

The Diary of a Public Man. Unpublished Passages of the Secret History of the American Civil War. Part IV

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## IV.

# THE DIARY OF A PUBLIC MAN.

UNPUBLISHED PASSAGES OF THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE  
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

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### PART IV.

#### MAJOR ANDERSON AND FORT SUMTER.

*Washington, March 6th.*—To-day — came to see me, having come directly through from Montgomery, stopping only a day in Charleston on the way, where he saw and had a long conversation with Major Anderson, who is a connection by marriage of his wife, and with whom he has long been on terms of particular good will. He astonishes me by his statements, which I can not doubt, as to the real status of things at Fort Sumter. That Major Anderson transferred his garrison to Fort Sumter from Fort Moultrie of his own motion, on discretionary instructions received last winter from the War Department, he has no sort of question; and indeed his very particular account given to me of the circumstances attending the act of transfer is most interesting—so interesting that I have asked him and he has promised to write it out for me, as it is too long for me to set down here. He tells me Major Anderson has no expectation whatever of the reëstablishment of the Government over the seceded States, and that he intends to be governed in his own future course (military considerations and the question of subsistence of course apart) by the course of his own State of Kentucky. He does not sympathize at all with the States which have now seceded, but he thinks the provocation given them in the action and attitude of the Northern abolitionists an adequate provocation; and — assures me that in his opinion Major Anderson would unhesitatingly obey the orders of a Confederate Secretary of War were Kentucky to withdraw from the Union and join this new and

menacing organization. Fortunately, there seems no immediate likelihood of this, but it shows how much more perilous the situation is than I own I had allowed myself to think, and how mischievous in its effects has been the leaving open through all these years of the question of States rights, their exact limitations, and their relations to the Federal Government. — is convinced that Major Anderson would never have abandoned Fort Moultrie had he not thought wise to remove himself from a position in which he was liable to be commanded by the authorities of South Carolina, his determination being to retain the control of the position primarily in the interest of his own Commonwealth of Kentucky, so that Kentucky might in no way be committed by his action either for or against the retention of the forts in Charleston Harbor. I asked — to go with me and state these facts to Mr. Lincoln, pointing out to him their grave importance, and the decisive influence which an accurate knowledge of the feelings and disposition of Major Anderson might have upon the President's judgment of what may be expedient to be done in this most dangerous matter. His own conviction as to the quiet and positive character of Major Anderson, of whom he tells me that, though not a man of unusual abilities in any way, he is a very resolute and conscientious man, holding stubbornly to his own ideas of duty, I told him I was sure would weigh much more with the President than any representations on the subject coming through a third party possibly could. He was quite averse to doing this at first, but finally consented, on my urgent representations, to do so, and I have written a note this afternoon to the President, asking his permission to call on him about a public matter at some hour which may suit him to-morrow.

#### THE SECESSIONISTS AT MONTGOMERY.

Of the proceedings at Montgomery — gives me an account at once grotesque and saddening. He tells me that a sharp division is already showing itself in the councils of the secession leaders. Mr. Toombs has the wildest ideas of the immediate recognition by England and France of the new government, and insists that no concession shall be made to public opinion in those countries or in the North on the question of slavery. "Cotton is king" is in his mouth all the time. Mr. Memminger, the South Carolinian Secretary of the Treasury, — thinks much the ablest man they have there, and he takes a more business-like view of the situation, being of the opinion that, unless something is done to secure the seceded States under

their new nationality a solid basis of credit abroad, they will not be able to carry on the ordinary operations of a government for any great length of time. None of them anticipate hostilities, and I am glad to learn from — that the number of persons of any weight and credit among them, who are disposed so to press matters in any direction as to make hostilities probable, is very small. Even in Charleston — assures me there is a perfect good temper shown in all intercourse between the United States authorities and those who have the present direction of affairs there. At Montgomery — found the women much more violent and disposed to mischief than the men, many ladies almost openly expressing their wish to see the “Confederate flag” planted at Washington. It appears too, that of this same Confederate flag a number of models have been furnished by ladies. Copies of some of these — had brought on, and he exhibited them to me. Nothing can be imagined more childish and grotesque than most of them were. The abler men at Montgomery he tells me are urgent that the seceded States should claim the flag of the United States as their own, a proposition which I should suppose would be quite agreeable to Mr. Sumner and others who have not yet got over their disposition to denounce the Union as a “covenant with death and an agreement with hell.” I asked — what these people really mean to do or to attempt to do about patents, showing him some of my letters from home, which clearly indicate the trouble brewing in our part of the country on that very important subject. He could give me no reassuring views of the matter, but, on the contrary, led me to think that the seceded States will try to raise a revenue by exacting heavy sums of patentees for a recognition of their rights within the territory of those States. Such measures, like the adoption last week by their Congress of an act throwing open the coasting-trade of all the seceded States to the flags of all nations on equal terms, are too clearly aimed at the material interests and prosperity of the country not to arouse extreme and legitimate irritation. They are a sort of legislative war against the rest of the Union, which may lead, before we are well aware of it, into reprisals and warfare of a more sanguinary kind.

#### MR. SEWARD'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH VIRGINIA.

I asked — what information he brought as to the relations between the people at Montgomery and the border States, especially Virginia. He had no doubt, from what he heard there, that Virginia

will secede, and was apparently very much surprised when I gave him my reasons for believing that nothing of the sort was to be expected. When I told him, as, in view of his position relatively to the well-disposed people of the South and of his intention to see the President to-morrow, I thought it right to tell him, that a messenger—and a messenger enjoying the direct personal confidence of Mr. Seward—left Washington this morning for Richmond with positive assurances as to the intention of the new Administration that no attempt should be made either to reënforce or to hold Fort Sumter, he was greatly surprised, but was forced to admit that such a communication might greatly alter the aspect of things and strengthen the hands of the Union men in Virginia. He thought it would, if made known, produce a great effect even at Montgomery.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. LINCOLN.

*March 7th.*—Early this morning I received a message from the President, making an appointment for this afternoon. I called for — at his hotel and we drove to the White House. I could not help observing the disorderly appearance of the place, and the slovenly way in which the service was done. We were kept waiting but a few moments, however, and found Mr. Lincoln quite alone. He received us very kindly, but I was struck and pained by the haggard, worn look of his face, which scarcely left it during the whole time of our visit. I told the President, in a few words, why we had asked for this interview, and — then fully explained to him, as he had to me yesterday, the situation at Fort Sumter. It seemed to me that the information did not take the President entirely by surprise, though he asked — two or three times over whether he was quite sure about Major Anderson's ideas as to his duty, in case of any action by Kentucky; and, when — had repeated to him exactly what he had told me as to the language used to himself by Major Anderson, Mr. Lincoln sat quite silent for a little while in a sort of brooding way, and then, looking up, suddenly said: "Well, you say Major Anderson is a good man, and I have no doubt he is; but if he is right it will be a bad job for me if Kentucky secedes. When he goes out of Fort Sumter, I shall have to go out of the White House." We could not resist a laugh at this quaint way of putting the case, but the gloomy, care-worn look settled back very soon on the President's face, and he said little more except to ask — some questions about Montgomery, not I

thought of a very relevant or important kind, and we soon took our leave. He walked into the corridor with us; and, as he bade us good-by, and thanked — for what he had told him, he again brightened up for a moment and asked him in an abrupt kind of way, laying his hand as he spoke with a queer but not uncivil familiarity on his shoulder, "You haven't such a thing as a postmaster in your pocket, have you?" — stared at him in astonishment, and I thought a little in alarm, as if he suspected a sudden attack of insanity, when Mr. Lincoln went on: "You see it seems to me kind of unnatural that you shouldn't have at least a postmaster in your pocket. Everybody I've seen for days past has had foreign ministers, and collectors, and all kinds, and I thought you couldn't have got in here without having at least a postmaster get into your pocket!" We assured him he need have no concern on that point, and left the house, both of us, I think, feeling, as I certainly felt, more anxious and disturbed than when we entered it. Not one word had Mr. Lincoln said to throw any real light either on his own views of the situation or on the effect of —'s communication upon those views. But it was plain that he is deeply disturbed and puzzled by the problem of this wretched fort, to which circumstances are giving an importance so entirely disproportionate to its real significance, either political or military.

#### THE INVASION OF THE OFFICE-SEEKERS.

We sent away the carriage and walked home. — called my attention as we passed along to the strange and uncouth appearance of a great proportion of the people whom we encountered on our way or passed lounging about the steps of the Treasury Department and the lobbies of the hotels. I had not noticed it before, but certainly in all my long experience of Washington I have never seen such a swarm of uncouth beings. The clamor for offices is already quite extraordinary, and these poor people undoubtedly belong to the horde which has pressed in here to seek places under the new Administration, which neither has nor can hope to have places enough to satisfy one twentieth part of the number. After dinner I went in to see Mr. Seward, determined, if possible, to get some satisfactory statement as to the outlook of the immediate future from his point of view, and anxious also to ascertain what he knows, if he knows anything, either to confirm or to contradict the story of — as to Major Anderson and Fort Sumter.

## MR. SEWARD'S EXPECTATIONS OF A SETTLEMENT.

I found Mr. Seward in a lively, almost in a boisterous mood, but I soon induced him to take a more quiet and reasonable tone. I told him what — had told me of Major Anderson, and that I had taken — to see Mr. Lincoln. At this his countenance lighted up and he exclaimed, "I am so glad you did!" He then went on to assure me in the most positive and earnest terms that he had no doubt whatever that Fort Sumter would be evacuated at a very early day, that there were no military reasons whatever for keeping it, and no more or better reasons for holding it than there had been for holding Fort Brown, which certainly would not be and could not be held. He spoke very severely of what he called Major Anderson's folly in going into Fort Sumter at all—a folly the secret of which, as he said, I had now explained to him, but which was only the greater folly by reason of the motives which led to it, assuming the story of — to be true, as he added with a great deal of emphasis, "As I have no sort of doubt it is." I asked him how the surrender of Fort Sumter could be effected otherwise than by violence if —'s story was true, since Major Anderson certainly would not give up the place on an express order from Washington if he cherished the notion of waiting for the action of his own State of Kentucky. That, he replied evasively, would be a matter for the negotiators, and he then gave me to understand that negotiations were, in fact, at this moment going on, which, in his judgment, would very soon relieve the Government of all anxiety on the score of Charleston Harbor and its forts. I then told him what account — had brought of the state of things at Montgomery, about which, however, he seemed to be himself very fully informed. He could give me no good reason for supposing it, but he seemed to be quite convinced that, as soon as the States of Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri rejected the appeals of the secessionists, as he has positive information they will reject them, the disintegration of the new-born Confederacy will begin. I asked him how, admitting these expectations to be well founded, we were, in the interval during the process, to get on with our postal and business relations, mentioning to him what — had told me, that Mr. Toombs and others were strongly in favor of establishing a passport system by sea and land against all citizens of the United States. This apparently made little or no impression upon him, and I must say that I have come home quite discouraged and depressed. In the Senate no one of the Republi-

cans seems to be just now thinking seriously of anything but the new appointments. I have been besieged for a week past with letters and applications asking me every day to see a score of persons whom I hardly know, in order to oblige a score of other persons whom, in many cases, I know only too well. It is a shameful and humiliating state of things, none the more tolerable that it was to have been expected. Mr. Seward was very anxious to get my views as to the proper treatment of Mr. Forsyth and the other commissioners. He seemed inclined to think that a mode might be found of receiving them and negotiating with them, without in any way committing the Government to a recognition of the Government which they assume to represent.

I found it difficult, indeed I may say impossible, to make him admit the hopelessness of looking for such a thing, but I told him frankly that I saw no earthly reason why he should not informally and in a private way obtain from these gentlemen—all of them, as we knew, honorable and very intelligent men—some practical light on the way out of all this gathering perplexity, if indeed they have any such practical light to give. He then gave me to understand that this was exactly what he had done and meant to do, and he repeated his conviction that the evacuation of Fort Sumter would clear the way for a practical understanding out of which an immediate tranquillization of the country must come, and in the not distant future a return of all the seceding States to their allegiance. I can only hope he is right.

#### THE PROGRESS OF EVENTS AT RICHMOND.

*Washington, March 9th.*— — came in to breakfast with me, having just returned from Richmond. He confirmed the story that an agent has been sent thither by Mr. Seward, with a most positive assurance that on no account shall Fort Sumter be reënforced, either with men or with supplies. He says this assurance reached Richmond the day after the confirmation by the Senate of the new Cabinet appointments, and he was told by — at Richmond, who certainly ought to know the facts in the case, that Senator Hunter agreed to press for the immediate confirmation of Mr. Seward in conformity with the precedents, on the express understanding that such a message should be forthwith dispatched to Richmond. Certainly, but for the attitude of Senator Hunter, and one or two other gentlemen of like views, the Chase and Sumner men in the Senate would have pretty surely, I think, given Mr. Seward some



trouble before that body. As things are, — thinks the Union men will control the action of Virginia, and that we shall consequently have no war. Heaven grant it! But in all this I do not see what the Government of the Union is negotiating for, or what we are to get for the Union by all these concessions, beyond the boon—priceless, indeed, no doubt—of a peace which has not yet been seriously disturbed, and which the seceded States have at least as great an interest as we ourselves in seeing preserved. The whole thing seems to me much too onesided a piece of business, and I told — so plumply. Mr. Seward stopped to see me a moment, not long after breakfast, to say, with some appearance of fear, that the President's friends were "pestering" him about sending Mr. Corwin to England, and to intimate that he had put his foot down pretty forcibly in refusing to do anything of the kind. He showed me a note from a common friend of his and of Mr. Forsyth, asking him to receive and give audience to a certain Colonel —, who had a matter to lay before him of great national importance, and asked me if I would object to seeing Colonel — myself, as he did not wish to do so, and yet was anxious to ascertain what Colonel — might have to say. I expressed some perplexity as to how such a thing could be arranged, but he laughed, and said that if I would name an hour there would be no trouble about it at all. I thought this odd, but named an hour for to-morrow morning.

#### A GLIMPSE OF SENSE FROM THE SOUTH.

A letter from —, at Augusta. She writes in good spirits, but is evidently much impressed with the awkward situation, and with the feverish state of feeling all about her in Georgia. Certainly there is nothing bellicose or savage in her mood, but she tells me that her husband is disturbed and disquieted by what he thinks the imminent peril of great business disasters at the South, and especially in Georgia. He may well feel in this way, with the investments which he has made in factories sure to be ruined by the policy of his "Confederated" brethren at Montgomery.

#### CERTAIN PLANS OF SOUTHERN LEADERS.

*March 10th.*—While Mr. Douglas was talking with me this morning on some propositions which he means to offer in the Senate in a day or two, Mr. Seward's Colonel — sent his name in to me. I wished to excuse myself, but Mr. Douglas insisted I should not do so, and went away, promising to come back in the evening. I found

Colonel — a very keen, bright, intelligent person, who was full of a great scheme in which he said that Mr. Davis and Mr. Forsyth both were very deeply interested, and in which he believed the eventual solution of the whole trouble in this country would be found. This was neither more nor less than a plan for the building of a great railway to the Pacific through the southwestern portions of the country, on the surveys made under the direction of Mr. Davis while he was Secretary of War. This, he said, the Confederate States Government would at once undertake. It would unite the Confederacy with California, and make it the interest of the whole North to seek a reunion on proper terms at the earliest possible moment with the Confederate States, which would then stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, “enveloping Mexico and the Gulf.” I listened to the man in silent amazement for some time, for certainly I never heard such wild and fantastic propositions advanced with so much seriousness and apparent good faith, and, finally interrupting him, ventured to ask him what he wished or expected me to do in the premises, and why he should have been referred to me. He seemed not at all embarrassed, but said quietly that he had wished to see me as being a conservative man and a lover of peace, in order to show me that all we needed at the North was to have a little patience, and we should see the way opened out of all our difficulties by this notable project. Is it possible there can be truth in the old notion that, in times of great national trial and excitement, so many men do go mad, so to speak, in a quiet and private way, that madness becomes a sort of epidemic?

*Washington, March 11th.*—The debate on the expulsion of Wigfall has gone off to-day into abstractions, which vex and irritate one in the presence of the practical questions now pressing upon us. I could scarcely listen with patience to Mr. Foster's discussion of the point whether a Senator of the United States ought or ought not to consider his seat vacated upon the passage of an ordinance of secession by his State. Nothing will come of it all, and it only gives occasion to men like Mr. Mason to add fuel to the flame all over the country, by discussing and debating the circumstances in which it will be necessary for them to swell the list of seceders and for their States to go out of the Union.

As for Wigfall himself, his bearing for the last day or two has been rather better than it was on the day of his collision with Mr. Douglas, when he really looked like a tiger, and acted not unlike one. He and all the extreme men seem to be a great deal de-

pressed, I am glad to say, by the intelligence which has crept out of the general agreement of the Cabinet to adopt the course recommended by General Scott on plain military grounds, and order Major Anderson to abandon Fort Sumter.

THE ORDER TO EVACUATE FORT SUMTER.

I had a long conversation on the subject with Senator Douglas to-day. He is entirely of my mind that the fort ought to have been abandoned already, and that much valuable prestige has been lost by the new Administration, which might have been secured had orders been sent at once to Major Anderson to that effect. The delay is attributable, no doubt, in part to the dilatoriness of Mr. Cameron in taking up the reins of the War Department; but I am sure Mr. Douglas is right when he lays a part of the responsibility on the influence of the Blairs, who keep pressing for a war policy. Even from their point of view, nothing can be more childish than to make an issue on the holding of Fort Sumter, which has already been abandoned in regard to Fort Brown, and to make that issue on the holding of an entirely untenable place. Mr. Douglas tells me, too, that a further difficulty has been raised by the friends of Major Anderson here from Kentucky, who insist that he shall not be ordered to leave Fort Sumter unless the order is accompanied by a promotion to one of the vacant brigadierships in the army, certainly under the circumstances a most scandalous and even foolish demand to make.

THE PRESIDENT WISHES THE FORT EVACUATED.

Mr. Lincoln has assured Mr. Douglas positively, he tells me, that he means the fort shall be evacuated as soon as possible, and that all his Cabinet whom he has consulted are of the same mind excepting Mr. Blair, which is precisely what I had expected. Mr. Douglas says that the President sent for him after his speech of Wednesday to assure him that he entirely agreed with all its views, and sympathized with its spirit. All he desired was to get the points of present irritation removed, so that the people might grow cool, and reflect on the general position all over the country, when he felt confident there would be a general demand for a National Convention at which all the existing differences could be radically treated. Meanwhile he did not see why the Executive should attempt to dispossess the seceded States of the forts occupied by them unless Congress insisted that he should, and gave him the means necessary for the work. "I am just as ready," he said to Mr. Douglas,

“to reënforce the garrisons at Sumter and Pickens or to withdraw them as I am to see an amendment adopted protecting slavery in the Territories or prohibiting slavery in the Territories. What I want is to get done what the people desire to have done, and the question for me is how to find that out exactly.”

Meanwhile, as I suggested to Mr. Douglas, no one is taking any steps that I can see to find out exactly or inexactly what the people desire to have done, and the secessionists are doing a good many things which for one I do not believe the people at all desire to have done.

#### BREAKING UP THE UNION BY LEGISLATION.

I called Mr. Douglas's attention to a letter received by me from Mobile yesterday, in which the opinion is expressed that, if the mission of Mr. Forsyth and his colleagues turns out a failure, the Confederate Congress will certainly adopt a sort of legal non-intercourse bill already in the hands of their Judiciary Committee, dismissing all cases from the courts to which citizens of other than the seceding States are parties. Mr. Douglas agreed with me, of course, that such legislation as this would be equivalent in some degree to a war, so far as its effects alike upon the country and upon individuals are concerned; and he was not less painfully struck by another bill, a copy of which I have just received from Montgomery, prohibiting absolutely the importation of slaves from the United States unless accompanied by their owners, and with an eye to settlement within the Confederate States. The object of this, of course, is to coerce Kentucky and Virginia, and particularly Virginia, into joining the new government. How long will it be possible for us to sit still and see all the conditions of our prosperity and importance thus nibbled at and taken away piecemeal?

It may be true, as Mr. Douglas suggests, that the introduction of such legislation at Montgomery indicates the obstinacy of the Union feeling in the border States, and may so far be taken as a sign rather of hope than of imminent danger. But the spirit and the intent of it all, so far as concerns the rest of the Union, are not the less hostile and mischievous. Certainly such steps can do little to promote the objects had in view by the Southern Commissioners.

#### THE DIPLOMATIC PERPLEXITIES OF MR. SEWARD.

*March 12th.*—Mr. Seward is much better to-day, and in unusually good spirits even for him; mainly, I think, because he has succeeded

in getting Mr. Corwin to agree to take the mission to Mexico instead of the mission to England. He has news from Richmond, and I understood him from Mr. Summers, that the prospect of defeating the secessionists in the Convention brightens all the time, and that Virginia, after disposing finally of the importunities of the Southern States, will take the initiative for a great National Convention. Of this he feels as confident as of the complete overthrow of the schemes of the fire-eaters by the quiet evacuation of Fort Sumter, which can not now be long delayed. He is very much pleased with the tone and bearing of the Southern Commissioners, he says, "as reported to him," and certainly nothing can be more reasonable or pacific than the disposition shown by these gentlemen so far. But I do not see that they offer any practicable solution—and I told Mr. Seward so—of the situation; nor, indeed, do I see why it should be expected they could do so. The difficulties are not difficulties of sentiment, but of fact. Mr. Seward intimates to me pretty clearly that he already finds Mr. Sumner making trouble for him in the Senate, and pressing him disagreeably in his own department.

He is annoyed too, I thought, at having to send Mr. Cassius M. Clay to Spain, and said with a good deal of sagacity that if he must give a mission to Kentucky he thought it a pity to "waste it on a Kentuckian he was sure of already."

#### MR. SEWARD AND THE CONFEDERATES.

He is hopeful of the success of the Convention plan if we can but get the better of our own mischief-makers here, who are much more dangerous to us, he thinks—and I agree with him—than the people at Montgomery. Without precisely saying as much, he gave me very distinctly the impression that the intentions of the Administration to Fort Sumter have been made known at Montgomery, and have there produced a most beneficial effect. When I called his attention to the hostile and mischievous legislation going on there, he reminded me that the direction of the practical action of the seceded States just now rests with the Executive and not with the Legislature at Montgomery, and repeated several times his conviction that no one in the government there desired a collision more than he or I, which indeed I can readily believe.

I thought Mr. Seward seemed a little annoyed at the present attitude of Mr. Douglas; at all events, he showed an evident anxiety to lead me into expressing an opinion, which I positively declined to express, as to the efforts which Mr. Douglas has been

persistently making to drive the Republican Senators into showing their hands, and which of course are not made in the interests of the Republican party. But he had nothing to say when I asked him why none of the Administration Senators were willing to speak for the Administration either one way or the other.

THE SILENCE OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADERS.

*March 15th.*—The declaration made yesterday in the Senate, that the seats of Davis, Mallory, Clay, Toombs, and Benjamin are vacant, has envenomed matters a good deal, and the debate of to-day will make them worse. It is a pity Mr. Douglas should have lost his temper, but certainly nothing could have been more irritating than Mr. Fessenden. It was perfectly obvious that the two Republicans who did most of the speaking after Mr. Fessenden—Hale and Wilson—knew Mr. Douglas to be really uttering the sentiments and sketching the policy of the President, and were pretty nearly half willing to admit as much and attack the White House, but they had discretion and self-command enough to forbear, so that Mr. Douglas really threw away his time for the moment. When the news of the evacuation of Fort Sumter comes, though, it will be his turn, and we shall then see collisions which will bring out the innermost truth as to the political chart of the new Administration, and which must pretty certainly lead to the complete reorganization of our political parties, if indeed it stops there.