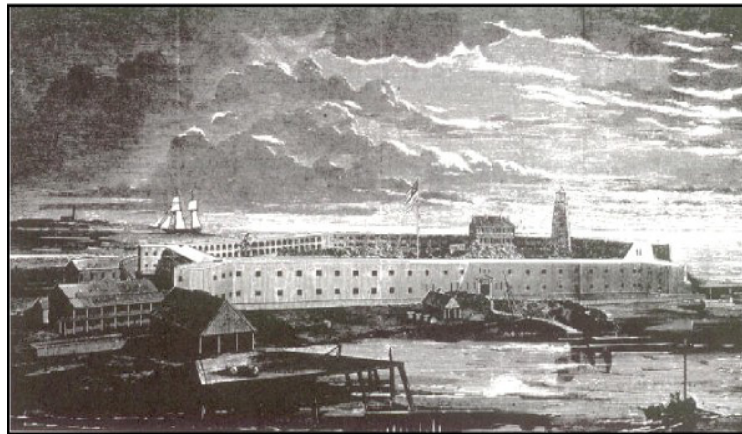


At the
Dry Tortugas
During the War
by **Emily Holder**



The great progress in modern scientific warfare within the last quarter of a century has made fort-building to our Engineer Corps a difficult problem. Discoveries in destructive power so keep pace with those of resistance that for humanity's sake we can but hope that the time may not be far distant when "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," and that just and righteous arbitration will be method of tranquilizing all national disturbances.

Among our coast defenses thirty-five or forty years ago Key West and Tortugas, Florida, were considered stations of sufficient importance for the establishment of elaborate fortifications.

They were the extreme points reaching out toward the Spanish possessions. In any case they would be useful as depots of supply for our navy; and a fort on one of these keys farthest from the mainland would prevent its occupation by a foreign force.

About the year 1847 Fort Jefferson was commenced under the charge of Captain Wright of the United States Engineer Corps, and in 1859 had assumed a formidable



appearance as it rose, apparently, directly from the sea to a height of nearly sixty feet, and after the towers at each bastion were completed presented a castellated and picturesque appearance.

This great work gave employment to some two or three hundred workmen, mostly slaves, whose masters lived in Key West, sixty miles away. So large a force naturally necessitated a resident physician. Doctor Whitehurst, who held the appointment for several years, resigned in the summer of this year.

Professor Agassiz had visited Tortugas the preceding winter, returning very enthusiastic over the coral and other marine forms; and those in authority had consented that the succeeding physician should be chosen with reference to biological science.

Professor Baird of the Smithsonian Institution knowing all this and also that my husband combined both qualities of surgeon and naturalist, it was through this influence that the position was tendered him and accepted in the autumn of 1859.

It seems strange to refer to letters that say the trip from New York to Washington was the most tiresome part of the journey, taking from six o'clock at night until six the next morning, with so many changes that the attempt to sleep was only an aggravation-when now the comforts and luxury in traveling simply depend upon the length of one's purse.

From there to Charleston the trip was slow but sure,-literally for the accommodation of every one. I remember the train stopping one day in the woods without any apparent cause. After a while people began to question the reason of the delay, when an old couple were seen coming through the woods putting on their wraps as they came. When they were assisted aboard, the train started on as leisurely as though time was of little value; we had evidently left hurry and bustle behind.

While in Charleston, although it impressed as having a general air of dilapidation,-its moldy walls, uneven sidewalks, and a want of thrift even in the better part of the city,-yet with it all we felt that the people found more enjoyment in life than we in the North with all our hurry and energy.

Taking the Isabel, the Havana steamer, we reached Key West in the evening a few days later, finding the mail schooner Tortugas waiting to convey us to Fort Jefferson, or Tortugas; so we saw nothing of the town, only as we steamed into the wharf; yet it gave us a most pleasant impression,-the lights glimmering through the cocoanut trees, the white sand, glimpses of the houses half hidden in the foliage, and the brilliant moonlight throwing a fairy-like glamor over all, making a picture never to be forgotten.



One night took us to Fort Jefferson, that in time became known as the famous Dry Tortugas; and our first view in the early morning as we sailed in through the winding channel was surely suggestive of a prison. Over the top of the fort we caught sight of trees and the roof of a building with a tall, white lighthouse towering over all. The little keys that we had passed, some pure white, others with a few trees and shrubs, took away something of the isolated feeling.

Three miles away stretched out the largest of all these islands except the one on which the fort was built, on which was another larger lighthouse. The exterior of the fort was bare and repulsive, the interior offering a decided contrast.

Here were trees of the deep green belonging to tropical vegetation, so restful to the eye in the glaring sun; and as the walls inclosed about thirteen acres, and water could not be seen, I instinctively lost the feeling of being so far from the mainland.

The walk, hard as cement and white as snow, partly shaded by the evergreen trees, led past the lighthouse and cottage of the keeper to the opposite side of the fort, where we were taken into a large, cool and pleasant house, and given a warm welcome by Captain Woodbury and his charming wife and family, who soon made us feel that a home does not depend upon locality, but in the hearts of the people.

It had been very difficult in our hurried departure from home to learn just what was necessary for living in such an out-of-the-way place; and, as we only looked forward to a stay of one winter, we took nothing for housekeeping purposes, thinking that we should probably board at some hotel perhaps-suggestive of the idea we had of the Dry Tortugas.

We soon concluded that, however primitive it might be, a home of our own would be preferable, so went shopping at the one store outside the walls. The winds had blown up sand until there was an acre perhaps stretched along the moat outside the seawall; and on this atom of land was the store, mess-hall for the workmen, carpenter-shop and a long building where the men slept, and further along the edge of the sand stood the Engineer Hospital, where it was always cool and breezy.

The store was for the accommodation of the men, and contained a medley of things. Here we bought a stove and enough of the necessities to start our primitive housekeeping.

We had some tables made by the island carpenter, a bedstead, also a rocking-chair, that must be in existence now judging from its strength and durability. There was always a mystery about its rocking power, which my kindly feeling for the carpenter prevented questioning. It was not a frisky piece of furniture that made one feel in danger of tipping



over, but tall, staid and dignified, requiring some effort to tilt it. The length of the rockers suggested the long swing of a hammock, so that one started off with anticipation of a restful enjoyment; but these anticipations were soon dispelled by its little tilt forward and very sudden termination of the backward swing, causing the occupant to look around for the obstruction, when, seeing nothing, the impetus would be given again with a little more energy. After several such unsuccessful attempts we came to the conclusion that it was its own peculiar way of rocking; and the mystery was never solved why such a wonderful length of rockers produced so few rocks; but we managed to obtain unqualified comfort from it, and some quiet amusement when strangers attempted it.

We finally began housekeeping with an old colored woman as cook and a boy as waiter. The former was a character, a slave of a Mrs. Fogarty, who kept the mess-hall and who loaned her to me until my cook, a certain Aunt Rachel, could come from her master at Key West.

The latter was evidently held in great veneration by the colored people; and I was considered very fortunate in securing her. She was a famous cook and the wife of Bill King, the cook of the schooner *Tortugas*.

Aunt Eliza was so black that in the dark I could see nothing but the whites of her eyes, under a huge yellow turban from which two little black braids the size of pipestems stood at right angles behind each ear, from which hung enormous gilt hoops. Her front teeth had long since disappeared; and I found that the strong odor of a pipe, which, she said, came from Jack's smoking in the kitchen, was from her own, which I found in all sorts of improper and inconceivable places.

She stooped so that I asked her the cause when she replied: 'Why, honey, dat's from workin' in de cotton field. I'se so ugly dey couldn't keep me in de house; and after Mr. Phillips (the overseer) bought my gal Clarssy I dun took on so, and was dat bad, my master glad nuf to sell me down yer.'

But I said where was your husband? "Oh, I lef him and got Jack." Jack was a good-looking colored boy about thirty, while she confessed to fifty. He was one of the workmen owned in Key West, and lived with Aunt Eliza over our kitchen, which was a separate house with a chamber over in the rear of the larger one. She showed none of her ugliness to me, but one day I heard on outcry and ran to the dining-room window just in time to see Jack flying out of the back gate, with Aunt Eliza in close pursuit swinging an axe, threatening to "split his head open if he ever came there again."



I called her in to remonstrate, and at first she said she really meant it, but after awhile confessed she did it to frighten him, as he was so lazy he would not wait upon her. "I'se boss, Missus," was her explanation.

For several days she had supreme control of the kitchen, with little Lewis, and smoked her pipe in peace; then she asked me if Jack might come back; she was lonesome. I consented upon the condition that if there were any more disturbances he must stay away entirely.

She evidently wanted to please, and was anxious to remain in my service; yet without being openly disloyal to Aunt Rachel, she never lost an opportunity to give a good reason for her delay in coming.

The fort on the inside showed long stretches on each curtain of arches, making pleasant places for walking, cool and shady; and in the moonlight the effect was really beautiful. Looking not unlike some grand old ruin with its lights and shadows, one could invest it with all sorts of romance. Cooper laid the scene of "Jack Tier" here, in a cottage by the lighthouse which had given place to the one now standing.

The seawall around the moat was our favorite walk, making nearly a mile. The atmosphere was so clear that the space between the sky and the earth seemed interminable. The sun was dazzling in its brightness.

The wind coming in through the embrasures kept the shiny leaves of the mangrove constantly quivering; and the rattling among the cocoanut branches sounded not unlike gentle rain. Outside the deep blue water was covered with whitecaps, which broke into waves wherever the coral approached the surface.

Such was our winter weather, except when a norther came scurrying over the gulf; then, as the children say, we played that it was cold, and built a fire in one of the big fireplaces, listened to the wind blowing the sand against the windows, and said, "Doesn't that sound like snow?"

The northers lasted three or four days; then we would have another two or three weeks of lovely summer days again, and my husband would spend part of each day collecting specimens. He had built on the water's edge a little house with a wall extending fifteen feet square out into the water, so that it flowed in and out through the interstices; and here he kept all kinds of specimens and watched their growth and development.

It was most interesting even to those who did not claim to be naturalists; and, as all our outside pleasures were necessarily aquatic, one learned without an effort from



the familiarity of natural objects; and as our resources were necessarily limited we took advantage of everything that presented itself, and so found amusement and entertainment.

On Sundays Captain Woodbury; who with his family were Episcopalians, read the lessons and afterwards a sermon. Mrs. Woodbury had organized a choir, some among the white workmen, in fact any one who could sing; and everybody was invited to attend the service; oftentimes filling the large parlor.

Rowing and trips to the adjacent keys for shells, especially after a norther, were our frequent pastimes.

The water was so clear we could distinguish objects clearly at the depths of sixty feet; and it was like rowing over a garden when it was calm, to drift along watching the fish darting in and out among the huge heads of coral, and sea-fans that gently waved back and forth in the current.

Often there would be large schools of harmless sharks close in shore. As there were acres of shoal water only a few feet deep, where all this could be seen, and as there were always boats ready we went rowing or sailing as the people on the mainland went to drive.

The event of this first winter was a visit to Key West, which, in its palmiest days, was a lovely place with charming society, though the war cloud changed it utterly and hopelessly later on.

We arrived at night, going to the hotel, but before breakfast the next morning, Captain Curtis, to whom we had letters of introduction, came and took us to his lovely home sheltered in a grove of cocoanut trees. It seemed a bit of fairy land, so purely tropical was it with all the luxury and taste of a Northern home. I shall never forget the first impression it made upon me.

We were given the quaintest, cosiest little house they called the cabin to sleep in; it was in the yard, embowered in trees and flowering shrubs, and was really a ship's cabin taken from a wreck, brought there and arranged as a guest-room, or two rooms rather, and a dressing room, with a little piazza in front. The very romance of the surroundings kept me awake listening to the gentle sound of the wind among the trees, when to add to all this we were suddenly roused by a serenade of stringed instruments, sweet and soft, carrying out the fairy idea of it all.

The next day we dined at Fort Taylor, meeting Captain Hunt and Professor Trowbridge. The former was the engineer in charge,—a most agreeable gentleman, full of life and good humor. His wife, who after his sad death became the famous author “H.H.,”



was in the North. I remember Captain Hunt took us to ride in a huge carriage drawn by a very small mule that was wise enough to understand that, when the whip dropped through the drawbridge, he was master of the situation; and nothing short of the prods of the Captain's umbrella, after a cane had been sacrificed, would arouse him to a sense of duty; but he carried us safely to all the points of interest.

The following night a party was given us at the fort, where we met many delightful people,-Judge Marvin, Judge Douglass, the officers of the steamship Corwin, and a number who were to leave the next day; and as Captain Hunt was to return with us on a visit at Captain Woodbury's, and Judge Douglass and Professor Trowbridge were going to Havana, we were invited to go down on the steamer Corwin with them.

My memories of Key West, as it was then, are delightful, standing out clear and bright; every one was happy and contented in their island home.

So many names come into my mind as I write;-Mr. Herrick, the rector and his hospitable wife, the Bethels, the Browns, who had the most beautiful house on the island, and many others who showed us many kinds of attentions.

Judge Douglass was an inimitable story-teller; and it was a merry party that reluctantly separated at eleven, when the steamer reached the entrance of Tortugas harbor on the return, sending us ashore in a cutter in charge of an officer, a son of Bishop Odenhemier of New Jersey.

Captain Hunt remained a week, and Mrs. Woodbury gave a dinner party for him; and, finally, two days before he left, I extended the same hospitality, wondering if he would notice the similarity in china and table equipment, for our "things" were yet en route; even the chairs had not reached Key West.

Calling in Sophy Benners, the chief cook of the island, who belonged to the lighthouse keeper, and deposing old Eliza, who looked rather mournful over the downfall, we planned a dinner that must have been a surprise; there were fruits and flowers and borrowed china, even to the chairs, which I feared encountered the guests going into the back door as they entered the front, as the hall passed through from front to rear.

My guests were kind enough to pronounce the dinner a success, and I enjoyed the novelty of the whole thing extremely, perhaps more than I should if my ingenuity had been less taxed.

A few days later Sophy Benners (for the slaves all took the name of their masters) and Peter Philor proposed entering the married state with more than ordinary pomp and



splendor. The master, Mr. Philor, lived in Key West, owning a large number of slaves who worked on the fort, there being four Johns alone, the last one always giving his name as “John de fofe, sah” in answer to the overseer’s call.

Peter had obtained permission from his master to marry Sophy, and so came to Captain Woodbury to ask if he would marry them. The latter replied, “Certainly, where are you going to be married?”

“In your parlor, sah,” said Peter. And we heard that Sophy had given out invitations to this effect:

“Sophy will be agreeable to her friends at seven o’clock in Captain Woodbury’s parlor; after dat comes de ball.”

Aunt Eliza soon came up to tell me what was going to happen, and I asked her if she was going to the ball.

“Sartinly, ma’am, and I must go and wash my skin, now I’s got de kettle on.”

The wedding was affair to be remembered. All the white people assembeled in the front parlor; and at the supreme moment the folding doors were thrown open, and the bridal party came forward: two bridesmaids all in white, and two groomsmen. The bride wore a white veil with flowers; and she married with a ring, her mistress giving her away (in theory only).

The boys (all black men were called boys) had had their hair braided for a week; and some of their heads were large enough to fill a bushel basket.

After the couple were pronounced man and wife they adjourned to the mess-hall, the guests following in about an hour, as every one had been formally invited.

We saw them dance a while; then they passed us cake and wine, and we started to go home, when some one said we ought to stay and see Aunt Eliza dance a jig; and to my amazement my old cook with a young man took the floor. She looked rather shy, saying, “de Lor’, I cyant dance;” but the music soon took possession of her poor old feet, and she gradually straightened up, swaying back and forth with the music, evidently forgetting everything else. She danced away I could scarcely believe that the jubilant figure was the old slave that groaned and grumbled about the little work demanded of her. She outdanced the boy and left him far behind. They are as a race music-loving; and I saw in a dark corner of the ballroom my incorrigible servant Lewis dancing all by himself happy as a king.

We learned that the colored people knew old Eliza’s gift and had coaxed her to come and dance a jig, with the promise that one of the boys should do all her scrubbing on



Friday; and we certainly came near being flooded the following day. He was as good as his word, as the house shone from top to bottom.

Old Eliza was such a character I cannot refrain from recounting some of her amusing, yet at the same time rather perplexing, acts.

The dignity of the cook was not easily adjusted, and rather overpowering, but she improved as time went on. In the early days of her new position, installed in a house the same as the cook of the commanding officer, she felt her importance and showed it, not unlike wiser and older people. Such differences vary only in degree; and in her case it was very amusing.

Fresh beef was a luxury only indulged in occasionally; but turtles were kept in the moat and killed whenever we wanted them.

As I was not accustomed to the methods of preparation in vogue on the reef, and not wishing to unnecessarily expose my ignorance, I concluded "that discretion was the better part of valor," and pretended to be very busy in the house, so that on those days Eliza was mistress of the kitchen.

The first time she prepared green turtle a very fine soup was served, followed by what she called turtle balls.

After dinner Eliza asked me how I liked it.

I replied very much, only the next time we would try it without onions.

They had brought me a quantity and I had told her to partly cook what was left, to be sure that it would keep.

The following afternoon she came upstairs and said, "What shall we hab for dinner, Missis?"

"Why, the turtle balls that were left yesterday," I replied, "and whatever vegetables we can get, with a pineapple tart."

She looked at me with a queer expression, finally bursting into an embarrassed laugh, and said, "De Lor', de Lor', how funny. Yo' 'spect to hab dem balls for dinner, and I and Jack and Lewis dun eat 'em all up las' night. De Lor', de Lor', I eat five, like to kill me, and Jack say he neber eat sech balls on dis yer key fore."

"But," I said, "you told me you did not like them, never ate them, and I gave you bacon for your dinner."

I suppose she saw a look of dismay on my face, for she stopped laughing and said:

"I'se sorry, Missis; I tout you didn't like 'em wid de onions, so we dun eat um. De Lor', want dey good."



“Well,” I said, as a dinner without meat seemed to be the prospect, “make an ochre soup and we will do without fresh meat to-day,” and she left me, as I thought, with rather a woebegone expression.

When the soup was served at dinner, the ochre was certainly not in sufficient quantity to warrant its name, and I said, “Why didn’t you put in more ochre?”

“Why,” she replied, with a toss of her head that endangered the foundation of the yellow turban, “want time, Missis, want time, guess ise made soup afore.”

“But ,” I said, “it would not take any longer to cook all you had than a few.”

Seeing there was no help for it, the confession very awkwardly followed, that they had eaten the ochres too.

I then learned that I must treat her like a child, giving her what she was to have, and telling her what to serve us.

I had learned that planning one’s meals at the Dry Tortugas depended, in a great measure, upon one’s wits and ingenuity.

The plan was to bring us fresh beef from the mainland once a month; but the best of intentions fail sometimes and our supply was no exception to that rule.

Time sped very rapidly notwithstanding our necessarily monotonous life, the greatest events of interest consisting of our mails; and the delight with which we hailed the sight of the mail schooner Tortugas over the top of the fort when we looked out in the morning never abated.

No orders of removal had yet arrived for Captain Woodbury, although they had spent four years there, so they decided to go North for the summer.

Our intercourse had been so delightful that the prospect of living there without them was appalling; for my husband had become so interested in his scientific labors he had planned to remain another year. Our household goods had arrived from the North some time before, so that the home began to look cheerful; yet Mrs. Woodbury’s piano and large family nearly always attracted us there in the evenings.

The mornings were devoted to lessons for the young folks, but the afternoons invariably found us on the water or wandering over some of the adjacent keys, where the boys became apt pupils in the study of natural objects.

Our evenings after the little folks were asleep we spent together, reading aloud or with music and conversation; and the peaceful, happy life we led I think was often, by all of us, looked back in the sorrowful years that followed, if not with longing, with great pleasure.



They were sad days before and after Captain Woodbury's family left, for it took some time to adjust ourselves to the loneliness that followed; and I never shall forget the peculiar sensation with which I watched the schooner *Tortugas* float away with them all one bright moonlight night, leaving us almost alone upon this sand bank on the borders of the great Gulf Stream. The Fourth of July of 1860 passed very quietly. Our greatest annoyances now were the delay of the mails and the scarcity of good things to eat. We wearied of canned food, and pined for fresh vegetables that were not. Even green grass to look at was a premium. Green turtles and fish we had in abundance, and, occasionally, a pig was killed; but we longed for more variety. The fowls were poor from not having the proper food, and coral sand did not answer as a substitute for gravel. We sent to Key West, sixty miles away, for any and all kinds of vegetables that Captain Wilson could find; but he returned with the word that there was nothing in Key West but a few onions, which were quoted at one dollar per small bunch.

We had excellent rainwater to drink, caught during the rainy season in large reservoirs. Ice was an unknown quantity on the Key and twenty cents a pound in Key West. If we had ordered it, and there had not been a stiff breeze, it would simply have resulted in our providing the boat's crew with ice water, and having the pleasure of paying for it; so we kept our drinking-water in porous jars called monkeys, which hung in the shade, keeping it sufficiently cool. The butter would have been benefited by ice if we could have kept it all the time, but to be frozen one day and dealt out with a spoon the next day would, in all probability, have had a bad effect upon it; so we kept it in as cool a place as we could find, and it was test of the temperature whether a knife or a spoon was placed by the side of the butter dish. It was usually a feast or a famine, and just at that date the latter state seemed to prevail.

The flour grew poor; the weevils shared it with us; we could see them flying in the air near the casemate where a quantity of flour was stored. We grew hungry for even some of the lean things of the land; but we did not lose our spirits or cheerfulness. The first of August a steamer arrived with our own private stores of canned fruits and vegetables from New York, and, better yet, with news of an appropriation for the forts, which meant more comforts in the way of livestock and new life generally.

The mail boat brought us bananas, fresh beans and, best of all, a box of good things from home; and to say that we were excited and happy rather proved that we were previously in much the same state Aunt Eliza complained of when I tried to hurry her,—"stagnated."



During August and September we had a succession of fearful thunderstorms that frightened me more than I cared to admit. They continued for nine days in succession. Even the old fishermen acknowledged them to be unusually severe. The thunder echoed and reverberated through the arches so that it seemed as though the whole fort was going to tumble down about our heads.

The heat was intense, and the mosquitoes distracting. As the Tortugas brought no mail, a month without letters was almost as trying as going without food. August found us in low spirits.

Finally the transport arrived; bringing us fresh beef, the first we had seen in four months; and, having some onions and potatoes, we feasted. The great delay was thus explained by Captain Wilson: he had purchased some fresh meat for the fort, and was all ready to sail when a squall came up without warning; and he was obliged to take it back to the butcher's ice-box and wait for the gale to subside. When it had spent itself he made another purchase; but the elements were in a capricious mood, and, fearing a calm would be as disastrous to his cargo as a gale, he again appealed to the butcher, who this time refused to take it back, and it was packed in ice, we reaping the benefit.

Aunt Eliza often spoke of "broiling her brains it was so hot." I now felt that it might almost be possible.

The rainstorms continued up to October, but more gently; yet to the north of us a number of wrecks were reported.

It did not take much to rouse the residents of the island to a state of excitement; and when the Tortugas came back one morning, after having started for Key West, with a deserted wreck in tow, a crowd soon assembled.

It was a sad sight. Both masts were gone, and there was a great hole in the side which had been stopped with the bedding. The rudder was gone, but they had made a temporary one which suggested that the crew had survived the worst of the gale and been taken off, which was the case, as we heard that a vessel from New Orleans, bound for Liverpool, picked them up and landed them in Havana.

There were fifteen on board the hapless craft, some women and children. The vessel was from Trinidad, bound for Cuba, loaded with fruits in glass jars, and wines, which were afterwards sold in Key West. Several dismantled vessels went into Key West that could not make our harbor. One that was spoken was out of water and provisions. They hoped to make Key West, but, as they did not, it was feared the vessel went down. The gales at that season were to



be dreaded as there was so little warning; and yet they did not call them hurricanes, which they were to all intents and purposes. Even Aunt Eliza began to tire of the Dry Tortugas.

She was evidently in a "low-down state," as she announced one day that she was, "De only one lef' of all her fambly."

Thinking she had heard some bad news, I asked, "Where are your brothers?"

"Oh," she replied, "dey is in Sabanna, but dey might as well be dead; I neber see um 'gin," and she would "not las' long herself. De rheumatiz got above my knees now." Then she would take her pipe and smoke until she was dizzy.

About the middle of October we had our first norther. The mercury fell from eighty-five to seventy-five degrees; and we all took heart as we inhaled the cool air.

Just before the norther a vessel drifted upon the reef off Loggerhead. Had the norther held off a few hours even, she might have been floated, as the wrecking-smacks were trying to lighten her; but there was no hope after that. She was driven up where the sharp coral crushed a hole in her; and the water was soon even outside and in.

There was rumor that the vessel was allowed to float upon the reef, which would account for the wreckers being so promptly on hand. Such things had been done; but no one felt positive enough to make such an assertion openly.

I was glad to have the hurricane season pass without a genuine one. As an example of the suddenness of the squalls, one day while we were at the dinner-table it grew suddenly dark; we rose, walked through the hall to look at the clouds, and before we could return to the foot of the stairs, half way from the front door, the squall struck the island with such violence that a chair, standing before a long window on the second floor, was blown across the room and a hall and half way down the stairs, and the rooms flooded with water, while it grew so dark that we had to light the lamps. No wonder we were glad to have the season for such performances over.

The irregularity of the mail was exasperating, as it was our only connection with the outer world; and to wait three weeks again for a letter or any news from the North made us almost desperate.

The last detention was caused by a disabled steamer at the mouth of the Mississippi River; for our mails came in various ways, there being no regular mail contact for Key West. The railroad was under water up the coast, so the mail was sent to Mobile to reach the New Orleans steamer. The schooner Tortugas waited a week for the mail, then started to come down without it, but sighting the steamer returned, even then being becalmed twenty-four hours in sight of Key West.



A rumor now reached us that Captain Woodbury was coming with Captain Meigs* by the next boat, which meant a change in the command.

We watched most anxiously for the boat, spending the afternoon on the ramparts with the glass; but the horizon showed nothing that came out of the regular course to New Orleans until nearly night, when we discovered the black topmasts of what we thought was the Tortugas; but it was so calm there was no hope of her reaching us for hours.

We could see the wreck away on the other side of the fort with its fleet of schooners looking like a harbor in the midst of the sea; but the darkness came on with the Tortugas scarcely any nearer. At ten o'clock there was no word, and by midnight we gave it up and went to bed, to be awakened by the watchman calling to the clerk of the office that mail was in. Of course sleep was out of the question until I knew of the arrivals, and how I should manage if the guests had arrived.

Captain Wilson had been ordered to have the flag at the peak if strangers were on board, but in the darkness we could not see. After a while one pair of feet only came into our hall; and we soon heard that there was no mail, that Captains Woodbury and Meigs would come on the next boat, also that the mail contract had been given to the Isabel, and that hereafter we could look forward to a regularity in the arrivals,-a great relief.

Disturbing political rumors that for the past six weeks had been in the air without giving us any special uneasiness seemed to increase; yet we gave them little thought, considering them as evidences of a strong party feeling, perhaps increased by the nomination and election of Lincoln.

Being surrounded by people of Southern sympathies, we heard little except their side of the question, and the one of appropriation for the forts. The latter was an all-important one to them, as, if it failed, there would be hundreds of slaves without employment,-a serious matter to slave-owners who had to feed and clothe them.

The next boat brought Captain Woodbury, Captain Meigs, his clerk, Dr. Gowland, and Mr. Howells as draughtsman.

Captain Meigs accompanied him to Key West, returning by the next boat, which also brought a friend and her maid, to make me a long-promised visit, and my husband's brother,-the latter a most delightful surprise. My new cook proved a treasure; and all this made quite a revolution, and for a few weeks I felt that civilization had overtaken us. My guest brought her beds for herself and her maid, needing them on the boat; so that they were provided for.



We enjoyed the bustle and commotion of people about us, and the return to some of the conventionalities of life, which so much time spent upon the water had interfered with. To add to the life infused by all this, a man-of-war, the Mohawk, Captain Craven,* came into the harbor. The following day I gave a dinner party of twelve covers to Captain Craven and his officers. With a market sixty miles away, one's wits did extra duty. But the dinner was apparently a success, if one could judge by the appearance of the guests; and to us, who had been so long deprived of society, it was a delightful occasion. The next day the gentlemen took the Tortugas and went fishing, and the following week was a gay one for all.

Threatening news came by the next boat. Sometimes when we heard Captains Meigs and Craven, who were so recently from the active world, discussing the state of feeling in the South, it made us a little apprehensive, but that soon passed away. The idea of a civil war seemed impossible.

A few weeks later it became so desolate at Tortugas that I accepted an invitation to visit Key West.

The climate here was perfection at that season of the year, with much less wind than we had at Tortugas; and it was a delight to go about the streets, into real stores, and to visit people after our seclusion for so many months.

During my visit Captain Craven arrived with two slave ships, captured off Havana, that had just started for Africa.

The following day came the election for candidates to attend the Secession Convention held in Tallahassee. The secessionists were victorious, and announced boldly that they would take Fort Taylor at Key West.

Rumor also said there was no money in the State treasury; that the Governor had taken it to send North for ammunition.

A rather decided secessionist told Captain Brannon, who was in command of the fort, that they would starve them out. His reply was that he could drop a ball into his house that would bring out all the provisions they wanted.

I wondered at the good feeling where so much spirit was displayed, and tried not to be drawn into any discussion, as I could not believe there would be anything more than a war of words.

The day before Christmas Mr. Philor placed his carriage at our service, and we drove to some gardens where all the trees and shrubs were new to us, a perfect tangle of tropical growth, even to a Banyan tree. Then we drove to the fort, which was the end of the drive



in that direction, and to the barracoons where the slaves were kept until they could be sent to Africa. Those here were taken by the U. S. S. Powhatan some months before. It was a sorrowful sight, and brought home the horrors of slavery more intensely than anything I had ever seen before.

Christmas was more like a Northern fourth of July in temperature and noise. We attended service in the morning, met numbers of our friends, and spent a most delightful day; and at night some of the officers of the Mohawk gave us a serenade that made a delightful ending to the holiday.

Captain Meigs stopped on his return from a trip to Havana, bringing the news of the secession of South Carolina, Captain Hunt joining him to talk over the outlook. It began to look cloudy at least; yet no one thought there would be a civil war.

The next Sunday a proclamation from the President was read in church “of a day for fasting and prayer” on account of national trouble and the prospect of a civil war.

The few remaining days of our visit were spent in returning the calls of the many pleasant people who had entertained us. There were so many delightful and homes it was sad to think what might result from the feeling that would show itself in spite of all courtesy.

Captain Meigs and my husband talked of a trip to Tampa, after which we were to return to Tortugas, as we had already remained away longer than we intended.

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