Fourth Federal Occupation

On January 13, 1864, President Lincoln wrote General Q. A. Gillmore (U. S. A.), commanding the Department of the South as follows: "I understand an effort is being made by some worthy gentlemen to reconstruct a loyal State government in Florida. I have given Mr. Hay a commission of major and sent him to you with some blank books and other blanks to aid in the reconstruction."

Elaborate plans were made, and an expedition of more than 20 vessels, gunboats and transports, carrying in the neighborhood of 7,000 troops, under the command of General T. Seymour, left Hilton Head, S. C., for Jacksonville before daybreak, February 6, 1864. This expedition arrived at the mouth of the St. Johns River early on the morning of the next day, crossed the bar and proceeded to Jacksonville. The transport Maple Leaf was the first vessel to reach the dock, and at 3:40 p. m. (7th) began landing troops. In a short time the other transports came up. There was a small Confederate picket, 20 men, in the town and they fired on the Hunter, one of the transports, and killed one man, but were immediately forced to retire by a cavalry company that had been hastily landed from the Maple Leaf. Later in the afternoon, the U. S. gunboat Norwich went up to McGirts Creek to capture the St. Marys, a river steamer being loaded with cotton consigned to Nassau, N. P. Finding himself hemmed in, the commander of the St. Marys sank his vessel in McGirts Creek, and two days later it fell into the hands of the Federals. There was considerable friction between the Federal army and navy officials as to who should claim the prize, the army or the navy; the official reports do not indicate how the question was settled.

In his official report, General Gillmore states that the object of this expedition to Florida was:

1. To procure an outlet for cotton, lumber, timber, turpentine and other products of the state of Florida.
2. To cut off one of the sources of supplies for the Confederates.
3. To obtain recruits for his colored regiments.
4. To inaugurate measures for the speedy restoration of the state to her allegiance.

For the purpose of carrying out these plans, the bulk of the Federal army set out on the afternoon and evening of