington, St. Albans, Rutland, Brattleboro, Bennington, Woodstock, Windsor and other towns, in all or most of which, salutes of 100 guns were fired at noon of the 8th "in honor of the Union of States, and of Major Anderson, the gallant defender of the country's honor," whose occupation of Fort Sumter, two weeks previous, had been hailed throughout the North with the liveliest satisfaction as evidence of a determination to resist the surrender of Charleston harbor to the secessionists.

Governor Andrew's advice to convene the Legislature and equip the Vermont militia for active service, was more cautiously received. Governor Fairbanks at once wrote to the Vermont Senators and Representatives at Washington, announcing the information and advice he had received, and requesting their views upon the subject. He added that if the information was confirmed he should not hesitate to call a special session of the Legislature. But if the revolutionists had actually planned to take Washington, in his

opinion, they would not wait even thirty days, and he hoped that the Secretary of War and General Scott were preparing for the worst. He communicated also with Governor Morgan, of New York, and with some or all of the New England Governors, requesting their views upon the emergency, and suggesting concert of action in preparing for the contingency of a call for troops to defend the Capital.

To Governor Andrew he replied that he deemed it desirable that provisional measures be adopted by the legislatures of the Free States to resist the treasonable designs of the Secessionists; that he was waiting advice from the Representatives of Vermont in Congress, and that he should call a special session of the Vermont Legislature if it was recommended by them, or if the Governors of the New England States should concur in such action.

The information he received in reply to his letters proved to be of such a character that he did not deem it best to call the Legislature together in advance of a requisition from Washington. But he authorized the Vermont Senators to inform President Buchanan that he stood ready to respond to any requisition for troops, by calling into the service the uniformed militia of Vermont, and by accepting the services of volunteers to any extent needed.

The remaining days of the winter wore away, with accumulating evidence of the purpose of the South to divide the Union, with rising indignation on the part of the Vermonters without distinction of party, and stern resolve that the Union should not be divided; with abundant conscious and unconscious nerving of purpose to sustain the Government and flag; but with little open or actual preparation for fighting, and with a lingering hope that the dread alternative of war might yet be averted, growing fainter daily till it was blown to the winds by the hot breath of the guns that opened upon Sumter.