

TRESCOT(WILLIAM H.--Assistant Secretary of State). "The Last Four Months of Buchanan's Administration, 1860-1861. Certified Copy in type-writing of Trescot's Narrative". [Foregoing title in General Crawford's autograph]. pp. 46. folio.

The following sworn statement appears on the last page "Manuscript in the possession of Maj.-Gen. Crawford, and that the above is true and correct copy of same original, and of the whole thereof. The above being in typewriting and on one side of each. In testimony, whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal this 23rd day of October, A.D. 1886. William Hoes, Notary, 69 Wall Street, New York".

"...These pages were written in February 1861...They were not written for publication" etc.

TRESCOT (WILLIAM H. --Assistant

379

Certified Copy  
in  
type writing  
of

Frescot's narrative

==  
Last four months of Buchanan's Admin-  
-istration, 1860 - 1861.  
==

Wm. Henry Trescot  
~~Breveort~~-House.

Pendleton  
S.C.

These pages make no pretension to be either literature or history. They are simply a record of the impression made upon me by events which have been the subject of much controversy and the truth about which is of essential importance to the future history of the country.

I do not even claim that my impressions are correct. All I can claim is that they are the honest impressions made by facts truthfully stated. There may be other facts, unknown to me, equally true and very different impressions may have been made by them on men equally honest.

But it is only by a rigid and impartial scrutiny of all the testimony that the future historian can reach the positive truth. This is only a contribution to the materials of that future history.

These pages were written in February 1861, immediately upon my return from Washington, now nearly ten years ago. They are published, with the exception of one, perhaps two not important paragraphs just as they were written.

They were not written for publication and are now published because I have recently had several applications for information as to my remembrance of certain events- I can trust to this record better than to my memory.

Wm. Henry Trescot.

~~Greenville~~, S.C.

Aug. 1870.

In May, 1860, I was invited by Gen. Cass, then Secretary of State, to accept the place of Assistant Secretary of State, vacated by Hon. John Appleton appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia. The nominations of Mr. Appleton and myself were confirmed early in June. Soon after my arrival in Washington, Congress adjourned, and just before the adjournment Gen. Cass left on leave of absence to spend his summer in Detroit, and I was appointed by the President's warrant, and in conformity with the act of 1797, acting Secretary of State.

Placed thus at the head of the State Department, my relations with the President, the Cabinet and the Foreign Ministers were naturally and necessarily freer and more intimate than they would have been under ordinary circumstances. I was thus familiar with the hopes and fears, the opinions and expectations which agitated the rulers of the country during that excited period which preceded the secession of South Carolina, while my correspondence from home kept me fully informed how public opinion there was preparing for the inevitable issue. During the summer all the political signs confirmed the belief that the defeat of the Democratic party was certain. The Southern Senators and members who had at the close of the session gone North to judge for themselves, all in passing through Washington bore the same invariable testimony as to what they had seen and heard. Evidence of all sorts flowed in upon the Executive Committee of the party which sat at the Capital, and to the same effect; one sort of testimony struck me particularly. The State Department had the selection of papers in which to publish the laws, so many papers for each State, and although the patronage was not very considerable, it was distributed of course with a view to party influence. The applications for ~~them~~

appointments brought me in contact with political editors from all parts of the country and with every disposition and every temptation to be sanguine, their statements only confirmed the certainty of a great political defeat.

The President and the Cabinet had full time to consider their positions.

The President and Gov. Toucey, the Secretary of the Navy, seemed to agree most perfectly. They thought that the Republican victory was only illusory, that the party could not survive success, that after four years of power checked and crossed by a powerful opposition, a great and universal re-action already commenced, would complete its destruction, and restore the old Democracy purified and strengthened to its ancient rule. They did not believe that the South was in earnest and thought secession only probable in the case of South Carolina, a result which being manageable, might after all have a very wholesome effect.

Mr. Cobb, the Secretary of the Treasury, held and expressed but one opinion, that it was the duty of the South in defense both of honor and of interest, to dissolve the Union. He thought that every State should secede by itself, and that secession should be practically accomplished on the 4th March, upon the close of Mr. Buchanan's administration. This he thought most likely to unite the South, and only due to Mr. Buchanan's consistent support of Southern rights. Of the earnestness of these opinions, he gave convincing proof by writing to his friends in Georgia, that if upon the election of Mr. Lincoln, there was a probability that the State would acquiesce, he wished his name withdrawn as a candidate for the U. S. Senate, as with his views he could no longer continue in public life with hope or honor.

Governor Floyd, Secretary at War, thought secession unwise

and a dissolution of the Union unnecessary. Like Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Toucey, he believed the black Republican triumph only temporary and that its success would be its destruction. As a matter of policy, therefore, he wished to fight in the Union, but he recognized the right of a State to secede, fully sympathized with the South in the opinion that as far as the North was concerned, enough had been done to justify any action the South might take, and was resolute that no force should be employed by the Government to restrain the action of an independent State. Mr. Thompson, Secretary of the Interior, seemed to me while holding the general opinions entertained by Southern men, to be governed in his personal conduct by a strong attachment to Mr. Buchanan, an unwillingness to believe in the necessity of the extreme measure of secession and a readiness to acquiesce in any course which his State - Mississippi - should adopt.

Gen. Cass, Secretary of State, like Mr. Cobb, held clear and well defined opinions. From the beginning, he believed Lincoln's election certain, and the dissolution of the Union, or at least the secession of the South, inevitable. Not recognizing any right in a State to secede, except as a revolutionary measure, he would have resisted the attempt at the commencement, and as the sworn officer of the U. S., he would have done his utmost to preserve its integrity. "I speak to Cobb", he would say, and he tells me he is a Georgian; to Floyd, and he tells me he is a Virginian; to you, and you tell me you are a Carolinian. I am not a Michigander; I am a citizen of the U. S. The laws of the U. S. bind you as they bind me, individually. If you, the citizens of Georgia, or Virginia or Carolina, refuse obedience to them, it is my sworn duty to enforce them." That he believed to be his duty, and he would have done it, although he believed he would not succeed in

the attempt. For he also believed that great wrong and injustice had been done the South, that the Black Republican party was organized for its destruction, and as he always predicated, that a long and bloody Civil War was the sure and necessary result of the existing condition of things.

Judge Black, the Att'y Gen'l, to a great extent agreed with Gen. Cass, but he treated the question exclusively as one of Constitutional Law. At least, it always seemed to me that he was unwilling to look at the political consequences of secession and the question which he proposed to himself for solution was: - What is the legal wrong involved in secession and what is the legal remedy; a question to be solved judicially not politically. His views were always supposed to be specially enforced in the full and forcible argument afterwards embodied in the President's message.

Of the opinions and feelings of Mr. Holt, the PostMaster General, I never knew more than was to be inferred from his position in the Cabinet and his action when appointed Secretary at War.

With these differences of opinion, and in perplexed and vague apprehension of a result that in spite of the angry discussions in Conventions and Congress, very few people distinctly realized, the country and the Cabinet drifted through the last Summer of the longest, the most unbroken and the most prosperous peace, that God has ever given to the most favored of Nations. The fall elections made Mr. Lincoln President of the United States. The Legislature of South Carolina called a convention of the people of the State to decide upon their action, and the points of inevitable difficulty soon begun to develop. After the call of the Convention but before the election of members of that body, just as I was sitting down to dinner one day, I received a telegraph from Charleston saying that intense excitement prevailed in the



City on account of the removal by Col. Gardner then in command at Fort Moultrie, of some arms and ammunition from the U. S. Arsenal in the City to the Fort and that if the removal was by orders from the Department of War, it ought to be revoked, otherwise, collision was inevitable. Knowing that the Cabinet were then in session, I went over immediately to the White House, and met the members coming from the President's room. I took Gov. Floyd aside, and he was joined I think by Messrs. Cobb and Toucey and shewed them the telegram. Gov. Floyd replied: "Telegraph back at once, say you have seen me, that no such orders have been issued and none such will be issued under any circumstances." This I did immediately. When a day or two after I received letters giving me a more detailed account of the whole transaction, I again saw Gov. Floyd, who communicated to me in a very full conversation the official information he had received, his impressions of the folly of Col. Gardner's conduct and his final determination to remove him and supply his place with Major Robert Anderson, in whose discretion, coolness and judgment he put great confidence. He also determined to send Col. Ben Huger to take charge of the arsenal, believing that his high reputation, his close association with many of the most influential people in Charleston, and the fact of his being a Carolinian would satisfy the State of the intentions of the Government. He said that with his opinions, he never could and never would consent to the coercion of a sovereign state, that while he did not think the anticipated action of South Carolina wise, he sympathized deeply with her spirit. That considering the re-inforcement of the garrisons in Charleston Harbor as looking very like coercion, and at any rate only calculated to excite and irritate the popular feeling, he would not consent to it. But that on the other hand, he would not submit to any attempt on the part of the people to take the

Forts, that he was bound to resist and would resist. What would be the consequence of the secession of the State was a grave question, but one which had not yet arisen; that at present he was only resolved upon two things, not to reinforce the forts, and not to allow them to be taken by an unlawful force. In these positions I agreed with him, and we agreed further in believing that there was no danger of an attack on the forts by an unlawful mob, and that the State would take the action she might deem necessary regularly, and with due notice to the government at Washington. The position of Gov. Floyd I explained fully and at his own request by letters to those at home who could in my opinion best use the knowledge for the purpose of quieting the alarm and apprehensions of the citizens of Charleston. The apprehensions of the people of Charleston, however, were not easily quieted, and General Cass and Judge Black were urgent that the Forts should be reinforced. The subject was one of constant discussion. Gov. Floyd was earnest in his determination and resolved not to re-inforce, but he thought that if such were his opinions, he ought to be trusted by the State; that if in the ordinary routine of the business of the War Department, he sent a few men to Fort Sumter or a few boxes of ~~ammunition~~ ammunition to Fort Moultrie, to supply the vacancies caused by death or desertion, and to furnish the usual amount of powder kept in the garrison; these acts ought not to be objects of suspicion, that in fact this jealousy and clamor against his ordinary action was weakening his power to act when an extraordinary emergency did arise. Besides, as he argued on one occasion, with great force, "You tell me that if any attempt is made to do what under ordinary circumstances is done every day, you will be unable to restrain your people. Suppose you are not able to restrain

them now, am I bound to leave these garrisons unprotected to the mercy of a mob? am I not bound to enable them to resist the unlawful violence which you cannot control?" While I felt the strength of this reasoning, I knew also that in the then condition of feeling in Charleston, anything that could be even misunderstood or misrepresented as re-inforcement would lead to an explosion that would injure the whole Southern cause. I therefore saw Mr. Cobb, explained to him what I understood to be Gov. Floyd's position. I told him that while I admitted its strength, things were in that condition that he could not act from it, that I had the most perfect confidence in him and had pledged myself at home that our people could trust him implicitly, but that any nice difference between what was re-inforcement for the purpose of re-inforcement, and what was ordinary routine business would not be understood at such a time. And that unless the Sec. at war could make up his mind to allow no change in the Forts important or not, I could not answer for the consequences, and after what I had written home, would feel bound to resign and tell the authorities there to judge for themselves. I believe that such a step would lead to the occupation of Fort Sumter in forty eight hours; and I told him that I was on my way to Gov. Floyd to announce to him my conclusion. He proposed that I should postpone my visit until after a conference that he was to have that morning with the Governor and Mr. Thompson. I did so. That night Gov. Floyd called at my house, and in a long and very free conversation expressed his former conviction, his feeling that the State ought to accept his action without suspicion as his opinions were well known, fixed, and had been acted on consistently long before this crisis had come; but that if I thought that collision between the people of the State and the Government forces would be precipitated, he would not consent that

a man or a gun should be sent to any of the Forts in the Harbor of Charleston; and if his sense of duty induced any change in his determination, I should be informed by him in advance of any action, and in ample time to pursue such a course as I deemed proper.

Things continued upon this footing during the preparation of the President's Annual Message, the completion of which it seemed certain must produce a dissolution of the Cabinet, for the nearer the time came for opinion to take the form of action, the more utterly impossible was it to reconcile the differences. Those members of the Cabinet who desired that re-inforcements should be sent to Charleston pressed their policy, and a few evenings after the conversation with Gov. Floyd just related, he called upon me, evidently much excited. He said that just after dinner, the President had sent for him (at the room in the State Dep. which he occupied while preparing his message), that when he reached him, he found Gen. Cass and Judge Black who retired immediately upon his entrance. The President then informed him that he had determined to re-inforce the garrisons in Charleston Harbor, upon which a very animated discussion arose. The President finally consented to suspend his decision until Gen. Scott could reach Washington, and he had been telegraphed to come on immediately. Gov. Floyd felt confident that he could satisfy General Scott of the impolicy of such a step, that it could not be supported and that the destruction of the U. S. troops was such as to render anything looking like the use of force, not only idle but disastrous, as it must provoke attack which the Government was in no condition to resist successfully. He asked me to accompany him to Mr. Cobb. Mr. Cobb had been quite sick for a day or two, and when we reached the house, we found that his physician had given orders that he should not be dis-

turbed. We then started for Mr. Thompson's, but met him a few steps off on his way to Mr. Cobb, and we all returned to Gov. Floyd's, where we had a very long discussion of the whole question. Gov. Floyd declared that his mind was made up, that he would cut off his right hand before he would sign an order to send re-inforcements to the Carolina Forts, and if the President insisted, he would resign. Mr. Thompson agreed with him perfectly and said he would sustain his course and follow him. The practical question was by what means the President could be induced to change his purpose. I suggested three.

II. I was not a Cabinet Minister, but as Acting Secretary of State during the Summer, I had been in confidential relations with the President. He had conversed with me more than once on this subject with freedom. I was the only South Carolinian in Washington occupying position that brought me into official relation with the President directly, and my relations with the public men at home enabled me to speak advisedly and confidentially both to and for them. I proposed therefore that I should go to the President, state to him that the Secretary at War had communicated to me his intention, and then endeavor to disabuse his mind of any unfounded apprehensions as to the action of the State and submit to him the reasons, based upon information in my possession, against such a policy as he thought of adopting. Should I make no impression, I would then say that under the circumstances it was my duty, however painful, to submit my resignation then and there and leave for Columbia, the next morning, to lay the facts before the Executive of South Carolina. I would be in Columbia in thirty six hours, and upon such information, there could be no earthly doubt that the Forts would be occupied in the following twenty four.

Such a resolution respectfully but firmly stated would, I thought, make the President hesitate. Indeed, he could not have acted, for he would have been forced to remove Gov. Floyd, and the time occupied in the changes and the execution of the orders would have been more than enough to give the State the necessary opportunity.

Such a proceeding was of course only to be adopted as a last resort, because it involved necessarily such a breach between the President and Gov. Floyd as would compel his resignation, if not anticipated by his dismissal, and because while it gave the State warning, it only precipitated the issue. For once taken, the die was cast, the ~~forts~~ would be seized and the Government could not have submitted either to its defeat or to the manner ~~or to the manner~~ in which it was effected.

II. To telegraph the Member of Congress from Charleston to come on immediately, in hopes that his representations of the public feeling in that city, - very much exaggerated by the telegraph and letter writers, - would relieve the President of any fear of a popular outbreak.

III. The third suggestion, which was adopted, was that I should write to the Governor of the State, Governor Gist, tell him that the President was under very strong apprehensions, that the people of Charleston would seize the forts, that in consequence he felt bound to send re-inforcements. That the Southern members of the Cabinet would resist this policy to resignation, but that they thought that if he felt authorized to write a letter assuring the President that if no re-inforcements were sent, there would be no attempt upon the forts before the meeting of the Convention, and then Commissioners would be sent to negotiate all the points of difference, that their hands would be strengthened, the responsibility of provoking collision would be taken from the State and the

President would probably be relieved from the necessity of pursuing this policy. They added that if such a letter was written and failed, he should have information in ample time to take such steps as the interest of the State required.

I therefore addressed Gov. Gist the following letter:

Washington,  
Novem. 26, 1860.

Strictly Confidential.

Dear Sir: -

I am aware (and I do not deem it necessary to specify my source of information), that apprehensions exist in the mind of the President, that before the State acts in Convention, some attempt will be made to take the forts in Charleston Harbor. Feeling that his personal honor would be involved in such an attempt, he may make his apprehensions the pretext or ground on which to order an increased force to these posts. This order will be resisted to the very last and at any cost, by the Southern members of the Cabinet, but they would be incalculably strengthened in their position if you were at liberty to say directly to the President that you could answer on your responsibility, that so long as no change was made in these garrisons, so long as no additional force was sent there, and the State remained in the Union, no such attempt would be made, and that any increase of force made in the face of this notice would lead to instant collision, and that for every drop of blood shed under such circumstances, he and he alone would be responsible.

I wish you to distinctly to understand that there is no possibility of such an order being issued without the dissolution of the Cabinet and your receiving ample notice. While I answer for this, I write with the confidence that such an assurance will prevent any hasty and indiscreet movement on the part of the State.

Believing that you agree fully with me that for the sake of the State and of the South, our move toward secession ought to be regular and orderly, and that all collision should be avoided; and feeling that the Southern members of the Cabinet are entitled to the support of the State, I write to you to indicate how you can support them. To that point alone, this letter is addressed. If it becomes necessary for the State to look to itself, you shall know promptly and certainly.

If therefore you can write such a letter as I indicate, the Southern members of the Cabinet can rest upon it triumphantly; no such order will be issued in the face of it, and if it is, you will be free to act, will have ample information as to the necessity of action, and the whole responsibility of what comes will be not on the head of S. C., but of the President of the U. S.

If so, your letter must be here by return mail directed under cover to me. Telegraph me also when this is received, and if you intend to answer yes or no to my proposition. Detail I cannot give you, but trust that my signature will command your confidence.

I am yours respectfully,

Wm. Henry Trescot.

To Gov. Gist.

To this letter I received the following answer.

Executive Office,  
Columbia, S. C.,  
Nov. 29, 1860.

Mr. Wm. Henry Trescot,

Dear Sir: -

Although South Carolina is determined to secede from the Federal Union very soon after her Convention meets, yet the desire of her constituted authorities is not to



do anything that will bring on a collision before the ordinance of secession has been passed and notice has been given to the President of the fact; and not then, unless compelled to do so by the refusal of the President to recognize our right to secede; by attempting to interfere with our exports or imports or by refusal to surrender the forts and arsenals in our limits. I have found great difficulty in restraining the people of Charleston from seizing the Forts, and have only been able to restrain them by the assurance that no additional troops would be sent to the forts or any munitions of War. Everything is now quiet and will remain so until the ordinance is passed, if no more soldiers or munitions of War are sent on. That is to say I will use my utmost efforts to effect that object and believe that I will succeed; but the Legislature and myself would be powerless to prevent a collision, if a single soldier or another gun or ammunition is sent on to be placed in the Forts. If President Buchanan takes a course different from the one indicated and sends on a re-inforcement, the responsibility will rest on him of lighting the torch of discord which will only be quenched in blood. I am under a pledge to sanction resistance and to use all the military power of the State to prevent any increase of troops in those garrisons, and had to make the pledge to restrain the people who are restive, and hope no necessity will arrive to compel me to redeem the pledge. I write to you, knowing that while you will be faithful to the Govt. of the U. S., so long as you hold office under it, yet you are also a South Carolinian, and would desire by all means to avoid the needless shedding of blood. If you think there is no impropriety in showing this letter to the President, you are at liberty to do so, for I do not wish him to be mistaken and act in such a way as to bring upon the country a bloody war without the most imperious necessity.

Very truly yours,

Wm. H. Gist.

At the same time, I received the following letter from Gov. Gist which had crossed mine to him on the road.

(Confidential).

Executive Department  
Columbia, S. C.  
Novem. 29, 1860.

Mr. W. H. Trescot,

Dear Sir: -

I take the liberty, from your general character and without the pleasure of a personal acquaintance, to ask if you have any objections in the event of your connection with the Federal Government ceased, to remain in Washington, and act as confidential agent for this Department. It is important to have some one at Washington to give me the earliest information of what transpires affecting the interest of this State, and I know no one so acceptable as yourself. It is probable that the Convention will want some one on the spot through whom the information of its final action can be authoritatively communicated to the President at the earliest moment and an answer received. If you remain, I will inform the Convention that you are in Washington, and suggest that you be selected to perform this delicate and important duty. If there is any inquiry as to the course S. C. will pursue, you may safely say that she will not permit any increase of troops or munition of War in the Forts or Arsenal, and considering it an evidence of intention to coerce and an act of War, she will use force to prevent it and a collision must inevitably ensue. I have had great trouble, as it is, to prevent an attack upon the Forts, and will not be able (if willing) to prevent an attack upon them, if another soldier is sent there. Of course, I do not expect you to act in the premises until your duty to the Federal Government ceases,

but I cannot but anticipate such a result soon. An early answer is requested.

Very respectfully,

and truly yours,

Wm. H. Gist.

As the President's message was now completed, in view of its tenor, the certain action of my State and the receipt of this letter, I deemed it proper to say to the President that under the circumstances which I communicated to him, it was time that I should resign, but that as the health of Gen. Cass devolved the entire duties of the Department upon the Assistant Secretary, I would remain for a few days, in order that he might select my successor, and that as Gen. Cass was informed of my intention, I hoped there would be no necessity for delay in the appointment. He said however much he regretted the necessity, he had anticipated it for some time, and then in language which it is unnecessary to repeat, expressed his pleasure at the relations which had always existed between us. He said that it was due to me to make his appointment of a successor as soon as possible, and that it certainly should be done before the Convention of S. C. had taken any action. And I cannot but express my grateful recollection of Mr. Buchanan's uniform kindness and confidence in his conduct to me. The absence of Gen. Cass for the Summer and his health when in Washington, brought me into very constant personal association with the President. Having been minister both to Russia and England, and also Secretary of State, he took special interest in that Department, and watched its proceedings with minute and well-informed interest. His Diplomatic experience was large, his general views very cautious and very clear, and his knowledge always accurate. My of-

ficial intercourse with him was invariably pleasant. With the ordinary mass of the business of the Department he never interfered, and on all matters large and important enough for his decision, gave careful and most considerate attention to views and opinions with which he did not agree, while he never failed to manifest, when he felt it, his cordial approval of the manner in which his own instructions were carried out. I shall always consider my intercourse with him a great advantage and whatever may have since occurred, however much I may have deplored or disapproved the course which under many difficulties he felt compelled to pursue, I shall cherish his memory kindly and do justice to the virtues and ability which he undoubtedly possessed.

A day or two after this interview, the Saturday I think preceding the Monday on which Congress was to assemble, Mr. Cobb informed me that the President desired that I would take a copy of his Message to Gov. Gist, in advance of its publication, that I had been conversant with the discussions relating to it, understood the President's views, could explain in Columbia what might be misunderstood there, and could bring back a correct and authorized account of the state of opinion in South Carolina, and thus serve to prepare the way for a temperate solution of the issues that must soon arise. The secession of the State was considered certain, but it was desirable that an issue of force or a rude collision should if possible be avoided. Mr. Cobb added that before my return, his connection with the Cabinet would be dissolved, that with his views, the Message gave the opportunity for his resignation without abruptness, and that he could be more useful now at home, than he could possibly be by remaining. I saw the President immediately, and expressed my willingness to go if he deemed it advisable. He then requested me to withhold my resignation until my re-

turn, and appointed the hour of nine the next night to give me such instructions as he thought necessary. I saw such of the Carolina Delegation as had arrived in Washington, explained to them the purpose of my journey, and at nine o'clock on Sunday night, the President sent for me.

While the President was preparing his Annual Message, it was his custom to spend the morning in a room at the State Department, specially set apart for him, and on several occasions he had sent for me in reference to Treaties and for papers relating to the Foreign affairs for the year. On several of these occasions, the conversation had turned upon the present condition of public affairs. As events developed, the President became very anxious, and would always enquire for the news from Carolina. He had come to the conclusion that the State would secede and the two issues that seemed most to render him uneasy were the collection of the revenues and the seizure of the forts. I assured him then that I did not think he had much to apprehend in the way of unlawful force, that the people of South Carolina not only held the right of secession but that they would take special pride in carrying out that right, quietly, regularly, peaceably, as a right, not as a revolutionary measure; that I really believed that it would mortify them to be compelled to resort to force, that they would pass the ordinance of secession and then send regularly accredited agents to negotiate with the Government. "But", said he, "you know I cannot recognize them." All I can do is to refer them to Congress." I told him that I believed such a reference courteously made and in good faith would be accepted, and that the State would wait a reasonable time for the decision of Congress. This he seemed to think would be sufficient if the secession was inevitable; but still he was very cautious and his great hope seemed to be by tem-

porizing to avoid all issue before the 4th March.

On Sunday night when I saw him, he went over the old ground, said that he thought his message ought to be acceptable to the South, that he had spoken the truth boldly and clearly, and that all he had declared was that with regard to the laws and property of the United States he would discharge the obligation of his official oath as far as his Constitutional powers enabled him.

I told him that I would take the message with pleasure, because it was a courtesy to the Executive of the State, and because I thought that, waiving the opinions expressed as to the right of secession, it was as conciliatory as it was possible for him to make it from his position, and indeed more so than I had expected. But that I must say in candor, that it would have no effect upon the action of the Convention, that my recent letters satisfied me that the State would not only secede but that it would secede immediately, that delay until the 4th March was impossible; but that having said that much, I was perfectly willing to take the message as he desired, and I felt confident that he might rely upon my assurance that there would be no violence used towards the Forts by any unlawful assemblage or mob, that I had with me a letter from the Governor of the State which I would read to him if he desired, and the tenor of which I then communicated to him. He then asked me if I had seen General Cass. I said not that day, but that I had talked over the whole subject with him again and again, and we always ended where we began. He said, however, that I must see him when I left the White House ( he wished it particularly), and repeat our conversation. I saw the General, of course, but our conversation was very brief; he said he was very sorry; he saw what was coming, but that nothing could prevent it. I left for Columbia on Monday morning, where I arrived early on Wednesday.

Governor Gist received the message in the spirit in which it was sent, but he said at once what indeed was evident, from even two or three days' association with the members of the Legislature, that the State was determined on immediate secession, that no scheme of policy, however, plausible, could induce delay until the 4th March, either in deference to Mr. Buchanan's position or with a view to the cooperation of other States. At the same time, it was evident that the leaders of public opinion did not desire an issue of force and would proceed temperately but resolutely in their work. It was also clear that to avoid such an issue, the Federal Government, however it temporized, would have to concede the principle upon which the State stood. There was also a strong resolution to prevent if possible, any popular demonstration of force, either in violation of the laws or in the seizure of the property of the United States. Having discharged the duty thus imposed upon me, I returned to Washington which I reached on Sunday evening, having been absent a week. I saw the President for a few moments that evening and made an appointment for Monday. When I called on Monday, the Carolina delegation was with him. I did not interrupt them, but returned after they left. He then shewed me a paper signed by all of them but Col. Ashmore, - the paper which he afterwards quoted in his letter to the Commissioners. He appeared to be much gratified and relieved by it and said that he had asked them to see me and he would then have a talk with me. I told him I had not seen them, but that the paper did not go any further, if as far as the Governor's letter which I had communicated to him. "What letter", said he, "I do not recollect it, and when did you shew it to me?" "The evening," I replied, "on which you gave me your message to carry to Columbia." He said he did not remember it - have you got it?"

I said it was at my house, and I could get it in a few minutes, and that as the Secretary of the Interior had just come in, I would leave them to their business while I went for it. I brought it back with me and read it to the President, in Mr. Thompson's presence. We then discussed it and the whole subject, and I told the President that my visit confirmed exactly what I had said to him before I went. "Well", said he, "that is all very well up to the point where the negotiation stops, for Congress may refuse to entertain it." "Then, Sir," said I, "I will speak with the most perfect candor, - the State will take the Forts; what else can she do, if she is in earnest. But I hope the negotiation will not fail"; and I added: "Mr. President, why keep troops in the Forts at all? If I understand your message rightly, you consider them simply as property, just as you do the Post Office, the Custom House, and the sub-treasury buildings; you don't propose to guard them, do you?" He said, "No." "Then," said I, "why not treat the forts precisely in the same manner? Keep an orderly sergeant, and one or two men there only." He said he had great faith in the honor of the State, and that the Governor's letter and the Memorandum of the Carolina delegation were a guarantee he believed, that nothing violent would be done; that he would receive the Commissioners kindly and refer the whole matter to Congress, and so on, traveling round in the same circle, and I took my leave.

Soon after my return, I placed my resignation dated the 10th December in the hands of General Cass. When I went into his room to give it to him, he begged me to keep it for a day or two, for events might render it unnecessary, at least, he perhaps could not act on it. He said he could not speak more plainly, but the next day he would explain all, although I probably understood him. This, of course, I knew meant only one thing. From the beginning



of the controversy, he had held but one opinion and one language, and he had now submitted to the President the alternative of reinforcing the Forts or accepting his resignation, and the next day the President having refused to consent to this course, he resigned. Under the circumstances, I feel bound to say to the President that I would continue in office until he had appointed a new Secretary, provided the appointment was made before the Ordinance of Secession was passed by the Convention. For the refusal to adopt the advice of Gen. Cass was in the interest of the State, and it would have embarrassed the President very much to have had the Department without either a Secretary or Ass't Secretary. Judge Black, the Att'y General, who was appointed Gen. Cass' successor, was very busy in the Supreme Court, and it was not I think before the 17th, that I fully ceased official action at the Department, and the 20th, before Judge Black acknowledged the resignation left with Gen. Cass.

In the meantime, the difficulties were increasing. On the 19th December, I received the following telegram: -

"W. H. Trescot,

Late Ass't Sec. State,

Charleston.

Captain Foster yesterday removed forty muskets from arsenal in Charleston to Fort Moultrie; great excitement prevails; telegraph to have the arms instantly returned, or a collision may occur at any moment. Three days will determine in Convention, peace or war, and this act not instantly countermanded by telegraph will be decisive. Not a moment's time should be lost. Telegraph immediately to me."

It was about 9 or 10 o'clock at night when the telegram reached me. I took it at once to Gov. Floyd who was sick in bed.

By his authority, I went to Col. Dunkard, the Chief Clerk of the War Department, and orders were immediately sent to Major Anderson to have the arms restored. The telegraph was kept open all night for the reply, which came by daylight the next morning, and the orders were duly obeyed.

Charleston, Dec. 19, 1860.

W. H. Trescot: -

The Governor says he is glad of your despatch, for otherwise there would have been imminent danger. Earnestly urge that there be no transfer of troops from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, and inform the Secretary of War.

J. Johnston Pettigrew,

Aid de Camp.

On the 20th December, Col. D. H. Hamilton arrived in Washington, bringing to me the following letter from Gov. Pickens, who had been elected Governor of the State of South Carolina, in succession to Gov. Gist.

Columbia, 17th Dec., 1860.

My dear Sir: -

I send Daniel H. Hamilton, the bearer of a very important confidential letter, to the President of the United States, and would be deeply obliged to you, as you are now in Washington, under request of Gov. Gist, to attend to him immediately, and go with him to see that he most certainly is able to deliver himself the letter to the President of the U. S.

You will take occasion to say to the President that Mr. Hamilton will remain one day, if it is desired he shall wait that long, to receive any letter or communication that may be made, and that you will deliver it yourself; and if you think it necessary, you may yourself bring the answer, if the President accompanies it by any verbal explanation that may be trusted to you from the President.

And by the end of one day, you will communicate with Mr. Hamilton, and inform him whether he will bring the answer or whether you will bring it yourself.

Most respectfully,  
and truly,  
F. W. Pickens.

Hon. W. H. Trescot,  
Washington City.

The communication brought by Col. Hamilton for the President was sealed, but I had received notice of this extraordinary missive in a confidential letter by the previous mail, not, however, from the Governor. I saw the President and returned ~~with~~ him with Col. Hamilton at the hour he appointed. The President received us in the Library, read the letter, and asked Col. H. when he expected to return. He replied, "the next morning." The President said it was impossible to give him the answer by that time; could he not wait longer? Hamilton said, "yes, until the next evening." The President said the answer would then be ready. Hamilton then said, "Mr. President, I am aware of the contents of that letter, and think that if you would accept them, it would greatly facilitate the negotiations between my Government and the U.S." The President replied, he would consider it, and give Mr. Hamilton his answer the next day. He then, as we were leaving the room, called me back, gave me the letter, and asked me to read it and return to him when I had done so.

The letter proposed that in order to quiet the apprehensions of the people of the State, as to the Forts, Governor Pickens should be enthroned by the President to occupy Fort Sumter with a small body of State troops, - the answer to the request or demand to be given in twenty four hours.

*See letter  
in Journal  
of H. of  
Rep.,  
S. C.,  
Dec. 11,  
1861.*

If Governor Pickens had simply asked the President for an assurance that Sumter should not be occupied and that Anderson should be so instructed, I think it could have been obtained. As it was, this demand if persisted in released the President from his pledge to the Delegation, placed them in a very awkward attitude and in my opinion would have lead to exactly what it wanted to avoid, - an issue before the arrival of the Commissioners. Besides which, the Convention was in session, the very day on which Col. Hamilton had his interview with the President; the Ordinance of secession was passed, and that body properly was in charge of the conduct and policy of the State. I consulted Senators Dans and Slidell and they were both of opinion that to press this demand could do nothing but mischief. Gen. Bonham and McQueen, two of the Carolina delegation, - the only two I believe then in Washington, - happened to dine with me that day, and as Hamilton had told them the object of his mission, I communicated to them the contents of the letter, and proposed that we should send a joint telegram to the Governor, suggesting its withdrawal. We did so and late that night I received the following telegram: -

Charleston, Dec. 20th, 1860.

Hon. W. H. Trescott: -

You are authorized and requested to withdraw my letter by Dr. Hamilton immediately. I have seen Gen'l Cushing. Despatch back immediately. Have you seen Huger?

F. W. Pickens.

The next morning I withdrew the letter. The President expressed his gratification, repeated to me over and again his desire to avoid collision, his readiness to receive Commissioners, to refer them to Congress in good faith and his determination not to dis-

turb the status of the Forts, but to wait the result of their negotiation. He was pledged, he said, not to disturb the status in favor of the U. S., and the Governor ought not and could not justly ask him to disturb it in favor of the state. He was trusting to the honor of Carolina, and they ought not to suspect him; he was acting under the obligations of his honor, and I and the State might rely upon it, would redeem it to the uttermost. He said he had taken no copy of the letter, but would be glad, if I had no objections, to have a copy of the telegram under which I withdrew it,

*See letter* which I gave him. I accordingly returned the letter to Hamilton *Journal* with another to the Governor, explaining my reasons for asking *No. of R.* authority to withdraw it. *S. C.,*  
*Dec. 11, 1861.*

On the 23rd, I received the following telegram: -

Charleston, Dec. 23, '60.

W. H. Trescott: -

I have been informed that thirteen men have arrived by the North Eastern Railroad, and they say they were sent to Fort Moultrie and are a part of one hundred and fifty (150). I desire to know immediately if it is intended to reinforce the forts, or to transfer any force from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter. I want a clear answer on this immediately. Until the Commissioners shall negotiate at Washington, there can be no change here.

F. W. Pickens.

Again I called upon Gov. Floyd. The Gov. was evidently becoming impatient under the embarrassments of his position, for it was difficult to be accountable to the President on the one hand, and to the State of S. C. on the other. He had done everything that a man in his situation could do to prove his good faith, and he felt very naturally that the difficulty of his position ought to

be appreciated and that explanations and pledges perhaps inconsistent as to his duties should not be pressed except under the very gravest necessity. It was, moreover, a matter of great moment, that in this juncture Gov. Floyd should retain his place in the Cabinet as long as possible, and every step he took or did not take was watched and misrepresented, for no man at the South was more cordially detested by the Black Republican Party. Gov. Floyd told me to reply to the Governor that there was not the slightest foundation for any alarm; that he knew nothing of any such men and any statement to such an effect was a sheer fabrication, made he must suppose, for purposes of mischief. As for the removal of troops to Sumter, he could not see any likelihood of it, that he did not think it necessary to send special orders to that end to Maj. Anderson, for he could not consider it all probable, and that in fact, he thought any such contingency provided against by orders already sent to which he did not feel at liberty to refer more specially; that the Commissioners must soon be in Washington, and that he could see no rational ground for anticipating premature difficulty. I thought this as far really as he could go, and that to press upon him or the President more positive action was to risk the advantage that continued delay on the part of the Government was giving to the State. I therefore telegraphed the Governor the contradiction he authorized and waited with anxiety the arrival of the Commissioners.

In the meanwhile, the State Convention had met, and on the 20th had passed the Ordinance of Secession, and on the 22nd the Governor telegraphed: -

Sir: - The Hon. R. W. Barnwell, Hon. J. H. Adams and Hon. James L. Orr, have been appointed Commissioners by the Convention to proceed immediately to Washington, to present the Ordinance

of Secession to the President, and to negotiate in reference to the evacuation of the forts and other matters growing out of the Act of Secession. They will probably arrive on Tuesday next. Please inform the President of this. Answer this.

F. W. Pickens.

Hon. W. H. Trescott.

I immediately waited on the President and gave him the information. He asked the character of the appointments, expressed himself pleased with the selection, declared his readiness to see them and his intention to refer them courteously to Congress and to act in perfect good faith; in all which I then thought and still think he was perfectly sincere.

The Commissioners arrived on Wednesday, the 26th December, and after seeing them, I called upon the President and informed him of their arrival. Judge Black, the Secretary of State, was present, and after some general conversation on the subject, the President appointed one o'clock the next day to receive them. I told him that they proposed to present their credentials and have an informal conversation with him, but that if he intended to submit the question of their reception to Congress, they desired to submit a communication to accompany his message. They would come prepared with it, or if he agreed with me in thinking it best, they would not prepare it until after the interview, when perhaps all parties would understand each other better, but that in that case the communication was to be considered as submitted at the interview. To this he cheerfully consented. But at the very hour that this conversation was going on in Washington, events were transpiring in the harbor of Charleston, which altered the relations of the parties and changed the whole character of the negotiation.

The next morning early, I was at the residence of the Commissioners, and while talking over the condition of affairs, Col. Wigfall, one of the Senators from Texas, came in to inform us that the telegraph had just brought the news that Major Anderson had abandoned Fort Moultrie, spiked his guns, burned his gun carriages, cut down the Flagg staff and removed his command to Fort Sumter. We all expressed our disbelief of the intelligence and after a good deal of discussion as to its probability, I said: "Well, at any rate, Colonel, true or not, I will pledge my life if it has been done, it has been without orders from Washington." Just as I made the remark, Gov. Floyd was announced. After the usual courtesy of meeting, I said, "Governor, Col. Wigfall has just brought us this news (repeating it) and as you were coming up stairs, I said I would pledge my life it was without orders." "You can do more," he said, smiling; "you can pledge your life, Mr. Trescott, that it is not so. It is impossible. It would be not only without orders, but in the face of orders. To be very frank, Anderson was instructed, in case he had to abandon his position, to dismantle Fort Sumter, not Fort Moultrie." I asked him if his carriage was at the door, to let me take it and go home, as there might be telegrams there. I went and in a few minutes returned with the telegrams for Col. Barnwell, which he read and handed them to Gov. Floyd, saying, I am afraid, Governor, it is too true." Floyd read them, asked the Commissioners if the authority was sufficient, and made no comment, but rose, saying, "I must go to the Department at once."

As soon as he had left, I drove to the Capitol, communicated the intelligence to Senator Dans of Mississippi and Senator Hunter of Virginia, and asked them to accompany me to the President.



We drove to the White House, sent in our names and were asked into the President's room where he joined us in a few moments. When he came in he was evidently nervous and immediately commenced the conversation by making some remark to Mr. Hunter concerning the removal of the Consul at Liverpool, to which Mr. Hunter made a general reply. Col. Davis then said: "Mr. President, we have called upon an infinitely graver matter than any consulate." "What is it," said the President; "have you received any intelligence from Charleston in the last few hours," asked Col. Davis. "None", said the President. "Then," said Col. D., "I have a great calamity to announce to you." He then stated the facts and added: "and now, Mr. President, you are surrounded by blood and dishonor on all sides." The President was standing by the mantel-piece, crushing up a cigar in the palm of one hand, - a habit I have seen him practice often. He sat down as Col. D. finished and exclaimed, "My God, are calamities or misfortunes (I forget which) never to come singly. I call God to witness, - you gentlemen better than anybody know, that this is not only without but against my orders. It is against my policy." He then expressed his doubt of the truth of the telegram, thought it strange that nothing had been heard at the War Department, said he had not seen Gov. Floyd, and finally sent a messenger for him. When Gov. Floyd came, he said no news had come to the Department, that the heads of the Bureaux there thought it unlikely, but that he had telegraphed Major Anderson to this effect himself. "There is a report here that you have abandoned Fort Moultrie, spiked your guns, burned your carriages and gone to Fort Sumter. It is not believed, as you had no orders to justify it. Say at once what could have given rise to such a story."

The President was urged to take immediate action, he was

told the probability was that the remaining Forts and the arsenal would be seized and garrisoned by South Carolina and that Fort Sumter would be attacked; that if he would only say that he would replace matters as he had pledged himself that they should remain, there was yet time to remedy the mischief. The discussion was long and earnest. At first, he seemed disposed to declare that he would restore the status, then hesitated, said he must call his Cabinet together, he could not condemn Major Anderson unheard. He was told that nobody asked that, only say that if the move had been made without a previous attack on Anderson, he would restore the status. Assure us of that determination, and then take what time was necessary for consultation and information. That resolution telegraphed would restore confidence and enable the Commissioners to continue their negotiation. This he declined doing, and after adjourning his appointment to receive the Commissioners until the next day, we left. On our way out, we met Gen. Lane, Senators Begler, Mallory, Yulee and some others on their way to make the same remonstrance, for the news was over the City. Later in the day I saw him again, to show him some telegrams fuller in details. Senator Slidell was with him, but all that he did was to authorize me to telegraph that Anderson's movement was not only without but against his orders.

The next day, the 28th, the Commissioners had their first and only interview with the President, when they presented their credentials and the first letter of their correspondence. I was not present at this interview, as I had no official connection with the Commissioners, having, for reasons which it is unnecessary to state, declined to act as Secretary to the Commission.

On the 29th, after several prolonged Cabinet meetings,

Governor Floyd resigned for reasons stated in his published letter.

On the 30th, the President replied to the letter of the Commissioners. On the same day, I again saw the President and found Mr. Toucey, the Secretary of the Navy, with him. I told him that with his permission, I would like to have a half hour's conversation, to which he very courteously assented. I then as temperately as I could commenced a review of the whole transaction. He stopped me, saying, "You, of all persons, ought to know that it is exceedingly irregular and improper for the President to discuss such matters with the Secretary of the Commissioners. I told him that I was not Secretary, nor had I any sort of official connection with the Commission, that I came to him, simply because he himself had established my connection with these events, and in such a way that I thought I had a claim to be heard. "In that case," he said, "proceed"; and I then had a long, very earnest and very interesting conversation with him. He showed a good deal of feeling and seemed much worn and distressed. I inferred from all that passed that his difficulty consisted in this, that the seizure of the other Forts by S. C. rendered the restoration of the former status impossible, for if he ordered Anderson from Fort Sumter he had nowhere to send him, unless he withdrew him altogether from the harbor, and this "lowering of the flag" in the face of an armed rebellion, both Mr. Toucey and himself thought was impossible in the face of Northern sentiment. Under this impression I went to Mr. Hunter of Virginia, and told him that if that was the difficulty, to say to the President, that if he would withdraw from Sumter, the State would withdraw from the other forts, and that Major Anderson would be as safe in Fort Moultrie as if he were here; the Commissioners would accept this return to the status and guarantee his safety. Mr.

Hunter immediately went to him and when he returned, - I was waiting at his rooms, - said, "Tell the Commissioners it is hopeless. The President has taken his ground. I can't repeat what passed, but if you can get a telegram to Charleston, telegraph at once to your people to sink vessels in the channel of the harbor; and this message he sent the next morning again by his colleague, Mr. Mason. A Messenger had, however, been sent the night before to Richmond, to forward the telegram from that point. There is no doubt that at that time orders for re-inforcement had been issued, although afterwards countermanded. In this condition of affairs, the Commissioners addressed their second letter to the President and left Washington.

In the whole of these transactions, Mr. Buchanan's position was a most difficult one, and it was aggravated by three things.

I. Mr. Buchanan never, not even I think at the last moment, realized the danger. The representations made to him of the condition of feeling and opinion at the South he never would believe. He thought it likely that South Carolina would secede, but that she would not be supported by any other State. And not even Mr. Cobbs' resignation opened his eyes, although he had great respect for Mr. Cobbs' judgment and must have seen that this resignation was the utter destruction of Mr. Cobbs' political future, if he had misinterpreted Georgia. The first time he seemed really to begin to believe in what was so near at hand was upon the occasion of a visit from Mr. Toombs, one of the Senators from Georgia. While the Commissioners from S. C. were waiting in Washington, several gentlemen of influence in Savannah, Georgia, telegraphed both Mr. Toombs and Col. Orr to know whether Fort Sumter would be restored to its status by the withdrawal of Andersen, or whether it would be held by the Government. The object of the inquiry was clear, for there

were Forts in the harbor of Savannah; and it was thought not impolitic to give the President information of the possible consequences of his persistence. Mr. Toombs accordingly went to the White House and sent in his card. The Cabinet was in session, but the President received him in the next room. "I am aware, Mr. President, said T, "that the Cabinet is in session, that it is late, and that this is the day for your annual dinner to the Supreme Court, and that you have scarcely time to see me. But while I apologize for the intrusion, it is an evidence what importance I attach to the interview. I would ask whether you have decided upon your course as to Fort Sumter?"

"No, Sir. I have not yet decided. The Cabinet is now in session on that very subject."

"I thank you, Sir, for the information; that is all I wanted to know," said T, retiring.

"But Mr. Toombs, why do you ask?"

"Because my State has a deep interest in the decision."

"How - your State - what is it to Georgia whether a fort in Charleston harbor is held or abandoned?"

"In the cause of Charleston is the cause of the South."

"Good God, Mr. Toombs, do you mean that I am in the midst of a revolution?"

"Yes, Sir, more than that; you have been there for a year, and have not yet found it out"; and he retired.

When the President returned to the Cabinet, he was very much agitated and said: "Gentlemen, I really begin to believe that this is a revolution."

Mr. Buchanan ought to have known the truth sooner and better. He was not ignorant of the consequences of

40

such a move, as one State at least , even in his opinion, was sure to make. For I recollect one evening that I was spending with him at his summer home, the Soldiers Retreat near Washington. Gov Floyd dropped in after tea and while sitting in the porch the conversation turned upon the result of the coming Presidential election and its probable consequences and Mr Buchanan remarked- Well there is no danger as long as the States wait upon each other, as long as they delay for joint action. But if any one State is bold enough to act- to secede by itself, then questions will be raised beyond the solution of any Statesman in the Country.

But when the very thing happened he could not believe it. Accustomed like all Northern Statesmen to look at the Union rather than the States, habituated to use State politics merely as counters in the game for Federal power and belonging to a party which had never hesitated to make "a cry" of the most solemn and important issues, he could not realize that this popular excitement was anything wider and deeper than the thousand and one agitations on which skilful men had come into power. It would run its course, a little more violently perhaps than usual, there would be a reaction at the North and all would be well for another four years .

39

2. In the next place Mr Buchanan was really powerless. His four years of patronage had drawn to their close, his influence was to shape no longer any mans future and the great party in whose ranks he had served for many laborious years was torn by fierce dissensions and divided into



-dren, the piteous burden of his cry was "Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my day ?"

He therefore diplomatized with those whose action he could not entirely stay. He promised not to force an issue, to receive Commissioners, to refer to Congress and in this policy he persevered even in face of the resignation of Gen Cass. On the other hand he wrote a very able message against the right of secession and declared his resolution to maintain the laws and protect the property of the U.S. and appointed a new collector for the port of Charleston when the incumbent resigned. But the issue came nevertheless and Major Andersons removal to Sumter placed it sharp and sudden before the Country. Now this policy of delay and compromise and reference was Mr Buchanan's not his Cabinets it was conducted without the intervention of his Northern Ministers and in private consultation with his Southern, not exactly in official pledges but in adopting suggestions, in conversation with Southern Members of Congress and by indirect communication with those in authority and influence in South Carolina. When Andersons conduct made the issue, official action was necessary. Mr Buchanan had to take his choice between two courses, to sustain his officer or to condemn him. The conduct of his officer was in direct contradiction to the whole under-current of his policy but not so to the positions of the Message, nor the official action of the Cabinet. He wavered. But what could he do. Cobb was gone. Floyd went and <sup>Thomas</sup> Thomas had to go, the excitement in the South grew fiercer, the act of Anderson had fired



43

the whole train of Southern feeling, to go with the South now was to go entirely with them. Black and Toucey, Stanton and Holt said Decide- Whatever you may have done we are uncommitted. Keep the word which the South says you have pledged and we resign. We believe in the Union and will not betray it. In the Senate, every state that seceded - and at length even he saw that the secession of six States was certain, swept away his former friends, while the Black Republican party grew in ~~given~~ proportions and the few Southern Senators left bore him no love and owed him no allegiance, and so he surrendered into the hands of the North. Besides like the Northern members of his Cabinet he was a Northern man. If this revolution was choked, he and they would claim credit for their firmness. If it succeeded they were to remain at the North and must stand or fall by Northern opinion. To those Southern men who were for conciliating and humoring Mr Buchanan, this was evident from the first. Whenever the real issue came, they and he must separate but they were willing for reasons of their own to make the issue as peaceful as possible and lost nothing by meeting Mr Buchanan half way in the direction in which they were going .

4

3. But there was another motive at the bottom of the Presidents vacillation and apparent weakness. He could not bring himself to take decisive measures in Lincolns interest. While he was anxious to preserve the Union, he was not willing to allow the extent of the danger. His secret sympathy was with the South. In his heart he

felt that their protest was his defence . The Black Republican triumph was one especially over him. They had denounced him and his policy they had taken away his own Pennsylvania, they had personally labelled him and held him up to scorn by the famous *Corode* Committee. The South had elected him, had supported his Administration, and after all their indignation, to accept Lincoln and submit to Black Republican rule was almost to acquiesce in his condemnation. He had no objection to see the storm rage if it stopped short of shipwreck, to see the Republicans broken to pieces in the very flush of their insolent triumph, a re-action sweep over the North and float the old Democracy into power in 1864. A sharp issue might do much good. He would not therefore encourage "the Rebels", he would check them as far as he could but the Constitution had not given him authority, he could not stain his executive robes with the blood of American Citizens and if he could fight off the issue instead of fighting it until Lincoln who had sowed the storm, should arrive in person to reap the whirlwind, why that was all the Country had a right to expect, all that his duty called him to perform. He could go home to Wheatlands with a quiet conscience and an unbroken oath and if the Ship of State must go down his hand at least was not on the helm-

This of course is an opinion, not a fact susceptible of proof- but if human nature is human nature it is true and it is the only explanation of Mr Buchanans extraordinary conduct from the departure of the Commissioners until the inauguration of Lincoln.

The position of the Southern members of Mr Buchanan's Cabinet was scarcely <sup>by</sup> less embarrassing and anomalous <sup>as</sup> than his own but to apply to their conduct, as the whole Northern press did, the words treason and treachery was to borrow a technical language from Foreign Governments which had no true application to our own. The theory upon which the South based its action was that the Union was a confederacy of States. The administration therefore being only the official exponent of the daily practical life of the Country, the moment the Union was ~~dismantled~~ <sup>disintegrated</sup>, so was the Cabinet and the contest then to prevent the power of the Government from interfering against either party on the ground that it was the mere agent of both and as between them without independent authority, became legitimate. Mr Cobb with his usual clear judgment and sound common sense retired before the issue became too complicated. The States to which Gov Floyd and Mr Thomson belonged had not yet seceded. Until they did these gentlemen had a perfect Constitutional Right to remain in the Cabinet for two purposes. I. Either to devise some plan of compromise or 2 to maintain if they could the Constitutional doctrine which they held, that force could not be used against a seceding State. This was all they did and this they had a right to do. Gov: Floyd refused to use force against South Carolina and the President sustained him until the seizure of Fort Sumter and then changing his policy. Gov Floyd very properly resigned. Mr Thomson, thinking that until this change of policy was carried into action it might be again reversed, remained

46

and  
but in a few days was forced to follow Gov: Floyd leav-  
ing the President free to re-construct his Cabinet which  
he did by making Mr Holt, Sec at War and Mr Stanton Atty  
General, thus giving it an unity of purpose and an ability  
which would soon have been felt but for his own persistent  
and consistent indecision, if that can properly be called  
indecision which was really a fixed purpose to be unde-  
cided. gaining nothing but a groundless and bitter contro-  
versy with one of his colleagues.

The negotiation which the Commissioners from South  
Carolina went to Washington to open was never commenced.  
The Commissioners themselves were admirably selected.  
They had all filled with distinction very eminent places  
either in the Federal or State Governments, some of them  
in both. They were men of decided and varied ability  
and when they represented the unity of the States purpose,  
also represented with singular accuracy the ~~differe~~  
minor differences of opinion which existed in the State.  
They They came to Washington with an implicit confidence  
in Mr Buchanans intention to deal fairly with them and  
were anxious to do all that was consistent with their  
sense of duty, to solve the issue as temperately as circum-  
stances would permit and however they may have been con-  
trolled by their knowledge of public opinion at home,  
they were allowed by the Convention which appointed them,  
~~the~~ unlimited discretion in the  
discharge of their grave responsibility. That Mr  
Buchanan was sincere in his desire to meet them in the  
same spirit is evident from the necessities of his posi-

47

47

-tion and his course both before and after their visit. B  
But Major Andersons movement made the very day of their  
arrival, complicated the whole subject before solution.  
That Mr Buchanan xx failed to redeem very solemn pledges  
when he acquiesced in Major Andersons conduct, there can  
be no question. But it is a question whether he could  
have done otherwise. At the commencement of xx an Admin-  
istration, with a strong and successful party behind him  
he could have done it. Perhaps even then with a resolute  
will and perfect directness of purpose he could have done  
it. But all substantial authority had departed from him  
and he was not a man of direct ways. The threat of im-  
peachment with no friendly Senate to sit in judgment  
stood in his way, popular clamour became loud at the North  
and he said to a friend " If I withdraw Mr Anderson from  
Sumter, I can travel home to Wheatlands by the light of  
my own burning effigies"- His Cabinet was resolute, as  
Mr Stanton expressed himself very strongly to me " You  
say the President has pledged himself- I dont know it,  
I have not heard his account but I know you believe it .  
For the present I will admit it. The President was  
pledged- Andersons conduct has broken that pledge. You  
had two courses to choose- You had a right to either. You  
could have appealed to the President to redeem his pledge  
or you could have said The circumstances under which  
Anderson has acted prove bad faith, we will not trust  
you any further and then have acted as you saw fit: but  
you have no right to adopt both- stand on the Presidents  
pledge and give him a chance to redeem it or take the

46

48

matter in your own hands- Now you have chosen- You have by seizing the remaining forts and arsenals undertaken to redress yourselves. The Presidents pledge may be broken or not that now concerns him individually - as to the Government you have passed by the pledge and assumed in vindication a position of hostility- with that alone I have to deal-"

47

But while it was impossible for Mr Buchanan to redeem his word, the Commissioners would accept nothing less. They knew the temper of their people, they knew with what difficulty they had been restrained from seizing Fort Sumter when it was undefended- they knew that the possession of Fort Sumter meant the sealing up of the harbour of Charleston and the collection of Federal revenue by the Federal navy and they knew that nothing but the practical disavowal of instant removal would ~~would~~ convince the State that she had not been treacherously duped. All this they stated frankly to Mr Buchanan in their interview and in their first letter. His reply left little hope that there would be room for negotiation. He refused positively to disavow Major Anderson or to countermand his movement. Even then the Commissioners hesitated to abandon all hope of an arrangement. After careful deliberation, with a full sense of the responsibility of their act, an act indeed touching the utmost verge of their largest discretion, they made as I have already stated through Mr Hunter the proposition that they would engage to restore the forts which had been seized if the President would withdraw Major Anderson from Sumter and re-

-turn him to Moultrie and with the status thus re-established they were still ready to negotiate. This was declined and Mr Hunters message indicated that active measures had been taken in precisely the contrary direction. Then but not until then did the Commissioners write their concluding letter. It was in no sense a Diplomatic Document. It was formally addressed to the President but in reality to the Country. It was meant and ought so to be considered as a indication of the earnestness and sincerity of the State in the pacific course which she had attempted as a proof to the South that the issue was not to be avoided and as an explanation and justification of their own conduct in terminating their mission and returning home.

It may well be questioned whether after all this was not the most fortunate termination of their mission. It seems impossible that even if Major Anderson had not intervened, any satisfactory solution could have been reached. Had the Commissioners

*Some writing torn off at top of page her*

, the prospect of a peaceful solution would have extinguished the enthusiasm which the <sup>gleam</sup> ~~flame~~ of war had excited and while the perseverance of the State would have brought on the issue sooner or later, it would have been only when the Country had been worried with Congressional discussions and endless negotiations and when the politicians

had got the better of the people. No man can venture now to say what would have been the result.

Whether when Mr Lincoln came into power war was inevitable is a question that belongs to the future historian. My only object here has been to state those facts which came under my own observation at a time which full of interest as it was to those who lived and moved in it, can scarcely be xx of less to those who witnessing the results of this great revolution shall turn with natural curiosity to trace its progress. It is proper to say that I left Washington early in January 1861 and that these papers with some slight and not material modifications were written in Feby. of the same year.

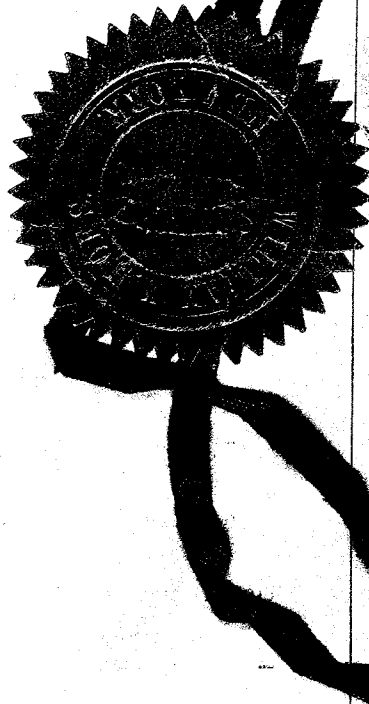
In writing about what I saw and heard I have been forced to use the personal pronoun oftener than good taste would warrant but I hope that no one who may read these pages will find any disposition to exaggerate my own importance or think that I have spoken as an actor where my object has been to describe as an observer.

State City and County of New York ss  
I William W. Hoed  
a Notary Public in and  
for the City, County and State  
of New York, do hereby Certify  
That I have compared  
the foregoing with an original



Manuscript in the possession of  
Major General Crawford, and that  
the above is a true and correct  
copy of said Original and  
of the whole thereof - the above  
being in type writing on one side of each page  
In testimony whereof I have  
hereunto set my hand and  
affixed my official seal at  
23<sup>rd</sup> May October AD 1885

WILLIAM M. HOES,  
ATTORNEY & COUNSELLOR,  
69 WALL STREET, N. Y.



HOES & MORGAN,

Attorneys,

69 WALL STREET,

NEW YORK.

Printed by the Case, 208 Broadway, N. Y.