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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

THE POLICIES OF PRESIDENTS BUCHANAN AND LINCOLN
IN THE FORT SUMTER CRISIS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts (Or Science)

Department of History

and

Political Science

By

W. L. DENNIS

1943

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TITLE OF THESIS: THE POLICIES OF PRESIDENTS LINCOLN AND
BUCHANAN IN THE FORT SUMTER CRISIS

APPROVED BY READING COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF THE
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.	1
I Buchanan Faces The Secession Movement.	4
II A Policy of Appeasement in Charleston Harbor . . .	32
III Major Anderson Transfers His Command From Fort Moultrie to Sumter	54
IV The South Carolina Commissioners and the Cabinet Crisis	78
V The New Policy of Reinforcement	98
VI The Hayne Mission and the End of the Buchanan Administration	121
VII Lincoln and Secession through the Inaugural . .	151
VIII Fort Sumter - Lincoln's Problem	175
IX The Fall of Fort Sumter	205
Bibliography	232

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to review the period between the election of Lincoln and the beginning of the Civil War, especially in regard to the influence Fort Sumter was to play in the actual commencement of hostilities.

Even in the colonial days there had been a reluctance to enter into a strong central Union, although such a Union had been required by the strongest necessity of self-interest and self-preservation. The old Articles of Confederation had demonstrated the reluctance on the part of the States to yield their sovereignty to a central Government. Although the new Constitution of 1789 had remedied the governmental weaknesses of the old Articles of Confederation, the States still held to the idea of separate and independent sovereignty. The idea that a State had the right to withdraw from the Union, upon what might be considered just cause, was by no means an exclusively Southern doctrine. The importance given such doctrine by John C. Calhoun in the nullification crisis of 1832, and the recourse to it by the South to meet the anti-slavery challenge of the Northern abolitionists, had tended to make the right of secession a Southern doctrine.

After many threats by the South that secession would be resorted to to protect the "peculiar institution" of slavery, and after the untiring efforts of Southern radicals since 1850 in propagandizing the secession movement, the opportunity came

in 1860 to test whether the Union was a "rope of sand" or a "chain of steel". The election of Lincoln, the candidate of the anti-slavery North, although perfectly legal and regular, was seized upon as cause for secession by the pro-slavery South. It mattered little that Lincoln and the Republicans would be powerless to harm the "peculiar institution" with a Democratic Congress. Revolutions are not amenable to logic and cold reason.

South Carolina was to lead the secession parade. Between the election of Lincoln and his inauguration, six other cotton States followed. As each State seceded it took over, if it had the power, the Federal property and forts within its limits. By March 4, 1861, all the Federal forts in the South had been taken except Fort Sumter and two or three more. It seems strange that while all the other forts were taken with little or no excitement, the question of South Carolina's taking over Fort Sumter was to be accompanied by such resistance on the part of the Federal Government, and was finally to bring on actual hostilities.

Both Buchanan and Lincoln were reluctant to believe that the secession movement was in dead earnest. They hoped to the end that some remedy short of war might be found. States were permitted to leave the Union by their own declaration and enter into a Southern Confederacy. Seemingly they were independent, although a recognition of independence had been remote from the thoughts of both Buchanan and Lincoln. No outstanding coercive measures had been directed against the seceding States by either Buchanan or Lincoln. Both Presidents had feared the

effect of coercion on the doubtful border slave States, which still clung uneasily to the Union. How long was the Federal Government to remain inactive and conciliatory?

It was the question of holding or surrendering Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, which was to bring an end to the period of inaction and the hope for a peaceful restoration of the Union. It will be the purpose of this study to trace the story of Fort Sumter under Presidents Buchanan and Lincoln, and to show how it brought about the beginning of the Civil War.

CHAPTER I

BUCHANAN FACES THE SECESSION MOVEMENT

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It is perhaps unfortunate, with respect to James Buchanan's place in history, that he was elected in 1856. In that year, before he had secured the nomination, he had written to a friend words that events were to make prophetic. Said Buchanan:

I had hoped for the nomination in 1844, again in 1848, and even in 1852, but now I would hesitate to take it. Before many years the Abolitionists will bring war upon the land. It may come during the next Presidential term.¹

The opposition party and its anti-slavery principles over which Buchanan triumphed were to help drive him into a close affiliation with the extreme pro-slavery wing of the Southern Democratic party. In 1856 the new Republican party, whose fundamental program was opposition to the further spread of slavery, entered its first candidate for the Presidency, John C. Fremont. The imposing total of votes polled by the Republicans inspired fear among the ranks of the pro-slavery elements of the South especially, and the new party became a menace and a challenge to the South. It was but natural that Buchanan should consider himself the champion of the pro-slavery elements of the Democratic party and the South. He owed his election to these groups and his personal leanings were already on the pro-slavery side.

As early as 1851 Buchanan, in a letter to Isaac Toucey, in which he discussed his chances for the Presidency, presaged his eventual championship of the pro-slavery cause. Said Buchanan in 1851:

1. Auchampaugh, Philip Gerald, James Buchanan and His Cabinet on the Eve of Secession, p. 30. Privately Printed, Lancaster Press, Lancaster, Pa., 1926.

I was never a favorite in New England and I presume that my opinions on the slavery question have rendered me less so than formerly.²

But in 1856 the anti-slavery movement had spread beyond the New England borders, increasing Buchanan's chances of being "less a favorite than formerly". In 1856 Buchanan had said privately and publicly that his mission would be to destroy sectionalism everywhere, and bring back the good old times. To his mind, and to many of those of conservative leanings, his election had saved the Union.³ To support this view, Horace Greeley has left the story of a convention of Southern Governors at Raleigh, N. C., in October, 1856, called at the invitation of Governor Wise of Virginia. The gathering was kept secret at the time, but it was afterward proclaimed by Governor Wise that, had Fremont been elected, he would have marched at the head of twenty thousand men to Washington, and taken possession of the Capitol, preventing by force Fremont's inauguration at that place.⁴

It may be that the election of Buchanan in 1856 prevented a secession movement then, but the accentuation of the slavery issued during his administration was to have the opposite effect. During his administration he was to alienate further the anti-slavery North by his Kansas policy, and even to drive from him the majority of Northern Democrats when he split with Douglas. Douglas broke with Buchanan because of the latter's extremely pro-slavery policy in Kansas. Thus, when secession came upon him, Buchanan had unfortunately set the stage for Northern

2. Ibid, p. 19

3. Auchampaugh, op. cit., p. 31

4. Greeley, Horace, The American Conflict, p. 329, Hartford, Conn., The O. D. Case Co., 1864.

suspicion and condemnation of his every action in his sincere desire to save the Union and avert civil war. Strangely enough, the pro-slavery advances made during Buchanan's administration were not to work to the disadvantage of the nascent anti-slavery Republican party, but to the discomfiture of the Democratic party of which Buchanan was the leader.

The intensification of the issue had caused the Democratic party to disintegrate into two factions, instead of welding the party into a militant phalanx to meet the menace of the anti-slavery Republicans. The moderate pro-slavery Northern group was led by Stephen A. Douglas, the extreme pro-slavery Southern wing by John C. Breckinridge. The Southern Union group, largely recruited from the ranks of the former American party, was led by John Bell of Tennessee. Abraham Lincoln was nominated over the most outstanding leader of the Republican party, William H. Seward, to lead the new party in what might be called the most important election of our history, that of 1860. The Democrats, in their split over the slavery issue, had given the Republicans a decided advantage. Because of these conditions, Lincoln was to become a minority President.

Now what role was Buchanan to play in this momentous election of 1860? It was not to be expected that he would throw his support to Douglas, who had injured his prestige and that of the party by his defection over the Kansas issue. It was only consistent with his past record and pro-Southern sympathies that he should throw his influence on the side of the Breckinridge or extreme Southern pro-slavery party.¹ In a

5. Curtis, George Ticknor, *Life of James Buchanan*, Vol. 2, p. 289, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1883.

campaign speech from the White House Buchanan declared that neither of the Democratic conventions was regular, and therefore every Democrat was at liberty to vote as he thought proper, but that for himself he preferred the Breckinridge ticket. One plank of that platform called for the "immediate annexation of Cuba" as a means of protecting the Southern interests in the national government.⁶

President Buchanan's attitude as between the North and South was illustrated in the above speech. He said, speaking of the right of the South to carry slavery into the territories, which right had been affirmed by the Dred Scott decision:

The people of the Southern States can never abandon this great principle of State equality in the Union without self-degradation. Never without an acknowledgment that they are inferior in this respect to their sister States. Whilst it is vital to them to preserve their equality, the Northern States surrender nothing by admitting this principle. In doing this they only yield obedience to the Constitution of their country as expounded by the Supreme Court of the United States. While for the North it is comparatively a mere abstraction, with the South it is a question of co-equal State sovereignty in the Union.⁷

While President Buchanan was thus defending the cause of the South in her grievances against the North, Governor W. H. Gist of South Carolina, on October 25, 1860, was addressing a circular letter to several governors of the cotton States, feeling them out as to the probable action of their States in the event of Lincoln's election, and hinting for some definite promise of support if South Carolina should

6. Nicolay and Hay, Abraham Lincoln, A History, vol. 2, p. 282 New York, The Century Co., 1904.

7. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 293.

secede alone.⁸ Said Governor Gist, "If no other State takes the lead, South Carolina will secede (in my opinion) alone, if she has any assurance that she will soon be followed by another or other States".⁹ Even earlier, on the 9th of August, 1860, W. W. Boyce, a member of Congress from South Carolina, in a speech at Winsboro, was saying that if Lincoln was elected, he thought that the Southern States should withdraw from the Union, as many as would, and if no other, South Carolina alone.¹⁰ From all the actions and utterances of the leading politicians in the State, as well as from the reactions of the people, there could be little doubt that Lincoln's election would set the stage for the immediate secession of South Carolina.¹¹ South Carolina was the logical State to take the lead in the movement of secession. Calhoun's doctrines, producing the Nullification Ordinance of 1832, had prepared the minds of the people for secession, and when the slavery crisis of 1850 was at its height, South Carolina was ready for secession. Now the smouldering fires of secessionism, allayed by the Compromise of 1850, were blown to white heat by the threat of victory of an anti-slavery party.

From the nomination of Lincoln until his election on November 6, 1860, the central theme of discussion in the political circles of South Carolina had been the policy to be

8. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 306, 307

9. Ibid, p. 307

10. Crawford, Samuel Wylie, The Genesis of the Civil War, p. 14

11. Rhodes, James Ford, History of the United States, 1850-1896, vol. 3, p. 2, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1920.

pursued by the State in the event of Lincoln's success. Captain Abner Doubleday, stationed at Fort Moultrie in Charleston harbor, has said that Charleston, at that period, was far from being a pleasant place for a loyal man. Almost every public assemblage was tinctured with treasonable sentiments, and toasts against the flag were always warmly applauded. As early as July there was much talk of secession, accompanied with constant drilling, and threats of taking the forts in Charleston harbor as soon as a separation should occur.¹² Radical propaganda had actually made the Southern masses believe that the election of Lincoln would bring the appointment of such men as John Brown and Hinton Helper to United States offices in the South, and that every official bureau would become a hot-bed of conspiracy, and a hatching-place of negro insurrections.¹³ After the news of Lincoln's election was known, a South Carolina diarist recorded the remark of a common citizen at a railway station, to the effect that, "Now that the Black Republicans have the power I suppose they will Brown us all".¹⁴

Therefore it is not surprising that on the evening of November 6, the day of the election, the crowd that had gathered in Charleston to await eagerly the news of the result, broke forth in cheers for a Southern Confederacy.¹⁵ The seriousness of the situation, and the firmness of purpose among the leaders of that city was emphasized on November 7, by the refusal of

12. Doubleday, Abner, Reminiscences of Forts Sumter and Moultrie, p. 14, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1876.

13. Burgess, John W., The Civil War and the Constitution, vol. 1, p. 10.

14. Randall, J. G., The Civil War and Reconstruction, p. 184 New York, D. C. Heath and Co., 1937.

15. Rhodes, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 2.

the Grand Jury of the United States District Court to perform the duties of their office.¹⁶ On the same day, the Hon. A. G. Magrath, the Judge of the court, rose in his place and formally resigned his office with the following serious pronouncement:

For the last time I have, as a judge of the United States, administered the laws of the United States within the limits of South Carolina. So far as I am concerned the Temple of Justice, raised under the Constitution of the United States, is now closed. If it shall never again be opened, I thank God that its doors have been closed before its altar has been desecrated with sacrifices to tyranny.¹⁷

On the 5th of November, 1860, the day before the election, the South Carolina Legislature had met, earlier than usual in order to be ready to take steps for future action in the event of Lincoln's election.¹⁸ On the 12th of November the Legislature passed an act calling for a convention of the people to vote on secession, appointing the 6th day of December for the election of the delegates to it, and the 17th of November for the meeting of the convention.¹⁹ Threats of disunion had been heard ever since the very beginning of the Federal Government, through the period of Jeffersonian expansion and the War of 1812, the nullification episode of 1832, and the slavery crises of 1850 and 1856. Now they were on their way toward realization through the instrumentality of

16. Crawford, op. cit. p. 12

17. Crawford, op. cit. p. 13

18. Burgess, op. cit. p. 78

19. Ibid., pp. 78, 79.

the State of South Carolina.²⁰ The paramount question of the hour was naturally how the national peril was to be averted, and in particular, how President Buchanan, his Cabinet and Congress would propose to deal with it.

Buchanan's position was indeed unenviable. He not only sympathized with the South generally, but also had at least one ardent secessionist in his Cabinet. All the Cabinet members were pro-slavery in sentiment. As originally constituted, the Cabinet had been made up of four Southern men and three Northern men. From the South Buchanan had selected Howell Cobb of Georgia for the Treasury, John B. Floyd of Virginia for Secretary of War, Jacob Thompson of Mississippi for the Interior, and Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee for Postmaster-General. From the North there were Lewis Cass of *Michigan, Secretary of State*, Isaac Toucey of *Connecticut, Secretary of the Navy*, and Jeremiah S. Black of Pennsylvania, Attorney-General.²¹ This membership had remained the same up to the secession crisis, except for the removal by death of the Postmaster-General, Brown. In Brown's place Buchanan had appointed a Kentuckian, Joseph Holt.²²

Cobb, the Secretary of the Treasury, had been working for the secession of his State, Georgia, before he resigned his post, and even before South Carolina passed her ordinance of secession. There is some truth in the charge that Buchanan had profited by the secession movement as a politician, and

20. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 296, 297.

21. Blaine, James G., Twenty Years of Congress, 1861, 1881, volume 1, p. 124, Norwich, Conn., The Henry Bill Publishing Co., 1884.

22. Buchanan, James, Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of The Rebellion, p. 110, New York, D. Appleton Co., 1866.

when disunion actually came, he was powerless to oppose it, because he was disarmed by his own words and acts. The disunionists were his partisans, friends and counselors.²³ It is also true that there was not in President Buchanan's Cabinet a single sympathizer with the Northern anti-slavery attitude, that all were pro-Southern before the question of reinforcing the forts in Charleston harbor became an issue, and a minority were outright advocates of secession as the only Southern remedy.²⁴ In the early stages of the South Carolina rebellion President Buchanan was regularly calling in, for conference and advice, the Assistant-Secretary of State, W. H. Trescot, the only South Carolinian really close to the administration.²⁵

On November 7, 1860, an administration newspaper, the "Constitution", which was receiving the Government patronage, declared in an editorial:

We can understand the effect that will be produced in every Southern mind when he reads the news that he is now called on to decide for himself, his children, and his children's children, whether he will submit tamely to the rule of one elected on account of his hostility to him and his, or whether he will make a struggle to defend his rights, his inheritance and his honor.²⁶

On reading this editorial, Horatio King, then First Assistant Postmaster-General, was so infuriated that on the same day he addressed a letter to President Buchanan, deploring the spirit

23. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 336.

24. Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XV, 1933, p. 90. No author given. Article: "Secession and Coercion". (Attorney-General Black's Correspondence).

25. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot", American Historical Review, XIII, 1908, pp. 531, 532.

26. Quoted by Horatio King, in his Turning on the Light, p. 25 Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1895.

of this editorial, protesting against men holding office under the administration parading the streets of Washington with disunion cockades on their hats, and calling on the President to use his power to check the "dread spirit of disunion here in our midst".²⁷

A letter from Mr. King to John A. Dix, later Buchanan's Secretary of the Treasury, gives such evidence of the fears entertained by loyal Union Democrats of Buchanan's course of action, that the following extract will be quoted:

I have good reason to believe that the President is beset by secessionists, who are almost exclusively occupying his attention; and it is important that the true friends of the Union should do all in their power to strengthen his hands. Why will you not write or come to see him, and get all the strong men of your city to do the same? I cannot call names, but rest assured what I tell you is true. The course of the "Constitution" is infamous, but the President, I presume, has no means of controlling it. Pray let him hear from you all in a most decided manner on this subject. Let him know how much the paper and suspicions of disunion influences near him are injuring him.²⁸

Whatever may be said of President Buchanan's methods and motives in his efforts to check the tide of disunion, there is little doubt that he was believed to be dominated in his course at the outset by pro-Southern and disunionist advisers. This was not only the belief of the victorious Republicans of the North, but in as emphatic degree that of the South.²⁹ Floyd, Buchanan's Secretary of War until he broke with the President on the issue of the reinforcement of the federal forts in Charleston harbor, has left a rather apt analysis of Buchanan's support of the South, modified by his Northern

27. Ibid, p. 25.

28. King, Horatio, op. cit. p. 25

29. Channing, Edward, A History of the United States, vol. 6, p. 281, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1936.

background. The New York Herald, January 17, 1861, carried a speech which Floyd made after his resignation from the Cabinet, in which he spoke of Buchanan thus:

Let me come again to the support in justice of what I believe to be that good old man. Was there since God made this earth a man ever placed in so difficult a position as the President of the United States was placed in? Had he not been true to you? Had his administration not been faithful to the South? Had it not been honest and faithful to the whole Union, because it was distinctly and fearlessly constitutional? I do not come here to censure, gentlemen, but I will say, because it is due to the truth of history, that in that terrific conflict in which he was engaged, he was not as well sustained by the South as he deserved to be. Perhaps it was intended that this present catastrophe should be precipitated upon the country. If they had taken a different course this doubtless would not have come. But it is not in human nature to be as true to another as to the mother that gave you suck. Mr. Buchanan could not come to the support of the South as a son of the South would.³⁰

Now the most immediate specific problem to be dealt with in the incipient stages of the South Carolina secession movement, with reference both to the success of the movement on the part of South Carolina, and the ability of the national government to cope with it, was that of the national property in Charleston and Charleston harbor. The national property within the territorial limits of South Carolina consisted of the forts in the harbor and a large arsenal within the city limits, not to mention the post-office and customs house in the city. There were three forts, Castle Pinckney, Moultrie, and Sumter. These had been ceded to the United States by South Carolina in 1805.³¹ Next to the success of secession itself, the possession of these forts by the State, and the prevention of their being strengthened by reinforcements on

30. Auchampaugh, op. cit. p. 19

31. Crawford, op. cit. p. 2

the part of the national government, was the most anxious concern of the South Carolina authorities.³² And the question of these same forts was to be also the chief cause of anxiety to Buchanan for the remainder of his term of office. On November 7, the day after Lincoln's election, Buchanan called in his Secretary of War to find out the truth or falsity of a rumor to the effect that the forts had been assaulted and carried by the South Carolinians.³³ On November 26, W. H. Trescott, in a letter to Governor Gist of South Carolina, stated that the President feared the forts were in danger of an assault by the South Carolinians, even before the passage of the ordinance of secession, and Governor Gist, in his reply of November 29, declared that he had found great difficulty in restraining the people of Charleston from seizing the forts.³⁴ Thus, at the beginning of the rebellion, the status of the forts in Charleston harbor was a chief concern to both parties in the conflict.

One of the first instances of the President's attention being called to the desirability of strengthening the garrisons of the Southern forts was in the memorandum of General Scott. On October 29, several days before the election of Lincoln, General Scott, Chief of Staff of the army, addressed to the President a paper entitled "Views suggested by the imminent danger of a disruption of the Union by the secession of one or more of the Southern States."³⁵ In these views, in addition to

32. Ibid, p. 31

33. Auchampaugh, op. cit. p. 130

34. Crawford, op. cit. pp. 30, 31.

35. Buchanan, James, Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of The Rebellion, pp. 287, 288, 289, 290, New York, D. Appleton Co., 1866.

a rather strange opinion that rather than have a civil war all its horrors, it might be preferable to let the Union be divided into about four confederacies, General Scott went on to say that all the Southern forts in danger of Southern aggression should be so garrisoned as to "make any attempt to take any one of them, by surprise or coup de main, ridiculous".³⁶ "From the impracticable nature of the 'views', and their strange and inconsistent character", said Buchanan, "the President dismissed them from his mind without further consideration".

In defense of his action the President argued that from Scott's own estimate there were only five companies, or about four hundred men available for reinforcement, and to have distributed these among nine forts would have been a confession of weakness instead of strength. That it would have done nothing to prevent secession, but much to provoke it. Besides he had no power, under the laws, to add to this force by calling forth the militia or accepting the services of volunteers. Most of the small regular army was beyond reach on the remote frontiers.³⁷ Buchanan's explanation of his action on General Scott's proposal gives us the key to his policy at that time. Said Buchanan:

Under these circumstances it became the plain duty of the President, destitute as he was of military force, not only to refrain from any act which might provoke or encourage the cotton States into secession, but to smooth the way for such a compromise as had in times past happily averted danger from the Union. There was good reason to hope that this might still be accomplished.³⁸

36. Ibid, p. 289.

37. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 313

38. Buchanan, op. cit. p. 104

39. Buchanan, op. cit. p. 300

Even if he had had at his immediate disposal sufficient troops to garrison the Southern forts, as he did have enough to garrison those in Charleston, he would not at this time have sent them. He firmly believed that an increase in the troops at the forts would be viewed by the South as an attempt at coercion and lead other cotton States to call secession conventions.⁴⁰

There was evidence of the danger of encouraging other cotton States into secession by the President's adoption of an aggressive policy. On October 5, 1860, Governor Gist of South Carolina addressed a letter to several Governors of cotton States, asking them for their views as to the action of their States in the event of a Black Republican victory.⁴¹ The majority of replies stated that, above all else, an attempt at coercion would be resisted; that such coercion would probably result in concerted action of the cotton States.⁴² Buchanan's confidence that another compromise could be made is justified by Rhodes, who believes that if Crittenden's compromise had been submitted to the people, it would have been accepted by both the North and South.⁴³ Yet, a few weeks later, the policy pursued by Buchanan at this time was condemned by his Secretary of State as the "fatal error" of the administration.⁴⁴

Floyd, the Secretary of War, has left a record of what must

40. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 300.

41. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 306-314.

42. Ibid

43. Rhodes, op. cit. vol. 3, pp. 149, 150.

44. Black, C. F., Essays and Speeches of J. S. Black, p. 15
New York, D. Appleton Co., 1885.

have been the first Cabinet meeting called by Buchanan after the election of Lincoln. The President called the meeting on November 9, and said that the business before the Cabinet was the most important since his induction into office. The President asked the opinion of the Cabinet on his suggestion that a general convention of the States should be called, for the purpose of effecting a compromise of the "angry disputes" between the North and South.⁴⁵ According to Floyd, the President said that if this were done, and the North should refuse a compromise, the South would be justified before the whole world for refusing to remain in a Confederacy where her rights were so shamefully violated. Buchanan recognized the "alarming condition" of the country, and promised that he would not "shrink from his duty". The majority of the Cabinet were for a convention. Cass, the Secretary of State, deplored Southern injuries, favored a convention and coercion; secession he held illegal. Black, then the Attorney-General, was for a convention, coercion, and reinforcements to Charleston. Cobb, the Secretary of the Treasury, was hopeless upon the future of the Union. Holt, then Postmaster-General, did not advise a convention, because in case it failed he thought it would accelerate secession. Thompson, Secretary of Interior, was for a convention. He was opposed to coercion, which he believed would drive his State to direct action. Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, was for a convention, and believed that retaliatory State measures would bring the Northern fanatics to

45. Auchampaugh, op. cit. p. 131

their senses. Floyd described himself as opposed to secession and rashness. He believed the Republicans would be powerless to do anything and was for a convention.⁴⁶ This statement of Cabinet opinions agrees substantially with that of the Assistant Secretary of State, W. H. Trescot, who wrote his record in February, 1861, only a few weeks after his resignation.⁴⁷ A probable error in Floyd's account is the view of Black on coercion. At this time Black did not believe that coercion was legal.⁴⁸ He was in favor of a convention.⁴⁹

Throughout November Buchanan was busy preparing his annual message to the Congress which was to assemble in the early part of December. On November 17, he asked his Attorney-General, J. S. Black, for an answer to the following questions:

1. In case of a conflict between the authorities of any State and those of the United States, can there be any doubt that the laws of the Federal Government, if constitutionally passed, are supreme?
2. What is the extent of my official power to collect the duties on imports at a port where the revenue laws are resisted by a force which drives the collector from the custom house?
3. What right have I to defend the public property (for instance, a fort, arsenal and navy yard), in case it should be assaulted?
4. What are the legal means at my disposal for executing those laws of the United States which are usually administered through the courts and their officers?
5. Can a military force be used for any purpose whatever under the Acts of 1795 and 1807, within the limits of a State where there are no judges, marshals or other civil officers?⁵⁰

46. Ibid.

47. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit., pp. 532, 533, 534.

48. See Black's advice to Buchanan, Nov. 20, 1860, Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 324.

49. Auchampaugh, op. cit., p. 131

50. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 319.

From these questions it can be seen that the President was extremely cautious in undertaking any action that might be considered aggressive.

The Attorney-General gave the President his answers to the five questions in a rather long document, on November 20.⁵¹ This opinion has been called by one historian of the period one of the most unfortunate state papers of our history and the basis of the President's even more unfortunate message of December 4.⁵² It was in line with Buchanan's belief that the Federal Government had no right to coerce or make war on a State, and that the problem of dealing with a seceded State was one for Congress to solve. It was also in line with the President's policy of inaction. Said the Attorney-General:

If one of the States should declare her independence, your action cannot depend upon the rightfulness of the cause upon which such declaration is based. Whether the retirement of the State from the Union be the exercise of a right reserved in the Constitution, or a revolutionary movement, it is certain that you have not in either case the authority to recognize her independence or to absolve her from her Federal obligations. Congress, or the other States in convention assembled, must take such measures as may be necessary and proper. In such an event, I see no course for you but to go straight onward in the path you have hitherto trodden - that is, execute the laws to the extent of the defensive means placed in your hands, and act generally upon the assumption that the present constitutional relations between the States and the Federal Government continue to exist, until a new code of things shall be established, either by law or force.⁵³

The last question, concerning the use of military force in the limits of a State where there were no federal officers, caused the President the greatest concern. S. W. Crawford, in a conversation with Judge Black in 1883, was told that next to Major Anderson's transfer of his troops from Moultrie

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 319 - 324.

52. Burgess, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 80

53. Curtis, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 323.

to Sumter, Federal Judge Magrath's resignation of his office caused the President more anxiety than any other event that occurred.⁵⁴ In the opinion of the Attorney-General, the President, under the laws of 1795 and 1807, could call out the militia only in aid of the courts and marshals, and there must be courts and marshals to aid. As most of the Federal officers had already resigned, the problem was to consider what could be done if there were no courts to issue judicial process, and no ministerial officers to execute it. The Attorney-General certainly did not give the President any encouragement for aggressive action when he wrote in the following language:

In that event (lack of Federal officers), troops would certainly be out of place, and their use wholly illegal. If they are sent to aid the courts and marshals, there must be courts and marshals to be aided. Without the exercise of those functions which belong exclusively to the civil service, the laws cannot be executed in any event, no matter what may be the physical strength which the Government has at its command. Under such circumstances, to send a military force into any State, with orders to act against the people, would simply be making war upon them. . . The existing laws put and keep the Federal Government strictly on the defensive. You can use force only to repel an assault on the public and aid the courts in the performance of their duty.⁵⁵

Later Mr. Black, the Attorney-General, was to change his views as to a strictly defensive policy, but it must be remembered that at this time no State had seceded, although South Carolina was preparing for it. Indicative of the defensive attitude, not only on the part of the Attorney-General, but of the Administration as a whole, is the reply of Judge Black to a letter from Judge Woodward of Pennsylvania. Judge Woodward wrote Black on November 28:

⁵⁴. Crawford, op. cit. p. 16

⁵⁵. Curtis, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 323.

As a Northern man, I cannot in justice condemn the South for withdrawing from the Union. We have driven them off, and if we raise an arm to strike, the stones of Rome will move to mutiny.⁵⁶

According to Black, Woodward's letter was submitted to the President and his Cabinet, and it "excited universal admiration and approbation for its eloquence and its truth".⁵⁷

At about the same time Judge Woodward had written the Attorney-General:

And if they do go out, don't let a blow be struck against them by the present administration. Dissuade them if you can, but if you can't, let them go in peace. I wish Pennsylvania could go with them. They are our brethren.⁵⁸

But it must not be inferred that Black was a "let them go in peace" man. Notwithstanding his opposition to the use of coercion, and his approval of the spirit of Judge Woodward's letter of November 28, he could not agree with Judge Woodward and other Pennsylvania friends that the seceding States should be allowed to go in peace. He was probably inconsistent in the following letter to Judge Woodward, but in it he gave evidence of a strong Union spirit when he said:

I value as highly as anybody the recollection that I once seemed to have some portion of the public confidence at home. But it will give me far more pride for the balance of my life to remember that I risked and lost it in a faithful support of principles which sooner or later will be acknowledged as necessary for the preservation of the noblest political system that the world ever saw.⁵⁹

On December 4, 1860, President Buchanan's message to Congress, on the state of the nation, was delivered. In this message, according to Buchanan, his policy was announced, to

56. Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XV, 1933, P. 90, No author given. Article: "Secession and Coercion". (Black's Correspondence.)

57. Ibid, Black to Woodward.

58. Ibid, p. 94.

59. Ibid, p. 96

which he "inflexibly adhered" to the end of his administration.⁶⁰ One can hardly read any historian whose condemnation of this message is not severe. One historian has said that the message was craven and cowardly for the emergency; that its whole scope was to upbraid the people for their choice of a President and "to exhort them to fall upon their knees to propitiate the fellow-citizens they had outvoted, and avert the dire calamity of disunion which otherwise seemed inevitable."⁶¹ The message does charge the North with responsibility in the following words:

Why is it, then, that discontent now so extensively prevails, and the Union of the States, which is the source of all these blessings, is threatened with destruction?

The long continued and intemperate interference of the Northern people with the question of slavery in the Southern States has at length produced its natural effects.⁶²

Then the President went on to plead with the South not to take any rash and precipitate action, not to yell before the abolitionist dog had bitten, but to await some overt act of the incoming administration. Speaking of the duty of the Northern States to repeal their Personal Liberty laws, he said:

The Southern States, standing on the basis of the Constitution, have a right to demand this act of justice from the States of the North. Should it be refused, then the Constitution, to which all the States are parties, will have been willfully violated by one portion of them in a provision essential to the domestic security and happiness of the remainder. In that event the injured States, after having first used all peaceful and constitutional means to obtain redress, would be justified in revolutionary resistance to the Government of the Union.⁶³

60. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 109

61. Schouler, James, op. cit. vol. V, p. 462

62. Richardson, J. D., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, vol. V, p. 626. Published by Authority of Congress, 1899.

63. Ibid., pp. 630, 631

The message followed the Attorney-General's opinion to the letter in that part concerning the President's lack of power to execute the laws in a State where the Federal officers had resigned. He said that that duty could not possibly be performed where no judicial authority existed to issue process and no marshal to execute it. And even if there were such an officer, he believed the entire population would combine to resist him.⁶⁴ But the right of secession he repelled in words that might have been written by Lincoln:

This Government. . . is a great and powerful Government, invested with all the attributes of sovereignty over the special subjects to which its authority extends. Its framers never intended to implant in its bosom the seeds of its own destruction, nor were they at its creation guilty of the absurdity of providing for its own dissolution. It was not intended by its framers to be the baseless fabric of a vision, which at the touch of the enchanter would vanish into thin air, but a substantial and mighty fabric, capable of resisting the slow decay of time and of defying the storms of ages.⁶⁵

Buchanan gave a very thorough and able argument against the right of secession, saying that to justify secession, as a constitutional remedy, it must be on the principle that the Federal Government is a mere voluntary association of States, to be dissolved at pleasure by any one of the contracting parties. "Such a principle", he said, "is wholly inconsistent with the history as well as the character of the Federal Constitution". He quoted Jackson and went back to the old Articles of Confederation to buttress his argument. The old Articles of Confederation, in the thirteenth article, expressly declared that the Union was to be perpetual. The preamble to the Constitution declares that it was established "in order to

64. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., p. 634

65. Ibid, p. 633

form a more perfect union"; therefore Buchanan insisted that the increased perfection of an already perpetual Union made that Union doubly perpetual and indissoluble.⁶⁶ Certainly no sign of weakness and vacillation was shown in denying the right of secession.

But the strength of the argument against the right of secession was considerably counterbalanced by an emphasis on the right of revolution and the identification of secession with revolution. The following paragraph might well have been omitted:

It may be asked, then, Are the people of the States without redress against the tyranny and oppression of the Federal Government? By no means. The right of resistance on the part of the governed against the oppression of their governments can not be denied. It exists independently of all constitutions, and has been exercised at all periods of the world's history. Under it old governments have been destroyed and new ones have taken their place. It is embodied in strong and express language in our own declaration of Independence. But the distinction must ever be observed that this is revolution against an established government, and not a voluntary secession from it by virtue of an inherent constitutional right. In short, let us look the danger fairly in the face. Secession is neither more nor less than revolution. It may or it may not be a justifiable revolution, but still it is revolution.⁶⁷

So it might be argued that there was no legal right to secede, but there might be a moral right of revolution; but secession is revolution, therefore there is a moral right of secession. What Buchanan meant was that if the South seceded, it must be without the sanction of the Constitution, while the right of revolution existed outside the Constitution. The argument seems merely academic however. Whether the Southern States withdrew from the Union by the right of secession or the

66. Ibid, pp. 630, 631, 632.

67. Richardson, J. D., op. cit. vol. 5, p. 634.

right of revolution, if successful, the denial of the right of secession would matter little.

As for coercion, Buchanan said, "The question fairly stated is, Has the Constitution delegated to Congress the power to coerce a State into submission which is attempting to withdraw or has actually withdrawn from the Confederacy?" He said that if answered in the affirmative, it must be on the principle that the power to declare and to make war against a State has been conferred upon Congress. After much serious reflection he had concluded that no such power had been delegated to Congress or to any other department of the Federal Government. To the support of his contention he quoted Madison's denial of coercion in a speech before the Constitutional Convention of 1787:

The use of force against a State would look more like a declaration of war than an infliction of punishment, and would probably be considered by the party attacked as a dissolution of all previous compacts by which it might be bound.

Here the President identified coercion with making war against a State, and said that the power to make war against a State is at variance with the whole spirit of the Constitution. "But if we possessed this power", said Buchanan, "would it be wise to exercise it under existing circumstances? The object would doubtless be to preserve the Union. War would not only present the most effectual means of destroying it, but would vanish all hope of its peaceable reconstruction."⁶⁸ It was emphasized that the Union rested upon public opinion and could never be cemented by the blood of its citizens shed in civil war.

⁶⁸. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 635, 636

Then the President put the responsibility of conciliation on Congress when he said: "Congress possesses many means of preserving it by conciliation, but the sword was not placed in their hand to preserve it by force."⁶⁹ We can at least understand why Senator Hale wittily summed up Buchanan's position as: (1) South Carolina has just cause to secede. (2) She has no right to secede. (3) We have no right to prevent her.⁷⁰ W. H. Seward also threw in his quip: "It shows conclusively that it is the duty of the President to execute the laws, - unless somebody opposes him, - and that no State has a right to go out of the Union - unless it wants to."⁷¹

Buchanan again reminded Congress that secession could be prevented by invoking the fifth article of the Constitution, which provided for amendments. "Congress can contribute much to avert it", he said, "by proposing and recommending to the legislatures of the several States the remedy for existing evils which the Constitution has itself provided for its own preservation". Then the President recommended an explanatory amendment on the subject of slavery. The amendment was to be confined to the "final settlement" of the true construction of the Constitution on three special points: (1) An express recognition of the right of property in slaves in the States where it now exists or may hereafter exist. (2) The duty of protecting this right in all the common Territories throughout their Territorial existence, and until they shall be admitted as States into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitutions may prescribe. (3) A like recognition of the right of the master to have his slave who has escaped from one

^{69.} Ibid, p. 636

^{70.} Schouler, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 473

^{71.} Ibid

State into another restored and "delivered up" to him, and of the validity of the fugitive-slave law enacted for this purpose, together with a declaration that all State laws impairing or defeating this right are violations of the Constitution, and are consequently null and void. The President said that it might be objected that this construction of the Constitution had already been settled by the Supreme Court, but that a very large proportion of the people still contested that decision (Dred Scott), and would never cease from agitation until it was established by the people of the several States in their sovereign character. Such an explanatory amendment, he believed, would forever terminate the existing dissensions, and restore peace and harmony among the States.⁷² But it was obvious that the Republicans could not agree to such an amendment.

As to the immediate danger of an appeal to arms in the harbor of Charleston, the President had the following to say:

Then, in regard to the property of the United States in South Carolina. This has been purchased for a fair equivalent, "by the consent of the legislature of the State", "for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals", etc., and over these the authority "to exercise exclusive legislation" has been expressly granted by the Constitution to Congress. It is not believed that any attempt will be made to expel the United States from this property by force; but if in this I should prove to be mistaken, the officer in command of the forts has received orders to act strictly on the defensive. In such a contingency the responsibility for consequences would rightfully rest upon the heads of the assailants.⁷³

In the last sentence of the above quotation Buchanan expressed a determination from which he was not to depart, to avoid any contingency that would throw the responsibility of

⁷². Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 5, p. 638

⁷³. Ibid., p. 635

initiating a conflict of arms on the Government. If war must come, Buchanan wanted the responsibility to rest on the secessionists. Lincoln's inaugural was to express the same desire.⁷⁴

There was little hope of Buchanan's plan of compromise by the amendment method succeeding. This was not because of the refusal of Congress to try the method recommended by the President, for many were the committees appointed and the plans submitted. There were the Committee of Thirteen of the Senate, the Committee of Thirty-three of the House, the Crittenden plan of compromise, one outstanding feature of which was the extension of the Missouri Compromise line westward, and the Peace Convention sponsored by the State of Virginia.⁷⁵ The failure of the compromise efforts was because the plans worked out were contrary to the fundamental Republican principle of "no further extension of slavery". On the other hand, the attitude of radical Southern Congressmen augured ill for the success of compromise, for on December 13, when the "Committee of Thirty-three" had just begun its efforts, and before a single State had actually seceded, a group of Southern Congressmen issued the following address to their constituents:

The argument is exhausted. All hope of relief in the Union, through the agency of committees, Congressional legislation, or constitutional amendments, is extinguished, and we trust the South will not be deceived by appearances or the pretense of new guarantees. The Republicans are resolute in the purpose to grant nothing that will or ought to satisfy the South. We are satisfied the honor, safety, and independence of the Southern people are to be found only in a Southern Confederacy - a result to be obtained only by separate State secession - and that the sole and primary aim of each slaveholding State ought to be its speedy and absolute separation from an unnatural and hostile Union.⁷⁶

74. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 342, Lincoln's Inaugural.

75. Randall, J. G., op. cit., p. 200

76. Ibid, p. 201

CHAPTER II

A POLICY OF APPEASEMENT IN CHARLESTON HARBOR

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It has already been noted that the Federal forts and property in the harbor of Charleston were the foremost cause of anxiety, both on the part of the Buchanan administration and the State of South Carolina. Even if South Carolina were allowed to leave the Union in peace, and Buchanan's policy of using no force to bring her back into the Union were indefinitely continued, the possession of these forts and property by the Federal Government would have been an infringement of South Carolina's alleged sovereignty. Therefore it was almost as important that South Carolina should secure the ultimate possession of these forts as to make good her claim to the right of secession.

Jefferson Davis has left an interesting argument that the forts, by virtue of the act of cession of 1805, were legally in the possession of South Carolina, even under the Constitution.¹ He stated that the property in Charleston harbor and on Beaufort River, the various forts and fortifications, and sites for the erection of forts, were granted to the Federal Government by legislative enactment by South Carolina, on the following conditions:

That, if the United States shall not, within three years from the passage of this act, and notification thereof by the Governor of this State to the Executive of the United States, repair the fortifications now existing thereon or

1. Davis, Jefferson, Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, vol. 1, p. 210, Appleton and Co., New York, 1881.

build such other forts or fortifications as may be deemed most expedient by the Executive of the United States on the same, and keep a garrison or garrisons therein; in such case this grant or cession shall be void and of no effect.²

The conditions in the act of cession apparently were not fulfilled, for no additional defenses nor repairs were determined upon until 1827, long after the three year limit had expired.³

President Buchanan, in his annual message to Congress of December 4, 1860, declared that the property had been purchased for a fair equivalent, by the consent of the Legislature of the State.⁴

But Jefferson Davis seems to have been correct in denying a purchase, citing a law of 1794 providing "that no purchase shall be made where such lands are the property of a State".⁵ This argument, however, was not made by Davis until after the Civil War.

Now what was the status of the forts in Charleston harbor in the fall of 1860? There were forts Moultrie, Sumter, and Castle Pinckney. Fort Sumter was unoccupied, being in an unfinished state, while Castle Pinckney was in charge of a single ordnance sergeant. The garrison of Fort Moultrie consisted of two companies that had been reduced to sixty-five men, who with the band made the total number in the post seventy-three. Fort Moultrie had no strength, being merely a sea battery, and its walls were about as high as an ordinary room. The sand had drifted from the sea against the walls so that cows could actually scale the ramparts.⁶

2. Ibid., quoting from Statutes at Large of South Carolina, vol. 5, p. 501.

3. Crawford, op. cit. p. 2

4. Richardson, J. D., op. cit. vol. 5, p. 635

5. Davis, Jefferson, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 210

6. Johnson and Buel, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. 1, p. 42, New York, The Century Co., 1887.

Castle Pinckney, a small round structure of brick, had long been practically abandoned. Grass grew on its walks, its casemates had cracked here and there, and signs of neglect and decay were evident; but twenty-two guns still stood on its parapet, and the old sergeant still polished the lacquer on the guns and trimmed the harbor light that was mounted on its walls.⁷ This fort commanded the city of Charleston.

Fort Sumter was located on a shoal, right in the narrowest part of the channel of the harbor, a large pentagonal fort, fifty feet high. It was unfinished and without armament of any kind. A few heavy guns of old pattern lay on the parade, with masonry and large stones and material for the completion of the work. One hundred twenty workmen, under the charge of a lieutenant of engineers, were at that time working on the fort to complete it, under an appropriation made by an Act of Congress passed in June, 1859.⁸ This work on the forts, begun in the fall of 1860, had no connection with their possible future role in the secession drama, as the law appropriating the funds had been passed as a matter of routine. But as the actual work started in the fall of 1860, it aroused the suspicions of the people of Charleston.⁹

On November 26, 1860, W. H. Trescot, the Assistant Secretary of State in Buchanan's Cabinet, wrote Governor Gist of South Carolina that the President feared that before South Carolina acted on secession in the coming convention, an attempt might be made to take the forts in Charleston harbor.

7. Crawford, op. cit., p. 2

8. Crawford, op. cit., p. 2

9. Ibid, p. 7

Feeling his personal honor involved in such an attempt, the President, said Triscot, might make his fear the pretext to order an increase of forces to those posts. This order would be resisted at any cost by the Southern members of the Cabinet, but they would be strengthened in their position if Governor Gist would assure the President that so long as the status of the forts remained the same, and so long as the State remained in the Union, no attempt to take them by force would be made.¹⁰ The Assistant Secretary of State received a reply, dated November 29, 1860, which so clearly outlined the situation as to any reinforcement that the greater part of it will be quoted. Said Governor Gist:

Although South Carolina is determined to secede from the 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. . . . If President Buchanan takes a course different from the one indicated and sends on a reinforcement, the responsibility will rest on him of lighting the torch of discord, which will only be drenched in blood.¹¹

Thus we see that the attitude of South Carolina was that the Federal Government must surrender the forts after the ordinance of secession was passed, and if war was to be avoided no troops were to be sent even before the State left the Union. This was indeed a clever attempt to play upon the President's

10. *Ibid.*, p. 30

11. Nicolay and Hay, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 379.

fear of a civil war, and to make the taking of the forts after secession all the easier. This letter was shown to the President by Mr. Trescot.¹²

Buchanan's Secretary of War, Floyd, has left a story to the effect that the President was asking him to send reinforcements at just about the time that Governor Gist sent the above letter to Trescot. Floyd's testimony has been questioned because of the fact that he did quite a bit of boasting to the South, after his resignation, of his part in preventing reinforcements. Although contrary to the President's policy at this time, it might well be that he had temporarily yielded to the pressure of Secretary Cass and Attorney-General Black, who favored reinforcements as early as the first week in November. Trescot, writing of the same period of time to which Floyd referred, said that he went to call on Buchanan, found Cass and Black in conference with the President, and the President announced to him that he had determined to send reinforcements.¹³ Floyd's account ran as follows:

Buchanan: "Mr. Floyd, are you going to send recruits to strengthen the forts? What about sending reinforcements to Charleston?"

Floyd: ("I was taken very much by surprise to find the President making this inquiry, indicating to my mind a change of policy on his part".)
"I said", "Mr. President, nothing about sending recruits to Charleston".

Buchanan: "Don't you intend to strengthen the forts at Charleston?"

Floyd: "I do not intend to strengthen the forts at Charleston".

12. Crawford, op. cit., p. 34

13. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot", op. cit., p. 535

Buchanan: " Mr. Floyd, I would rather be at the bottom of the Potomac tomorrow than that these forts in Charleston should fall into the hands of those who intend to take them. It will destroy me, sir."

Mr. Floyd, if that thing occurs it will cover your name - and it is an honorable name, sir - with an infamy that all time can never efface, because it is in vain that you will attempt to show that you have not some complicity in handing over those forts to those who take them.

Floyd replied that he would risk his life and honor on the declarations of the South Carolinians that they would not be touched. Buchanan said that was all very well, but "Does that secure the forts?" Floyd replied that it didn't, but that it was a guarantee that he believed in. Buchanan added that he wasn't satisfied. Floyd said that he was sorry for it. He offered to make out orders, but said that it would mean conflict. He said the forts would be safe. The State would send her commissioners to Congress, and that body would decide what to do. Floyd added that he would resign if Congress decided on coercion.¹⁴ The above conversation so excited Floyd that he sent for Davis, Mason, and Hunter to come up earlier than usual to Washington to assure Buchanan there was no danger to the forts. Davis, while finding Buchanan concurring with some of his views, was not at all successful in persuading him to take the troops out of the harbor.¹⁵

The appeasement policy, which was initiated by President Buchanan's message of December 4 to Congress, had thus been followed for weeks already by the Secretary of War. Much could^{be} and has been written on the question of Floyd's loyalty

14. Auchampaugh, op. cit., p. 150

Floyd's speech at Richmond, Jan. 17, 1861.

15. Ibid, p. 151

or treachery to the Union cause in this crisis, but we do know his position on the question of reinforcing the forts in Charleston harbor. Mr. Trescot, who had an opportunity to know him intimately, and who would have had no reluctance to brand him as a secessionist in the first weeks of the crisis, has declared that Floyd thought secession unwise, and was in favor of preserving the Union. However he fully recognized the right of a State to secede and his sympathy was with the South.¹⁶ The Secretary of War was opposed to the coercion of a State, thought the reinforcement of the garrisons in Charleston harbor very much the same as coercion, and would not consent to it. On the other hand, he declared that any attempt on the part of the people to take the forts he was bound to resist and would resist.¹⁷

Not only was this the avowed policy of the Secretary of War, but his actions indicated that he opposed anything that could be interpreted by the South Carolinians as a change in the "status quo" of the forts. In the month of November Fort Moultrie's garrison was commanded by Colonel J. L. Gardner.¹⁸ A few days before the first of November, the Chief Engineer, J. G. Foster, had asked the War Department for forty muskets to arm the workmen in the forts, on the ground that he feared a possible assault.¹⁹ There could be no better indication

16. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit., p. 3.

17. Ibid, pp 533, 534

18. U. S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, vol. 1 p. 68, Quoted hereafter as Official Records.

19. Ibid, p. 67

than this of the state of feeling among the people of Charleston, who inspired such fears in the Chief Engineer even before the election of Lincoln. On November 1, the War Department asked the approval of Colonel Gardner for the issuance of the muskets, and he advised against it, on the ground that many of the workmen were secessionists.²⁰ Colonel Gardner, in his reply to the Department on November 5, gave warning of the danger of assault and asked for reinforcements in the following language:

. . . The only proper precaution - that which has no objection - is to fill these two companies with drilled recruits (say fifty men) at once, and send two companies from Old Point Comfort to occupy respectively Fort Sumter and Castle Pinckney.²¹

Thus it is clear that the War Department was aware of the situation, for here is a definite statement of the facts and a request of the commanding officer for reinforcements and for the occupation of the two unoccupied forts. The advice was not heeded; it was contrary to the Secretary of War's views on coercion.

On November 6, F. J. Porter, Assistant Adjutant-General, was ordered by the Secretary of War to Charleston harbor to inspect the fortifications and troops. In his report of November 11, Porter, speaking of Fort Moultrie, said that the unguarded state of the fort invited attack, needed strengthening without exciting the community, and that "all could have been easily arranged weeks since, when the danger was foreseen by the present commander. Now much delicacy must be practiced. The garrison is weak, and I recommend that a favorable opportunity be taken to fill up the companies with the best

20. Ibid, p. 68

21. Ibid, p. 69

drilled recruits available."²² Here was another request for reinforcements by the War Department's own special investigating agent. These recommendations were made just a few days after General Scott had sent his views to the President, October 29, and asked for reinforcements.²³ Buchanan's objection to General Scott's views was that the four or five hundred men available would be a confession of weakness when distributed among the nine Southern forts, but judging from the requests of Col. Gardner and F. J. Porter, there were plenty of men available for reinforcing the forts in the critical danger zone.

Why were not the forts in Charleston harbor alone reinforced? Surely this line of action presented itself to the President's consideration. He took the responsibility upon himself when writing in 1866 of his refusal to follow Gen. Scott's advice, he said:

This refusal is attributed, without the least cause, to the influence of Governor Floyd. All my Cabinet must bear ~~with~~ me witness that I was the President myself, responsible for all the acts of my administration; and certain it is that during the last six months previous to the 29th of December, the day on which he resigned his office, after my request, he exercised less influence on the administration than any other member of the Cabinet.²⁴

Thus it must have been Buchanan's own policy, as well as Floyd's, not to send reinforcements to Charleston harbor, when there were men available for those particular forts, and two separate official requests for them. The President's

22. Official Records, op. cit. pp. 70, 71.

23. See page 8

24. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 307

responsibility becomes all the more serious when it is remembered that at that time the secession ordinance had not even been passed, and the sending of a few additional soldiers would have been merely a matter of routine. The South Carolina military forces were not yet organized sufficiently for successful resistance to reinforcement. The explanation must be in Buchanan's fear that such an attempt must produce a collision and inaugurate a civil war. As Floyd thought reinforcement bordered on coercion, so the President must have thought that it was aggression. When later comparing his policy with Lincoln's, he said:

The true policy was that expressed by President Lincoln to the seceded States in his inaugural months afterward, in which he informs them, 'you can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors.'²⁵

The removal of the commanding officer in Fort Moultrie was, according to both Northern and Southern opinion, a concession to the insurgents in Charleston. The Southern opinion was that Colonel Gardner was removed because of his requests for reinforcements, and that the order to F. J. Porter to inspect the forts and report on conditions in Charleston was simply an excuse to get rid of an efficient commander.²⁶ Porter's report, made to the War Department November 11, in the main approved the conduct of Col. Gardner, but there were references to "a laxity of discipline" and a reference to the facilitation of certain matters given a "proper commander".²⁷ If there was no connection between this inspection and report, it was a

25. Ibid, p. 165

26. Nicolay and Hay, Vol. 2, op. cit. p. 345.

27. Official Records, I, pp. 70,-72

rare coincidence that on the next day, November 12, Major Robert Anderson received a message from Adjutant-General Cooper, saying that the Secretary of War desired to see him and to proceed to Washington and report to him without unnecessary delay.²⁸ Major Anderson was a Kentuckian with Southern sympathies, had married a Georgia woman who owned slaves, and there can be little doubt that he was put in command in Charleston harbor to appease the Charlestonians.²⁹ Captain Abner Doubleday, the second in command under Major Anderson, later recorded his suspicion that Floyd thought the new commander could be relied on to carry out the Southern programme.³⁰ Another officer, Captain James Chester, was of the same opinion, saying that Anderson was appointed because he was expected to be reasonable, and that if he had scruples upon the question of qualified allegiance, he might surrender on demand, on purely professional grounds.³¹ The Assistant-Secretary of State, who was quite close to Floyd, and whose evidence should carry weight, also stated, a few days after Col. Gardner's removal, that it had been done because of Gardner's removal of ammunition from the arsenal in Charleston to Fort Moultrie.³²

To show the urgent need either for reinforcement of the forts, or a policy of appeasement, we have a startling report of the military storekeeper at the Federal arsenal in Charleston.

28. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 72

29. Crawford, op. cit. p. 61

30. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. I, p. 41

31. Ibid., p. 51

32. Crawford, op. cit. p. 85

On November 12, the same day that Major Anderson was notified to report immediately to the Secretary of War, the military storekeeper at the arsenal wrote the War Department as follows:

In view of the excitement now existing in this city and State, and the possibility of an insurrectionary movement on the part of the servile population, the governor has tendered . . . a guard of South Carolina Militia . . . a lieutenant and twenty men for this post, which has been accepted.³³

Brevet-Colonel Benjamin Huger, who was ordered to replace Humphreys in charge of the arsenal, in a report of November 20 approved the course of Humphreys in accepting the South Carolina guard.³⁴ This appointment was also in line with the appeasement programme. Huger was a native of South Carolina, and from his ability, high social standing and prominent social relations, he was expected to be a suitable appointment.³⁵ In this connection it is pertinent to refer to an alleged conversation between S. W. Crawford and General De Saussure. De Saussure, at one time commanding the State forces in Charleston, declared that he was told by Colonel Huger that the latter took charge of the arsenal as a sort of envoy from Mr. Buchanan and General Scott; that he had been assured that the status of the forts would not be changed.³⁶

Whatever the expectations of the War Department or the Administration were as to a conciliatory policy on the part of Major Anderson, his first report after taking command was much in the vein of his predecessor's. In his report to the

33. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 72

34. Ibid, p. 74

35. Crawford, op. cit., p. 119.

36. Ibid, p. 120, De Saussure to author.

War Department of November 23, soon after taking command, he referred to his verbal instructions from the Secretary of War to inspect the forts, but said that as Porter had already made a report in relation to them, he would refer to other matters of great importance, "if the Government intends holding them".³⁷ This last phrase is worthy of reflection. Did Major Anderson's conversation with Floyd leave him with the impression that the Government might go so far in conciliation that the forts would be given up if assaulted? Or did the surprising weakness of the forts give him the idea? In a rather lengthy report he gave such an alarming view of things that one may easily wonder why immediate and positive action was not forthcoming on the part of the Government.

Said the Commander:

The garrison now in it (Moultrie) is so weak as to invite an attack, which is openly and publicly threatened. We are about sixty, and have a line of rampart of 1,500 feet in length to defend. If beleaguered, as every man of the command must be either engaged or held on the alert, they will be exhausted and worn down in a few days and nights of such service as they would then have to undergo.³⁸

Again:

The clouds are threatening, and the storm may break upon us at any moment. I do, then, most earnestly entreat that a reinforcement be immediately sent to this garrison, and that at least two companies be sent at the same time to Fort Sumter and Castle Pinckney... I feel the full responsibility of making the above suggestions, because I firmly believe that as soon as the people of South Carolina learn that I have demanded reinforcements, and that they have been ordered, they will occupy Castle Pinckney and attack this fort.³⁹

37. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 74

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., p. 75.

Now, Major Anderson had done his duty, but he had said the wrong thing for his requests to be granted. He admitted that reinforcements would provoke an immediate attack by South Carolina military forces. This was what President Buchanan, above all else, was anxious to avoid. It was contrary to his fundamental policy.⁴⁰ It was contrary to Floyd's stand on reinforcements. He had said to the Assistant Secretary of State at just about that time that if the latter thought that collision between the people of South Carolina and the Government forces would be precipitated, "he would not consent that a man nor a gun should be sent to any of the forts in the harbor of Charleston".⁴¹ On November 28 and December 1 Major Anderson again renewed his requests.⁴² On the latter date Major Anderson received his refusal through the Adjutant-General, S. Cooper, who wrote:

It is believed, from information thought to be reliable, that an attack will not be made on your command, and the Secretary has only to refer to his conversation with you, and to caution you that, should his convictions unhappily prove untrue, your actions must be such as to be free from the charge of initiating a collision. If attacked, you are, of course, expected to defend the trust committed to you to the best of your ability.

The increase of the forces under your command, however much to be desired, would, the Secretary thinks, judging from the recent excitement produced on account of an anticipated increase, as mentioned in your letter, but add to that excitement, and might lead to serious results.⁴³

The commander, if attacked, was to defend himself to the best of his ability, but the Government in refusing to send reinforcements, was limiting his ability from the fear of

40. See page 16

41. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot", op. cit. p. 535.

42. Official Records, Vol. I, pp. 78, 79, 81, 82.

43. Ibid, pp. 82, 82.

serious results. Buchanan approved this course whole-heartedly. His feeling was that South Carolina was at that time the only *State* advocating secession, and that had collision been the result of reinforcement, the other cotton States would have rushed to the support of South Carolina, thus realizing her long sought object. He believed that South Carolina was seeking the spilling of a little blood in order to secure the cooperation of the other cotton States.⁴⁴

Another instance that gave evidence of the paramount desire on the part of the War Department to do absolutely nothing that could be interpreted as a hostile movement toward the State of South Carolina was the case of the forty muskets already referred to.⁴⁵ Although Col. Gardner advised against the issuance of the muskets to the workmen, the order was approved by the Secretary of War, but held in abeyance in the files of the Charleston arsenal.⁴⁶ On November 30 the Chief Engineer in charge of the repairing of Fort Moultrie, notified the War Department that he intended to use the old order for the forty muskets and more if Col. Huger, in charge of the arsenal, would agree to let him have them.⁴⁷ In this communication he disagreed with Major Anderson's report of November 23.⁴⁸ He thought that the sending of reinforcements would not have produced a collision of arms, while the Major believed a collision would have followed. No plainer charge of a neglect of duty on the part of the Administration could have

44. Buchanan, James, op. cit. pp. 163, 164.

45. See page 22.

46. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 68

47. Ibid, p. 80

48. See page 27.

been made. Wrote the Chief Enginner, Lieutenant J. G. Foster, to his superior, De Russy:

I think that more troops should have been sent here to guard the forts, and I believe that no serious demonstration on the part of the populace would have met such a course. But, as it is decided not to do this, and to rely instead upon the Engineer employes for the protection of the public property, I shall do everything in my power to carry out this purpose. I shall, of course, exercise the necessary amount of prudence, and avoid any appearance of arming, as I conceive this to be the wish of the War Department.⁴⁹

If the forts were to be protected as public property only, it seemed that it was up to the engineer workmen to do it.

President Buchanan, just three or four days after Foster's denunciation of Government policy, explained that policy in his annual address to Congress of December 4, 1860. Speaking of the public property in Charleston harbor, he said that he did not believe that any attempt would be made to expel the United States from that property by force, but if events should prove him wrong, the officer in command had orders to act strictly on the defensive; that if an attack was made, the responsibility for consequences would rightfully rest upon the heads of the assailants.⁵⁰ Thus, it was acting on the defensive to refuse to send reinforcements, which were apparently needed to make a successful defense of the public property. At any rate, the Chief Engineer obtained his forty muskets by virtue of the previous order on file at the arsenal. They were transferred to Forts Sumter and Castle Pinckney on December 17, without causing any excitement, according to Major Anderson's report.⁵¹ But on the same day that Major

49. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 81

50. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 635

51. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 95

Anderson made his report, the military storekeeper at the arsenal addressed a note to the Chief Engineer, stating that the transfer of the muskets had caused intense excitement, and that Col. Huger had assured the Governor of the State that no arms would be removed from the arsenal and pledged his word that the arms should be returned at once.⁵² The Chief Engineer refused to return them.⁵³

On December 19, W. H. Trescot, who had recently resigned as Assistant Secretary of State, and had assumed his new role as special negotiator for South Carolina, received the following telegram from Charleston:

Captain Foster yesterday removed forty muskets from the 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.⁵⁴

The threat brought results. On the same day that Trescot received his telegraph message, the Secretary of War telegraphed Major Anderson: "I have just telegraphed Captain Foster to return any arms that he may have removed from Charleston Arsenal."⁵⁵ If the public property was to be defended, it was not only to be done, if at all, by the engineer workmen, *but also without sufficient arms.*

Another example, although seemingly trivial, will show the Government's policy of appeasement. Toward the latter part of November, an application was made by an adjutant of a South Carolina regiment to the engineer officer at Moultrie for his

52. Crawford, *op. cit.* p. 77

53. *Official Records*, Vol. I, p. 97

54. Hunt, Gaillard, "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot", *op. cit.* p. 539.

55. *Official Records*, Vol. I, p. 98

rolls, for the purpose of enrolling the men for military duty for the State. Major Anderson wrote to the War Department asking what he should do if the State authorities should demand from Captain Foster men whom they might have enrolled into the service of the State.⁵⁶ On December 14 came the reply of the Secretary of War:

If the State authorities demand any of Captain Foster's workmen on the ground of their being enrolled into the service of the State, and the subject is referred to you, you will, after fully satisfying yourself that the men are subject to enrollment, and have been properly enrolled under the laws of the United States, and of the State of South Carolina, cause them to be delivered up or suffer *them* to depart.⁵⁷

Major Anderson was so surprised at the attitude of the Secretary of War that he felt the latter must have misunderstood his question. In a reply of December 18 we can read the Major's astonishment between the lines:

As I understood it, the South Carolina authorities sought to enroll as a part of their army intended to act against the forces of the United States, men who are employed by and in the pay of that Government, and could not, as I conceived, be enrolled by South Carolina "under the laws of the United States and of the State of South Carolina."⁵⁸

Major Anderson had also asked the War Department for authority to level the sand hills and remove some houses which rendered the defense of Fort Moultrie extremely difficult.⁵⁹ In the same communication from the War Department of December 14, regarding the enrollment of the workmen, it was stated that under ordinary circumstances the leveling of the sand hills, which commanded the fort, would not be considered as initiating a collision; but in the delicate state of the

56. Crawford, op. cit. p. 67

57. Official Records, Vol. I, pp 82, 93

58. Ibid, p. 94

59. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 88

popular mind, the question demanded the coolest and wisest judgment; that the leveling of the houses in anticipation of an attack might betray distrust, and prematurely bring on a collision. The advice was to await an attempted assault before taking the necessary measures for defense.⁶⁰ In a letter to a friend, December 19, Major Anderson summed up his anomalous situation when he said that the fort (Moultrie) was a very weak one in its capacity of being defended and "it is surrounded by houses that I cannot burn or destroy until I am certain that I am to be attacked, and I shall not be certain of it until the South Carolinians are in possession; but I have so little ammunition that I cannot waste it in destroying houses."⁶¹ In the same letter he lamented his lack of authority for leveling the sand hills, asserting that sharpshooters could pick off his little band of sixty men in a short time.⁶²

This situation had been previously prepared by one of the most widely publicized episodes of the Government's appeasement policy. On December 8, the members of the South Carolina Congressional delegation who had not yet resigned their seats called on the President. They were John McQueen, Wm. Porcher Miles, M. L. Bonham, W. W. Boyce, and Lawrence M. Keitt.⁶³ Their purpose was stated in a written memorandum handed to the President in their second interview of December 9. The memorandum read:

60. Ibid, p. 93

61. Crawford, 6p. cit. p. 70

62. Ibid.

63. Curtis, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 377

In compliance with our statement to you yesterday, we now express to you our strong convictions that neither the constituted authorities nor any body of the people of the State of South Carolina will either attack or molest the United States forts in the harbor of Charleston previously to the action of the convention, and we hope and believe, not until an offer has been made through an accredited representative to negotiate for an amicable arrangement of all matters between the State and the Federal Government, provided that no reinforcements shall be sent into those forts, and their relative military status remain as at present.⁶⁴

The importance of this communication is that it was the basis for most of the condemnation of Buchanan's policy, both North and South. The belief was general throughout South Carolina that the President had given a pledge that the status of the forts would not be changed prior to the secession of the State and the sending of accredited agents to negotiate for their possession.⁶⁵ Mr. Buchanan himself later emphatically denied that he had given any pledge and that he objected to the word "provided" because it might give cause for believing he had given a pledge "which he never would make."⁶⁶ But the question of a pledge seems to have been only an academic argument. It seems from the evidence that the interview resulted in the equivalent of a pledge. The report of two of the Congressional delegation who called on the President admitted Buchanan's refusal to give a formal pledge; but when the delegation emphasized a gentlemen's agreement that the relative military status of the forts would be maintained, and asked Buchanan about the possibility of his changing his mind and ordering reinforcements, the President said in that case he would first return to them "this paper".⁶⁷

⁶⁴. Curtis, op. cit. Vol 2, p. 377

⁶⁵. Crawford, op. cit. p. 40

⁶⁶. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 168

⁶⁷. Statement of Miles and Keitt, Official Records, Vol. I, p. 126

It is to be remembered that these members of the South Carolina Congressional delegation, by their own admission, were not calling on the President as authorized agents of the State of South Carolina, but only as individuals. The President likewise let them know that he had no authority to make a pledge and that he was acting in an unofficial capacity in his discussions.⁶⁸ To substantiate the statement that the President made the equivalent of a pledge, we have his own admission of the fact in his reply to the South Carolina commissioners of December 31, 1860. To use the President's own words, he said:

But I acted in the same manner I would have done had I entered into a positive and formal agreement with parties capable of contracting, although such an agreement would have been, on my part, from the nature of my official duties, impossible.⁶⁹

Another admission in this same communication explains the bewilderment of Major Anderson and his officers at their neglect by the Administration. The President stated that it was a well known fact, freely admitted, that it was his determination not to reinforce the forts in the harbor and thus produce a collision, until they had been actually attacked, or until he had certain evidence that they were about to be attacked.⁷⁰ If the Government did not have sufficient evidence that the forts would be attacked if they were not surrendered after the ordinance of secession was passed, then Major Anderson and his subordinate officers should have been

68. Curtis, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 386

69. Ibid, p. 388

70. Ibid.

removed on the grounds of willfully misinforming the Government or of being incapable of sound judgment. For on December 9, the very day that the South Carolina delegation gave the President the written proposition for maintaining the relative status of the forts, Major Anderson had reported that the attention of the South Carolinians seemed to be turned more toward Fort Sumter than it had been and that probably their first act would be to take possession of that work.⁷¹ The danger of attack seemed to be so imminent that Anderson thought it might be advisable to destroy the ammunition, except what might be required for the defense of Moultrie and the armament of Sumter and Castle Pinckney, rather than let it fall into the possession of South Carolina.

71. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 89.

CHAPTER III

MAJOR ANDERSON TRANSFERS HIS COMMAND
FROM FORT MOULTRIE TO SUMTER

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It has been already noted that as soon as Major Anderson arrived in Charleston harbor and inspected the forts, he made his first report of November 23, in which he asked that the two unoccupied forts, Castle Pinckney and Sumter, should be garrisoned.¹ In fact, he immediately saw the superior location of Fort Sumter for the defense of the harbor. He believed that Sumter was the key of entrance to the harbor, its guns commanded Fort Moultrie and could drive out its occupants, and should be garrisoned at once.² Major Anderson's insistence that Fort Sumter should be garrisoned did not proceed from a soldier's impulse to invite a conflict. He thought that the occupation and strengthening of the two other forts would prevent an attempt of the South Carolina forces to occupy them, and thus avoid a collision of arms and a civil war. His attitude toward the South and war was expressed on December 11 in a letter to Robert N. Gourdin, a friend and leading secessionist in Charleston:

You need no assurance from me that, although I am exerting myself to make this little work as strong as possible and to put my handful of men in the highest state of discipline, no one will do more than I am willing to do to keep the South in the right and to avoid the shedding of blood. You may be somewhat surprised at the sentiment I express, being a soldier, that I think an appeal to arms and to brute force is unbecoming the age in which we live.

1. See page 27.

2. Crawford, op. cit. p. 62

Would to God that the time had come when there should be no war, and that religion and peace should reign throughout the world.³

In several of his reports to the War Department he expressed his anxiety concerning the threat of Fort Sumter's being taken by the forces of South Carolina. He also expressed a desire for definite written instructions, as he had nothing but the verbal instructions of the Secretary of War to guide him. His communication to the War Department of December 1, 1860, emphasizes his fears inspired by the visit of the Assistant Surgeon Crawford to Charleston. Referring to Crawford's report of the situation in Charleston, Major Anderson writes:

He (Crawford) says that never until today did he believe that our position was critical. One of his friends told him that we would have trouble in less than fifteen days. He thinks that they will first attempt to take Fort Sumter, which they (justly) say will control this work. Castle Pinckney they regard as theirs already. Mr. King, the intendant of this island, told the doctor that as soon as the act of secession was passed a demand would be made on me to surrender this fort. All these remarks lead to the same conclusion - a fixed purpose to have these works. The question for the Government to decide - and the sooner it is done the better - is, whether, when South Carolina secedes, these forts are to be surrendered or not. If the former, I must be informed of it, and instructed what course I am to pursue. If the latter be the determination, no time is to be lost in either sending troops, as already suggested, or vessels of war to this harbor. Either of these courses may cause some of the doubting States to join South Carolina.⁴

Again the commander joins his request for reinforcements with the opinion that such an action might encourage the secession of other States. No thing could have been surer to cause the President to hesitate; this was in opposition to his

3. Ibid. p. 69

4. Official Records, Vol. I, pp 81, 82

fundamental policy of doing nothing to encourage the secession movement.

As the time was fast approaching when South Carolina's Secession Convention was to meet, and as the result was a foregone conclusion, the Government felt it urgent that Major Anderson should have some additional and written instructions to guide his conduct. Accordingly, Major Don Carlos Buell, an officer of the Adjutant-General's Department, was selected by the War Department to proceed to Charleston and convey the instructions to Major Anderson.⁵ The realization of the urgency of sending orders, however, seems to have been the result of Major Anderson's repeated entreaties.⁶ The subject of orders had been discussed in the Cabinet around December 7, but the nature of the instructions had not been agreed upon, being left solely to the responsibility of the Secretary of War, Floyd.⁷ Because of the crisis produced by Anderson's future conduct, and because Buchanan's Secretary of State, J. S. Black, defended Anderson on the basis of these instructions, it is deemed essential to quote them in full. It is to be remembered that they were communicated verbally to Major Buell, but he, impressed with the importance of the occasion and the responsibility of the Commander of Moultrie, took it upon himself to commit them to writing.⁸ The written instructions were not the literal record of the Secretary's communication to Buell, but were the latter's

5. Crawford, op. cit. pp. 71, 72

6. Rhodes, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 72

7. Crawford, op. cit. p. 72

Rhodes, op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 73

8. Crawford, op. cit. p. 73. Buell's letter to author.

interpretation of the Secretary's intentions, adapted to the conditions of things.⁹ The written form of the order was approved, however, by the Secretary of War¹⁰ and were as follows:

You are aware of the great anxiety of the Secretary of War that a collision of the troops with the people of this State shall be avoided, and of his studied determination to pursue a course with reference to the military force and forts in this harbor which shall guard against such a collision. He has therefore carefully abstained from increasing the force at this point, or taking any measures which might add to the present excited state of the public mind, or which would throw any doubt on the confidence he feels that South Carolina will not attempt, by violence, to obtain possession of the public works or interfere with their occupancy. But as the counsel and acts of rash and impulsive persons may possibly disappoint those expectations of the Government, he deems it proper that you should be prepared with instructions to meet so unhappy a contingency. He has therefore directed me verbally to give you such instructions.

You are carefully to avoid every act which would needlessly tend to provoke aggression; and for that reason you are not, without evident and imminent necessity, to take up any position which could be construed into the assumption of a hostile attitude. But you are to hold possession of the forts in this harbor, and if attacked you are to defend yourself to the last extremity. The smallness of your force will not permit you, perhaps, to occupy more than one of the three forts, but an attack on or attempt to take possession of any one of them will be regarded as an act of hostility, and you may then put your command into either of them which you may deem most proper to increase its power of resistance. You are also authorized to take similar steps whenever you have tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act.¹¹

Thus, we see that in the last sentence of the first paragraph, that originally the orders were to be given verbally. It is probable that Buell's sympathy with Anderson in his delicate position outweighed his directions from the Secretary of War, and caused him to commit them to writing. After a

9. Ibid.

10. Official Records, Vol. I, p. 103

11. Ibid. pp. 89,90.

careful consideration of Anderson's secret desire to occupy Fort Sumter, one might wager that the last sentence of the instructions was added at Anderson's request. Certain writers have taken the extremely suspicious view that the instructions were purposely ambiguous and meant to subtly prepare Anderson's mind for an easy surrender; that they were the treacherous work of a secession conspiracy in Washington.¹² Another historian, considered reliable, does not agree with such a theory, and believes that the policy of the Government being what it was, it is difficult to see how the instructions could be improved upon.¹³

One ground for the conspiracy charge is that the instructions were kept secret from General Scott; in fact, up to December 28, the whole conduct of military affairs in Charleston harbor had been withheld from the knowledge of the Chief of Staff of the Army.¹⁴ Another reason given for doubting Floyd's loyalty is that he did not refer the instructions to the President before communicating them to Anderson. It is true that the President was not aware of the instructions until December 21,¹⁵ but as they were more aggressive than the President's policy, he ordered them amended to a more defensive nature.¹⁶ It is difficult to consider the instructions in any other light than the repetition of a policy of appeasement to avoid armed hostilities; yet, considering the threats of aggression evidenced by Major Anderson's reports, the necessary authority to move

12. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 41

13. Rhodes, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 72

14. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 114

15. Ibid p. 117, Buchanan's Statement.

16. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 166

his command to Fort Sumter was in the last sentence of Buell's memorandum, as was to be pointed out later by Secretary of State Black. The orders given by Buell to Major Anderson contained no hint that the forts were to be turned over to South Carolina.

Things were now on the move in South Carolina. On the morning of December 17, the Convention met at Columbia. Mr. D. F. Jamison, its President, closed his inaugural speech with advice to the South: "To dare! and again to dare! and without end to dare!"¹⁷ South Carolina had just elected a new Governor, Francis W. Pickens, who was inaugurated on the same day the Convention met.¹⁸ The new Governor immediately dispatched a special messenger to Washington with a message to the President on the subject of the forts.¹⁹ After stating that the forts in Charleston harbor were being prepared to turn their guns upon the city, the Governor asserted that such preparation might be proper in case of an ordinary mob rebellion, but not so when the people of a sovereign State were in convention assembled to resume their original powers of separate and individual sovereignty. He asked that all work on the forts be stopped and no more force ordered there. Referring to the fact that the arsenal in Charleston had been turned over to the keeping of a State force at the request of the Governor, it was asked that the State be allowed to take possession of Fort Sumter to give a feeling of safety to the community. Then came a sort of threat when Governor Pickens said: "If something of the kind be not done, I cannot answer for the consequences".²⁰ The

17. Crawford, op. cit., p. 45

18. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 1,2

19. Ibid., p. 2

20. Crawford, op. cit., p. 82

Assistant Secretary of State, whose resignation had not yet become final received this message and was the intermediary agent; and through him the President was to give an answer to this threat of Governor Pickens.²¹

There is a record of this episode left by the President himself. The following memorandum in the President's own handwriting describes what took place at the meeting between the President and the Governor's messenger:

On Thursday morning, December 20th, 1860, Hamilton, late marshal of South Carolina, sent especially for this purpose, presented me a letter from Governor Pickens, in the presence of Mr. Trescot, dated at Columbia, South Carolina, 17th December (Monday). He was to wait until this day (Friday afternoon) for my answer. The character of the letter will appear from the answer to it, which I had prepared. Thursday night, between nine and ten o'clock, Mr. Trescot called upon me. He said that he had seen Messrs. Bonham and McQueen of the South Carolina delegation; that they all agreed that this letter of Governor Pickens was in violation of the pledge which had been given by themselves not to make an assault upon the forts, but leave them in statu quo until the result of an application of commissioners to be appointed by the State was known; that Pickens, at Columbia, could not have known of the arrangements. They, to wit, Bonham, McQueen, and Trescot, had telegraphed to Pickens for authority to withdraw his letter.

Friday morning, 10 o'clock, 21st December. - Mr. Trescot called upon me with a telegram, of which the following is a copy from that which he delivered to me:
December 21st, 1860. - You are authorized and requested to to withdraw my letter sent by Doctor Hamilton immediately.

Mr. Trescot read to me from the same telegram, that Governor Pickens had seen Mr. Cushing. The letter was accordingly withdrawn.²²

It will be seen in this memorandum of the President that the members of the South Carolina Delegation stated that they had given a pledge not to make an assault on the forts, and probably they would not have made this pledge unilaterally

21. Ibid. p. 83.

22. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 383, 384.

without the agreement of the President not to change the status of the forts. In his prepared reply to the letter of Governor Pickens, the President stated that he had "declined for the present to reinforce these forts, relying on the honor of South Carolinians that they will not be assaulted whilst they remain in their present condition".²³

This question of a pledge made by the President is very important in the light of later developments. (~~Despite the President~~ is very important the light of later developments.) Despite the President's denial of a formal pledge the evidence seems to show that he did make the equivalent. Even Judge Black, the President's Attorney-General and later Secretary of State, hesitated to assert that he didn't make this pledge. When S. W. Crawford, in an interview with Black, asked: "Well, then, Judge Black, there appears to be but one inference to be drawn, but one conclusion to be reached; the President did make that agreement." Judge Black always faithful to Buchanan, replied: "Remember, that is your conclusion."²⁴

Of course, the President's prepared reply was not sent, as Governor Pickens' letter was withdrawn. The reply, however, shows a consistency of policy reminding the Governor of the risks he had incurred and would still incur to prevent any armed hostilities. But he rejected the idea that he had any power to surrender Fort Sumter, or any of the other forts or public property in South Carolina to any human being. As he

23. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 5

24. Crawford, op. cit. p. 25

had said in his address to Congress of December 4, it was a matter for Congress to decide.²⁵ The letter shows the confusion in the President's mind when he flatly refused to "acknowledge the independence of that State" and yet had expressed a willingness to refer the future commissioners of that State to Congress, which seemed to be an implied recognition of independence.²⁶ But he did warn the Governor that any attack on the forts would mean war, saying:

If South Carolina should attack any of these forts, she will then become the assailant in a war against the United States. It will not then be a question of coercing a State to remain in the Union, to which I am utterly opposed, as my message proves, but it will be a question of voluntarily precipitating a conflict of arms on her part, without even consulting the only authority which possesses the power to act upon the subject.²⁷

According to the testimony of Trescot, a principal in the events just related, President Buchanan expressed his pleasure at the withdrawal of the Governor's letter, repeated over and over his desire to avoid collision, his readiness to receive commissioners, to refer them to Congress in good faith, and his determination not to disturb the status of the forts, but to await the result of negotiation. He was pledged not to disturb the status in favor of the United States, and the Governor could not justly ask him to disturb it in favor of the State. He was acting under the obligations of his honor and would redeem it to the uttermost.²⁸ In a letter of December 21, to Governor Pickens, Trescot thanked the latter for withdrawing the letter, restating all the concessions

25. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, pp. 4,5. Full text of reply

26. Ibid. p. 5

27. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 5

28. Crawford, op. cit. p. 84

Buchanan had already made, saying that such a course had been violently denounced by the Northern press, and that an effort was being made to institute a Congressional investigation. Then there were hopes for the future. Said Trescot:

At that moment he could not have gone to the extent of action you desired, and I felt confident that, if forced to answer your letter then, he would have taken such ground as would have prevented his even approaching it hereafter - a possibility not at all improbable and which ought to be kept open.²⁹

In order to allay the fears of the Governor, Trescot, in the same letter, said that he had seen the Secretary of War that morning, and no orders had been issued that would at all disturb the "present condition" of the garrisons.³⁰ Had the instructions of December 11 been forgotten?

These December days were indeed crowded ones for the President. The day after Governor Pickens had addressed his letter to the President demanding possession^s of the forts, President Buchanan, December 18, had addressed one to the Governor, asking that the secession of the State of South Carolina might be stayed "so long as to allow the people of her sister States an opportunity to manifest their opinion upon the causes which have led to this proceeding."³¹ This message was sent by Caleb Cushing, also entrusted with a secret mission, believed to have been to persuade the Convention to postpone secession until after the 4th of March. Mr. Cushing also informed the Governor that there was no intention to change the status of the forts in the harbor in

29. Ibid., pp 85, 86. Full text of Trescot's letter.

30. Ibid.

31. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 11

any way.³² Of course, this mission was a failure, for the Convention had met on the 17th of December with the irrevocable determination to secede from the Union. The irony of it all was that he reached his destination just in time to be invited by a joint committee of both Houses of the Legislature to attend the solemn ceremonies of the signing of the Ordinance of Secession. This invitation he declined.³³ The Ordinance was signed on December 20, and on December 22 the Convention elected by ballot three commissioners, Robert W. Barnwell, James H. Adams, and James L. Orr to be sent forthwith to Washington, "to treat with the Government of the United States for the delivery of the forts, magazines, light-houses, and other real estate, with their appurtenances, within the limits of South Carolina."³⁴

Pressure was being brought on Governor Pickens for the immediate seizure of the forts.³⁵ Major Anderson was aware of this popular excitement, and on the same day that the commissioners were appointed, December 22, he was writing the War Department:

No one can tell what will be done. They may defer action until their Commissioners return from Washington; or if apprised by the nature of the debates in Congress that their demands will not probably be acceded to, they may act without waiting for them.

I do not think that we can rely upon any assurances, and wish to God I only had men enough here to man fully my guns. Our men are perfectly conscious of the dangerous position they are placed in, but are in as fine spirits as if they were certain of victory.³⁶

Major Anderson's fears were justified. On the same day that he

32. Crawford, op. cit. p. 87.

33. Ibid., p. 88

34. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 111

35. Crawford, op. cit. p. 89.

36. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 105, 106.

was deploring the fact that he had not men enough to man fully the guns of Fort Moultrie, the "Charleston Mercury" was boasting of the fact that no reinforcements would be sent. It further declared that when the forts were demanded and not given up, the people would obey the call for war and take the forts.³⁷ No wonder Major Anderson was anxious, and we can imagine his reaction when he received at just about this time a modification of his previous instructions of December 11.³⁸

President Buchanan has claimed the responsibility for the change of Anderson's written orders of December 11, delivered to him by Major Buell.³⁹ The President must have been alarmed at the phrase, "if attacked you will defend yourself to the last extremity". Having observed that phrase, the President, on December 21, the very day the orders first came to his notice, caused the Secretary of War to modify the instructions to "if attacked by a force so superior that resistance would, in your judgment, be a useless waste of life, it will be your duty to yield to necessity, and make the best terms in your power."⁴⁰ In fairness to Buchanan and Floyd it should perhaps be stated here that Lincoln sent Major Anderson a message of the same nature, April 4, 1861.⁴¹ Such instructions seemed only an act of humanity, and considering the plight the garrison had been left in by the Government, such instructions seem to have been the very least the Government

37. Charleston Mercury, Dec. 22, quoted in, Greeley, Horace, American Conflict, Vol. 1, pp. 407, 408. Hartford: Published by O.D. Case & Company. Chicago : Geo. & C. W. Sherwood 1865.

38. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 103

39. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 166.

40. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 103

41. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. Vol. 4, p. 28

could have done to atone for what Black later called its "fatal error" of not reinforcing the forts at an early date. But it is a fact, verified by Major Anderson's daughter, that Major Anderson considered these instructions from Floyd of December 21 as an "infamous order" to give up the Fort without a fight, and to brand him in the eyes of the world as a traitor to his trust.⁴² The secrecy of these orders and the closing paragraph, "These orders are strictly confidential and not to be communicated even to the officers under your command without a clear necessity,"⁴³ probably contributed to this suspicion.

Since the first report Major Anderson had made to the Government, he had never ceased to stress the importance of garrisoning Fort Sumter. He believed it to be impossible for the Government to maintain any occupancy of the harbor if South Carolina should seize and garrison it. Daily threats were heard that his position would be attacked, and after the passage of the Ordinance of Secession these threats were more frequent and positive. A nightly watch with patrol boats was maintained by South Carolina lest he should transfer his command to Fort Sumter.⁴⁴ He had orders to defend the forts in the harbor and the one he occupied was not in a state of defense. It was rumored that two thousand riflemen had been detailed to shoot down the troops from the houses which

42. Lawton, Eba Anderson, Major Robert Anderson and Fort Sumter, 1861, p. 5. New York, Knickerbocker Press, 1911.

43. Ibid, P. 6, Facsimile of orders in Floyd's handwriting.

44. Crawford, op. cit. p. 100

commanded the fort.⁴⁵ Anderson had always had a desire to throw his garrison into Sumter,⁴⁶ and after Floyd's orders of the 21st of December, which he received on the 23rd, his desire was intensified. His daughter has stated that he made his transfer of command to escape the snare which he thought the Secretary of War had set for him.⁴⁷ This was surely not the only reason, but it is possible that the new orders and Anderson's feeling toward them had something to do with the date of the transfer. He received these orders on December 23, and determined to make his move on December 25, which was prevented by rains.⁴⁸ He had orders not to make a useless resistance and needlessly sacrifice the lives of his men. The officers and men were of the opinion that in case of an attack from Charleston few of them would survive, but considered it a part of their business and were determined to make the best fight possible.⁴⁹ Therefore, it would seem that not only to make a successful defense of the forts, but to protect the lives of his men as well, the transfer was to be made. In a telegram to Floyd the day after the transfer, Major Anderson declared that in spite of the orders of December 21 "the garrison would never have surrendered without a fight,"⁵⁰

It must be admitted that the move was in harmony at least with Floyd's orders to avoid a needless sacrifice of life, when it is remembered that in the bombardment of Fort Sumter

45. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. 1, p. 42

46. Crawford, op. cit. p. 100

47. Lawton, Eba Anderson, op. cit. p. 5

48. Crawford, op. cit. p. 102

49. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, p. 43. Statement of Captain Abner Doubleday, Second in Command.

50. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 3

the garrison suffered not one casualty. It must also be remembered that Major Anderson was convinced that he had tangible evidence of a design to attack Fort Moultrie on the part of South Carolina,⁵¹ and his orders of December 11 authorized him to occupy any one of the forts when he had "tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act".⁵² At any rate, he transferred his command from Moultrie to Sumter December 26. It was done with the utmost secrecy as was essential in order to escape the constant vigilance of the South Carolina patrols. On December 25 preparations for the transfer were made under the guise of preparations for a possible attack from Charleston. The packing of necessary articles was done under plausible pretenses.⁵³ Anderson kept the plan of movement so secret that even his officers were given only twenty minutes notice.⁵⁴ The soldiers disguised as laborers, the movement was effected in the night of December 26 without being suspected by the South Carolina guards.⁵⁵ Immediately after the move had been made, at 8:00 P.M. on the night of December 26, 1860, Major Anderson addressed the following report to the War Department:

I have the honor to report that I have just completed, by the blessing of God, the removal to this fort (Sumter) of all of my garrison, except the surgeon, four non-commissioned officers, and seven men. We have one year's supply of hospital stores and about four months supply of provisions for my command. I left orders to have all the guns at Fort Moultrie spiked, and the carriages of the 32 pounders, which are old, destroyed. I have sent orders

51. Crawford, op. cit. p. 100

52. See page 38

53. Crawford, op. cit. p. 102

54. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. 1, p. 44

55. Ibid

to Captain Foster, who remains at Fort Moultrie, to destroy all the ammunition which he cannot send over. The step which I have taken was, in my opinion, necessary to prevent the effusion of blood.⁵⁶

Early on the morning of December 27, the smoke rising from the burning gun carriages notified the people of Charleston that something was wrong at Fort Moultrie. The fact of the evacuation of the Fort was soon communicated to the authorities and people of Charleston, creating intense excitement. Crowds collected in the streets, military organizations paraded, and threats were made that they would be heard from before twenty four hours and that bloodshed was now unavoidable. Anderson was pronounced a traitor, and it was claimed that his act would concentrate the South.⁵⁷ A committee from the Governor of South Carolina, headed by Colonel Pettigrew, was sent over to Fort Sumter to demand that he return to Fort Moultrie. After confessing that in the controversy between the North and the South, his sympathies were entirely with the South, but that his duty as commander of the harbor was first with him, Major Anderson replied: "Make my compliments to the Governor, and say to him that I decline to accede to his request; I cannot and will not go back."⁵⁸ The committee informed Major Anderson that there was an agreement between South Carolina and President Buchanan not to change the military status in the harbor, and that this move to Fort Sumter was considered by them as reinforcement. Anderson replied that as far as any understanding of the sort

56. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 2

57. Crawford, op. cit. pp. 108, 109

58. Crawford, op. cit. p. 111

existing he had not been informed of it.⁵⁹

Now, disregarding the question of an understanding, it is certain beyond any doubt that Major Anderson had acted contrary to the policy and wishes of both the President and the Secretary of War. The President admitted a few years after the event that he had determined not to disturb the status quo at Charleston as long as the troops remained in unmolested possession of the forts,⁶⁰ but it should have been apparent to the President that as soon as this "molesting" by overwhelming odds had been directed at about sixty men in an indefensible fort, it would have been too late to reinforce for their safety. The Secretary of War was opposed to the transfer to Sumter, and as soon as the news reached Washington, and before receiving Major Anderson's report of the 26th, Floyd telegraphed the Major on December 27:

Intelligence has reached here this morning that you have abandoned Fort Moultrie, spiked your guns, burned the carriages, and gone to Fort Sumter. It is not believed, because there is no order for any such movement. Explain the meaning of this report.⁶¹

But had Floyd forgotten the orders of December 11? Floyd had approved Major Buell's written order that "you are also authorized to take similar steps (to put his command in any one of the forts) whenever you have tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act."⁶² It was nowhere stated in the orders that anyone but Major Anderson should

59. Ibid, p. 110

60. Buchanan, James, op. cit. 167

61. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 3

62. Ibid, p. 90

be the judge of the "tangible evidence".

On the same day that he received Floyd's telegram of censure, Major Anderson telegraphed the explanation called for:

The telegram is correct. I abandoned Fort Moultrie because I was certain that if attacked my men must have been sacrificed, and the command of the harbor lost. I spiked the guns and destroyed the carriages to keep the guns from being used against us. If attacked, the garrison would never have surrendered without a fight.⁶³

In the last sentence Anderson was evidently objecting to the orders of December 21, which he interpreted as an order to surrender Moultrie without putting up a resistance.⁶⁴ Considering the text of the orders, Major Anderson seems to have had full authority to transfer his command, but still, there seems to have been some confusion on the point in his own mind, for at one time he wrote to a friend, on December 27, that he had made the move on his own responsibility and not in obedience to orders from Washington.⁶⁵ He obviously was referring to an absence of immediate and specific orders to occupy Sumter at that particular time. In a letter of December 30, to his former rector, the Rev. R. B. Duane, he said:

You see it stated that I came here without orders. Fear not! I am sure I can satisfy any tribunal I may be brought before, that I was fully justified in moving my command.⁶⁶

And President Buchanan, writing in 1866, justified Anderson when he said that the "President never doubted for a moment that Major Anderson believed before the movement that he had

63. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 3

64. See page 46

65. Crawford, op. cit. p. 128

66. Ibid, p. 130

'the tangible evidence' of an impending attack required by his instructions."⁶⁷

But this move was of the utmost importance and seriousness at the time, not only because it was in opposition to the avowed policy of the Government and South Carolina's belief in a pledge not to change the status quo, but on the very day the move was made, the three commissioners elected by the South Carolina Convention, to negotiate the question of the forts and public property, reached Washington.⁶⁸ The commissioners arrived on December 26, and according to Buchanan, writing in 1866 a defense of his administration, it was through them that he received his first intelligence of the transfer to Fort Sumter.⁶⁹ The President recorded that he received this news with astonishment and regret. With astonishment, because he believed Major Anderson to be in security at Fort Moultrie and that he wouldn't make such a move, especially while the commissioners were on their way to Washington. With regret, because it would probably impel the other cotton States, and the border States, into active sympathy with South Carolina; that it would defeat the measures of compromise before the Committee of Fifteen of the Senate, and wreck his policy of confining secession to South Carolina alone.⁷⁰ There was no mention here of a pledge having been violated by this act, nor of orders violated.

67. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 181

68. Rhodes, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 110

69. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 180

70. Ibid, pp. 180, 181

W. H. Trescot, the former Assistant Secretary of State, who had recently resigned and was now acting as South Carolina's special manager of her interests in Washington, has left quite a different record of Buchanan's reaction to Major Anderson's sudden change of the status quo. He wrote his record just a few weeks after the event and should have been less subject to errors of memory. Trescot has stated that on the morning of December 27, he, Jefferson Davis, and Senator Hunter of Virginia, called on Buchanan for an explanation of Major Anderson's move.⁷¹ Jefferson Davis told the President that he was surrounded with "blood and dishonor" on all sides. Buchanan called God to witness that they, better than anybody, knew that the move to Sumter was not only without, but against his orders. It was against his policy.⁷² Either he was at this time oblivious of the orders he had seen December 21, or he was, in his excited state, confusing his own policy with War Department orders. He was urged by these three gentlemen to restore the status by ordering Anderson back to Moultrie, which he declined to do, although he seemed disposed to at first. He said that he must call his Cabinet together, for he could not condemn Major Anderson unheard, and he postponed his meeting with the South Carolina commissioners until the next day.⁷³ The Secretary of War seemed to believe that Buchanan had made a pledge to South Carolina, for on the same day, December 27,

71. Hunt, Gaillard, ed. "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit. p. 543.

72. Hunt, Gaillard, ed. "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit. p. 539.

73. Ibid. p. 544.

that Trescott, Davis, and Hunter called on the President, Floyd had a conversation with Major Buell, in which he said that Anderson's move had made war inevitable and had compromised the President.⁷⁴

The Cabinet was called together immediately. At first all seemed to think that Major Anderson had acted without orders. Secretary Floyd vehemently repeated his accusation made to Anderson in the telegram of December 27, that he had disobeyed his instructions. At this point the Secretary of State, Judge Black, suggested that the orders of December 11 be sent for, and they were read in the presence of the President and the Cabinet, Black pointing out that the orders contained the endorsement of the Secretary of War for the move to Sumter.⁷⁵

But there were other serious results of this transfer of command to Sumter, besides the frustration of the policy pursued by Buchanan and Floyd. It accentuated the hostile attitude of South Carolina toward the Government and inspired her to take drastic retaliatory measures. On December 27, immediately after Anderson's move to Sumter, the Governor of South Carolina issued to Colonel J. J. Pettigrew the following order:

You are ordered to take possession of Castle Pinckney. You are to act with the greatest discretion and prudence, and to let it be known that you take possession in the name of the Governor of South Carolina, and in consequence of the extraordinary orders executed last night in relation to Fort Moultrie, and with a view at present to prevent

74. Crawford, op. cit. p. 146

75. Ibid.

further destruction of public property, and as a measure of safety also.⁷⁶

A similar order was issued to Lieutenant-Colonel De Saussure, to take possession of Sullivan's Island and Fort Moultrie. Both Moultrie and Castle Pinckney were thus taken the day after Anderson abandoned Fort Moultrie, all of their property and provisions being seized and appropriated by South Carolina.⁷⁷

On December 29, the Governor of South Carolina ordered Colonel John Cunningham to take a detachment of select men, and in the "most discreet and forbearing manner", proceed to the United States arsenal in Charleston and demand in his name its "entire possession". This was also done with "a view to prevent any destruction of public ~~property~~, and also as due to the public safety." So declared the Governor.⁷⁸ The Governor declared also that "I do not apprehend any difficulty in giving up the same, but if refused, then you are to take it, using no more force than may be absolutely necessary."⁷⁹ No doubt the Governor's optimism was well warranted by the Government's past policy of appeasement, and the consequent defenseless position of everything demanded. The arsenal was taken. Captain Humphreys surrendered it under protest, "as he had no force for its defense." He demanded the right to salute his flag, and that his men be

76. Crawford, op. cit. p. 113

77. Ibid, pp. 114, 115

78. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 7

79. Ibid.

allowed to occupy their quarters until instructions could be obtained from the War Department. This was granted and Colonel Cunningham began to issue the property of the United States arsenal to the soldiers of South Carolina.⁸⁰

On December 29 Captain Humphreys, in a report to the War Department, complained that he had asked for instructions but had received none, that the arsenal was practically in a state of siege; that he would make a formal protest against the posting of sentinels around the arsenal and ask that they be removed unless otherwise instructed from the War Department. If his request was denied he would consider the arsenal occupied by the State, haul down his flag and surrender.⁸¹ Just as Anderson had begged for some specific instructions and received none, so, it seems, a deaf ear was turned to Captain Humphreys, for on December 30, he sent a two-line report to the War Department, saying, "This arsenal has today been taken by force of arms. What disposition am I to make of my command?"⁸²

On the same day, December 30, Fort Johnson and adjacent grounds were seized and occupied by South Carolina troops. A large supply of fuel, later badly needed by the Sumter Garrison, thus passed into the hands of South Carolina. Having now obtained possession of the unoccupied forts and the arsenal, measures were now taken by the Governor for the establishment of batteries for the control and defense of the harbor.⁸³ Explaining his course to D. F. Jamison, President

80. Crawford, op. cit. p. 122

81. Official Records, Vol. 1, p. 6

82. Ibid.

83. Crawford, op. cit. p. 123

of the Convention, Governor Pickens definitely declared that there was a pledge on the part of the Buchanan Administration, and this pledge had been violated by Major Anderson. He considered the latter's action an act of aggression when he wrote:

I considered the evacuation of Fort Moultrie, under all the circumstances, a direct violation of the distinct understanding between the authorities of the Government at Washington, and those who were authorized to act on the part of this State, and bringing on a state of war. I therefore thought it due to the safety of the State that I should take the steps I have. I hope there is no immediate danger of further aggression for the present.⁸⁴

Regardless of the interpretations placed upon the action of Major Anderson by South Carolina and the Government at Washington, the fact remains that he had by this action, although authorized, produced a crisis. While waiting for the reception of the South Carolina commissioners by the President, let us see what Major Anderson said about his alleged violation of a pledge and the status quo. On December 29 he wrote a long letter to his secessionist friend, Robert N. Gourdin, of Charleston, to whom he expressed himself rather frankly. He wrote:

No one will regret more deeply than I shall, should it prove true that the movement I have made has complicated rather than disembarrassed affairs. There is an unaccountable mystery in reference to this affair. I was asked by a gentleman within a day or two, if I had been notified by your Government that I would not be molested at Fort Moultrie, and when I replied that I had not been so notified, he remarked that he was glad to hear it, as it convinced him that I had acted in good faith, having just told him that I had not received such an intimation from my own Government. Now if there was such an understanding, I certainly ought to have been informed of it.

84. Crawford, op. cit. p. 125

But why, if your Government thought that I knew of this agreement, was everything done which indicated an intention to attack? Why were armed steamers kept constantly on the watch for my movements? The papers say that I was under panic. That is a mistake; the moment I inspected my position I saw that the work was not defensible with my small command, and recommended weeks ago that we ought to be withdrawn. I remained, then, as long as I could under the fearful responsibility I felt for the safety of my command.⁸⁵

85. Ibid, pp. 128, 129. Anderson to Gourdin.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSIONERS AND THE CABINET CRISIS

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At the time of the President's annual message to Congress, December 4, 1860, the Cabinet membership was unchanged. The President had the same Cabinet that he had originally appointed, with the exception of Joseph Holt, who, as has been noticed in the first chapter of this study, had been appointed to succeed Aaron V. Brown, deceased.¹ Cobb and Thompson were the only members of the Cabinet to disagree with the President's message, in particular that part of it which denied the right of secession.² Cobb was the first member to resign, December 8, 1860, and he was replaced by Philip F. Thomas, formerly Governor of Maryland.³ Cobb, in his letter of resignation, said that a sense of duty to the State of Georgia required that he should take a step which made it proper that he should no longer be a member of the Cabinet. He said that his remaining in the Cabinet would expose him to unjust suspicions and put Mr. Buchanan in a false position. He said the evil had passed beyond control and must now be met by each and all under "our responsibility to God and country", and he believed that history would record Mr. Buchanan's administration as the last one of the

1. Buchanan, James, op. cit., p. 110

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Union and would place it "side by side with the purest and ablest of those that preceded it."⁴ Cobb was an ardent secessionist, and his action stands in bold contrast for honesty to that of the equally ardent secessionist, Thompson, who notified the President of his intention to resign at about the same time, but who remained as long as possible to use his influence in behalf of secession.⁵

Now the President wanted his Cabinet to remain intact and all go out together at the end of his administration, and he felt keenly the necessary withdrawal of the Southern members.⁶ An even more serious blow to the Administration's policy, in the eyes of the North, was the resignation of Secretary of State Cass, the oldest and most prominent member of the Cabinet and the most insistent on the necessity of sending reinforcements to the forts in Charleston harbor. He sent in his letter of resignation December 12, 1860, and although he expressed his agreement with the President's message and the theory that the Government had no power to coerce a State back into the Union, he made the basis of his resignation the President's refusal to reinforce the forts in Charleston harbor. "I continue to think", he said, "that these arrangements should be immediately made."⁷ In reply, the President said that as he believed that no necessity existed for a resort to force for the protection of the public

4. Crawford, op. cit. p. 37

5. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 110

6. Ibid., p. 111

7. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 397, Cass' letter of resignation.

property, it was impossible for him to risk a collision of arms in the harbor of Charleston, which would have defeated the reasonable hope which he cherished of the final triumph of the Constitution and of the Union.⁸ Cass was succeeded by the Attorney-General, Black, who was in turn replaced as Attorney-General by Black's friend and protege, Edwin M. Stanton.⁹ Thus the difficulties in Charleston harbor were interfering with the President's personal desire to keep his Cabinet together to the end of his term of office and "all go out together."

Now one of the most, if not the most, influential men in the Cabinet was Jeremiah S. Black. He was from Buchanan's own State and the President leaned on him for advice and trusted him. Although Black's advice to the President on November 20, the basis for Buchanan's constitutional argument on secession of December 4, was not all that might have been expected of a sincere Unionist that he was, no critic, however rabid, of the Buchanan administration has even hinted that Black was not able, sincere, and honest. Some writers on the period of history now under consideration believe that Black's more responsible position as Secretary of State caused him to take a different view of the theory of coercion, and that he reversed his constitutional argument of November 20.¹⁰ It has also been alleged that Black's

8. Curtis, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 398.

9. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 110

10. Burgess, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 89

friend, Stanton, who succeeded the former as Attorney-General, had some influence in this stronger view of the President's powers.¹¹ However this may be, in view of Black's opinion of the President's powers as to coercion given on November 20, and his firm policy as Secretary of State, there can be no doubt there was an intervening political metamorphosis.

As the Secretary of State was to be the decisive factor in the coming interview between the President and the South Carolina commissioners, let us see what type of man he was. A leading Republican contemporary of the period has left an enviable characterization of Black, the Unionist but extremely anti-abolitionist. Said James G. Blaine:

He was a man of remarkable character. He was endowed by nature with a strong understanding and a strong will. In the profession of the law he had attained great eminence. His learning had been illustrated by a prolonged service on the bench before the age at which men, even of exceptional success at the bar, usually attract public observation. . . In history, biography, criticism, romance, he had absorbed everything in our language worthy of attention. Shakespeare, Milton, indeed all the English poets, were his familiar companions. Reading had made him a full man, talking a ready man, writing an exact man. The judicial literature of the English tongue may be sought in vain for finer models than are found in the opinions of Judge Black when he sat, and was worthy to sit, as the associate of John Bannister Gibson, on the Supreme Bench of Pennsylvania. . . He applied to his own political creed the literal teachings of the Bible. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had held slaves without condemnation or rebuke from the Lord of hosts, he believed that Virginia, Carolina, and Georgia might do the same.¹²

But after this eulogy, Blaine stated that because Black wished it understood that the position of the Republican party was inconsistent with loyalty to the Union, and that its

11. Ibid.

12. Blaine, James G., op. cit., I, p. 230

permanent success would lead to the destruction of the Government, it was not unnatural that his extreme views should have carried him beyond the bounds of prudence in his legal opinion of November 20; that he thus in large degree became responsible for the unsound position of Mr. Buchanan. But Blaine admitted that Buchanan's message was the more "odious and more dangerous by the quotation of a part and not the whole." Blaine, as many others, believed that Black changed his position because of his more responsible position as Secretary of State, and also because of the greater seriousness of the issue after Major Anderson's occupation of Fort Sumter.¹³ Such an opinion seems correct. We have already seen that it was Black who had the orders of December 11 sent for and pointed out to the President and Cabinet that Major Anderson's occupation of Sumter was according to orders.¹⁴

Now, the South Carolina Commissioners had arrived in Washington on the same day that Major Anderson caused the military crisis in Charleston harbor, and in their turn were to cause a political crisis in the Cabinet. On December 22, 1860, W. H. Trescot, now South Carolina's special agent at Washington, received the following telegram from Governor Pickens:

The Hon. R. W. Barnwell, the Hon. J. H. Adams and the 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.

13. Ibid, pp. 231, 232, 233.

14. See page 52.

Please inform the President of this. Answer this.¹⁵

On Wednesday, December 26, the Commissioners arrived in Washington, and their arrival was communicated at once to the President by the agent of the State, Trescot. According to Trescot, Judge Black, the Secretary of State, was present at the interview. The subject was spoken of informally, and the President appointed one o'clock on the following day, December 27, as the hour when it would be agreeable to him to receive the Commissioners.¹⁶ The President was told by Trescot that the Commissioners proposed to present their credentials and have an informal conversation with him, but that if it was his intention to submit the question of their reception to Congress, they wished to submit a written communication to accompany his message. If, however, the President should agree in thinking it the better course, the Commissioners would not prepare the paper until after the interview with him, when they would better understand one another, but in that case it was to be considered that the communication was submitted at the interview.¹⁷

According to Trescot, the President consented to this, and matters were approaching some definite solution when Anderson made his sudden and unexpected movement from Fort Moultrie to Sumter. The news arrived in Washington, "at once wholly changing the relations of the parties and altering the whole character of the negotiation."¹⁸ Because

15. Crawford, op. cit. p. 142

16. Hunt, Gaillard, ed "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit. p. 543.

17. Ibid.

18. Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot," op. cit. p. 543.

of the excitement and the changed nature of things, the meeting of the President with the Commissioners, set for the 27th, took place on the next day. On December 28 the Commissioners presented the President their credentials, under which they were "authorized and empowered to treat with the Government of the United States for the delivery of the forts, magazines, lighthouses, and other real estate, with their appurtenances, within the limits of South Carolina; and also for an apportionment of the public debt and a division of all other property held by the Government of the United States as agent of the Confederate States, of which South Carolina was recently a member; and, generally, to negotiate as to all other measures and arrangements proper to be made and adopted in the existing relations of the parties, and for the continuance of peace and amity between this Commonwealth and the Government at Washington."¹⁹

A copy of the South Carolina ordinance of Secession was delivered to the President, and their desire to negotiate peaceably on the above matters was reiterated, but the changed state of things rendered a peaceful issue doubtful. Then the charge of a pledge violated. "We came here", they said, "the representatives of an authority which could at any time within the past sixty days have taken possession of the forts in Charleston Harbor, but which, upon pledges given in a manner that we cannot doubt, determined to trust to your honor rather than to its own power."²⁰ Then there was a demand for

19. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 109

20. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 109

satisfactory explanations before any negotiations would be continued, and a request for the immediate withdrawal of the troops from Charleston harbor, "a standing menace which renders negotiation impossible."²¹ This interview with the South Carolina Commissioners lasted nearly two hours, with R. W. Barnwell acting as chairman of the Commission. Mr. Barnwell stressed the fact that an agreement on the part of the Government of the United States had been violated by Anderson's conduct, and the faith of the President and the Government had been forfeited. Then he urged the President to restore the status in the harbor of Charleston by ordering Anderson back to Moultrie, an inconsistent demand in the light of the request in the Commissioners' credentials to withdraw the troops from Charleston harbor altogether.²²

Three times at least during the interview Mr. Barnwell insisted: "But, Mr. President, your personal honor is involved in this matter." Mr. Barnwell pressed him so hard on this point that the President said: "Mr. Barnwell, you are pressing me too importunately; you don't give me time to consider; you don't give me time to say my prayers. I always say my prayers when required to act upon any great State affair."²³ The President wrote a reply to the Commissioners and submitted it to the Cabinet on December 29. Mr. Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, was the only member to wholly approve it. Black, Holt and Stanton suggested changes in the paper, thinking that from

21. Ibid, pp. 109, 110.

22. Crawford, op. cit. p. 148, Letter of James L. Orr to Crawford.

23. Ibid, pp. 148, 149.

the unguarded language it was open to the criticism of making concessions, which it could not be the purpose of the President or his Cabinet to make. The three remaining members, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Floyd, opposed it because it yielded too little to the demands of South Carolina.²⁴ The President made no reply to these opinions but took the objections under consideration. The Secretary of War, Floyd, took this reply of the President as an opportunity to resign from the Cabinet, to avoid the odium of being forced out on other more serious grounds. As early as December 23 the President had, through his friend Breckenridge, asked for Floyd's resignation.²⁵ The story of the charges against Floyd of aiding treasonably the rebellion, by supplying the Southern arsenals with arms in the fall of 1860, and otherwise promoting the interests of secession while still a member of the Cabinet, is too long to be told here. However, Mr. Buchanan himself stated that the reason he requested Floyd's resignation was the discovery of the latter's irregularity in bond issues. Floyd was instrumental in purloining bonds, to the amount of 870,000 dollars, from the Interior Department and delivering them to William H. Russell, a member of the firm of "Russell, Majors & Waddell".²⁶ It was for this irregularity of conduct that the President had asked for his resignation.

But Floyd, who, until Major Anderson's move to Sumter, had apparently seen eye to eye with Buchanan's policy, in the Cabinet meeting of December 29, read to the President, before the Cabinet, the following paper:

24. Crawford, op. cit. p. 149

25. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 185

26. Ibid., p. 186

Sir: On the evening of the 27th instant, I read the following paper to you, in the presence of the Cabinet: Sir: It is evident now, from the action of the commander at Fort Moultrie, that the solemn pledges of this Government have been violated by Major Anderson. In my judgment, but one remedy is now left us by which to vindicate our honor and prevent civil war. It is in vain now to hope for confidence on the part of the people of South Carolina in any further pledges as to the action of the military. One remedy only is left, and that is to withdraw the garrison from the harbor of Charleston altogether. I hope the President will allow me to make that order at once. This order, in my judgment, can alone prevent bloodshed and civil war.²⁷

Embodying the above in a formal letter of resignation on December 29, Floyd stated that he considered the honor of the administration pledged to maintain the troops in the position they occupied. Again he was ignoring the orders he had given Anderson December 11, notwithstanding Black's recent review of those orders on December 27 before the whole Cabinet. Such an attitude indeed justified Anderson's suspicion that the modified orders of December 21 were of treasonable intent. But Black, whose honesty has never been doubted, later stated his conviction that Floyd's sudden espousal of the cause of secession was because of the break with the President on other matters. Said Black: "Up to the time when he got notice that he must resign, he was steadily opposed to the Southern movement, and the bitterest enemies he had were the leading men of that section. After he found the whole Administration against him, he was driven by stress of necessity into the ranks of the party which he had previously opposed."²⁸

In closing his letter of resignation, Floyd stated that the refusal, or delay, to place things back as they stood

27. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 409

28. Black, C. F., Essays and Speeches of J. S. Black, op. cit. pp. 266. 267.

under "our agreement" invited collision, and must inevitably lead to civil war. He could not consent to be the agent of such a calamity.²⁹ Thus, the crisis had afforded Floyd the opportunity to withdraw on more dignified grounds than those of fraudulent manipulations of bond issues. Mr. Holt was transferred from the Post Office to the War Department at the end of December, his place being filled by the appointment of Horatio King, of Maine, as acting Postmaster-General, and shortly after confirmed as Postmaster-General.³⁰ The importance of this change in the War Department, as well as Southern confidence in Floyd, was reflected in the telegram sent by the secessionist Louis T. Wigfall, in Washington, to M. L. Bonham, of Charleston. Wigfall telegraphed on January 2, 1861: "Holt succeeds Floyd. It means war. Cut off supplies from Anderson and take Sumter soon as possible."³¹ This fear proved to be exaggerated, but the telegram shows the excitement produced by the Cabinet crisis produced by Major Anderson's action.

But the most serious threat of withdrawal from the Cabinet was yet to come, immediately after Floyd's resignation. The determination of the Secretary of State, Black, to resign, proceeded from the same reply the President had written to the Commissioners, but on wholly different grounds from those of Floyd. Black believed that the reply conceded too much to South Carolina, and compromised the President and Cabinet. On

29. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 409.

30. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 111

31. Official Records, vol. I, p. 252.

the morning after the President presented his reply to the Commissioners to the Cabinet, Judge Black communicated his conviction to Messrs. Stanton, Holt, and Toucey that it was his conviction that the President's mind was fixed beyond all hope of change, and his own determination to resign in consequence.³² Mr. Toucey told the President, and Judge Black was sent for. He went reluctantly, dreading the effect on his own feelings of the appeal which he knew Mr. Buchanan would make to the sacred friendship which had lasted through so many years. The President showed great emotion at the interview, which ended by the President's handing Black the paper and telling him to revise it to meet his own views.³³ There has been no copy of this original reply of the President preserved, but in it, among other unwise things, the President seemed to have admitted a pledge made to maintain the status quo in Charleston harbor. In the interview, Judge Black told him that such an understanding was impossible, that he could not make it or any other agreement that would tie his hands in the execution of the laws; that if he did make it, he must repudiate it.³⁴ Judge Black immediately went to the Office of the Attorney-General, Stanton, and there made the amendments to the President's reply to the Commissioners. As fast as the sheets were written they were handed to the Attorney-General, who copied them in his own hand, the original being sent directly to the President.³⁵

32. Black, C. F., op. cit. p. 14

33. Ibid.

34. Crawford, op. cit. p. 152

35. Ibid., pp. 152, 153.

As the original letter to the Commissioners has not been preserved, it will be necessary to quote rather freely from the long reply of the Secretary of State, which he divided into seven headings:

1. The first and the concluding paragraphs both seem to acknowledge the right of South Carolina to be represented near this Government by diplomatic officers. That implies that she is an independent nation, with no other relations to the Government of the Union than any other foreign power. If such be the fact, then she has acquired all the rights, powers, and responsibilities of a separate government by the mere Ordinance of Secession. . . . But the President has always, and particularly in his late message to Congress, denied the right of secession, and asserted that no State could throw off her Federal obligations in that way.
2. I would strike out all expressions of regret that the Commissioners are unwilling to proceed with the negotiation, since it is very clear that there can legally be no negotiation with them, whether they are willing or not.
3. Above all things it is objectionable to intimate a willingness to negotiate with the State of South Carolina about the possession of a military post which belongs to the United States, or to propose any adjustment of the subject or any arrangement about it.
4. The words, 'coercing a State by force of arms to remain in the Confederacy' - a power which I do not believe the Constitution has conferred upon Congress - ought certainly not to be retained. They are too vague, and might have the effect (which I am sure the President does not intend) to mislead the Commissioners concerning his sentiments. The power to defend the public property, to resist an assailing force which unlawfully attempts to drive out the troops of the United States from one of their fortifications. . . . is coercion, and may very well be called 'coercing a State by force to remain in the Union.'

Thus Black departed from his constitutional legal hair splitting of November 20. No one can compare this opinion with that of November 26 and doubt that Black, the Secretary of State, held much stronger views on combating secession than Black, the Attorney-General.

5. The implied (sic) assent of the President to the accusation which the Commissioners make, of a compact with South Carolina by which he was bound not to take whatever measures he saw fit for the defense of the forts, ought to be stricken out and a flat denial of any such bargain or pledge or agreement asserted.
6. The remotest expression of a doubt about Major Anderson's perfect propriety of behavior should be carefully avoided. He is not only a gallant and meretorious officer, who is entitled to a fair hearing before he is condemned: he has saved the country, I solemnly believe, when its day was darkest and its peril most extreme.
7. The idea that a wrong was committed against South Carolina by moving from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter ought to be repelled as firmly as may be consistent with a proper respect for the high character of the gentlemen who compose the South Carolina Commission. It is a strange assumption of right on the part of that State to say that the United States troops must remain in the weakest position they can find in the harbor. . . The apparent objection to his being in Fort Sumter is, that he will be less likely to fall an easy prey to his assailants.³⁶

From the above, it might seem that the President had conceded nearly every thing to South Carolina except the national debt. But it must be remembered that Floyd based his resignation on his not conceding enough. At any rate, Black's amendments and advice to the President give us an analysis of the nature of the President's original reply. It is quite possible that the President had determined to order Anderson back to Moultrie, for the President has admitted that "at the moment it was worthy of consideration", but "to abandon all these forts to South Carolina, on the demand of commissioners claiming to represent her as an independent State, would have been a recognition, on the part of the Executive, of her right to secede from the Union. This was not to be thought of for a moment."³⁷ The President

36. Black, C. F., op. cit., pp. 14, 15.

37. Buchanan, James, op. cit., p. 182

wrote this in 1866. Among the many other writers who have attempted a defense of Buchanan's policy, Horatio King, Buchanan's friend and Postmaster-General, in speaking of Black's memorandum, does not attempt to reconcile Black's strictures with the claim of Buchanan's executive propriety in the answer to the Commissioners.³⁸ King quoted a declaration of Holt to the effect that never had the President "willingly contemplated the surrender of the forts at Charleston."³⁹

Judge Black, after listing the seven points on which the President's reply to the Commissioners should be amended, also entreated the President to order the Brooklyn and the Macedonian to Charleston without the least delay, and in the meantime send a trusty messenger to Major Anderson to let him know that the Government would not desert him.⁴⁰ In the seven points Black had condemned the past policy of the Administration, when he charged "the fatal error" of the administration in not sending down troops enough to hold all the forts.⁴¹ Buchanan's policy had definitely reached a turning point. The retirement of Cass had undoubtedly weakened Buchanan at the North, and when Black threatened to resign, it seems that Buchanan capitulated and was willing to change his attitude toward secession to prevent another Cabinet defection at the President's expense. In the last analysis, his administration

38. King, Horatio, op. cit. p. 171

39. Ibid.

40. Crawford, op. cit. p. 155.

41. C. F. Black, op. cit., p. 15

must rest upon conservative Northern opinion.⁴² The President amended his reply to the Commissioners on the basis of Black's points, and it is believed that Black's influence prevented the President from following his first impulse and ordering Anderson back to Moultrie.⁴³

On December 31 the President communicated to the South Carolina Commissioners a rather lengthy reply, in which he made it clear that negotiations were now impossible. He went over the old ground very fully, quoted the correspondence between him and the South Carolina delegation of December 10, denied the charge of a pledge, and quoted in full the orders sent to Anderson on December 11.⁴⁴ The President further declared that he had acted in the same manner as he would have done had he entered into a positive and formal agreement with parties capable of contracting, although such an agreement would have been on his part, from the nature of his official duties, impossible." The world knows that I have never sent any reinforcements to the forts in Charleston Harbor, and I have certainly never authorized any change to be made "in their relative military status!"⁴⁵ This statement was indeed puzzling, as he had been reminded by Black of the orders by which Anderson had moved his command, and the President was to say in 1866 that Major Anderson did have the necessary instructions to change "the

42. Randall, J. G., The Civil War and Reconstruction, p. 207 Chicago, Ill., D. C. Heath Co., 1937.

43. Crawford, op. cit. p. 156.

44. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 115,116,117,118.

45. Ibid, p. 117.

relative military status!"⁴⁶

The President further stated that his first promptings were to command Anderson to return to his former position, and there await the contingencies presented in his instructions; but that before any steps could be taken in that direction, the South Carolina authorities had seized all the remaining forts in the harbor; and on the very next day after the occupation of Sumter by Major Anderson, the Federal Custom-House and Post Office in Charleston had been taken.⁴⁷ The President continued:

It is under all these circumstances that I am urged immediately to withdraw the troops from the harbor of Charleston, and am informed that without this, negotiation is impossible. This I cannot do; this I will not do. Such an idea was never thought of by me in any possible contingency. No allusion had ever been made to it in any communication between myself and any human being. But the inference is that I am bound to withdraw the troops from the only fort remaining in the possession of the United States in the harbor of Charleston, because the officer there in command of all the forts thought proper, without instructions, to change his position from one of them to another. I cannot admit the justice of any such inference.⁴⁸

The President closed the communication by saying that, while it was his duty to defend Fort Sumter as a portion of the "public property" of the United States against hostile attacks, he did not see how such a defense could be construed into a menace against the city of Charleston.⁴⁹ The statement that Fort Sumter was to be defended as public property, and not necessarily as a military post of the United States, was

46. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 165

47. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 118

48. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 118

49. Ibid.

evidently an attempt to calm the South Carolina fears of aggression. Later, it was to be made the basis of another attempt to negotiate the question of the forts, by outright purchase.

On January 1, 1861, the South Carolina Commissioners replied to the President in an equally long and comprehensive argument. The whole tone of the letter was a scathing denunciation of the duplicity practiced on South Carolina by the President and the Government of the United States. The Commissioners refuted the President's assertion that he had made no formal pledge.⁵⁰ In replying to his denial that he had never thought of withdrawing the troops from Charleston harbor, the Commissioners were "compelled to say that your conversation with us left upon our minds the distinct impression that you did seriously contemplate the withdrawal of the troops from Charleston Harbor."⁵¹ And in support of their contention, they had the positive assurance of gentlemen of the highest possible public reputation, that such suggestions had been "made to and urged upon you by them, and had formed the subject of more than one earnest discussion with you."⁵² They also declared that they could simply not believe the President's claim that Anderson had occupied Sumter against the orders of the President. The President was charged with probably rendering civil war inevitable, but the State of South Carolina would accept that issue, "relying upon Him who is the God of Justice as well as the God of Hosts, will

50. Ibid, pp. 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125.

51. Ibid, p. 123.

52. Ibid

endeavor to perform the great duty which lies before her, hopefully, bravely, and thoroughly."⁵³ Expressing their belief that the President had determined to reinforce the garrison in Charleston harbor, and the impossibility of negotiation and peace in the light of the President's letter of the 31st of December, they stated their intention of returning to Charleston on the afternoon of January 2.⁵⁴

The President's reaction to the Commissioners' reply of January 1 can best be given in the President's own words:

This (reply) was so violent, unfounded, and disrespectful, and so regardless of what is due to any individual whom the people have honored with the office of President, that the reading of it in the Cabinet excited indignation among all the members. With their unanimous approbation, it was immediately, on the day of its date, returned to the commissioners with the following indorsement: "This paper, just presented to the President, is of such a character that he declines to receive it." Surely no negotiation was ever conducted in such a manner, unless, indeed, it had been the predetermined purpose of the negotiators to produce an open and immediate rupture.⁵⁵

Buchanan's explanation of his offer to lay the propositions the Commissioners had to make before Congress, when he knew they would not meet a favorable response, reiterates his fundamental policy. He said he made the offer to gain time for passion to subside, to bring the whole subject before the representatives of the people and cause them to adopt such measures as might possibly reclaim even South Carolina herself. But even if South Carolina were not reclaimed, it might prevent the other cotton States from following her example.⁵⁶

53. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 124

54. Ibid, p. 125

55. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 183

56. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 184

At least the critical phase of Buchanan's policy had now passed. He now broke completely with his Southern friends and advisers. The remaining secessionist sympathizers in the Cabinet were soon to go as a result of the new direction given his policy by this crisis. This new direction was largely owing to the threat of Black's resignation.⁵⁷ It has also been stated by more than one critic of Buchanan's administration, that from the time of the above crisis, the administration of Buchanan was not only thoroughly loyal to the preservation of the Union, but it fixed the policy that Lincoln accepted and pursued until war came upon him.⁵⁸ A new direction and a different attitude had been assumed, but, as will be seen, the necessary aggressiveness of action was to be thwarted by last minute hopes of avoiding a conflict. Also, an apparent change of attitude, and the adoption of an unwarranted optimism as to the safety of his position on the part of Major Anderson also contributed to a laxity in the prosecution of the new policy of firmness.

57. Dumond, Dwight L., The Secession Movement 1860 - 1861, p. 176 New York, The Macmillan Co., 1931.

58. McClure, A. K., Abraham Lincoln and Men of War Times, p. 273, Philadelphia, The Times Publishing Co., 1892.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW POLICY OF REINFORCEMENT

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The insistence of General Scott on reinforcing all the Southern forts, and the communication of his views on the subject to the President on October 29, have already been observed. The President turned down the proposal of General Scott as inconsistent with his policy and as requiring more troops than were available. Again, on December 12, General Scott had gone to Washington and, in an interview with the Secretary of War, Floyd, had urged that reinforcements be sent, and pointed out the organized companies and recruits available for the purpose. The Secretary refused his request on the ground that it would be in opposition to the announced policy of the President.¹ The Secretary of War arranged an interview between General Scott and the President, which took place on the 15th of December. The General again urged a policy of reinforcement, but in vain.² The President later stated that Scott knew at the time that his request would be rejected, that the President could not consent to it "without at once reversing his entire policy, and without a degree of inconsistency amounting almost to self-stultification."³ His main reason was that it would have

1. Crawford, op. cit. p. 168

2. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 168

3. Ibid.

dissolved the existing conferences for a peaceable adjustment. According to Scott, the President was determined to await the action of the South Carolina Convention and the arrival of Commissioners to him, which he would refer to Congress, and if Congress should decide against them, he would then reinforce the forts in Charleston harbor and direct the commanding officer to defend them.⁴

Referring to this interview, the President later stated that Scott knew at the time that a warship, the "Brooklyn", had a short time before been ordered to be made ready to go to the relief of Major Anderson in case of need.⁵ Now, on the 28th of December, General Scott urged upon the Secretary of War that Fort Sumter might not be evacuated, but that one hundred fifty recruits be sent immediately to the fort.⁶ On this same day General Scott sent a message to the President, revealing that since Major Anderson had been assigned to Fort Moultrie, "no order, intimation, suggestion, or communication for his government and guidance has gone to that officer from the Headquarters of the Army." Nor had the General-in-Chief received any communication from Major Anderson, later than the first report of the latter.⁷ The General definitely did not trust the Secretary of War. In a letter written to Major Anderson's brother, through the agency of Lieut. Col. Lay, Scott's aide, the General asserted that he had done everything in his power

4. Crawford, op. cit., p. 169. Quoting Scott's autobiography, p. 615.

5. Buchanan, James, op. cit., p. 168

6. Crawford, op. cit., p. 169

7. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 111.

to support Major Anderson and declared that the War Department had kept secret from the General the instructions sent the Major, but that the General, in common with the whole army, "has admired and vindicated as a defensive measure the masterly transfer of the garrison from Fort Moultrie to the position of Fort Sumter."⁸ There was a mutual distrust of Scott on the part of the Secretary of War, and he had intentionally ordered that all communications from Charleston harbor should be kept from the General-in-Chief of the Army.⁹

General Scott's distrust of the Secretary of War, and the latter's complete conversion to the cause of South Carolina and secession, as evidenced by his statement in the Cabinet meeting of December 27, probably account for the language of General Scott's memorandum to the President of December 30. On this date the General requested of the President permission, "without reference to the War Department and otherwise, as secretly as possible, to send two hundred and fifty recruits from New York Harbor to reinforce Fort Sumter, together with some extra muskets or rifles, ammunition, and subsistence stores."¹⁰ The General hoped that a sloop of war and cutter might be ordered for the same purpose as early as the next day.¹¹ At this date General Scott's request fell on more willing ears. It came shortly after Secretary of State Black's advice of the same date. We have the President's own admission that on the

8. Ibid., pp. 113, 114.

9. Ibid., p. 77, Adjutant-General Cooper to Anderson, Nov. 28

10. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 114

11. Ibid.

receipt of Scott's request "the President immediately decided to order reinforcements."¹² But now the President and General Scott differed on the kind of ship to be used. Scott had asked for a sloop-of-war, while the President preferred the warship "Brooklyn", and on Monday, December 31, he instructed the Secretaries of War and Navy to despatch the "Brooklyn" to Fort Sumter. The General, on the same evening, called on Buchanan to congratulate him, saying that he had the orders in his pocket.¹³ But the President explained to General Scott that it might be considered improper to transmit the orders to the "Brooklyn" until the Commissioners had had time to reply to his letter of a few hours before, and the delay, in his opinion, would not exceed forty-eight hours. The General concurred in this suggestion.¹⁴

General Scott had conferred with an expert in naval affairs, and had become convinced that both secrecy and success would be best secured by sending a "mercantile steamer". General Scott's opinion was based on the fact that the Brooklyn drew too much water to cross the bar of Charleston harbor.¹⁵ For this reason the "Star of the West", a side-wheel merchant steamer, was substituted for the "Brooklyn", to which change the President yielded with "great reluctance" on the "pressing instance" of General Scott.¹⁶ The detail of the expedition

12. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 189.

13. Ibid

14. Ibid, p. 190

15. Crawford, op. cit., p. 190

16. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 190

was entrusted to General Scott, who, for the first time in all the long drawn crisis, was taken into the confidence of the Government and given his proper role as Chief of Staff of the Army. It has been alleged that the brief delay in executing the orders issued December 31, until the Commissioners had had time to reply to the President's letter, was fatal, in that it gave time for General Scott to change the ship to be used. The argument is that instead of a powerful man of war and seasoned soldiers, capable of repelling an attack in the harbor, there was substituted a weak, unarmed merchant steamer, with lately recruited men, and at a decided disadvantage if attacked by the South Carolina batteries in the harbor.¹⁷ A good argument if it could be conclusively shown that the "Brooklyn" could have crossed the bar in the harbor. Available facts and the opinions of authorities support the argument.

The details of chartering the Star of the West, which had previously been suggested to General Scott by a Mr. Schultz, were entrusted to Assistant-Adjutant General L. Thomas. Thomas went to New York, saw Schultz, and the two visited a Mr. M. O. Roberts, the owner of the "Star of the West". In his report to General Scott of January 4, Thomas stated that Mr. Schultz was acting for the good of his country, but that Mr. Roberts was looking exclusively to the dollars. The ship had been chartered at \$1,250 per day.¹⁸ The Assistant Adjutant-General further stated:

17. Chadwick, French Ensor, Causes of the Civil War, 1858-1861, p. 225. American Nation Series, New York, Harper & Brothers 1906.
 18. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 130.

She is running on the New Orleans route, and will clear for that port; but no notice will be put in the papers, and persons seeing the ship moving from the dock will suppose she is on her regular trip. Major Eaton, commissary of subsistence, fully enters into my views. He will see Mr. Roberts, hand him a list of the supplies with the places where they may be procured, and the purchases will be made on the ships account. In this way no public machinery will be used. Tonight I pass over to Governor's Island to do what is necessary, i.e., have 300 stand of arms and ammunition on the wharf, and 200 men ready to march on board Mr. Schultz's steam-tugs about nightfall tomorrow, to go to the steamer, passing very slowly down the bay. I shall cut off all communication between the Island and the cities until Tuesday morning, when I expect the steamer will be safely moored at Fort Sumter.¹⁹

Thus precautions for secrecy were being taken. On January 5, Thomas sent an order to Major T. H. Holmes of Fort Columbus, saying that by order of General Scott, Holmes would detach that evening two hundred of the best instructed men, by the "Star of the West," to reinforce Fort Sumter.²⁰

On the same day, January 5, Thomas notified First Lieutenant Charles R. Woods of Fort Columbus:

The steamship "Star of the West" has been chartered to take two hundred recruits from Fort Columbus to Fort Sumter, South Carolina, to reinforce the garrison at that post. You are placed in command of the detachment, assisted by Lieuts. W. A. Webb, C. W. Thomas, and Asst. Surg. P. G. S. Ten Broeck, Medical Department. Arms and ammunition for your men will be placed on the steamer and three months' supply of subsistence.²¹

The greatest secrecy was enjoined, his men were to be placed below deck on approaching the Charleston bar, and every precaution was to be resorted to to prevent being fired upon by batteries erected either on Sullivan's or James Island.²² Then, again on the same day, the Assistant Adjutant-General

19. Ibid., pp. 130, 131

20. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 131.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 132.

Thomas wrote a communication to Major Anderson, which, if it had not been carried to him on the "Star of the West," might have brought on civil war in January instead of April. The orders were as follows:

Should a fire, likely to prove injurious, be opened upon any vessel bringing reinforcements or supplies, or upon tow-boats within the reach of your guns, they may be employed to silence such fire; and you may act in like manner in case a fire is opened upon Fort Sumter itself.²³

Note the qualification of the order, "likely to prove injurious." Just as in the orders of December 11 it was left to Anderson's discretion to determine whether he had "tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act", now he was authorized not to open fire if he thought the enemy fire not "likely to prove injurious."

On the very day that General Scott had the orders for reinforcement in his pocket, December 31, Major Anderson, despite his almost daily reports detailing the extensive preparations of South Carolina in the harbor, gave the Government an optimistic report on his situation. It is difficult to reconcile the Major's optimism with the intensive erection of batteries at various points by the South Carolina forces. Still he wrote the Government:

Thank God, we are now where the Government may send us additional troops at its leisure. To be sure, the uncivil and uncourteous action of the Governor in preventing us from purchasing anything in the city will annoy and inconvenience us somewhat; still we are safe. . . . We can command this harbor as long as our Government wishes to keep it.²⁴

Then, on January 6, Anderson's position was so controlled by the South Carolina authorities that a message was sent to

23. Ibid.

24. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 120

Washington "through the courtesy of Governor Pickens." Again the commander reports on the warlike preparations of South Carolina, but says that if there is no treachery among his workmen, he would be able to hold the fort against any force that could be brought against him.²⁵ Then concerning the relief expedition, which sailed on the 5th of January, but which Anderson didn't know was coming, he gave no encouragement. He reported that "at present it would be dangerous and difficult for a vessel from without to enter the harbor, in consequence of the batteries which are already erected and being erected." To show the difficulty of his situation in consequence of being deprived of free communication with the Government, after reinforcement was on the way, Major Anderson wrote:

I shall not ask for any increase of my command, because I do not know what the ulterior views of the Government are. We are now, or soon will be, cut off from communication, unless by means of a powerful fleet, which shall have the ability to carry the batteries at the mouth of this harbor.²⁶

It is difficult to reconcile Major Anderson's optimism with this last opinion. It is evident that in the Major's mind there was confusion as to the intentions of the Government. His opinion that it would take a powerful fleet to run the batteries at the mouth of the harbor gave little hope of success for the relief expedition already under way.

Abner Doubleday, second in command at Fort Sumter, has charged that Anderson was a Union man, and in the beginning

25. Ibid, p. 133.

26. Ibid.

of the difficulties was perfectly willing to chastise South Carolina in case she should attempt any revolutionary measures, but that his feeling changed when he found that nearly all the Southern States had joined in the support of South Carolina.²⁷ It is true that Anderson had always felt a reluctance to see a beginning of hostilities, and his hesitancy of action in later developments proceeded both from this reluctance to see civil war initiated as well as from his correct opinion that it was still the policy of his Government to do everything possible to prevent a collision.

On the very day the "Star of the West" sailed, General Scott despatched a telegram to his son-in-law, Colonal Scott, then at New York, to countermand her departure. This action was authorized by the Government on the basis of Anderson's report of December 31, but the countermand came too late to stop the sailing of the relief ship.²⁸ Buchanan has asserted that now both the Secretaries of War and Navy, as well as General Scott, were convinced of the error of substituting the "Star of the West" for the "Brooklyn", and proceeded to provide, as far as possible, against anticipated disaster.²⁹ This was based on the receipt of Anderson's communication of January 6, for on the next day the following order was sent by

27. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, op. cit. p. 41

Abner Doubleday, "From Moultrie to Sumter".

28. Buchanan, James, op. cit., pp. 190, 191.

29. Ibid., p. 191

General Scott to Lieut. Woods, in command of the troops on the "Star of the West:"

This communication is sent through the commander of the steam sloop-of-war "Brooklyn".

His mission is twofold: First to afford aid and succor in case your ship be shattered or injured; second, to convey this order of recall for your detachment in case it cannot land at Fort Sumter, to proceed to Fort Monroe, Hampton Roads, and there await further orders.

In case of your return to Hampton Roads, send a telegraphic message here at once from Norfolk.

P. S. On arrival at Fort Monroe, land your troops and discharge the ship.³⁰ From this order it seems that there was no confidence the relief expedition would succeed.

In fact, it seems likely that the expedition would never have been attempted if Anderson's report of December 31, affirming the safety of his position, had reached the Government in time to countermand the sailing. A letter sent to Anderson on January 10, before the fate of the "Star of the West" was known, shows that the policy of the Government was still a defensive one, and the emphasis was on preventing a collision. Secretary of War Holt wrote the following:

Your despatches to No. 16, inclusive, have been received. Before the receipt of that of 31st December, announcing that the Government might re-enforce you at its leisure, and that you regarded yourself safe in your present position, some two hundred and fifty recruits had been ordered to proceed from Governor's Island to Fort Sumter on the 'Star of the West', for the purpose of strengthening the force under your command. The probability is, from the current rumors of today, that this vessel has been fired into by the South Carolinians, and has not been able to reach you. To meet all contingencies, the 'Brooklyn' has been despatched, with instructions not to cross the bar at the harbor of Charleston, but to afford to the "Star of the West" and those on board all the assistance they may need, and in the event the recruits have not effected a landing at Fort Sumter, they will return to Fort Monroe.

30. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 134.

I avail myself of the occasion to express the great satisfaction of the Government at the forbearance, discretion and firmness with which you have acted, amid the perplexing and difficult circumstances in which you have been placed. You will continue, as heretofore, to act strictly on the defensive; to avoid, by all means compatible with the safety of your command, a collision with the hostile forces with which you are surrounded. But for the movement, so promptly and brilliantly executed, by which you transferred your forces to Fort Sumter, the probability is that ere this the defenselessness of your position would have invited an attack, which, there is reason to believe, was contemplated, if not in active preparation, which must have led to the effusion of blood, that has been thus so happily prevented. The movement, therefore, was in every way admirable, alike for its humanity and patriotism, as for its soldiership.³¹

At least the Government was ^{not} condemning Major Anderson, but giving him some moral support. This Secretary of War sent a message quite different from Floyd's "there is no order for any such movement, explain the meaning of this report."³²

At 1:30 on the morning of January 9, the "Star of the West" arrived off the Charleston bar. The harbor lights were all out and she extinguished her own. All of the buoys that marked the channel had been taken up, making careful soundings necessary. At 6:20 A. M. the national flag was run up, and the ship crossed the bar at high tide and continued along the Morris Island side up the ship channel. When opposite a group of houses near the shore, a red palmetto flag was seen and without warning a gun-battery opened on the ship. The battery was concealed amid the sand-hills near the shore and its existence had been unsuspected.³³ The first shot had been fired across the bow of the ship, and as the ship continued on her course, a rapid and continuous fire was opened

31. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 136, 137

32. See page 49.

33. Crawford, op. cit. p. 183.

by the battery. The ship was hit but suffered slight damage. As soon as the battery opened fire a large garrison flag was run up on the ship, lowered, and again run up as a signal to Major Anderson, whose flag was flying at Sumter. Before leaving New York, Assistant Adjutant-General Thomas had sent the garrison flag to the ship, giving orders *for* its use, and saying that in case the ship was fired on by the batteries, Major Anderson would understand the signals and protect the ship with the guns of Sumter.³⁴

At reveille on the 9th of January it became generally known among the men at Sumter that a large steamer, flying the United States flag, was off the bar, apparently at anchor. There had been some talk among the men, based upon rumors from Charleston, that the garrison would either be withdrawn from the harbor or returned to Fort Moultrie, and there were some who believed the rumors. Therefore quite a few of the men believed that a withdrawal had been determined upon and that this ship was the transport to take them away.³⁵ Nearly all the men were at the ramparts when the ship was fired on by the batteries, and there was great "hurrying and scurrying" among the men. The long roll was beaten, and the batteries were manned almost before the guns of the hidden battery had fired their second shot. As the "Star of the West" approached a single gun at Fort Moultrie opened at long range, its shot falling over half a mile short.³⁶ Major Anderson was excited and uncertain what to do. Should he open fire with his

34. Ibid, p. 184.

35. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, op. cit. pp. 60, 61.

36. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, op. cit. p. 61.

batteries and thus initiate the civil war which he so religiously hoped would be averted? The responsibility for decision was his, and the time was upon him. Lieutenant Meade, of Virginia, who was shortly after to go with the Confederacy, advised that fire should not be opened at all, as it would at once initiate civil war, and that the Governor would probably repudiate the act of hostility on the part of the South Carolina battery.³⁷ Major Anderson called a conference of his officers. He stated that he had called them together to hear their views in relation to the act of the State, and to tell them that he proposed to close the harbor with his guns, and to fire on any vessel that might attempt to enter. He desired to receive any recommendations they might have to make.³⁸

The decision of the officers' council was not to open fire, but to await the Governor's explanation. Some of the officers, notably Captain Abner Doubleday, second in command, advised immediate action. Assistant Surgeon Crawford thought that as the battery was not fired upon when it opened up on the ship, they had allowed the opportunity to go by for immediate action. Lieutenant Meade repeated his opinion, adding that as they had been directed to act strictly on the defensive, they had no right to open fire. Major Anderson acted on the advice of his officers, that the Governor should be advised of the course he proposed to take in case the action should not be disavowed by the Governor.³⁹ There was apparently some

37. Crawford, op. cit. p. 186.

38. Crawford, op. cit. p. 187.

39. Ibid, pp. 186, 187.

dissatisfaction with the decision, as one witness has left the record that Captain Foster left council, "smashing his hat, and muttering something about the flag, of which the words, 'trample on it' reached the ears of the men at the guns."⁴⁰ Lessening her speed, the "Star of the West" came round in a narrow part of the channel, lowered the flag from her fore, and putting on all steam headed down the channel for the bar. The battery on Morris Island continued its fire as long as the ship was in range, but without injury. The strong ebb-tide carried the ship swiftly out of range to the bar, upon which the tide had so fallen that she struck three times in crossing it. A steamer from Charleston followed the retiring ship for some time, but finally returned.⁴¹ Thus the first determined effort of the Buchanan administration to "defend the public property" ended in a fiasco.

Buchanan, writing in 1866, stated that Major Anderson was wrong in his action subsequent to the firing on the "Star of the West"; that if he thought the fort was going to be attacked, "which was then extremely doubtful", that he let a propitious moment slip by for the commencement of hostilities.⁴² This was hardly a fair criticism in the light of the Government's past policy, and even at the very time the "Star of the West" was being fired on, the attitude of the Government justified Anderson's failure to open fire on the South Carolina batteries. The orders sent Anderson by Holt, Secretary of War, on January

40. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, op. cit. p. 61.
Captain James Chester, "Inside Sumter In '61".

41. Crawford, op. cit. p. 184

42. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 195

10, prove this. He was still to "avoid, by all means compatible with the safety of your command, a collision with the hostile forces with which you are surrounded."⁴³ Strictly speaking, it was not Anderson's command in Fort Sumter that was threatened as long as the firing was directed at the Star of the West. Whether or not the failure to return the fire was wise, it cannot be denied that the action was in harmony with the Government's "strictly defensive" policy.

On January 9, Major Anderson addressed a communication to the Governor of South Carolina, declaring that he had refrained from opening fire on the South Carolina batteries under the hope that the hostile act was without the Governor's sanction. If the action was not disclaimed, after the return of his messenger, Anderson would not permit any vessel to pass within range of his guns in Fort Sumter.⁴⁴ On the same day the Governor replied that the act of firing on the Star of the West was perfectly justified by him. Later in the same day Major Anderson sent another communication to Governor Pickens, informing him that the plan to blockade the harbor with his guns would be withheld until the whole matter could be referred to Washington, and asked that his messenger, Lieutenant Hall, be allowed to make the journey unmolested.⁴⁵ On the same day, Captain Foster, Chief of Engineers at Sumter, was voicing his protest at Anderson's action by writing his superior, General Totten:

43. See page 80.

44. Crawford, op. cit. P. 188, Official Records, vol. 1, p. 135.

45. Ibid.

The firing upon the Star of the West this morning by the batteries on Morris Island opened the war, but Major Anderson hopes that the delay of sending to Washington may possibly prevent civil war. The hope, although a small one, may be the thread that prevents the sundering of the Union. We are none the less determined to defend ourselves to the last extremity.⁴⁶

This was the same officer who, earlier in the day, had left the officers' council smashing his hat and protesting that the flag was being trampled on.⁴⁷

In the meantime, South Carolina was taking measures to completely isolate Fort Sumter and prevent a second attempt to send reinforcements. On January 11, the main ship channel was closed by sinking four hulks across it, upon the bar, and during the night a good deal of work was done on Fort Moultrie, now in possession of South Carolina, to defend it from the fire of Fort Sumter. A large steamer, apparently a man of war, was stationed outside the bar.⁴⁸ Amid these defensive preparations, the Governor sent two agents, Judge A. G. Magrath and General D. F. Jamison, two of the highest ranking officials of the State, to hear Major Anderson a demand to deliver Fort Sumter to the constituted authorities of South Carolina.⁴⁹ Major Anderson replied that the demand must not be made on him, but on the Government. He was just as anxious as Buchanan to effect a peaceful settlement of the difficulties. He appealed "as a Christian, as a man, and as a fellow-countryman", though not as a soldier, as he said his

46. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 136

47. See page 82

48. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 138, Report of Capt. Foster.

49. Crawford, op. cit. p. 192.

duty was plain in that respect, that the Governor's messengers would use their influence to prevent an appeal to arms. He would send an officer with a messenger from the Governor to Washington. He would do anything that was possible and honorable to prevent an appeal to arms.⁵⁰ Even Holt, the new Secretary of War, whose aggressive character Senator Wigfall had so feared, at this time agreed with Buchanan on the desirability of preserving peace, and was not as "stiff" in policy as Stanton or Black.⁵¹

Therefore, in consonance with the prevailing attitude, Anderson sent the Governor a message by the returning agents, Magrath and Jamison, in which he regretted that the Governor had made a demand on him with which he could not comply, but stated that should the Governor deem fit, "prior to a resort to arms", to refer the matter of surrendering the fort to Washington, he would depute one of his officers to accompany any messenger the Governor might deem proper to be the bearer of his demand.⁵² The Governor accepted Anderson's proposal, and appointed Colonel I. W. Hayne, the Attorney-General of South Carolina, to accompany Lieut. Hall, who had already been charged by Anderson with referring the matter of closing the harbor to Washington. The two started to Washington on the afternoon of January 12.⁵³ This was the origin of what the President considered as a truce, the news of which reached him "greatly to the surprise of the President."⁵⁴

50. Crawford, op. cit. p. 194.

51. Randall, J. G., op. cit. p. 209

52. Crawford, op. cit. p. 194

53. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 137, 138

54. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 194

Quoting Vattel's Law of Nations, the President called this "a partial truce under which hostilities are suspended only in certain places, as between a town and the army besieging it!" And until the decision should be made by the President, Major Anderson had thus placed it out of his own power to ask for reinforcements, and equally out of the power of the Government to send them without a violation of the public faith pledged by him as the commandant of the fort.⁵⁵ Thus Major Anderson, according to the President, had produced a stalemate which could only be broken when the truce ended, and Hayne's negotiations were prolonged until February 5.⁵⁶ It was an anomalous fact that the Government's first and only real attempt to send reinforcements to Charleston harbor was to lead to a situation which for weeks prevented a second effort.

This act of firmness on the part of Buchanan had brought other results. The Secretary of Interior, Jacob Thompson, claimed that the President had promised, after the orders for reinforcements had been held up temporarily to await the reply of the South Carolina Commissioners, that no further orders would be issued without being previously considered and discussed in the Cabinet.⁵⁷ It seems that Thompson was kept in the dark on the "Star of the West" expedition, for on the very day that it sailed from New York, he sent Judge A. B. Longstreet of South Carolina, a message to the effect that he

55. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 194

56. Ibid., p. 195

57. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 401, 402

didn't believe that any additional troops would be sent to Charleston while the "present status" lasted; but if Fort Sumter should be attacked, he believed they would be sent.⁵⁸ On the day before he had telegraphed to a Mr. Kimball, of Jackson, Mississippi, that no troops had been sent, nor would be, while he was a member of the Cabinet.⁵⁹ Naturally, the Secretary's discomfiture was uncomfortable when on January 8 he learned that reinforcements had been sent. He sent the President his letter of resignation the same day, charging that the matter of reinforcements had been discussed in the Cabinet meeting of January 2, but no conclusion had been reached.⁶⁰ The President sent Thompson a letter accepting his resignation, January 9, with a full argument against the Secretary's contention, which showed that Thompson must have been asleep at the Cabinet meetings or was lying. The President regretted that he had been mistaken.⁶¹ Thus the "Star of the West" fiasco at least accomplished a resignation from the Cabinet which should have occurred back in December with that of Cobb. The post of Thompson was not filled by a new appointment, the duties being performed by the chief clerk, Moses Kelly, until the close of the administration.⁶² The new policy also brought the resignation of Philip F. Thomas, Secretary of Treasury, who gave his reason to be the purpose of the Cabinet and President to enforce the collection of the

58. Crawford, op. cit. p. 178

59. Ibid.

60. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 401, 402.

61. Ibid., p. 402.

62. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 111

customs in the port of Charleston. He resigned January 11.⁶³ Thus, by January 11, all the secessionists were out of the Cabinet. John A. Dix, of New York, was immediately appointed to fill the Treasury vacancy,⁶⁴ and he was a strong Unionist.

The stiffening of the Buchanan administration was also made evident in the President's message to Congress on January 8, 1861. According to one of the Cabinet members, Thomas, it was written paragraph by paragraph in the presence of the Cabinet and discussed as it was prepared.⁶⁵ The President stated frankly that the hope that Congress might make some amicable adjustment of the difficulty had been diminished by every hour of delay, and that as the prospect of a bloodless settlement faded away the public distress was becoming more aggravated. Government bonds were not being taken at a lower rate of interest than 12 percent.⁶⁶ There was an absence of negative emphasis, such as insistence on the lack of power to coerce a State and a positive emphasis on his "right and ... duty to use military force defensively against those who resist the Federal officers in the execution of their legal functions and against those who assail the property of the Federal Government."⁶⁷ But the President still urged Congress to act to settle the difficulties which had now reached such vast and alarming proportions as to place the subject above and beyond Executive control. "The fact can not be disguised", said the President, "that we are in the midst of a great revolution. In all its various bearings, therefore, I commend the question to Congress as the only human tribunal under

63. Ibid., p. 110

64. Ibid.

65. Randall, J. G., op. cit. p. 209

66. Richardson, J. D., op. cit. vol. 5, p. 655

67. Ibid., p. 656

Providence possessing the power to meet the existing emergency."⁶⁸ Then the President declared that to Congress alone belonged the power to declare war or to authorize the employment of military force in all cases contemplated by the Constitution, and Congress alone possessed the power to remove grievances which might lead to war and to secure peace and union to the distracted country.⁶⁹ Instead of condemning the North for bringing on the trouble, as he did in his message of December 4, the President now accused the South of being in the wrong. He was firmly convinced that the secession movement "has been chiefly based upon a misapprehension at the South of the sentiments of the majority in several of the Northern States." He appealed through Congress to the people of the country that the Union "must and shall be preserved by all constitutional means." "The present", he said, "is no time for palliations. Action, prompt action, is required. A delay in Congress to prescribe or to recommend a distinct and practical proposition for conciliation may drive us to a point from which it will be almost impossible to recede."⁷⁰ Toward the end of the message he praised Major Anderson for his occupation of Fort Sumter and gave evidence to the effect that the move had been made according to orders.⁷¹

This was the last time the President addressed Congress on the subject of disunion. In this last message he stressed two aspects of his policy in^{which} he was consistent from the beginning, that Congress or the people should find some satisfactory

68. Richardson, J. D., op. cit. vol. 5, p. 656.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., p. 657.

71. Ibid., p. 658.

compromise, and that any forceful measures were for the Congress to prescribe and outside the province of the Executive. In closing his message of January 8, 1861, the President expressed sentiments prophetic of the avalanche of criticism to be loosed upon him. He said:

In conclusion it may be permitted to me to remark that I have often warned my countrymen of the dangers which now surround us. This may be the last time I shall refer to the subject officially. I feel that my duty has been faithfully, though it may be imperfectly, performed, and, whatever the result may be, I shall carry to my grave the consciousness that I at least meant well for my country.⁶²

72. Richardson, J. D., op. cit. vol. 5, p. 659.

CHAPTER VI

THE HAYNE MISSION AND THE END OF THE BUCHANAN ADMINISTRATION

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THE HAYNE MISSION AND THE END OF THE BUCHANAN ADMINISTRATION

The attempt through the "Star of the West" to reinforce Fort Sumter marked the highest point of Buchanan's "aggressive" defensive policy. Major Anderson, because of hesitancy and overcaution, and a sincere aversion to initiating a civil war, played into the hands of the South Carolina authorities when he made the truce with the Governor.¹ The difficulty of the Fort Sumter situation was that time ~~was on~~ the side of the South Carolinians. Although military preparations had been in progress in the harbor since the occupation of Sumter by Anderson, the South Carolina military power was very slight at the time Anderson made the truce. On January 1, the South Carolinians had on Morris Island only three 24-pounders, manned by a force that had probably never seen a 24-pounder manipulated or fired.² It was all important for South Carolina to have time to erect batteries and strengthen the forts taken over from the Federal Government, while the small Federal force in Fort Sumter was isolated and without reinforcements.

The President, writing in 1866, said that Major Anderson probably had committed an error in making the truce, that

1. See page 85.

2. Chadwick, French Ensor, op. cit. p. 240.

under the laws of war it might be annulled after due notice to Governor Pickens; but it would cast a serious reflection on Major Anderson for having concluded it, although he, beyond question, had acted from the purest and most patriotic motives."³ In this connection it is interesting to refer to the communication to Anderson from Secretary of War Holt on January 16, 1861. Holt stated that Anderson rightly designated the firing on the "Star of the West" as "an act of war", and had it been perpetrated by a foreign nation, it would have been "your imperative duty to have resented it with the whole force of your batteries"; but as it was the work of the Government of South Carolina, which must still be considered a member of the Union, and was prompted by the passions of citizens of the United States, his forbearance to return the fire was fully approved by the President.⁴ But note the responsibility of Major Anderson for a return to the non-reinforcement policy. In the same letter Holt stated that, from Anderson's late dispatches, the Government was relieved of the apprehensions previously entertained for his safety, and therefore it was not the Government's purpose at present to reinforce him. "The attempt to do so", said Holt, "would, no doubt, be attended by a collision of arms and the effusion of blood - a national calamity which the President is most anxious, if possible, to avoid."⁵ From this point on, Major Anderson must share a large part of the responsibility for his own discomfiture. He was told in the

4. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 140.

5. Ibid.

same letter that whenever, in his judgment, additional supplies or reinforcements were necessary for his safety, or for a successful defense of the fort, he was to communicate the fact at once to the War Department, and a prompt and vigorous effort would be made to forward them.⁶

Secretary of State Black, impatient at the turn events were taking, on the same day as Holt's letter to Anderson, addressed a long letter to General Scott. In this letter Judge Black expressed a fear that the old policy of inaction was to be resumed. He asked General Scott three questions: 1. "Is it the duty of the Government to reinforce Major Anderson?" 2. "If yes, how soon is it necessary that those reinforcements should be there?" 3. "What obstacles exist to prevent the sending of such reinforcements at any time when it may be necessary to do so?"⁷ Judge Black said that it then seemed to be settled that Major Anderson and his command at Fort Sumter were not to be withdrawn. But if the troops remained in Fort Sumter without any change in their condition, and the hostile attitude of South Carolina remained the same, the question of surrender was one of time only. "If he is not to be relieved", asked Judge Black, "is it not entirely clear that he should be ordered to surrender at once?" He urged that relief be sent at once before it was too late to save him.⁸ Black asked for an immediate reply from Scott, but it seems that he never received one.⁹

6. Ibid.

7. Crawford, op. cit. p. 237.

8. Crawford, op. cit. p. 237.

9. Chadwick, French Ensor, op. cit. p. 237.

It was just three days before Secretary of State Black's questions were put to General Scott that South Carolina's envoy, I. W. Hayne, arrived in Washington, accompanied by Lieut. Hall, Major Anderson's messenger. They arrived on January 13, and on the next morning, January 14, Hayne called upon the President and stated that he would deliver the Governor's letter on the following day. The President, "admonished by his recent experience with the former commissioners", declined to hold any conversation with him on the subject of his mission, and requested that all communications between them might be in writing.¹⁰ The President suspected that the message contained a demand for the surrender of Fort Sumter, "which he was at all times prepared peremptorily to reject." The President expected that the letter would be transmitted to him on the following day, that he would refuse to surrender the fort, and the truce would be terminated, leaving both parties free to act as each saw fit.¹¹

On January 16, Senator C. C. Clay, of Alabama, called upon the President on behalf of a group of Senators from seceding States. He mentioned the fact that there had been a truce agreed on so long as Hayne was in Washington, to which the President agreed. The President was told that these Senators wanted Hayne to remain a few days while they submitted through him a proposition to the Government of

10. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 196.

11. Ibid.

South Carolina, suggesting that the latter agree that Major Anderson should be placed in his former position; which meant that he was not to be treated as under siege; that his Government might have free access to him, and he could buy all the provisions he wanted in Charleston. He should not be disturbed if the President would not send him additional reinforcements. Senator Clay went on to suggest that the truce, already effected and confirmed by the President, might be extended till the 4th of March.¹² The President made it clear that the truce would last only until Hayne left Washington, and that no proposition could be entertained unless it was presented in writing. The last sentence of Buchanan's memorandum on this interview, made it clear that he "could not, and would not, withdraw Major Anderson from Fort Sumter."¹³ This action on the part of the seceding Senators was an attempt to forestall any action on the part of South Carolina until the Southern Confederate Government had been organized, when the controversy regarding possession of the Charleston forts would be made a part of a more comprehensive programme of "taking over". Nearly all the cotton States seceded in January. It was expected that the Confederate Government would be instituted in a few weeks, and to that Government Jefferson Davis was anxious to leave the settlement of the Charleston harbor controversy. Davis wrote to Governor Pickens after Hayne had

12. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 452, 453. Buchanan's memorandum.

13. Ibid, p. 454.

arrived in Washington:

The opinion of your friends . . . is adverse to the presentation of a demand for the evacuation of Fort Sumter. The little garrison in its present position presses on nothing but a point of pride, and to you I need not say that war is made up of real elements. Your friends here think that you can well afford to stand still, so far as the presence of the garrison is concerned, and if things continue as they are for a month, we shall then be in a condition to speak with a voice which all must hear and heed.¹⁴

The above was written on January 20, just a week after Hayne had arrived in Washington, and after the seceding Senators had conferred and agreed on a plan of delayed action. Just a week before, January 13, the day Hayne arrived in Washington, but of whose mission Davis had only a vague idea, the latter's letter to Pickens was quite different in tone. Davis had written to Pickens on January 13:

I cannot place any confidence in the adherence of the administration to a fixed line of policy. The general tendency is to hostile measures, and against these it is needful for you to prepare. I take it for granted that the time allowed to the garrison of Fort Sumter has been diligently employed by yourselves, so that before you could be driven out of your earthworks you will be able to capture the fort which commands them.

Let us compare the letter of January 13 with that of January 20, and we can agree that Davis expected the Hayne mission to tie up any action on the part of the Government, and in this he was supported by the President's own views. If Hayne could be kept in Washington, the truce would remain in effect, Davis could trust in a "fixed line of policy", the Charleston batteries would be strengthened, and the Confederate Government

14. Crawford, op. cit. p. 265.

15. Crawford, op. cit. p. 264.

would be a going concern, able to cooperate with South Carolina, while the Government's position, and that of the garrison in Fort Sumter, would be growing daily weaker.

On January 15, Senators Louis T. Wigfall, John Hemphill, D. L. Yulee, S. R. Mallory, Jefferson Davis, C. C. Clay, Benjamin Fitzpatrick, A. Iverson, John Slidell and J. P. Benjamin had addressed their note to Hayne, asking him to defer presenting the South Carolina Governor's letter to the President.¹⁶ They said they had assurances that Sumter was held with no hostile purpose, but "merely as property of the United States". They went on to say that they represented States which had already seceded from the United States, or would have done so before February 1, and those States would meet with South Carolina in convention before February 15. Then, "our people feel that they have a common destiny with your people, and expect to form with them in that convention, a new confederation and provisional government. We must and will share your fortunes - suffering with you the evils of war, if it cannot be avoided, and enjoying with you the blessings of peace if it can be preserved. We therefore trust that an arrangement will be agreed upon between you and the President, at least till the 15th of February next, by which time your and our States may in convention devise a wise, just, and peaceable solution of existing difficulties. If not clothed with power to make such an

16. Ibid, p. 220, Official Records, vol. 1, p. 149.

arrangement, then we trust that you will submit our suggestions to the Governor of your State for his instructions."¹⁷ They added that, of course, until Hayne had received his reply and communicated it to the President, South Carolina would not attack Fort Sumter, and the President would not reinforce it.¹⁸ They urged, too, that South Carolina should allow Major Anderson to obtain necessary supplies of food, fuel or water, and enjoy free communication with the President, all of which had been prohibited or seriously curtailed, upon the understanding that the President would not send reinforcements during the same period.¹⁹

Hayne replied to the Senators on January 17, saying that he had no power to make the arrangement referred to, but that he agreed to withhold the presentation of the Governor's letter pending further instructions.²⁰ On the 19th of January the correspondence between the Senators and Hayne was submitted to the President, accompanied by a note from three of the Senators asking him to take the subject under consideration. The President's answer made through his Secretary of War, on January 22,²¹ stated that the President refused to enter into the proposed agreement. The Senators were told that they did Mr. Buchanan no more than justice when to Hayne they had said: "Notwithstanding the circumstances under which Major Anderson left Fort Moultrie and entered Fort Sumter with the forces under his command, it was not taken, and is not held,

17. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. Vol. 3, pp. 155, 156.

18. Ibid, p. 156.

19. Crawford, op. cit. p. 219.

20. Ibid, p. 220

21. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 198.

with any hostile or unfriendly purpose towards your State, but merely as property of the United States, which the President deemed it his duty to protect and preserve."²² The same words had been used in the reply to the South Carolina commissioners. The Secretary further declared that as to the proposition of Hayne, that no reinforcements would be sent to Fort Sumter in the interval, and that the public peace would not be disturbed by any act of hostility towards South Carolina, it was impossible for him to give any such assurances; the President had no power to enter into such an engagement. But further, "at the present moment it is not deemed necessary to reinforce Major Anderson, because he makes no such request, and feels quite secure in his position. Should his safety, however, require reinforcements, every effort will be made to supply them."²³ The Secretary expressed his pleasure at Hayne's assurance that Major Anderson was then receiving all necessary supplies from Charleston, and hoped that he would continue to do so. Yet in a report to the War Department of the same date as the above, Major Anderson asked that he be sent through Lieut. Hall some "thin ruled note paper, with envelopes". Being cut off from Charleston, he could not procure "those indispensable articles."²⁴

On the next day, January 23, seven of the seceding Senators again addressed Hayne, enclosing him a copy of

22. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 149.

23. Ibid, p. 150.

24. Ibid.

Secretary Holt's reply and again asking him to withhold the Governor's letter until he had further instructions. They expressed the hope that South Carolina would take no step tending to produce a collision until their States should join their counsels with hers.²⁵ In his reply to this note, Hayne took advantage of both the President's and Holt's declaration that Fort Sumter was held and protected as merely property. He gave an argument on purely a property basis, saying that South Carolina would scorn the appropriation of another's property without paying for it to the last dollar. He advised that holding the fort by United States troops was the worst possible means of protecting it as "property".²⁶ Later developments were to prove him correct in the latter observation.

After a rather long and repetitious exchange of correspondence among the several parties concerned, Hayne, at last, received the reply of the Governor of South Carolina, on January 30, and on the next day, January 31, transmitted the reply to the President.²⁷ The Governor's letter was dated January 12, the day Hayne left Charleston, and Hayne transmitted it with a long letter of his own to the President.²⁸ The Governor's long-delayed letter read as follows:

At the time of the separation of the State of South Carolina from the United States, Fort Sumter was, and still is, in the possession of the troops of the United States, under the command of Major Anderson. I regard that possession as not consistent with the dignity or safety

25. Crawford, op. cit. pp. 221, 222.

26. Crawford, op. cit. p. 222

27. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 199

28. Ibid.

of the State of South Carolina, and have this day addressed to Major Anderson a communication to obtain possession of that fort by the authorities of this State. The reply of Major Anderson informs me that he has no authority to do what I required, but he desires a reference of the demand to the President of the United States. Under the circumstances now existing, and which need no comment from me, I have determined to send to you Hon. I. W. Hayne, the Attorney-General of the State of South Carolina, and have instructed him to demand the delivery of Fort Sumter. In the harbor of Charleston, to the constituted authorities of South Carolina. The demand I have made of Major Anderson, and which I now make of you, is suggested by my earnest desire to avoid the bloodshed which a persistence in your attempt to retain possession of that fort will cause, and which will be unavailing to secure to you that possession, but induce a calamity most deeply to be deplored. If consequences so unhappy shall ensue, I will secure for this State, in the demand which I now make, the satisfaction of having exhausted every attempt to avoid it.²⁹

The last paragraph of the letter emphasized the purely proprietary aspect of the demand, for which view there had been some support given by the President's statements. On this point the Governor continued:

In relation to the public property of the United States within Fort Sumter, the Hon. I. W. Hayne, who will hand you this communication, is authorized to give you the pledge of the State that the valuation of such property will be accounted for by this State, upon the adjustment of its relations with the United States, of which it was a part.³⁰

To this letter the President gave an answer through the Secretary of War, February 6, 1861. The Secretary of War went over the whole ground of the correspondence exchanged on the subject of Hayne's mission, and gave a very able and thorough argument against the claims advanced by the Governor and Hayne.³¹ The reply was too long for full

29. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 456.

30. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 456.

31. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 166, 167, 168.

quotation in this paper, but it definitely corrected the impression that the demand for the surrender of the fort was to be made on a purely proprietary basis. Hayne had referred, in one of his communications to the President, to the right of "eminent domain" possessed by South Carolina. Said the Secretary of War:

The title of the United States to Fort Sumter is complete and incontestable. Were its interest in this property purely proprietary, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, it might, probably, be subjected to the exercise of the right of eminent domain; but it has also political relations to it, of a much higher and more imposing character than those of mere proprietorship. It has absolute jurisdiction over the fort and the soil on which it stands. . . . South Carolina can no more assert the right of eminent domain over Fort Sumter than Maryland can assert it over the District of Columbia. The political and proprietary rights of the United States in either case rest upon precisely the same grounds.³²

Holt added that the President was relieved from the necessity of further pursuing that phase of the subject, whatever might be the claim of South Carolina to the fort, as he had no constitutional power to cede or surrender it.³³ Holt stated that it could not be a menace to the safety of Charleston and South Carolina, as the garrison was acting under orders to act strictly on the defensive; that South Carolina must well know that she could receive nothing but shelter from its guns, unless, in the absence of all provocation, she should assault it and seek its destruction.³⁴ The Secretary quoted Jefferson Davis and the other seceding Senators, in their letter to Hayne of January 15, to counter the argument of the Governor that the fort was a menace to the safety of South Carolina: "It is not held with any hostile or unfriendly

32. Ibid., p. 167

33. Ibid.

34. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 168

purpose towards your State, but merely as property of the United States, which the President deems it his duty to protect and preserve".³⁵ In conclusion the Secretary declared:

If, with all the multiplied proofs which exist of the President's anxiety for peace and of the earnestness with which he has pursued it, the authorities of that State shall assault Fort Sumter and peril the lives of the handful of brave and loyal men shut up within its walls, and thus plunge our common country into the horrors of civil war, then upon them, and them alone, must rest the responsibility.³⁶

In a letter dated February 7, but which the President has said addressed to him on February 8, Hayne gave what the President considered an insulting reply, "not to Secretary Holt, as usage and common civility required, but directly to the President".³⁷ Hayne commenced his letter by saying that he was constrained to correct some "strange misapprehensions into which your Secretary has fallen".³⁸ The reply was a very bitter denunciation of the Government's policy, and contained a flat denial of the Secretary's implied charge that Hayne had modified the original demand of the Governor. Said Hayne:

You next attempt to ridicule the proposal as simply an offer on the part of South Carolina to buy Fort Sumter and contents as property of the United States, sustained by a declaration, in effect, that if she is not permitted to make the purchase, she will seize the fort by force of arms. It is difficult to consider this as other than intentional misconstruction.³⁹

Then Hayne delivered a rather astute argument when he referred to the point of the President's former declaration that the fort was held as public property:

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 205

38. Crawford, op. cit. p. 231 (Full text of letter, pp. 231, 232, 233)

39. Ibid. p. 232.

It was precisely because you had yourself chosen to place your action upon the ground of 'purely proprietary' right, that the proposal of compensation was made, and you admit that in this view 'it (Fort Sumter) would probably be subjected to the exercise of the right of eminent domain. In your letter of yesterday (through your Secretary) you shift your position. You claim that your Government bears to Fort Sumter 'political relations of a much higher and more imposing character'.⁴⁰

Hayne's letter was returned to him on the same day, addressed to Charleston, with the following indorsement by the President: "The character of this letter is such that it cannot be received. Col. Hayne having left the city before it was sent to the President, it is returned to him by the first mail."⁴¹

Although Hayne failed in his immediate mission, the seceding Senators had scored a success in their policy of delay. Hayne was kept in Washington from January 13 to February 7, during which time, by the President's own admission, the status quo in Charleston harbor was to be maintained, unilaterally only, while the South Carolinians were free to prepare to take the fort. Also, by February 7, the Confederate Government was well on the way to being instituted. Seven States had now seceded, and shortly before Hayne had left Washington, a meeting of delegates was held at Montgomery, Alabama, to form a provisional Government for the Southern Confederacy. The provisional government was soon formed and in operation.⁴² By the 18th of February, Jefferson Davis had been inaugurated as President, and the new Government

40. Crawford, op. cit. p. 232.

41. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 205

42. Channing, op. cit. p. 272, vol. 6

43. Burgess, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 123.

was put into operation.⁴³ The forts in Charleston harbor were no longer a subject for negotiation between the Federal Government and South Carolina, for the Confederacy had taken over the matter.

In addition to Major Anderson's truce, which the President had respected, and which had precluded the reinforcement of Fort Sumter for several weeks, there was yet another event which, in the mind of the President, amounted to a truce. This was the Peace Convention, which had been instituted under the auspices of the General Assembly of Virginia. Now, on February 4, just a day or two before the Anderson truce and the Hayne mission ended, this Peace Convention assembled in Washington. It was presided over by the ex-President John Tyler, and had many distinguished names among its delegates. The Convention was seriously weakened by the refusal of the seven States of the lower South to send delegates, as well as the failure to do so on the part of Arkansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, and Oregon.⁴⁴ The Convention deliberated until February 27, when it presented to Congress a plan of conciliation, involving seven amendments to the Constitution, very similar to those of the abortive Crittenden plan. The plan received but negligible support when brought to a vote in the Senate on March 2. Even the Virginia leaders repudiated the plan of the Convention.

Thus, as the President has said, this Peace Convention "had

43. Burgess, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 123.

44. Randall, J. G., op. cit. p. 204.

interposed another insurmountable obstacle to the reinforcement of Fort Sumter, unless attacked or in immediate danger of attack, without entirely defeating this beneficent measure".⁴⁵ Thus, knowing the President's paramount desire that some plan of compromise might be effected to insure a peaceful settlement of the crisis, and in the light of his own statement above, it is logical to consider the Peace Convention with the same force of a truce as the truce made by Major Anderson. This view is supported, in a measure, by a dispatch from the Secretary of War to Major Anderson, February 23. In this dispatch, the Secretary reminded Anderson that he still held Fort Sumter as he had held Fort Moultrie, under the orders given him by Major Buell, December 11, and as subsequently modified by the instructions of December 21. Anderson was to continue to act strictly on the defensive, and was encouraged and advised as follows:

A dispatch received in this city a few days since from Governor Pickens, connected with the declaration on the part of those convened at Montgomery, claiming to act on behalf of South Carolina as well as the other seceded States, that the question of the possession of the forts and other public property therein had been taken from the decision of the individual States and would probably be preceded in its settlement by negotiation with the Government of the United States, has impressed the President with a belief that there will be no immediate attack on Fort Sumter, and the hope is indulged in that wise and patriotic counsels may prevail and prevent it altogether.

The labors of the Peace Congress have not yet closed, and the presence of that body here adds another to the powerful motives already existing for the adoption of every measure, except in necessary self-defense, for avoiding a collision with the forces that surround you.⁴⁶

45. Buchanan, James, op. cit., p. 206.

46. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 183.

Thus, from January 13 to almost the end of the Buchanan administration, the President had considered his hands tied in the matter of reinforcements. Yet, they would probably have been sent even during the Peace Convention had there been an attack or danger of attack.

It must be noticed, to the credit of the Buchanan administration, that on January 30, the President was taking measures to reinforce in case of need. On January 30, the day before he had received the demand of Governor Pickens for the surrender of Fort Sumter, the President had requested the Secretaries of War and the Navy, accompanied by General Scott, to meet him for the purpose of devising the best practicable means of "instantly reinforcing Major Anderson, should this be required".⁴⁷ After several consultations an expedition for that purpose was quietly prepared at New York, under the direction of Secretary Toucey, the command of which was intrusted to the Secretary's intimate friend, Commander Ward. The expedition consisted of a few small steamers, and it was arranged that on receiving a telegram from the Secretary of the Navy, in case of an emergency, the Commander, in the course of the following night, should set sail for Charleston. He was to enter the harbor in the night and anchor under the guns of Fort Sumter.⁴⁸ Again it must be noticed that Major Anderson's changed opinion on reinforcement contributed in large measure to the Government's policy at this time. On January 30, the same day that the

47. Buchanan, James, op. cit. pp. 210, 211.

48. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 210.

President was arranging for the expedition to relieve him in case of an emergency, Anderson was writing to the War Department, hoping "that no attempt will be made by our friends to throw supplies in; their doing so would do more harm than good".⁴⁹

Another attempt to form a plan of relief for Major Anderson had been undertaken by General Scott. Early in January, soon after the "Star of the West" fiasco, Captain G. V. Fox submitted a plan in writing to a friend of General Scott, to whom it was shown and approved.⁵⁰ The Fox plan was to place troops and provisions on board a large steamer, preferably the "Baltic", which was to carry three hundred extra sailors and enough armed launches to land all the troops in one night. The whole was to be convoyed by the United States sloop of war, the Pawnee, the only available steam vessel north of the Gulf of Mexico. The batteries were to be run at night by the tugs.⁵¹ On February 4, General Scott summoned Fox to Washington. The plan was discussed in the presence of Major Anderson's messenger, Lieut. Hall, who had accompanied Hayne and was still in Washington. The plan was approved by Scott on February 7, and he agreed to present it to the President that evening. Fox's plan was turned down for the time in deference to the Peace Convention.⁵² According to the President's statement, it was

49. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 159.

50. Crawford, op. cit. p. 248.

51. Ibid, p. 249.

52. Ibid, p. 250.

learned a few days after the termination of Major Anderson's truce that Governor Pickens had determined to respect the appeal made to him by the General Assembly of Virginia, and to refrain from attacking the fort during the session of the Peace Convention.⁵³

The story of President Buchanan's policy regarding Fort Sumter would not be complete without a word or so about the Fort Pickens truce. At Pensacola, Florida, there was a large navy yard, and near it, on the mainland, Fort Barrancas with a nominal garrison of 46 men under Lieut. A. J. Slemmer; also there was Fort McRae, occupied by an ordnance sergeant only, and Fort Pickens, entirely unoccupied.⁵⁴ On January 3, General Scott sent a written order to Slemmer to take measures to prevent the seizure of either of the forts in Pensacola Harbor by surprise or assault. Slemmer received the order on January 9 and immediately started the occupation of Fort Pickens, completing his move on January 11.⁵⁵ On January 21, orders were given by the Assistant Adjutant-General for the sloop of war "Brooklyn" to be provisioned and loaded with troops, with sealed orders for Captain Vogdes, not to be opened until the ship was at sea.⁵⁶ The sealed orders directed Captain Vogdes to reinforce Fort Pickens, of which he would become the commander, as well as of other forts which it might be in his power to occupy and defend with the cooperation

53. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 209

54. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 162

55. Ibid, p. 163.

56. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 351.

of any naval commanders at hand. The company was to be first landed to cover the supplies intended for the fort.⁵⁷ In a postscript Vogdes was given to understand that he was not to attempt any reoccupation or recapture involving hostile collision, but to confine himself strictly to the defensive.⁵⁸

But it seems that representations from ex-president Tyler, Senator Mallory, and others, prevailed on the President to change the plan of reinforcing Fort Pickens.⁵⁹ On the 28th of January, Senators Slidell, Hunter, and Bigler received a telegram from Senator Mallory, who had gone to Pensacola to inspect the situation. Mallory asked them to present the telegram to the President.⁶⁰ Mallory reported:

We hear the "Brooklyn" is coming with reinforcements for Fort Pickens. No attack on its garrison is contemplated, but, on the contrary, we desire to keep the peace, and if the present status be preserved we will guarantee that no attack will be made upon it, but if reinforcements be attempted, resistance and a bloody conflict seem inevitable. Should the Government thus attempt to augment its force-when no possible call for it exists; when we are preserving a peaceful policy-an assault may be made upon the fort at a moment's warning. Our whole force - 1,800 strong - will regard it as a hostile act. Impress this upon the President, and urge that the inevitable consequence of reinforcement under present circumstances is instant war, as peace will be preserved if no reinforcements be attempted.⁶¹

The peaceful intent, barring reinforcements, expressed by Mallory, is hard to reconcile with the fact that already the navy yard had been demanded by Florida authorities and surrendered.⁶² Mallory's telegram was dated the 28th, and on

57. Ibid., p. 352.

58. Ibid.

59. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 166

60. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 354.

61. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 354.

62. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, pp. 163, 164.

the 29th of January the Secretaries of War and the Navy sent a joint order to the officers responsible at Pensacola. The assurances of Senator Mallory were believed, Fort Pickens would not be assaulted, so "you are instructed not to land the company on board the "Brooklyn" unless said fort shall be attacked or preparations shall be made for its attack. The provisions necessary for the supply of the fort you will land."⁶³ But the "Brooklyn" and other vessels were to remain and the officers were to exercise the utmost vigilance and be prepared to land the company at a moment's warning. They were to instantly repel an attack on the fort.⁶⁴ This has been considered as a truce, but the time limit was indefinite. The Anderson truce ended when Hayne left Washington. The secessionists claimed that the Pickens truce was still in effect when the Lincoln administration was inaugurated.

Buchanan has stated his reasons for the truce. He carefully considered Senator Mallory's proposal". The Brooklyn might not arrive in time for the protection of the fort. Besides, he thought a collision would be fatal to the Virginia Peace Convention, about to assemble. But the fort was badly in need of provisions, and these must "at every hazard" be supplied.⁶⁵ The President later claimed that the decision reached was with the approbation of every member of the Cabinet, but in a letter in July, 1861, Secretary Stanton declared that the order was opposed by himself, Black, and Dix.⁶⁶ General

63. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 355.

64. Ibid.

65. Buchana, James, op. cit. p. 215.

66. North American Review, November 1879, p. 481.
Stanton to Buchanan, quoted by Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol.3, p. 169.

Scott, in a later report to Lincoln, severely condemned the Pickens truce, and said the armistice was consequent upon the meeting of the Peace Convention, and was understood to end with it.⁶⁷ Scott denied that he had approved the truce or the joint order of the Secretaries establishing it. This claim must have been a result of defective memory, for Secretary Holt, in a letter to Buchanan, declared that Scott was shown the order and said that he could see no objection to it.⁶⁸ Thus the Buchanan administration ended on March 4, 1861, after having "muddled through" one of the most critical periods in the history of the nation. The key to the policy throughout the four months of the secession threat was, without doubt, the overwhelming desire to avoid war at almost any cost, and to cling to any hope, even the faintest, of saving the Union without a civil war.

There has been written a mass of criticism, favorable and unfavorable, of Buchanan's course. Many reasons and theories have been advanced to explain his conduct of the crisis. A Democratic anti-secessionist candidate for the Governorship of Tennessee, in a campaign speech delivered an extremely condemnatory opinion of Buchanan. As this was a very common opinion of Union men immediately after Buchanan's retirement, it is worthy of quotation. Said Parson Brownlow, March 23, 1861:

67. Buchanan, James, op. cit., p. 481.

68. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 462.

The late Chief Magistrate, James Buchanan, was inaugurated into office under auspices of general peace and prosperity, -- strong in the confidence of a might, united, and triumphant Democracy. Possessed of every aid and inducement to an honest, a patriotic, a brilliant, and a vigorous and successful administration of the Government, he has retired from power amid general execration and disgrace, carrying into his retirement the official brand of public condemnation upon his forehead, and leaving to history, as the only trophies of his administration, the national treasury depleted, the country loaded with an incubus of debt, that great national and conservative party, to whose generous and confiding suffrages he owes all his fortunes, demoralized and dismembered, and perpetuity of the republic a doubtful and an appalling problem, and his own name a by-word of infamy and derision throughout the civilized world.⁶⁹

The same opinion as the above has been expressed by many historians with a Northern viewpoint. The charge has been frequently made that Buchanan's policy was strained in the "skim-milk of apology", that it had no backbone in it, and that the secessionists who came to Washington to negotiate with the Government should have been arrested as traitors instead of being encouraged by official welcome.⁷⁰

The frequent charge that Buchanan was senile and in his dotage, incapable of meeting the heavy responsibilities of office, must have an element of truth in it, but has been probably overemphasized. In a letter to a correspondent of New York, on December 20, 1860, the President stated that he had never enjoyed better health nor a more tranquil spirit than during the past year. He said that all his troubles had not cost him an hour's sleep or a single meal, though he trusted he had a just sense of his high responsibility. "I

69. Brownlow, W. G., Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession. Philadelphia, George W. Childs Co., 1862, p. 232.

70. Schouler, op. cit. vol. 5, p. 472.

weigh well and prayerfully", he said, "what course I ought to adopt and adhere to it steadily, leaving the result to Providence".⁷¹ W. H. Trescot, the Assistant Secretary of State during some of Buchanan's most trying months, and very much in his confidence, has left his opinion of the President, written in February, 1861. Said Trescot of Buchanan:

He therefore diplomatized with those whose action he could not entirely stay. He promised not to force an issue, to refer to Congress, and in this policy he persevered even in the face of General Cass' resignation. But the issue came nevertheless, and Major Anderson's move 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 Cabinet's - it was conducted without the intervention of his Northern members, and in private consultations with his Southern - not exactly in official pledges, but in conversations with Southern members of Congress - in adopting suggestions from Floyd and Thompson - and keeping up indirect communications with those in authority in South Carolina. When Anderson's conduct made the issue, official action was necessary. Mr. Buchanan had to take his choice between two courses, to sustain him or condemn him. The conduct of his officer was in direct contradiction to the whole undercurrent of his policy. . . He surrendered into the hands of the North and refused to withdraw Anderson.⁷²

Trescot went on to assign a selfish motive for Buchanan's policy. His opinion was that Buchanan could not bring himself to take decisive measures in Lincoln's interest; that while he was anxious to preserve the Union, his secret sympathy was with the South, and in his heart he felt that their protest was his defense. The Black Republican triumph was one especially over him, taking from him his State of Pennsylvania,

⁷¹. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 354, 355.

⁷². Hunt, Gaillard, ed., "Narrative and Letter of William Henry Trescot", op. cit. p. 548.

and they had held him up to scorn by the famous Covode investigation. According to Trescot, Buchanan had no objection to see the storm rage if it stopped short of shipwreck, to see the Black Republicans broken to pieces in the very flush of their insolent triumph and a reaction sweep over the North and float the old Democracy to power in 1864.⁷³

Buchanan, in his defense, charged with truth that much of his dilemma was the result of the persistent refusal of Congress to pass laws to increase the military forces, and to authorize him to take the necessary measures. The Congress that met in December was hostile to the administration and not inclined to help the President. Buchanan has charged that "Congress positively refused to pass a law conferring on the President's authority to call forth the militia, or accept the services of volunteers, to suppress insurrections which might occur in any State against the Government of the United States".⁷⁴ He further stated that this omission, which ought to have been supplied, was allowed to continue until after the end of his administration, and was remedied only on the 29th of July, 1861, when Congress conferred the necessary power on Lincoln.⁷⁵ Buchanan's Secretary of State, Judge Black, has made the same charge. In a letter to Henry Wilson Black charged that the Republicans refused to increase

73. Ibid., pp. 549, 550.

74. Buchanan, James, op. cit. p. 154.

75. Ibid.

the military forces. "Why?", Black asked; "you must have desired the Union cause to be disgraced and defeated, for nothing else could have resulted from such a war as you now abuse Mr. Buchanan for not making. You and your party in Congress. . . did not recommend peace, nor offer your support to war."⁷⁶

As has been noted before, the failure of the administration to reinforce Major Anderson after the Cabinet crisis of December 30, must be in a large degree charged to the responsibility of Major Anderson. It may be that the Government's policy up to that time had demoralized Anderson, and thoroughly convinced him that a collision of arms would be the inevitable result of reinforcement. In fact, there is a letter written by Anderson, on April 5, 1861, to a woman sympathizer in New York, in which he admits his responsibility for the failure of reinforcement after the Floyd resignation. Major Anderson wrote as follows:

Justice, however, compels me not to stop here, but to take upon myself the blame of the Government's not having sent to my rescue. Had I demanded reinforcements while Mr. Holt was in the War Department I know that he would have dispatched them at all hazards. I did not ask for them, because I knew that the moment it should be known here that additional troops were coming, they would assault me and thus inaugurate civil war. My policy, feeling - thanks be to God - secure for the present in my stronghold, was to keep still, to preserve peace, to give time for the quieting of the excitement, which was at one time very high throughout this region, in the hope of avoiding bloodshed. The ladies must not then blame the latter part of Mr. Buchanan's administration, nor the present one, for not having sent me reinforcements. I demanded them under Mr. Floyd. The time when they might have been sent has passed weeks ago.⁷⁷

In the same letter Anderson expressed the hope that the seceding States, leaving the Union as friends, might at some future

⁷⁶. Black, C. F., op. cit., p. 249.

⁷⁷. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 290, 291.

time be won back by conciliation and justice.⁷⁸

Historians of the present day tend to judge Buchanan with more tolerance and pronounce a more favorable and unprejudiced opinion. A recent study of the period under investigation concludes that Buchanan's motives, at any rate, were of the best, and that unless one begs the question with the assumption that his basic policy of peace toward the South was invalid, it is hard to find many mistakes in the measures that he actually took. He did avert war for a time, giving the various compromise efforts a chance to develop, and offering the incoming administration an opportunity to work out its own schemes of conciliation, should that be the intention. Avoiding any recognition of the Confederacy, Buchanan made no commitments that would seriously embarrass his successor.⁷⁹

A very thorough study of Buchanan and his Cabinet on the eve of secession has been made by Dr. Philip G. Auchampaugh, who came to the conclusion that Buchanan had every reason to congratulate himself on the success of his policy. According to the writer, Buchanan's main aim, to give things a peaceful direction, to prevent the opening of a brothers' war, had been accomplished. At the same time, Buchanan had held his Northern Cabinet members together, save one, thus preventing the disintegration of his administration. No official recognition had been given the seceded States, so that his successor was under no commitment in that regard. Some Federal property had been taken, but other points had been reinforced. No stone

78. Ibid.

79. Randall, J. G., op. cit., p. 195

had been left unturned to promote measures of compromise that would be fair to all concerned. The public was rapidly becoming quite^e and reconciled to the idea that the Union could be saved without civil war. The President had also escaped the pitfalls of the Republicans, by standing firmly on his constitutional prerogatives, both in dealing with Congress and the Southern States. Few men, thought Dr. Auchampaugh, beset by so many chances of pitfall have ever managed to extricate themselves so skillfully.⁸⁰

Some Northern historians would have one believe that Buchanan's Secretary of War, Joseph Holt, was contemptuous of his chief's policy and constantly sought to strengthen it on the side of aggressiveness toward the secessionists. The facts do not seem to justify this belief. During the war, Holt became a Republican and therefore was much more hostile toward the South than at the time he was Buchanan's Secretary of War. Holt has left many letters of approval of Buchanan's policy. A typical one is the following:

I wish distinctly to say that I believe Mr. Buchanan was in all respects and at all times true to the Union. He believed, and so did I, that a war during his administration, especially if we began it, would result in the destruction of the Union. It was his policy to preserve the peace if possible and hand over the Government intact to his successor. Mr. Stanton, Judge Black, and myself differed at times with him as to the best way to do this, but we were agreed that it must be done.⁸¹

At the end of Buchanan's administration, Buchanan and Holt were warm friends. Buchanan said, "Holt, you have been true". "I have tried to be", replied Holt.⁸²

80. Auchampaugh, op. cit. p. 190.

81. Ibid, p. 81

82. Ibid, p. 82

It is the opinion of the writer of this study that Buchanan, with all his faults and pro-Southern leanings could hardly have accomplished more than he did in the way of preventing civil war and a rapid disintegration of the Union. He did turn the Government over to the incoming administration without having recognized the independence of any of the seceding States, and had refused all along to withdraw the Federal garrison from Fort Sumter. It is true that five more States had followed South Carolina in secession before the end of Buchanan's administration, and most of these had seceded after the only effort Buchanan had made to reinforce Fort Sumter. Before condemning Buchanan's policy there should be some evidence that fewer States would have seceded if Buchanan had resorted to more forceful measures.

It might also be argued that the apparent weakness of Buchanan's policy toward the seceding States was its strength. It was Buchanan's chief desire to save the Union and avert civil war, to do nothing that could swell the tide of secession. He did everything in his power to give the people an opportunity to settle the crisis by peaceful means. Much has been made of Buchanan's failure to emulate Jackson in his forceful treatment of the South Carolina nullification crisis in 1832; but at that time Jackson had to deal with the rebellious attitude of one State alone, with the people of the State about equally divided for and against nullification. Buchanan had to deal

with practically a unanimous South Carolina in her secession movement, with other States ready to follow her if the Federal Government resorted to coercion. A comparison of Buchanan's dilemma with Jackson's smaller problem is not fair. Buchanan was successful in the policy that he chose to follow.

CHAPTER VII

LINCOLN AND SECESSION THROUGH THE INAUGURAL

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We have reviewed the policy of the Buchanan administration in regard to secession in general, and the Fort Sumter crisis in particular. We have seen that the policy pursued was based on the fear of an armed conflict as the result of any forceful action. Secession was illegal, yet it could not legally be prevented by coercive measures. The President disclaimed any responsibility for a settlement of the difficulties and put the burden on Congress exclusively. He pinned his faith on compromise and conciliation, to be effected by Congressional action. He promised to receive, and did receive, South Carolina commissioners. While waiting for Congress to repair the house divided, he followed a "strictly defensive" policy in regard to the forts in Charleston harbor, and refused to reinforce the garrisons there. Those garrisons could have been successfully reinforced in November, when Major Anderson and his predecessor, Colonel Gardner, earnestly requested it. But the policy of delay and inaction had not only made reinforcement more difficult, but had disheartened the commander of Fort Sumter, and convinced him also that a conflict should be prevented at almost any price.

It is reported that Buchanan, during his last days at the White House, exclaimed several times, "I am the last President

of the United States!" Lincoln, on the contrary, decided that the Union could and must be saved. Buchanan believed in and proposed further compromises on the slavery question, while Lincoln, in accordance with the Chicago platform on which he was nominated, could accept no compromise which would extend slavery in the Federal territories. Buchanan's proposal of explanatory amendments, in his message of December 4, provided for that extension of slavery!¹ But the Republican platform stated that "the new dogma that the Constitution, of its own force, carries slavery into any or all of the Territories of the United States, is a dangerous political heresy", and that the "normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom".² Lincoln therefore could not afford to accept a compromise such as the South demanded. The only support he could immediately count on was that of a united party. He could not jeopardize that support by a violation of his party's platform.

It was a great responsibility that Lincoln assumed in rejecting this compromise, but those who would condemn him must prove that such a compromise would have definitely averted civil war, instead of merely postponing it a few years. But did the South really want a compromise? It must be remembered that the radical secessionists had been preparing the Southern mind for years to support secession when the favorable moment came. Lincoln's election was not so much the cause, as the "Sarajevo" of secession and civil war. The radical secessionist,

1. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 5, p. 638.

2. Greeley, American Conflict, vol. 1, p. 320.

Roger Pryor of Virginia; expressed a scorn for compromise in his speech of April 10 to the people of Charleston. Said Pryor:

Gentlemen, if Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin were to abdicate their office tomorrow, and were to give me a blank sheet of paper whereupon to write the conditions of reannexation to the Union, I would scorn the privilege of putting the terms on paper. (Cheers) And why? Because our grievances have not been with reference to the insufficiency of the guarantees, but the unutterable perfidy of the guarantors. I thank you especially that you have at least annihilated this accursed Union, reeking with corruption and insolent with excess of tyranny. Not only is it gone, but gone forever. As sure as tomorrow's sun will rise upon us, just so sure will old Virginia be a member of the Southern Confederacy; and I will tell your Governor what will put her in the Southern Confederacy in less than an hour by a Shrewsbury clock. Strike a blow! (Tremendous applause) The very moment that blood is shed, old Virginia will make common cause with her sisters of the South.³

This feeling was not representative of the Southern people, but it was typical of the radical secessionist "fire-eaters!"

Lincoln's policy, both in the election of 1860 and during the months before inauguration, was to maintain prudent silence on his intended actions. We have an ample record of Buchanan's views, but there is a striking dearth of material on those of Lincoln. Many were the letters he received soliciting his views on the compromise efforts of Congress and his own plans of meeting secession. Lincoln's most common answer to those wanting a pre-view of his policy was that given to Truman Smith, in a reply of November 10 to the latter's complaint that uncertainty as to his policy had caused a financial depression. Lincoln told Smith that his views were already known, and to give them again would be useless." "To press a repetition of this upon those who have listened is useless; to press it upon

3. Sandburg, Carl, Abraham Lincoln - The War Years, vol. 1. p. 207.

those who have refused to listen, and still refuse, would be wanting in self-respect, and would have an appearance of sycophancy and timidity which would excite the contempt of good men and encourage bad ones to clamor the more loudly."⁴

Lincoln continued, "I am not insensible to any commercial or financial depression that may exist, but nothing is to be gained by fawning around the 'respectable scoundrels' who got it up. Let them go to work and repair the mischief of their own making, and then perhaps they will be less greedy to do the like again".⁵

Lincoln's attitude on a compromise such as was being considered at the time in Congress, was given in many letters to close party friends and advisers. To the Hon. William Kellog, the Illinois Congressman on the Committee of Thirty-three, who had written Lincoln early in December for instructions as to the course he should pursue, Lincoln wrote the following:

Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. The instant you do they have us under again; all our labor is lost, and sooner or later must be done over. Douglas is sure to be again trying to bring in his "Popular Sovereignty". Have none of it. The tug has to come, and better now than later. You know I think the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution ought to be enforced - to put it in its mildest form, ought not to be resisted.⁶

Not only was Lincoln averse to compromise, but the leading Republicans in the Congress that met in December 1860 also thought they had no concessions to make. On December 10, Senator Corwin wrote Lincoln that all the Republican Senators, except one, had the impression that they had no concessions or

4. Lincoln's Works, ed., Nicolay and Hay, 2 vol.

5. Ibid.

6. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 259.

compromise to offer, and that it was impolitic even to discuss making them. Corwin thought that inactivity and a kind spirit was all the Republicans could offer until the 4th of March. Senator Corwin admitted that he never in his life had seen the country in such a dangerous position, and although he looked upon it with great alarm, he declared, "I am resolved not to be paralyzed by dismay. Our safety can only be insured by looking the danger full in the face and acting with calm dignity in such a way that, if possible, we may ride out the storm".⁷

It seems that Lincoln and the leading Republicans, such as W. H. Seward and Salmon P. Chase, did not think that a dissolution of the Union and civil war were inevitable. They were almost as eager, it seemed, as Buchanan had been, to let things drift, and believed that somehow, after the 4th of March, some solution for peace and Union could be found. Chase wrote to Henry Wilson, December 13, 1860, that the Republicans could do nothing, in the way of a settlement of the crisis, until they assumed control of the Government on March 4. He thought that all attempts on their part to do anything, under existing circumstances, would prove unfortunate.⁸ Seward, the man who, probably more than anyone else, was responsible for the successful organization of the Republican party, and the coiner of the phrase "irrepressible conflict", could not convince himself that the Union was disintegrating. Both he and Thurlow Weed, his alter ego, were strong advocates of a policy

7. Ibid, p. 255.

8. Annual Report of American Historical Association, 1902, pp. 293, 294. Diary and Correspondence of S. P. Chase, Gov't. Print. Office, 1903.

of conciliation toward the South. Seward had been chosen Lincoln's Secretary of State, and he was possessed with an overweening confidence that as soon as the new administration took over the Government, he would be able to effect a reconciliation. Speaking before the New England Society of New York, December 22, 1860, he expressed his confidence of secessions's waning in the following words:

The cause of secession was as strong on the night of November 6, when a President and Vice-President were elected who were unacceptable to the Slave States as it has been at any time. Fifth days have passed; and I believe that every day the sun has set since that time, it has set upon mollified passions and prejudices; and if you will only wait the time, sixty more suns will shed a light and illuminate a more cheerful atmosphere.⁹

Seward had been actively engaged, during the winter of 1860-61, in contacting all parties, and had openly proclaimed that his policy was one of peace and conciliation.¹⁰ He held many conferences with the members of Buchanan's Cabinet, and at the end of the first week of January, 1861, he wrote his wife of his efforts, saying, "I have assumed a sort of dictatorship for defense, and am laboring night and day with the cities and States. My hope, rather my confidence, is unabated".¹¹ Seward's activities and confidence in himself made him feel as if he were the guiding light of even the Buchanan administration. On January 18 he wrote his wife; "It seems to me if I am absent only eight days, this administration, the Congress, and the District would fall into con-

9. Lothrop, Thornton K, William Henry Seward, p. 223. American Statesmen Series, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898.
 10. Congressional Globe, Jan. 12, 1861, p. 343, Vol. 30, Part I.
 11. Tarbell, Ida M., The Life of Abraham Lincoln, vol. 2, p. 26. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1917.

sternation and despair. I am the only hopeful, calm, conciliatory person here".¹²

Lincoln himself had a lingering faith in a conciliatory solution of the national crisis. Early in December, in a conference with Thurlow Weed, David Davis, and Leonard Swett, Lincoln declared that while there were some loud threats and much muttering in the cotton States, he hoped that by wisdom and forbearance the danger of serious trouble might be averted, as such dangers had been in former times.¹³ It was a natural expectation that Lincoln would repudiate the policy pursued by Buchanan, and take a firm stand against secession, but during the election and after he gave no sign of such a policy in any public utterance. On November 28, Lincoln wrote to Henry J. Raymond, in regard to a speech made by Senator Trumbull, Republican, which the opposition had seized upon to inflame the North with the opinion that Republican ground was to be abandoned by the incoming administration. Lincoln wrote to Raymond:

This is just as I expected, and just what would happen with any declaration I could make. These political fiends are not half sick enough yet. Party malice and not public good, possesses them entirely. They seek a sign, and no sign shall be given them. At least such is my present feeling and purpose.¹⁴

Although Lincoln had said little or nothing publicly about his attitude on secession, his private correspondence was not lacking in revealing a determination not to recognize secession, but to ignore any de facto status in regard to it,

12. Tarbell, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 26.

13. Weed, Thurlow, Autobiography, ed. Harriet A. Weed, p. 605 Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1883.

14. Lincoln's Works, vol. 1, p. 656.

and not to treat it with the deference and respect with which Buchanan had met it. In a letter to Weed, December 17, Lincoln wrote:

I believe you can pretend to find but little, if anything, in my speeches, about secession. But my opinion is, that no State can in any way lawfully get out of the Union without the consent of the others; and that it is the duty of the President and other Government functionaries to run the machine as it is.¹⁵

In a letter to Lincoln of December 17, Congressman Washburne reported to Lincoln the anxiety of General Scott as to the President-elect's firmness. Scott was smarting under the affront of Buchanan's refusal to follow his recommendations to reinforce the Federal forts. Scott said to Washburne, "I wish to God that Mr. Lincoln was in office. I do not know him, but I believe him a true, honest, and conservative man. Mr. Washburne, is he a firm man?" Washburne replied that Lincoln would discharge his duty, and his whole duty, in the light of the furnace seven times heated. General Scott then said, "All is not lost".¹⁶ A note of firmness in regard to the question of the forts was given by Lincoln in his reply to Washburne: "Please present my respects to the General, and tell him, confidentially, I shall be obliged to him to be as well prepared as he can to either hold or retake the forts, as the case may require, at and after the inauguration".¹⁷ Seward now communicated to Lincoln his views regarding the questions of the forts and secession. On January 27, two weeks before

15. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 253.

16. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 249.

17. Ibid.

Lincoln started on his way to Washington for the inaugural ceremony, Seward advised him thus:

For my own part I think that we must collect the revenues, regain the forts in the Gulf, and if need be maintain ourselves here; but that every thought that we think ought to be conciliatory, forbearing, and fraternal, and so open the way for the rising of a Union party in the seceding States which will bring them back into the Union.¹⁸

Not a word about Fort Sumter. Waiting for the rising of a Union party in the seceded States explains much that is to follow; it was to be the key of the Lincoln policy for the first few weeks of the new administration.

Lincoln had drafted his inaugural address and started on his way to Washington on February 11. On the way he made several speeches in the cities through which he passed, and in these utterances we probably find Lincoln at his worst. He could say little of importance without anticipating his prepared inaugural address. In a speech at Indianapolis, February 11, he spoke interrogatively, explaining that he was not asserting anything, but merely raising questions for his hearers to consider. Yet he gave some indication of his intentions when he spoke thus:

The words "coercion" and "invasion" are much used these days, and often with some temper and hot blood. Let us make sure, if we can, that we do not misunderstand the meaning of those who use them. . . What then is "Coercion?" What is "Invasion?" Would the marching of an army into South Carolina, without the consent of her people, and with a hostile intent towards them, be invasion? I certainly think it would; and it would be coercion also if the South Carolinians were forced to submit. But if the United States should merely hold and retake its own forts and other property, and collect the duties on foreign importations, or even withhold the mails from places where they were habitually violated, would any or all these things be "invasion" or "coercion"? Do our professed lovers of the Union, but who spitefully resolve that they will resist coercion and invasion, understand that such

18. Ibid, p. 366.

things as these on the part of the United States, would be coercion or invasion of a State? If so, their idea of means to preserve the object of their affection would seem exceedingly thin and airy. . . In their view, the Union, as a family relation, would seem to be no regular marriage, but a sort of "free love" arrangement, to be maintained only on "passional attraction".¹⁹

It is quite clear that Lincoln, while on the way to assume control of the Government, intended to hold and retake the Federal forts and public property. He intended to "run the machine" as it was. In the same speech he also asked: "On what rightful principle may a State, being not more than one-fiftieth part of the nation, in soil and population, break up the nation and then coerce a proportionally larger subdivision of itself, in the most arbitrary way? What mysterious right to play tyrant is conferred on a district of country, with its people, by merely calling it a State?"²⁰ Here Lincoln was reversing the South Carolina argument that she was being, or feared she was to be coerced, and presented a wholly different view of the matter. South Carolina was coercing the Government of the United States.

In the light of all that had happened since November 6, with seven States by their own action out of the Union, and a Southern Confederate government already organized, with many thinking people even in the North convinced of the inevitability of a dissolution of the Union, with nearly every Federal fort in the South in secessionist hands, and the Confederate forces hurling defiance at the United States Government in Charleston harbor, it is puzzling to consider Lincoln's utterance at

19. Raymond, Henry J., History of the Administration of President Lincoln, p. 80. New York, J. C. Derby and N. C. Miller Co., 1864.

20. Ibid, p. 81.

Columbus, Ohio, when he said:

I have not maintained silence from any want of real anxiety. It is a good thing that there is no more than anxiety, for there is nothing going wrong. It is a consoling circumstance that when we look out there is nothing that really hurts anybody. We entertain different views upon political questions, but nobody is suffering anything. This is a most consoling circumstance, and from it we may conclude that all we want is time, patience, and a reliance on that God who has never forsaken this people.²¹

From the above expression it might easily be inferred that Lincoln did not realize the magnitude of the secession movement and the earnest resolve of the South to support secession by force of arms. No wonder Congressman Edwin R. Reynolds of New York expressed astonishment at Lincoln's attitude, when he asked the House of Representatives:

Have not our forts and vessels been seized, our arsenals invaded, our mints robbed, by men and States in arms? Has not our flag been fired into, our mails rifled and intercepted, our commerce on the Mississippi obstructed? Is not the public mind today, North and South, convulsed as never before? What else crowds the bursting columns of the daily and weekly journals wherever published? What other topic now feeds the thunders of the London Times and attracts more undivided attention from European Governments.²²

These speeches of Lincoln on his way to Washington did nothing to bolster the morale of the Federal troops in Fort Sumter. They were tired of their confinement and wanted action. They expected that Lincoln would now sound an aggressive note and repudiate Buchanan's "strictly defensive policy". We have the word of one of the men in the fort that these speeches, from their pacific nature, "produced a depressing effect upon the garrison, who were disappointed in them".²³

21. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 47.

22. Ibid.

23. Crawford, op. cit. p. 295.

If these mediocre speeches of Lincoln on his way to Washington gave no encouragement to those who hoped for some firm and aggressive policy as to the forts, what would the Inaugural Address say on the subject? The day before the inauguration, March 3, Senator Wigfall of Texas delivered his farewell speech, in which he flung defiance in the face of the North. Said Wigfall: "The Star of the West", flying your flag, staggered into Charleston Harbor with supplies for Fort Sumter, South Carolina struck her between the eyes, and she staggered back; and now, what do you propose to do about it?"²² He sat down, and for a time nobody responded. Then, the staunch Unionist of Tennessee, Andrew Johnson rose and exclaimed: "Mr. President, I will tell the Senator from Texas what I would do about it. I speak only for myself. But if I were President, as James Buchanan today is, and as Abraham Lincoln tomorrow will be, I would arrest the Senator and his friends on the charge of treason; I would have them tried by a jury of their countrymen, and, if convicted, by the eternal God, I would hang them!"²³ But Andrew Johnson was not to be President until after Lincoln had met the issue of Civil War. What was Lincoln to do about the forts?

Lincoln arrived at Washington February 23, while the Virginia Peace Convention at Washington was still in session. Committees from this convention called on the President-elect to try to get some guarantees from him, on the basis of which

22. Macartney, Clarence Edward, Lincoln and His Cabinet, p. 3

23. Ibid. Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1931

a compromise could be effected. On February 23, Stephen T. Logan of Illinois, a member of the Peace Convention and a former law partner of Lincoln, rose in the convention and moved that the President of the convention be instructed to call on the President-elect and inform him that the members of the convention would be pleased to wait upon him in a body. It was so ordered, and John Tyler, the convention's President, sent a note to Lincoln, who replied that he would be happy to receive the delegates at nine o'clock that night. Many were the arguments made by the members of the Peace Committee, and they were ably answered by Lincoln. William E. Dodge, a merchant and capitalist of New York, was much concerned about the financial and commercial ruin which he thought would follow a conflict. Dodge said that it was for Lincoln to say whether the whole nation should be plunged into bankruptcy, and whether the grass should grow in the streets of the commercial cities. Lincoln replied: "Then I shall say it shall not. It if depends upon me, the grass shall not grow anywhere except in the fields and the meadows". "Then", said Dodge, "you will yield to the just demands of the South. You will not go to war on account of slavery!"²⁴ With all merriment now gone from Lincoln's face, he answered in words which held no promise of a recognition of the Southern Confederacy. Said Lincoln:

I do not know that I understand your meaning, Mr. Dodge. Nor do I know what my acts or opinions may be in the future, beyond this. If I shall ever come to the great office of President of the United States, I shall take an oath. I shall swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, of all the United States,

24. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 89.

and that I will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. This is a great and solemn duty. With the support of the people and the assistance of the Almighty I shall undertake to perform it. I have full faith that I shall perform it. It is not the Constitution as I would like to have it, but as it is, that is to be defended. The Constitution will not be preserved and defended until it is enforced and obeyed in every one of the United States. It must be so respected, obeyed, enforced and defended, let the grass grow where it may.²⁵

Lincoln's answer to Dodge indeed sounded a firm note. The Southern Confederacy did not legally exist in Lincoln's mind. The Constitution must be obeyed in every one of the States. Yet William H. Seward was holding out promises of conciliation and peace to the South. He had promised Charles S. Morehead, ex-Governor of Kentucky and temporary chairman of the Virginia Peace Convention until John Tyler assumed the position of permanent chairman, that there would be no collision between the North and South. According to Morehead's declaration, Seward pledged his sacred honor that there would be no collision. "Nay, Governor Morehead", said Seward, laying his hand on Morehead's shoulder to make it more emphatic, "let me once hold the reins of power firmly in my hands, and if I don't settle this matter to the entire satisfaction of the South in sixty days, I will give you my head for a football".²⁶ Morehead and a group of men called on Lincoln shortly after his arrival in Washington, and in this interview Lincoln showed his great anxiety that the border slave States should be saved for the Union. Morehead told Lincoln that he prayed and trusted to God that he would not resort to coercion, and if he did, the history of his administration would be written in blood,

25. Ibid, p. 90.

26. Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 28, June, 1941, p. 66. D. R. Barbee and M. L. Bonham, "Notes and Documents: Fort Sumter Again". pp. 63 - 73.

and all the waters of the Atlantic Ocean could not wash it from his hands.²⁷ Lincoln asked Morehead what he should do, and if he meant by coercion the collecting of the revenue and the taking back of the forts which belonged to the United States. Morehead replied that that was the only mode in which it was possible under the Constitution to resort to coercion. Lincoln replied with a characteristic anecdote that that would be "gugin it up". Morehead replied that it might be "gugin it up", but that it would be better to give it up than to drench the land with blood and then have to give it up.²⁸

Lincoln replied, "I would like to know from you what I am to do with my oath of office?" Morehead replied, "As to the forts, that is a matter within your discretion, sir. You can withdraw the troops if you please. You are the commander-in-chief, and it belongs to you, either to keep them there or to withdraw them totally, and prevent a collision, and a consequent deadly and ruinous war."²⁹ Lincoln replied with one of Aesop's fables:

There was a lion once that was desperately in love with a beautiful lady, and he courted the lady, and the lady became enamoured of him and agreed to marry him, and the old people were asked for their consent. They were afraid of the power of the lion with his long and sharp claws and his tusks, and they said to him, "We can have no objection to so respectable a personage as you, but our daughter is frail and delicate, and we hope that you will submit to have your claws cut off and your tusks drawn, because they might do very serious injury to her". The lion submitted, being very much in love. His claws were cut off and his tusks drawn, and they took clubs and knocked him on the head.³⁰

27. Ibid, p. 69.

28. Ibid, p. 70.

29. Ibid.

30. Miss. Val. Hist. Review, vol. 28, June 1941, op. cit. p. 71.

Then W. C. Rives of Virginia, one of several men who accompanied Morehead in this interview with Lincoln, warned that if Lincoln should resort to coercion, Virginia would leave the Union and join the seceding States. "Nay, sir", said Rives, "old as I am, and dearly as I have loved the Union, in that event I go with all my heart". At this, according to Morehead, Lincoln leaped from his chair, advanced one step toward where Rives was standing, and cried, "Mr. Rives, Mr. Rives, if Virginia will stay in, I will withdraw the troops from Fort Sumter".³¹ There is quite a bit of evidence that Lincoln did make an offer to evacuate Fort Sumter. The Virginia State Convention had just met to consider passing an ordinance of secession. If Virginia should secede, her example would probably have great weight in determining the action of the remaining border slave States, which Lincoln, just as Buchanan before him, was most anxious to keep in the Union. John Hay reported in his diary that after the Morehead interview, Lincoln spoke of his offer, saying that a committee of pseudo-Unionists came to him for guarantees and that he "promised to evacuate Fort Sumter if they would break up their (Virginia) Convention without any row or nonsense. They demurred".³² Rudolph Schleiden, minister of the Republic of Bremen to the United States, reported to his Government that when border State men asked Lincoln to remove the troops from Fort Sumter, the President-elect replied: "Why not? If you will guarantee to me

31. Ibid, p. 71, Sandburg, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 97.

32. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 98.

the State of Virginia I shall remove the troops. A State for a fort is no bad business."³³ The above proposition will be discussed later, but it is probable that Lincoln made the proposal before inauguration.

Although Lincoln's inaugural address had been been written weeks before his arrival in Washington, it was submitted to Seward and others for suggestions and modifications. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into a detailed study of Lincoln's first Inaugural Address, but it might be observed that its original tone was much more hostile to the South than the final form. On February 24, Seward suggested many changes on the side of conciliation. He told Lincoln that he had a common interest and responsibility with him, and he would say frankly that the second and third paragraphs, even if modified as he proposed, would give such advantages to the disunionists in Maryland and Virginia that those States would secede, and "we shall within ninety, perhaps sixty days, be obliged to fight the South for this capital, with a divided North for our reliance, and we shall not have one loyal magistrate or ministerial officer south of the Potomac."³⁴ As for the forts, Lincoln's original draft stated:

33. Annual Report - American Historical Association, 1915, p. 211. Lutz, Ralph Haswell, "Rudolph Schleiden and the Visit to Richmond, April 25, 1861."

34. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 319, 320.

All the power at my disposal will be used to reclaim the public property and places which have fallen; to hold, occupy, and possess these and all other property and places belonging to the Government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion of any State.³⁵

The modified and final form of the above was:

The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government.³⁶

Thus it was on the suggestion of Seward that he was to follow Buchanan's policy of giving up the forts already taken by the South, at least in the inaugural. But Lincoln's friend and adviser, O. H. Browning, suggested also that the declaration of the purpose of reclamation, which would be construed into a threat or menace, and might be irritating even in the border States, might prudently be omitted. Said Mr. Browning: "The fallen places ought to be reclaimed. But cannot that be accomplished as well or even better without announcing the purpose in your inaugural?"³⁷

In still another respect Lincoln inclined to the policy of Buchanan. The latter had maintained that it would have been useless to attempt to supply the Federal offices in South Carolina by nominating men from other States and to force them on the people. On this point Lincoln declared in his Inaugural:

Where hostility to the United States, in any interior locality, shall be so great and universal as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the

35. Ibid, p. 333.

36. Ibid, pp. 333, 334.

37. Ibid, p. 334.

strict legal right may exist in the Government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable withal, that I deem it better to forego for the time the uses of such offices.³⁸

Buchanan, in his message of December 4, denied any Constitutional right of secession, but admitted a revolutionary right. Lincoln's reference to this line of thought was:

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing Government they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it.³⁹

Buchanan had disclaimed any responsibility to effect a settlement of the secession crisis, saying that it was the duty of Congress. Lincoln's statement of that side of the question was:

The Chief Magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have conferred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the States. The people themselves can do this also if they choose; but the Executive, as such, has nothing to do with it. His duty is to administer the present Government, as it came to his hands, and to transmit it, unimpaired by him, to his successor.⁴⁰

Buchanan had proposed to his Cabinet, at the first meeting after the election of Lincoln, that there should be a national convention of the States to determine the solution of the difficulties.⁴¹ Since Lincoln made no recommendations for amendments to the Constitution, and in his original draft of the inaugural address said that he was "not much impressed with the belief that the present Constitution can be improved", must he not have been thinking along the same line as Buchanan, when in the following paragraph he identified the voice of the people with the voice of God? Appealing to both North and South to avoid disunion, he said:

³⁸. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 334. ⁴⁰. Ibid, p. 341

³⁹. Ibid, p. 340.

⁴¹. Auchampaugh, op. cit., p. 131

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? In our present differences is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that judgment will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people.⁴²

Another point of comparison. Buchanan's policy had been based, among other things, on his anxiety of having the responsibility of war, if it must come, placed on the South. The strictly defensive policy in Charleston harbor had been pursued to dangerous extremes in order that civil war should not come, and if it came, that there would be no possibility of the charge that the Government had been the aggressor. Toward the end of Lincoln's address, after urging his countrymen, one and all, to think calmly and well "upon this whole subject", and saying that "nothing valuable can be lost by taking time", he said:

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it".⁴³

Did this mean that the seceded States, now organized in a Southern Confederacy, would be let alone? It seems that Seward was responsible for much of the generalizing and ambiguity of the inaugural address.⁴⁴

Naturally everyone was anxiously awaiting Lincoln's address. People in general expected a definite statement of

42. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 341.

43. Ibid., p. 342.

44. Ibid., p. 343.

policy, and that policy was also expected to be a radical departure from that of Buchanan. In some respects the policy announced was little different from that of Buchanan. Nicolay and Hay, prejudiced in Lincoln's favor, have said that Lincoln announced "a decided, though not a violent, change of policy"; that Buchanan's course had been one professedly of conciliation, but practically of ruinous concession, while Lincoln announced his purpose of conciliation, and restoration.⁴⁵ It is true that all through the inaugural address Lincoln made it clear that secession was impossible, but there was no declaration of an intention to use strong measures to prevent it. It is quite possible that Lincoln was doubtful of the support of a united North in coercive measures. There was the hope of eventual conciliation by some mysterious means, and the grave concern over the border slave States. Lincoln, in a message to Congress on July 4, 1861, stated the policy announced in the inaugural as follows:

The policy chosen looked to the exhaustion of all peaceful measures before a resort to any stronger ones. It sought only to hold the public places and property not already wrested from the Government, and to collect the revenue, relying for the rest on time, discussion, and the ballot-box. Of all that which a President might constitutionally and justifiably do in such a case, everything was forborne without which it was believed possible to keep the Government of foot.⁴⁶

The conciliatory tone of the address was directed especially to allaying secession sentiment in Virginia, but the Richmond "Whig", a conservative paper, declared "the policy indicated

45. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 376.

46. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 6, p. 21. Special Session Message, July 4, 1861.

towards the seceding States will meet the stern and unqualified resistance of the United South.⁴⁷ The Richmond "Enquirer", a secession paper declared that "no action of our Convention can now maintain peace".⁴⁸ The Richmond "Dispatch" said "every Border State ought to go out of the Union in twenty-four hours. Dispatches from Stanton state that the inaugural was received with universal dissatisfaction. Resistance to coercion is the feeling of all parties. The inaugural creates intense excitement. The secessionists regard it as a declaration of war. The Union men say little, but evidently are disappointed".⁴⁹ From Goldsboro, North Carolina, a news dispatch declared, "The inaugural was received at this place and throughout this section with indignation."⁵⁰ The Baltimore "American" said, "The tone of the speech is pacific; that is to say, Mr. Lincoln avows his determination to preserve peace, so far as it may be done, in the performance of his duty as he understands it. It is perfectly evident, from the whole tenor of his address, that he does not intend to be the aggressor, if peace may not be preserved."⁵¹ No truer words could have been written than those of the last sentence. The Baltimore "Sun" denounced the speech as "sectional and mischievous" and added that "if it means what it says, it is the knell and the requiem of the Union, and the death of hope".⁵² The Baltimore "Exchange" said, "the measures of Mr. Lincoln mean war".⁵³ The Baltimore

47. Louisville Daily Courier, March 7, 1861.

48. Ibid.

49. Louisville Daily Courier, March 7, 1861

50. Ibid.

51. Moore, Frank, Rebellion Record, vol. 1, Documents, p. 105 New York, D. Van Nostrand, 1866.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

"Patriot" declared that Lincoln meant to avoid aggression, but added, "In the seceding States intense excitement was created by the reception of the address".⁵⁴ The St. Louis "Democrat" remarked, "We can only say this morning that it meets the highest expectations of the country, both in point of statesmanship and patriotism, and that its effect on the public mind cannot be other than salutary in the highest degree".⁵⁵

At the inaugural, on the platform with Lincoln, were Senator Stephen A. Douglas and President James Buchanan, men who had participated and been principal actors in the slavery and secession drama which was fast approaching its climax. When the reporters asked Douglas for his opinion of Lincoln's address, he at once said that it did not mean coercion. "He says nothing about retaking the forts", said Douglas. "He is all right".⁵⁶ When Buchanan was asked for his opinion he replied "with a wretched leer": "I cannot say what he means until I read his inaugural. I cannot understand the secret meaning of the document, which has simply been read in my presence."⁵⁷ Cautious Buchanan, slow of perception. A study made by Dr. D. L. Dumond supports the conclusion that at least the inaugural address was intended to announce the policy of the administration, and that from that policy, as then outlined, Lincoln never deviated.⁵⁸

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Louisville Daily Courier, March 6, 1861.

57. Louisville Daily Courier, March 6, 1861.

58. Dumond, D. L., The Secession Movement, 1860-1861, pp. 262, 263. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1931.

From Lincoln's original inaugural it might be concluded that he thought war inevitable, but that by a conciliatory tone he might hold off the secession of the border States, especially Virginia and Maryland, until Washington had troops to protect it.

CHAPTER VIII

FORT SUMTER - LINCOLN'S PROBLEM

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We have reviewed Lincoln's attitude on secession and the Federal forts, and have seen that he was resolved to "run the machine" as it was, to defend, preserve and protect the Constitution as it was, and to hold the Federal forts and property not already captured by the forces of secession. We have also observed that in his original draft of the inaugural address Lincoln had announced his purpose to also retake the forts lost to the South, but he had omitted such a declaration in deference to the advice of Seward and Browning. We have also seen that before inauguration he had expressed a willingness to evacuate Fort Sumter in exchange for a guarantee that Virginia would stay in the Union, so great was his concern over the border slave States. It has also been observed that the inaugural expressed no purpose of making war on the South, but on the contrary, assured the South that no war could come without the South being the aggressor. Now it remains to be seen how a policy of peace and conciliation was frustrated by the course of events.

We have compared some aspects of Lincoln's policy as announced in his inaugural to the policy of Buchanan, but such a comparison is really unfair because of the accentuation of the crisis as a result of Buchanan's policy of inaction.

The Southern historian Pollard has said, "the separation had been widened and envenomed by the ambidexterity and perfidy of President Buchanan. The revolution in the meantime had rapidly gathered, not only in moral power, but in the means of war and the muniments of defense."¹ Whatever other results might have followed in the wake of reinforcement of the forts in Charleston harbor in the month of November, 1860, it is quite certain that such an attempt would not have met a successful resistance. Then the South Carolina authorities had not the slightest military strength, but since the first report Major Anderson had made to the War Department after taking command at Fort Moultrie, he had almost daily reported the military preparations that were being made by South Carolina. After the Confederate Government assumed direction of these preparations in February, Major Anderson continued to report them. For example, Anderson reported to the War Department on March 1, 1861:

I have the honor to report that nothing unusual occurred today, except the arrival from the city of a steamboat, fully loaded with troops, at Sullivan's Island. The works around us are being carried on with the same activity as heretofore. Yesterday some guns were fired from a battery on Sullivan's Island to the eastward of the Moultrie House.²

Nothing unusual except a boat fully loaded with Confederate reinforcements. On March 5, Major Anderson reported that parties were working on the mortar battery at Fort Johnson, which they were making higher and stronger, and on the Morris Island batteries, numbers 1, 9, and 10.³ On March 5, also, Captain J. G. Foster of the Engineers reported:

1. Pollard, Edward A, The First Year of the War, p. 40. Richmond, West and Johnson, 1862.

2. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 188.

3. Ibid, p. 190.

Yesterday three steamers landed troops and supplies on Cummings Point, and appearances indicated that preparations were making for immediate action in case the news from Washington exhibited a coercive policy on the part of the administration.⁴

The above quotations are not extreme cases, but typical of the reports that were sent almost daily to the War Department, especially after Anderson's occupation of Fort Sumter on December 26, 1860.

The policy of acting strictly on the defensive and granting concessions to South Carolina, had enabled the Confederacy by March 4, 1861, to complete, or have near completion the following armed positions:

Sullivans Island: Five-gun battery east of Fort Moultrie, Battery, 2 guns, Mortar Battery No. 2, two 10 inch Mortars, Fort Moultrie, 30 guns, Mortar Battery No. 1, two 10 inch mortars, and Enfilade Battery, four guns, The Point Battery, one 9 inch Dahlgren and the Floating Iron-clad Battery, two 42 pounders and two 32 pounders. The Mount Pleasant Battery, two 10 inch mortars.

Morris Island: Cummings Point Battery, two 42 pounders and three 10 inch mortars, Stevens Iron-clad Battery, three 8 inch columbiads, the Trapier Battery, three 10 inch mortars.

James Island: Fort Johnson, battery of 24 pounders; Upper Battery, two ten-inch mortars; Lower Battery, two ten-inch mortars, and the Mortar Battery.⁵

On the 4th of March, shortly before Lincoln announced his purpose to hold the forts, a communication from Major Anderson was received, declaring that such a policy, in regard to Fort Sumter, would be difficult. While President Buchanan was holding his last Cabinet meeting, Secretary Holt arrived very late, explaining that on that morning he had received "extraordinary dispatches" from Major Anderson. Anderson said

4. Ibid.

5. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. 1, p. 81

that without a force of some twenty or thirty thousand men to capture the batteries which had been erected, he could not maintain himself at Fort Sumter. Holt told the President and Cabinet that he intended to communicate the dispatches at once to Lincoln.⁶ On March 5, Holt, who performed the duties of the War Department for a day or two because of the illness of Simon Cameron, Lincoln's choice for Secretary of War, sent to Lincoln an extensive review of the Fort Sumter situation. Holt's summary justified the Buchanan policy and stated that the failure to reinforce Sumter was in part because of Anderson's confidence that he could hold his position; Anderson had asked that no reinforcements be thrown in, and therefore the Secretary was taken by surprise that Anderson estimated that so many men would be needed to reinforce him.⁷ Holt added:

So long, therefore, as he (Anderson) remained silent upon this point, the Government felt that there was no ground for apprehension. Still, as the necessity for action might arise at any moment, an expedition has been quietly prepared and is ready to sail from New York on a few hours' notice, for transporting troops and supplies to Fort Sumter. This step was taken under the supervision of General Scott, who arranged its details, and who regarded the reinforcements thus provided for as sufficient for the occasion. The expedition, however, is not upon a scale approaching the seemingly extravagant estimates of Major Anderson and Captain Foster, now offered for the first time, and for the disclosures of which the Government was wholly unprepared.

The declaration now made by Major Anderson that he would not be willing to risk his reputation on an attempt to throw in reinforcements into Charleston harbor, and with a view of holding possession of the same, with a force of less than twenty thousand men, takes the Department by surprise, as his previous correspondence contained no such intimation.⁸

6. Curtis, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 497

7. Curtis, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 498, 499.

8. Ibid, p. 499, Official Records, vol. 1, p. 197.

This must have been a rude shock for Lincoln's pacific policy.

On March 5, Lincoln transmitted the letter from Holt, with the accompanying documents received from Major Anderson on March 4, to General Scott, for his consideration and advice. On the same day they were returned by Scott, who gave his opinion on reinforcements.⁹ Scott had reached a rather gloomy conclusion, saying, "Evacuation seems almost inevitable . . . if indeed the worn-out garrison be not assaulted and carried in the present week".¹⁰ Lincoln referred the papers back to General Scott for a more thorough investigation, and wrote orders for General Scott which were transmitted over the signature of the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron. Scott was directed by the President "to exercise all possible vigilance for the maintenance of all the places within the military department of the United States, and to promptly call upon all the departments of the Government for the means necessary to that end".¹¹ On March 9, after having learned verbally from General Scott that he had given the subject a more thorough consideration, Lincoln addressed the General three questions, as follows:

- (1) To what point of time can Major Anderson maintain his position at Fort Sumter, without fresh supplies or reinforcements?
- (2) Can you, with all the means now in your control, supply or reinforce Fort Sumter within that time?
- (3) If not, what amount of means and of what description, in addition to that already at your control, would enable you to supply and reinforce that fortress within the time?¹²

9. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, p. 9

10. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 378.

11. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, p. 8.

12. Ibid, pp. 9, 10.

On Saturday night, March 9, Lincoln held his first Cabinet meeting, and the crisis at Sumter, with the question of relieving the fort, were for the first time communicated to his advisers. The Cabinet members were surprised at the information. No decision was reached or asked for at this meeting. Lincoln's Attorney-General, Edward Bates, reported in his diary concerning this Cabinet meeting:

I was astonished to be informed that Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, must be evacuated, and that General Scott, General Totten, and Major Anderson concur in the opinion, that as the place has but twenty-eight days' provisions, it must be relieved, if at all, in that time; and that it will take a force of twenty thousand men at least, and a bloody battle, to relieve it!¹³

Even if a relief expedition were successful, Bates thought it would be certain to begin civil war, and as Charleston was of little importance as compared to the chief points in the Gulf, he was willing to evacuate Fort Sumter and strengthen the forts in the Gulf so as "to look down all opposition."¹⁴ At this time Lincoln did not disclose any purpose of his own. He followed a policy of asking questions and getting all the information possible. To understand Lincoln's position on the question of evacuating or reinforcing Fort Sumter at this point, we must consider his declaration as he gave it later, in his message to the special session of Congress, July 4, 1861. He then declared:

13. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 380, Bates' Diary.

14. Ibid, p. 381

In a purely military point of view this reduced the duty of the Administration in the case to the mere matter of getting the garrison safely out of the fort. It was believed, however, that to so abandon that position under the circumstances would be utterly ruinous; that the necessity under which it was to be done would not be fully understood; that by many it would be construed as a part of a voluntary policy; that at home it would discourage the friends of the Union, embolden its adversaries, and go far to insure to the latter a recognition abroad; that, in fact, it would be our national destruction consummated.¹⁵

On March 12, General Scott added to Lincoln's perplexity by the following discouraging answer to the three questions put by Lincoln a few days before:

I should need a fleet of war vessels and transports which, in the scattered disposition of the Navy (as understood), could not be collected in less than four months; 5,000 additional regulars and 20,000 volunteers; that is, a force sufficient to take all the batteries, both in the harbor (including Fort Moultrie), as well as in the approach or outer bay. To raise, organize, and discipline such an army (not to speak of necessary legislation by Congress, not now in session) would require from six to eight months. As a practical military question the time for succoring Fort Sumter with any means at hand had passed away nearly a month ago, Since then a surrender under assault or from starvation has been merely a question of time.¹⁶

On the same day that General Scott outlined the huge and immediately impossible plan to relieve Fort Sumter, Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's Postmaster-General, telegraphed his brother-in-law, Gustavus V. Fox, to come at once to Washington. Fox had already formed a plan to relieve the fort under Buchanan's administration, but had never had an opportunity to try it. Blair told Fox that Anderson's fame would be nothing as compared to his if he succeeded. After explaining to Fox the situation as it had developed, Blair took him to Lincoln, to whom he explained his plan of relief.¹⁷ Fox maintained that

15. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 6, p. 21

16. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 197.

17. Smith, William Ernest, The Francis Preston Blair Family In Politics, vol. 2, p. 11, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1933.

General Scott exaggerated the force necessary, and that a naval force propelled by steam, could pass any number of guns there, because the course was at right angles to the line of fire, and the distance, thirteen hundred yards, too great for accurate shooting at night. Fox declared that the President agreed to his plan if he could get the consent of the Secretary of War and General Scott.¹⁸ Fox proposed to put troops on board a large sea-steamer, and hire two or three powerful light-draught New York tug-boats, having the necessary stores on board. These were to be conveyed by the United States steamer Pawnee, and the revenue cutter Harriet Lane. At night, two hours before high water, with half the force on board each tug, within relieving distance of each other, he was to run in to Fort Sumter.¹⁹

On March 15, Lincoln held a Cabinet meeting and put the following question to his advisers:

Assuming it to be possible to now provision Fort Sumter, under all the circumstances is it wise to attempt it? Please give me your opinion in writing on this question.²⁰

Lincoln was not asking an opinion on sending reinforcements, but merely on the provisioning of the fort. The answers were accordingly given on March 15 and 16 in rather long documents, that of Seward being the longest.²¹ Lincoln's Cabinet included four former Democrats, Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of Treasury, Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, Montgomery Blair, Postmaster-General, and Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy. The remain-

18. Smith, W. E., op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 11, 12.

19. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 203, 204.

20. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, p. 11.

21. Ibid, pp. 11 - 22.

ing three were former Whigs, W. H. Seward, Secretary of State, Caleb Smith, Secretary of Interior and Edward Bates, Attorney-General.²² Of these only two answered in the affirmative. Blair was for it unconditionally, and Chase was for it with reservations. Said Blair: "To the connivance of the late administration, it is due alone that this rebellion has been enabled to attain its present proportions. It has from the beginning, and still is treated practically as a lawful proceeding, and the honest and Union-loving people in those States must by a continuance of this policy become reconciled to the new Government, and, though founded in wrong, come to regard it as a rightful Government".²³ Blair said that Mr. Buchanan's policy had rendered collision almost inevitable, and that a continuance of that policy would not only bring it about, but would go far to produce a permanent division of the Union. Blair believed that Fort Sumter could be provisioned and relieved by Captain Fox with little risk, and he added, "you should give no thought for the commander and his comrades in this enterprise. They willingly take the hazard for the sake of the country, and the honor which, successful or not, they will receive from you and the lovers of free Government in all lands".²⁴ Chase said that the probable political effects of the measure allowed room for much difference of opinion, and he had not reached his conclusion without serious difficulty. Said Chase, "If the proposed enterprise will so influence civil war as to involve an immediate necessity for the enlist-

22. Macartney, op. cit., p. 14

23. Crawford, op. cit. p. 359.

24. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 359, 360.

ment of armies and the expenditure of millions, I cannot, in the existing circumstances of the country, and in the present condition of the national finances, advise it." But as he thought that civil war would not follow an attempt to feed a starving garrison, in which the Government would be discharging a plain duty, he said, "I return, therefore, an affirmative answer to the question submitted to me."²⁵

Cameron advised no, seeing that no practical benefit would result to the country, and basing his opinion on that of the army officers, that an attempt to provision would be disastrous. Welles advised no, saying that he entertained doubts. Smith advised no, saying that giving up Fort Sumter would cause surprise and complaint. but that it could be explained and understood. Bates advised no, saying that he was willing to evacuate Fort Sumter.²⁶ The opinion of Seward has been reserved to the last for discussion, because of his important position and his peace policy of long standing. Seward had for months been determined on a peaceful settlement of the crisis. He was under even greater delusions than Buchanan had been in his reliance on the saving of the border slave States for the Union, on the basis of which the seceded States might be persuaded to come back into the Union. Charles Francis Adams, whose father was very close to Seward and shared his views on conciliation and peace toward the South, has left in his autobiography his estimate of Seward's policy at this time. Charles Francis Adams was a frequent visitor at Seward's home at the period under discussion, and he said of Seward:

25. Ibid, p. 361.

26. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 189

He had been of great service, during the interim period, holding things together and tiding over dangerous shoals. This he had done; but he had done it under an entire misapprehension of the real facts of the situation and with an absolutely impossible result in view. As I have said, he believed in the existence of a strong underlying Union sentiment in the South; he looked forward with confidence to a sharp reaction of sentiment there, as soon as the people of those States realized that no harm was intended them; and he nourished the delusive belief that a recourse to force could be avoided; that, if it was avoided or postponed, the secession movement would languish, and gradually die out.²⁷

Seward's abhorrence of civil war led him into other misapprehensions. His scheme for a foreign war to knit the sections together did not dawn on him suddenly, when on April 1 he included such a scheme in his famous "views for the President's consideration". As early as the 26th of January, 1861, Seward had remarked to the minister from the Republic of Bremen; "If the Lord would only give the United States an excuse for war with England, France, or Spain; that would be the best means of reestablishing internal peace". And in a conversation with the same minister, Rudolph Schleiden, on February 10, 1861, Seward had complained that there was no foreign complication which offered an excuse to break with a foreign power.²⁸ Seward's confidence in the breakdown of secession if a collision could be avoided naturally caused him to oppose the provisioning of Fort Sumter. In a conversation with General M. C. Meigs, Seward had said that for his part, his policy had been all along to give up Sumter as too close to Washington. It would give a temptation to Davis to relieve

27. Adams, Charles Francis, Autobiography, p. 104
New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916.

28. Annual Report, American Historical Association, 1915, p. 210
Lutz, Ralph Haswell, "Rudolph Schleiden and the Visit to Richmond,
April 25, 1861."

it by an attack upon Washington; that he wished to hold Fort Pickens, to make the fight there and in Texas, and thus make the burden of the war fall upon those who by rebellion provoked it.²⁹

In answer to Lincoln's question of March 15, Seward was consistent with his policy of long standing. Seward said that if it were possible peacefully to provision Fort Sumter "it would be both unwise and inhuman not to attempt it". He was certain, however, that such an attempt would initiate civil war, and was therefore opposed to it. It might have been Buchanan's words when Seward said:

I have felt that it is exceedingly fortunate that to a great extent the Federal Government occupies thus far not an aggressive attitude, but practically a defensive one, while the necessity for action, if civil war is to be initiated, falls on those who seek to dismember and to subvert the Union.

Then Seward identified the policy of the Republican party with that of the Buchanan administration, thus:

Partly by design, partly by chance, this policy has been hitherto pursued by the late administration . . . and by the Republican party in its corporate action. It is by this policy, thus pursued, I think, that the progress of dismemberment has been arrested after the seven Gulf States had seceded and the border States yet remain, although they do so uneasily, in the Union.

It is to a perseverance in this policy for a short time longer, that I look as the only peaceful means of assuring the continuance of Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas, or most of these States, in the Union. It is through their good and patriotic offices that I look to see the Union sentiment revived, and brought once more into activity in the seceding States, and through this agency, those States themselves returning into the Union.

²⁹. American Historical Review, XXVI, 1921, p. 300
"General M. C. Meigs on Conduct of the War." (Diary)

Suppose the expedition successful. We have then a garrison in Fort Sumter that can defy assault for six months. What is it to do then? Is it to make war by opening its batteries and attempting to demolish the defenses of the Carolinians? Can it demolish them if it tries? If it cannot, what is the advantage we shall have gained? If it can, how will it serve to check or prevent disunion? In either case, it seems to me that we will have inaugurated civil war by our own act, without an adequate object, after which reunion will be hopeless.³⁰

It was but natural that such an unfavorable opinion of the Cabinet, with the Secretary of State so emphatically opposed to provisioning Fort Sumter, should have caused Lincoln to doubt its wisdom. It was certainly the opinion of the Cabinet that Sumter should be evacuated. Blair was convinced that Lincoln had resolved to evacuate the fort. He was so strong in his desire to reinforce as well as to provision Fort Sumter that he wrote out his resignation on March 15. The account of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, tells us that Blair had become aware of an understanding which Seward had had with the members of Mr. Buchanan's administration, or was suspicious of it, and observing that the President, with the acquiescence of the Cabinet, "was about adopting the Seward and Scott policy", he wrote his resignation, determined not to continue in the Cabinet if no attempt were made to relieve Fort Sumter.³¹

Said Welles:

³⁰. Crawford, op. cit. pp. 349, 350, 351, 352, 353.
Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, pp. 11 - 14.

³¹. Welles, Gideon, Diary of Gideon Welles, vol. 1, p. 13
 Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911.

Before handing in his resignation, a delay was made at the request of his father, the elder Mr. Blair sought an interview with the President, to whom he entered his protest against non-action, which he denounced as the offspring of intrigue. His earnestness and indignation armoured and electrified the President; and when in his zeal, Blair warned the President that the abandonment of Sumter would be considered by the people, by the world, by history, as treason to the country, he touched a chord that responded to his invocation. The President decided from that moment that an attempt should be made to convey supplies to Major Anderson, and that he would reinforce Sumter. This determination he communicated to the members of the Cabinet as he saw them, without a general announcement in Cabinet meeting.³²

The story of Francis P. Blair, the father of the Postmaster-General, was that Lincoln said the matter had not been fully determined, but that the Cabinet were almost a unit in favor of evacuation, "all except your son", and that such would probably be the result. Blair reminded Lincoln that if he followed such a course impeachment would probably follow. The elder Blair claimed that he persuaded Lincoln to change his course and relieve Sumter.³³

On February 15, the Confederate Government had appointed three commissioners to go to Washington to settle all questions of disagreement between the two Governments, to obtain a recognition of independence, and especially to obtain the evacuation of the forts in the South. These commissioners were Martin J. Crawford, A. B. Roman, and John Forsyth, who received their instructions on February 27, 1861. These commissioners were accredited to the Buchanan administration, but with instructions to negotiate with the Government of the United States. Thus they were authorized to deal with the Lincoln

32. Ibid.

33. Crawford, op. cit., p. 364 (Francis P. Blair to author) Smith, W. E., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 10, (Blair to Van Buren)

administration also.³⁴ Martin J. Crawford was the only commissioner to reach Washington before the end of Buchanan's administration, arriving on March 3. The commissioner reported that he would not attempt to open negotiations with Buchanan, as he was "incapable now of purpose as a child".³⁵ On March 12, the commissioners sought an unofficial interview with Seward, making their request through Senator Hunter of Virginia. The Secretary of State declined to grant the unofficial interview, "upon exclusively public consideration".³⁶ It seems that it was the secret purpose of these commissioners to play for time, and that they had secret instructions to that effect from the Confederate Government.³⁷ In a conversation with John Forsyth, one of the commissioners, S. W. Crawford was told that the secret instructions from Montgomery were "to play with Seward, to delay and gain time until the South was ready".³⁸ Two Justices of the Supreme Court, Judge Nelson, of New York, and Judge John A. Campbell, of Alabama, now intervened as intermediaries for the Confederate commissioners. The opinion of the two Judges was that the country would be better satisfied and the counsels of peace promoted, by the reception of the commissioners, without any recognition of them as officers of an organized government, or a recognition of the Confederate Government itself.³⁹

34. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 314, 315.

35. Ibid., p. 316.

36. Moore, Frank, Reb. Record, vol. 1, Documents, p. 43.

37. Lothrop, op. cit. p. 238.

38. Crawford, op. cit., p. 333.

39. Connor, Henry G., John Archibald Campbell, p. 123. New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920.

But Seward was firm in his determination not to receive the commissioners, even unofficially. When Nelson and Campbell went to Seward's office on March 15 to urge their views upon him, Seward said that not a member of the Cabinet would consent. In the conversation with Judges Nelson and Campbell, Seward revealed his belief that Fort Sumter would be surrendered. He evidently believed that Lincoln would follow the opinion of the Cabinet given on the same day. Said Seward to Campbell: "No, if Jefferson Davis had known of the state of things here, he never would have sent those commissioners. It is enough to deal with one thing at a time. The surrender of Sumter is enough to deal with".⁴⁰ Campbell then told Seward that he was going to write to Jefferson Davis and asked what he should say on the subject of Sumter. Seward said: "You may say to him that before that letter reaches him (How far is it to Montgomery?)" 'Three days'. "You may say to him that before that letter reaches him the telegraph will have informed him that Sumter will have been evacuated".⁴¹ On the same day Judge Campbell took this assurance to the commissioners, without telling them his authority, but asserting that it was an authorized statement and they must accept his word for it. But, five days later, General Beauregard, commanding the Confederate forces at Charleston, reported to the commissioners that there was no indication that the fort was to be evacuated, but on the contrary, Major Anderson was at work on the fortifications.

40. Connor, H. G., op. cit., p. 124.

41. Ibid, (Narrative of Judge Campbell)

On March 21, Judges Campbell and Nelson again called on Seward for an explanation, and Seward, being very occupied, assured them that everything was all right, and that he would see them the following day. On the following day, March 22, the Judges again saw Seward, who said that "in reference to the evacuation of Sumter, the resolution had been passed and its execution committed to the President; that he did not know why it had not been executed; that there was nothing in the delay that affected the integrity of the promise or denoted any intention not to comply."⁴²

Judge Campbell continued to act as intermediary between Seward and the Confederate commissioners throughout March and the first two weeks of April. The whole story is a long and complicated one, but the important fact is that Seward did give assurances that Fort Sumter would be evacuated, and he held to this opinion until the very last moment. Although Francis P. Blair has claimed that Lincoln had made a decision to relieve Fort Sumter on March 15, it is clear that Lincoln was still weighing the matter throughout March. On March 21, Lincoln sent Captain G. V. Fox to Charleston to visit Anderson and report on the condition of the garrison.⁴³ Governor Pickens allowed Fox to visit Fort Sumter, accompanied by a Captain Hartstene, an old comrade of Fox, a native of South Carolina, and formerly of the United States Navy, and now in the service of his State. Pickens thought the object of Fox was a peaceful one, and according to the reports of the

42. Ibid., pp. 126, 127.

43. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 208, 209

Confederate commissioners, thought Fox had been sent to prepare for evacuation. Fox had a conversation with Major Anderson, in which Anderson earnestly condemned any proposal to send him reinforcements. He asserted that it was too late; he agreed with General Scott that an entrance by sea was impossible, and he impressed upon Captain Fox his belief that any reinforcements coming would at once precipitate a collision and inaugurate civil war. To this Anderson declared his opposition, and dwelt at length upon the political results that would follow.⁴⁴ The visit of Fox was short. A statement of the provisions on hand was furnished him, and it was understood between Fox and Anderson that unless provisions were furnished the garrison, it could not hold out beyond the 15th of April at noon, even if the command were placed on short rations. For this Anderson said he would await the orders of the Government.⁴⁵

After the Fox visit, Lincoln authorized his former law partner and bodyguard, Ward H. Lamon, to make a visit to Charleston and Fort Sumter. According to Lamon's account, Lincoln "believed it possible to effect some accomodation by dealing directly with the most chivalrous among their leaders; at all events he thought it his duty to try, and my embassy to Charleston was one of his experiments in that direction".⁴⁶ Lamon has stated that it was believed in the South that Mr. Seward had given assurances, before and after Lincoln's inauguration, that no attempt would be made to reinforce the

44. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 369, 370, 371.

45. Ibid, p. 372

46. Lamon, Ward H., Recollections of Lincoln, p. 69

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Southern forts, or to resupply Fort Sumter under a republican administration. This, said Lamon, made matters embarrassing, as Mr. Lincoln's administration had, on the contrary, adopted the policy of maintaining the federal authority at all points. Mr. Seward opposed Lincoln's sending of Lamon to Charleston, fearing that he might be killed. "Mr. Secretary", replied Lincoln, "I have known Lamon to be in many a close place, and he has never been in one that he didn't get out of. By Jing! I'll risk him. Go, Lamon, and God bless you. Bring back a palmetto, if you can't bring back good news."⁴⁷

Stephen A. Hurlbut, of Illinois, accompanied Lamon on the trip. Some writers say that he was sent by Lincoln. According to Lamon, Hurlbut was anxious to visit a sister at Charleston, the place of his birth, and asked Lamon's permission to accompany him. Lamon arrived in Charleston March 25.⁴⁸ A chief object of Lamon's mission was to sound out possible Union sentiment in South Carolina, indicating that Lincoln was considering Seward's policy. The strange result of the mission, however, was to give the impression that Fort Sumter was to be evacuated. Lamon did not have authority to commit the Washington Government, but it is quite certain that he did give the impression that he had come to arrange evacuation.⁴⁹ It is quite possible that Lamon gave this impression to further his real mission. South Carolina authorities controlled all communication between Charleston and Fort Sumter, and sent

⁴⁷. Lamon, op. cit., pp. 69, 70.

⁴⁸. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 221.

⁴⁹. Randall, op. cit., p. 237.

escorts with those permitted to visit the fort. A note from Governor Pickens to Beauregard, March 25, indicated that Lamon had promised evacuation.⁵⁰ Lamon gave Anderson the impression that such was the purpose of his visit.⁵¹

The account of Nicolay and Hay conflicts with that of Lamon in regard to the part played by Mr. Hurlbut in the above mission. According to Nicolay and Hay, on March 21 Lincoln called Hurlbut to him, and explaining that Mr. Seward insisted that there was a strong Union Party in the South, - even in South Carolina - , asked him to go personally and ascertain the facts. Hurlbut's investigation gave no encouragement to the belief that the Union might still be saved by virtue of a Union party in the South, especially in South Carolina. Hurlbut reported:

By appointment I met Mr. Petigru and had a private conversation with him for more than two hours. I was at liberty to state to him that my object was to ascertain and report the actual state of feeling in the city and State. Our conversation was entirely free and confidential. He is now the only man in the city of Charleston who avowedly adheres to the Union. From these sources I have no hesitation in reporting as unquestionable that separate nationality is a fixed fact, that there is an unanimity of sentiment which is to my mind astonishing; that there is no attachment to the Union. There is positively nothing to appeal to.⁵²

Lamon's report to Lincoln was equally discouraging. From the Governor of South Carolina he brought the following message to Lincoln:

Nothing can prevent war except the acquiescence of the President of the United States in secession. . . Let your President attempt to reinforce Sumter, and the tocsin of war will be sounded from every hilltop and valley in the South.⁵³

50. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 294.

51. Ibid., p. 231

52. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 390, 391.

53. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 191

About this time, March 23, the opinion of the correspondent of the London Times in Washington was that "the Southern leaders are forcing on a solution with decision and energy, whilst the Government appears to be helplessly drifting with the current of events, having neither bow nor stern, neither keel nor deck, neither rudder, compass, sails or steam".⁵⁴

Soon after March 5, when Secretary Holt had forwarded to Lincoln his summary of the Fort Sumter situation, accompanied by the recent dispatches from Major Anderson, Lincoln had called in the acting Secretary of War, and confidentially asked him if he had any reason to doubt the loyalty of Major Anderson. Holt assured him that he had no reason to doubt Anderson's loyalty.⁵⁵ On March 10 Lincoln paid a surprise visit to the wife of Captain Abner Doubleday. Doubleday was second in command at Fort Sumter, and Lincoln explained to his wife that he wanted to see her husband's letters from the fort, so that he might form a better opinion as to the condition there, particularly in regard to the resources.⁵⁶ Lincoln evidently had doubts as to the loyalty or wisdom of Anderson's conduct of the last few weeks. On March 25, the Senate had requested the President to communicate to it the dispatches of Major Anderson to the War Department since he had been in command of Fort Sumter, "if not incompatible with the public interest". On March 26, Lincoln informed

54. Russell, Sir William H., My Diary North and South, p. 26 Boston, T. O. H. P. Burnham Co., 1863.

55. Crawford, op. cit., p. 285.

56. Doubleday, Abner, op. cit., p. 130

the Senate that he had, "with the highest respect for the Senate, come to the conclusion that at the moment the publication of it would be inexpedient".⁵⁷ But what of Seward? Had he been playing with the Confederate commissioners? The correspondent of the London Times, who held frequent interviews with Seward, referring to an assertion in a New York paper that orders had been given to evacuate Sumter, quoted Seward as saying on March 26: "That is a plain lie. No such orders have been given. We will give up nothing we have - abandon nothing that has been intrusted to us. If people would only read these statements by the light of the President's inaugural, they would not be deceived".⁵⁸ If Seward said the like he was not consistent with his true policy.

To add to the confusion and difficulty of making a decision, when all the advice was against him, General Scott reported an additional opinion on March 28 to Lincoln.

Said General Scott:

It is doubtful, however, according to recent information from the South, whether the voluntary evacuation of Fort Sumter alone would have a decisive effect upon the States now wavering between adherence to the Union and secession. It is known, indeed, that it would be charges to necessity, and the holding of Fort Pickens would be adduced in support of that view. Our Southern friends, however, are clear that the evacuation of both the forts would instantly soothe and give confidence to the eight remaining slave-holding States, and render their cordial adherence to this Union perpetual. The holding of Forts Jefferson and Taylor on the ocean keys depends on entirely different principles, and should never be abandoned; and indeed the giving up of Forts Sumter and Pickens may be best justified by the hope that we should thereby recover the States to which they geographically belong by the liberality of the act, besides retaining the eight doubtful States.⁵⁹

57. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, p. 26.

58. Russell, W. H., op. cit., p. 35.

59. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 200, 201.

On March 28, the same day Scott delivered his surrender opinion, Lincoln gave his first State dinner. Before taking leave that evening, Lincoln invited the members of his Cabinet into an adjoining room for a moment's consultation, and informed them of Scott's advice. Blair charged Scott with playing politics, and his remarks were understood by those present to be aimed at Seward's peace policy which he had freely criticised. Without a formal vote, there was a unanimous expression of dissent from Scott's suggestion, and the President requested the Cabinet to meet in formal council the next day.⁶⁰ It seems, however, that Lincoln had almost made up his mind to provision Fort Sumter, for on that same day, March 28, he had ordered Captain G. V. Fox to prepare him a short order for the ships, men and supplies he would need for his expedition.⁶¹ Fox immediately prepared the following order:

Steamers Pocahontas at Norfolk, Pawnee at Washington, Harriet Lane at New York, to be under sailing orders for sea, with stores, etc., for one month. Three hundred men to be kept ready for departure from on board the receiving ships at New York. Two hundred men to be ready to leave Governor's Island in New York. Supplies for twelve months for one hundred men to be put in portable shape, ready for instant shipping. A large steamer and three tugs conditionally engaged.⁶²

It may well be that Lincoln's hesitation to act throughout March had been because of his belief that the North would not support him in any war that might follow an attempt to relieve or supply Fort Sumter. There had been a rather large section of public opinion inclined to the policy of Greeley and Scott, to let the "erring sisters" depart in peace. On March 23,

60. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 394.

61. Ibid., p. 433.

62. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 227.

W. H. Russell, correspondent of the London Times, recorded in his diary that very little was being done by New York to support or encourage the Government in any decided policy; that the Journals were more engaged in abusing each other, and in small party warfare, than in the performance of the duties of a patriotic press.⁶³ The radical Republicans were now pressing for a firmer policy. On March 28, Senator Trumbull offered a resolution declaring it the duty of the President "to use all means in his power to hold and protect the public property of the United States, and to enforce the laws thereof, as well in the States of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana and Texas as within the other States of the Union".⁶⁴ The historian Rhodes has concluded that at the end of March there was a manifestation of public sentiment for a firmer policy, which, coupled with the protests of the radical Republican Senators, as well as a clearer comprehension of the public duty, influenced the President and some members of the Cabinet to adopt a more decided policy.⁶⁵

After the State dinner guests had departed on the night of March 28, Lincoln did not sleep for the rest of the night, so absorbed and perplexed was he as to his course in regard to Fort Sumter.⁶⁶ The next day, March 29, the Cabinet met as requested the night before, and Lincoln asked the Cabinet members for their opinions on the sending of an expedition to

63. Russell, W. H., op. cit., p. 27

64. Congressional Globe, March 28, 1861, 36th Congress, Second Session, vol. 36, part 2, p. 1519.

65. Rhodes, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 222.

66. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 395.

relieve Fort Sumter, peaceably, if possible. Mr. Seward wrote:

The dispatch of an expedition to supply or reinforce Sumter would provoke an attack, and so involve war at that point. The fact of preparation for such expedition would inevitably transpire and would therefore precipitate the war - and probably defeat the object. I do not think it wise to provoke a civil war beginning at Charleston and in rescue of an untenable position. Therefore I advise against the expedition in every view.⁶⁷

Then Seward went on to put in a word for his own pet scheme of reinforcing Fort Pickens instead of Sumter. Said Seward:

I would call in Captain M. C. Meigs forthwith. Aided by his counsel, I would at once, and at every cost, prepare for a war at Pensacola and Texas, to be taken, however, only as a consequence of maintaining the possessions and authority of the United States. I would instruct Major Anderson to retire from Sumter forthwith.⁶⁸

Chase gave a much more determined answer than he gave on March 15. Said he:

I am clearly in favor of provisioning Fort Sumter. If that attempt be resisted by military force, Fort Sumter should, in my opinion, be reinforced.⁶⁹

Smith wrote:

Believing that Fort Sumter cannot be successfully defended, I regard its evacuation as a necessity, and I advise that Major Anderson's command shall be unconditionally withdrawn.⁷⁰

Blair wrote:

First - As regards General Scott, I have no confidence in his judgment on the questions of the day. His political views control his judgment, and his course as remarked on by the President shows that whilst no one will question his patriotism, the results are the same as if he was in fact traitorous.

Second - It is acknowledged to be possible to relieve Fort Sumter. It ought to be relieved without reference to Pickens or any other possession. South Carolina is the head and front of this rebellion, and when that State is safely delivered from the authority of the United States it will strike a blow against our authority from which it will take us years of bloody strife to recover.

Third - For my own part, I am unwilling to share in the responsibility of such a policy.⁷¹

67. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, p. 26.

68. Ibid.

69. LINCOLN'S WORKS, VOL. 2, p. 26.

70. Ibid. p. 27

71. Ibid., 27.

Wrote Bates:

It is my decided opinion that Fort Pickens and Key West ought to be reinforced and supplied, so as to look down all opposition at all hazards - and this whether Fort Sumter be or be not evacuated. As to Fort Sumter, I think the time is come either to evacuate or relieve it.⁷²

Mr. Welles wrote:

I concur in the proposition to send an armed force off Charleston, with supplies of provisions and reinforcements for the garrison at Fort Sumter, and of communicating at the proper time the intentions of the Government to provision the fort, peaceably if unmolested. There is little probability that this will be permitted, if the opposing forces can prevent it. An attempt to force in provisions without reinforcing the garrison at the same time might not be advisable; but armed resistance to a peaceable attempt to send provisions to one of our own forts will justify the Government in using all the power at its command to reinforce the garrison and furnish the necessary supplies.

Fort Pickens and other places retained should be strengthened by additional troops, and, if possible, made impregnable.⁷³

There is no record of the opinion of the Secretary of War, Mr. Cameron. He was not present at the Cabinet meeting.⁷⁴ Thus the Cabinet now stood two for and three against the evacuation of Sumter, Bates being "on the fence".

After the Cabinet meeting Lincoln brought out the memorandum written by Captain Fox on the 28th, and on the bottom of it wrote an order on the Secretary of War:

Sir, I desire that an expedition, to move by sea, be got ready to sail as early as the 6th of April next, the whole according to memorandum attached, and that you cooperate with the Secretary of the Navy for that object.⁷⁵

There is difficulty in determining whether this order was with reference to Sumter specifically or not. The facts are not at

72. Ibid.

73. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., pp. 430, 431.

74. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 193.

75. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 226.

all clear, but the evidence indicates that Lincoln was at this time directing the sending of two expeditions, one to Sumter and another to Pickens. At least four Cabinet members wanted to relieve Pickens.

The story of Fort Pickens is intricately bound up with that of Sumter. As early as March 5, Lincoln, in his orders to Scott to "exercise all possible vigilance for the maintenance of all the places", had intended that Pickens should be reinforced. He made inquiries four days later and, to his surprise, found that nothing had been done. Assuming the omission had occurred through Scott's preoccupation about Sumter, Lincoln again on March 12, gave special directions to reinforce Pickens.⁷⁶ For some reason the orders again were not sent, and on March 30 Seward went to General Scott and told him that the President now ordered that Fort Pickens be reinforced and that he should issue the necessary orders. Scott replied: "Well, Mr. Secretary of State, the great Frederick used to say that, 'when the king commands, nothing is impossible'. The President's orders shall be obeyed, sir."⁷⁷ Scott must have acted at once, for the orders to land the troops held on board ship, near Fort Pickens, since the Buchanan truce, reached the commander on March 31.⁷⁸

Fearing another failure of the execution of orders as to Pickens, or believing that the troops held on ship there were not sufficient, Lincoln and Seward called on Captain M. C. Meigs, on March 31, to organize another expedition to relieve and

⁷⁶. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 393.

⁷⁷. Crawford, op. cit., p. 408.

⁷⁸. Ibid, p. 403.

reinforce Fort Pickens. This expedition was organized and sent with Lincoln's consent.⁷⁹ Because of a desire for the utmost secrecy, and because the only funds available to defray the cost were the secret service fund of the State Department, Seward took charge of the expedition over the heads and without the knowledge of the Secretaries of War and Navy.⁸⁰ This expedition could not be organized and sent for several days. Thus two expeditions were being organized; the one intended for provisioning Fort Sumter, the other for the more determined purpose of reinforcing Fort Pickens.

The orders issued by Scott on March 30, and which reached Captain Vogdes on March 31, were not obeyed. Captain Vogdes was in command of the Federal troops on shipboard off Fort Pickens. Vogdes asked Captain H. A. Adams, in command of the fleet, for immediate means to land. Adams refused, alleging that it was a violation of the joint order of Holt and Toucey made in consequence of the Pickens truce between Buchanan and certain Southern Senators on January 29. Adams held that Scott's army order could not supersede Secretary Toucey's navy order; he therefore sent an officer, April 1, to solicit the express commands of the Navy Department.⁸¹ Thus the attempt to reinforce Pickens before the Meigs expedition could sail was frustrated by Captain Adams. Adams' special messenger, asking for specific authority from the Navy Department, did not reach Washington until April 6.⁸²

79. American Historical Review, XXVI, 1921, pp. 287 - 299.
 "General M. C. Meigs on Conduct of the Civil War" (Meigs' Diary)
 80. Crawford, op. cit., p. 411.
 81. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 7
 82. Rhodes, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 233.

Lincoln's difficulty seemed to be in satisfying the more determined Northern public opinion in favor of upholding the Government's authority, and at the same time to avoid a conflict at Sumter in order to keep Virginia and the border slave States in the Union. The situation in Virginia was not improving for the Unionists. On April 3, Stanton wrote to Buchanan: "The rumors from Richmond are very threatening; secession is rapidly gaining strength there."⁸³ W. H. Russell wrote in his diary: "It is stated, nevertheless, that Virginia is on the eve of secession, and will certainly go if the President attempts to use force in relieving and strengthening the federal forts."⁸⁴ It is true that Virginia was more concerned over the Sumter case than that of Pickens. Although Lincoln had at last decided to at least attempt to provision Fort Sumter, he declared in his message to Congress of July 4, 1861, that Sumter might have been evacuated had not the orders to reinforce Pickens miscarried. Concerning this point Lincoln said:

Starvation was not yet upon the garrison, and ere it would be reached Fort Pickens might be reinforced. This last would be a clear indication of policy, and would better enable the country to accept the evacuation of Fort Sumter as a military necessity. An order was at once directed to be sent for the landing of troops from the steamship Brooklyn into Fort Pickens. This order could not go by land, but must take the longer and slower route by sea. The first return news from the order was received just one week before the fall of Fort Sumter. The news itself was that the officer commanding the Sabine, to which vessel the troops had been transferred from the Brooklyn, acting upon some quasi armistice of the late administration (and of the existence of which the present administration, up to the time the order was dispatched, had only too vague and uncertain rumors to fix attention), had

83. Curtis, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 538.

84. Russell, W. H., op. cit., p. 60.

refused to land the troops. To now reinforce Fort Pickens before a crisis would be reached at Fort Sumter was now impossible, rendered so by the near exhaustion of provisions in the latter-named fort. In precaution against such a conjuncture the Government had a few days before commenced preparing an expedition, as well adapted as might be, to relieve Fort Sumter, which expedition was intended to be ultimately used or not, according to circumstances. The strongest anticipated case for using it was now presented, and it was resolved to send it forward.⁸⁵

The facts of the case tend to prove that Lincoln was mistaken or confused in the above statement. It seems from the evidence that there was no such close connection between the Pickens and Sumter expeditions. As we shall see in the next chapter, on April 4, Lincoln told Fox, when the latter remarked that he had very little time to get to Sumter before the garrison would be starved out, that he would best serve his country by making the attempt. Lincoln was wrong in his statement to Congress when he said that it would have been impossible to relieve Fort Pickens before Sumter would have been forced to evacuate from lack of supplies. Major Anderson had told Fox that he could hold out until the 15th of April, at noon. Fort Pickens was actually reinforced on April 12.⁸⁶ It is the writer's opinion that, notwithstanding Lincoln's honesty, he made the best possible case for his conciliatory professions in his message to Congress. From Lincoln's own statement it seems that he was determined to attempt to provision Sumter, independently of Fort Pickens. He probably thought war was inevitable, and ~~if~~ *if* it must come Sumter would furnish the best grounds for forcing the South into firing the first shot.⁸⁷

85. Richardson, J. D., op. cit., vol. 6, pp. 21, 22
Lincoln to Congress, July 4, 1861.

86. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 12.

87. Crawford, op. cit., p. 420. Lincoln to Fox

CHAPTER IX
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Having reviewed the development of a policy toward the Southern forts through the month of March, we have seen that, according to one statement of Lincoln, there was doubt as to provisioning Sumter to the last moment. This assertion, however, does not seem to agree with the facts of the case. In his message to Congress, July 4, 1861, Lincoln asserted that the Sumter expedition would not have sailed, and that Sumter would have been evacuated, if news had not arrived on April 6 that Pickens had not yet been reinforced, and probably could not be reinforced before the garrison at Sumter was starved into evacuation. The writer has charged that Lincoln must have been wrong in his assertion, because, as will be shown in the present chapter, he gave final orders on April 4 for the dispatch of the Sumter expedition, before he received the news on April 6 that Pickens had not been reinforced, and probably could not be before a forced evacuation of Sumter. Secretary of the Navy Welles has said that Lincoln told him and Seward that the Sumter expedition was more important than that for Pickens,¹ which agrees more with the facts than Lincoln's statement of July 4, 1861. It is clear that two

1. Welles, Gideon, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 25.

separate expeditions had been ordered, the one for Sumter without reference to that for Pickens. The Cabinet, however, was stronger for the reinforcement of Pickens than for the provisioning of Sumter.

There is evidence, however, that Lincoln considered ordering the evacuation of Sumter just before the relief expedition sailed, not because of the Pickens situation, but because of concern over the possible action of the Virginia Convention. In the first week of April Lincoln sent a messenger to Richmond, requesting Judge George W. Summers to come to Washington for a conference. Summers was a Unionist member of the Convention, *and through him Lincoln hoped to get the Convention to adjourn, sine die, without passing an ordinance of secession.* In exchange, Lincoln would agree to the evacuation of Fort Sumter. Summers consulted with other members of the Convention and selected for the errand John B. Baldwin.² Baldwin's version of the conference with Lincoln, which took place on April 5, was that Lincoln complained that he should have come sooner, that he had had a proposition to make, but that now it was too late.³ The testimony of John Minor Botts, an anti-secession Unionist of Virginia, who had a conversation with Lincoln on April 7, affirmed that Lincoln told him that he had proposed to Baldwin that the orders for the sailing of the Fort Sumter expedition would be recalled if the Virginia Convention would adjourn sine die, without passing an ordinance of secession.⁴ When Botts asked the President to authorize him to make the same

2. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 424. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 195.

3. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 195

4. Ibid, p. 196.

proposition to the Virginia Convention, Lincoln replied that it was now too late, that the fleet had already sailed. A special study of the Lincoln-Baldwin conference, made by W. L. Hall in 1914, confirmed the testimony of Botts.⁵ When Botts asked Lincoln how Baldwin received his proposition, Lincoln, according to Botts, threw up his hands and said: "Oh, he wouldn't listen to it at all; scarcely treated me with civility."⁶

It might have been that Lincoln had been influenced to make such a proposal to the Virginia Convention by the advice of Seward. In the "views for the President's consideration" which Seward sent the President on April 1, Seward urged Lincoln to change the question before the public from one upon slavery, or about slavery, for one upon union or disunion. For such a purpose Seward reiterated his advice for the evacuation of Fort Sumter in the following language:

The occupation or evacuation of Fort Sumter, although not in fact a slavery or party question, is so regarded. Witness the temper manifested by the Republicans in the free States, and even by the Union men in the South. I would therefore terminate it as a safe means for changing the issue, I deem it fortunate that the last Administration created the necessity.⁷

On the 30th of March, 1861, Lincoln sent Captain Fox to New York with verbal instructions to make ready the expedition, but not to incur any binding engagements. On the 2nd of April, Fox, not having received the written authority which he had expected from the Government, returned to Washington.⁸ Accord-

5. Hall, Wilmer L., "The Lincoln Interview With John B. Baldwin," South Atlantic Quarterly, XIII, 1914, p. 269.

6. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 425.

7. Ibid., p. 446.

8. Smith, W. E., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 12. (Correspondence of G. V. Fox).

ing to Fox, delays which belonged to "the secret political history "of the period, prevented a decision until the afternoon of the 4th of April, when the President sent for Fox and told him that he had decided to let the expedition go. Lincoln said that a messenger would be sent to the authorities of Charleston, before Fox could get there, to notify them that troops would not be put into Sumter, provided the subsistence for the garrison was allowed to be landed at the Fort peacefully. Fox told the President that he would have but nine days in which to organize the expedition, after reaching New York, and to reach the destined point six hundred and thirty-two miles distant. This time limit was based on Anderson's report that he would run out of provisions by noon, April 15. Lincoln replied: "You will best fulfill your duty to your country by making the attempt."⁹

The orders of the Secretary of War to Captain Fox, issued April 4, were:

It having been decided to succor Fort Sumter you have been selected for this important duty. Accordingly you will take charge of the transports in New York having the troops and supplies on board to the entrance of Charleston harbor, and endeavor, in the first instance to deliver the subsistence. If you are opposed in this you are directed to report the fact to the senior naval officer of the harbor, who will be instructed by the Secretary of the Navy to use his entire force to open a passage, when you will, if possible, effect an entrance and place both troops and supplies in Fort Sumter.¹⁰

On the same date, April 4, the Adjutant-General, L. Thomas, gave Fox written orders which gave him authority to have any vessels which he might designate chartered for the expedition,

9. Ibid, p. 13.

10. Official Records, vol. 1, pp. 235, 236.

at such time and with such supplies as he might indicate.¹¹

On April 3, an ice schooner, bound from Boston to Savannah, had mistaken the harbor of Charleston for that of Savannah and entered, flying the United States flag. The Confederate batteries on Morris Island had fired into it, and Major Anderson, just as in the case of the Star of the West, had failed to return the fire.¹² On April 4, Anderson reported to the War Department his reasons for not returning the fire. Let Anderson tell the story:

The remarks made to me by Colonel Lamon, taken in connection with the tenor of newspaper articles, have induced me, as stated in previous communications, to believe that orders would soon be issued for my abandoning this work. When the firing commenced some of my heaviest guns were concealed from their view by planking, and by the time the battery was ready the firing had ceased. I then, acting in strict accordance with the spirit and wording of the orders of the War Department, as communicated to me in the letter from the Secretary of War dated February 23, 1861, determined not to commence firing until I had sent to the vessel and investigated the circumstances.

The accompanying report presents them. Invested by a force so superior that a collision would, in all probability, terminate in the destruction of our force before relief could reach us, with only a few days' provisions on hand, and with a scanty supply of ammunition, as will be seen by a reference to my letter of February 27, in hourly expectation of receiving definite instructions from the War Department, and with orders so explicit and peremptory as those I am acting under, I deeply regret that I did not feel at liberty to resent the insult thus offered to the flag of my beloved country.¹³

The above report shows two important things. Anderson, while orders were in process of being issued for his relief, believed that he was to be withdrawn from Fort Sumter, and that he was still acting under the orders of the Buchanan administration. It also shows the lack of supplies and fresh orders to guide

11. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 236.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 237.

Anderson. Major Anderson was so confident that he was to be withdrawn that he started packing up on March 29.¹⁴

On April 4, the Secretary of War, Cameron, sent a message to Anderson in answer to the above communication. Cameron told Anderson that his letter had caused some anxiety to the President. According to the information of Captain Fox, obtained on the latter's visit of March 21, Cameron stated that it had been expected that Anderson could hold out until the 15th of April. "Hoping still", said Cameron, "that you will be able to sustain yourself till the 11th or 12th instant, the expedition will go forward, and finding your flag flying, will attempt to provision you, and in case the effort is resisted, will endeavor also to reinforce you. You will therefore hold out, if possible, till the arrival of the expedition."¹⁵ In the same letter there was the type of order that Buchanan sent to Anderson on December 21, 1860, relieving him of the necessity to defend Fort Moultrie "to the last extremity". Cameron added:

It is not, however, the intention of the President to subject your command to any danger or hardship beyond what, in your judgment, would be usual in military life; and he has entire confidence that you will act as becomes a patriot and soldier, under all circumstances.

Whenever, if at all, in your judgment, to save yourself and command, a capitulation becomes a necessity, you are authorized to make it.¹⁶

It is to be observed that in the original memorandum which Fox wrote at Lincoln's request, on March 28, Fox had named the steamers Pocahontas, Pawnee, and the Harriet Lane.

¹⁴. Crawford, op. cit., p. 373.

¹⁵. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 235.

¹⁶. Ibid.

He had not asked for the Powhatan.¹⁷ Later Fox decided that he would need the Powhatan. The Powhatan had recently returned to port and gone out of commission, was immediately recommissioned because Fox thought it would be unwise to put all the sailors and launches on board the Baltic, in addition to the army detachment he had requested. In the opinion of Fox, "the Powhatan, with her disciplined crew and large boats, became indispensable to success".¹⁸ Accordingly, the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, on April 5, ordered Captain Mercer, commanding the Powhatan, to cooperate with Fox in the Fort Sumter Expedition.¹⁹ But Seward had other plans for the Powhatan. With the knowledge of the President, but acting over the heads of both the War and Navy Secretaries, and without their knowledge of it, Seward was busy planning his special expedition to reinforce Fort Pickens.²⁰ The principals in Seward's secret Pickens expedition were M. C. Meigs, Lieut. David D. Porter, and Lieut. Col. E. W. Keyes. Porter urged secrecy on Seward because the former thought there were many clerks in the Navy Department of secession sympathies, and if the orders went through the Navy Department, the news would be communicated and Fort Pickens would be taken by the secessionists forthwith. Porter also suggested to Seward that the Powhatan be fitted out for this expedition "by a secret order of the President".²¹

17. Ibid., p. 227.

18. Smith, W. E., op. cit. vol. 2, p. 13, (Fox Correspondence)

19. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 240.

20. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 197, Welles, Gideon, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 18. General M. C. Meigs, American Historical Review, XXVI, 1921, op. cit. p. 287.

21. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 411, 412.

On April 1, Seward, Meigs and Porter had gone to the President, to whom Porter explained his suspicions of the clerks in the Navy Department, and told Lincoln if he would issue the orders, they would be promptly executed to the letter. "But", said Lincoln, "is not this a most irregular mode of procedure?" "Certainly", said Porter, "but the necessity of the case justifies it". Then Seward said: "You are the commander-in-chief of the army and navy, and this is a case where it is necessary to issue direct orders without passing them through intermediaries". When Lincoln objected, "But what will Uncle Gideon say?", Seward replied, "Oh, I will make it all right with Mr. Welles."²² Lincoln signed the orders detaching the Powhatan from the Fort Sumter expedition, without reading them. He told Welles that he did not have time to read them and if he couldn't trust the Secretary of State, he knew not whom he could trust.²³

On April 5, between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, Seward and his son Frederick, the Assistant Secretary of State, came to Welles' rooms at Willard's with a telegram from Captain Meigs at New York. The telegram stated that the movements of the Pickens expedition had been retarded by conflicting orders from the Secretary of the Navy. Welles asked for an explanation, for he could not understand the nature of the telegram or its object. After it was made clear that there were conflicting orders for the disposition of the Powhatan, it was suggested that they should go see Lincoln. On the way

22. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 199.

23. Welles, Gideon, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 18.

over to Lincoln, Seward, according to Welles, remarked that old as he was, he had learned a lesson from that affair, which was that he had better confine his labors to his own department. To this Welles cordially agreed.²⁴ Welles' account of this conference with Lincoln is worthy of quotation:

The President had not retired when we reached the Executive Mansion, although it was nearly midnight. On seeing us he was surprised, and his surprise was not diminished on learning our errand. He looked first at one and then the other, and declared there was some mistake, but after again hearing the facts stated, and again looking at the telegram, he asked if I was not mistaken in regard to the Powhatan, - if some other vessel was not the flagship of the Sumter expedition. I assured him there was no mistake on my part; reminded him that I had read to him my confidential instructions to Captain Mercer. He said that he remembered that fact and that he approved of them, but he could not remember that the Powhatan was the vessel.

Commodore Stringham confirmed my statement, but to make the matter perfectly clear to the President, I went to the Navy Department and brought and read to him the instructions. He then remembered distinctly all the facts, and turning promptly to Mr. Seward, said the Powhatan must be restored to Mercer, that on no account must the Sumter expedition fail or be interfered with. Mr. Seward hesitated, remonstrated, asked if the other expedition was not quite as important and whether that would not be defeated if the Powhatan was detached. The President said the other had time to wait, but no time was to be lost as regarded Sumter, and he directed Mr. Seward to telegraph and return the Powhatan to Mercer without delay. Mr. Seward suggested the difficulty of getting a dispatch through and to the Navy yard at so late an hour, but the President was imperative that it should be done. The President took upon himself the whole blame, said it was carelessness, heedlessness on his own part, he ought to have been more careful and attentive.²⁵

So Seward couldn't make it right with Mr. Welles.

But the Powhatan had sailed on April 6, without waiting for a reply to Meigs' telegram to Seward. Porter's orders to take command of the Powhatan had been signed by the President,

24. Welles, Gideon, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 24, 25.

25. Ibid.

and insisted on telegraphing the Secretary of the Navy for instructions. Foote said to Porter: "Porter, these are ticklish times. How do I know that you are not going to run off with the ship? I must telegraph immediately to the Secretary".²⁶ The Powhatan had hardly left to go down the harbor, April 6, 1:00 P. M. when a telegram from the Secretary of State arrived for Lieutenant Porter. The commandant of the Navy Yard at once dispatched an officer to employ a fast vessel in New York and go in pursuit. The Powhatan was overtaken and Porter was given the brief telegram: "Deliver up the Powhatan to Captain Mercer. - W. H. Seward."²⁷ Porter at once replied: "I have received orders from the President which I cannot disobey", and proceeded on his course.²⁸ There had been quite a delay in the arrival of the telegram. Seward was ordered by Lincoln to send the telegram on April 5, at midnight, but it was not sent until the next afternoon. Was Seward giving Porter time in which to get away?

After all the assurance Seward had given Judge Campbell that Fort Sumter would not be reinforced, but evacuated, Campbell received a different story from Seward on April 1. On this date Campbell received a note from Seward in writing: "I am satisfied the Government will not undertake to supply Sumter without giving notice to Governor Pickens."²⁹ According to Judge Campbell, Seward added verbally that the President might desire to supply Sumter but would not do so, and there

26. Crawford, op. cit., p. 412, (Porter to author.)

27. Crawford, op. cit., p. 415

28. Ibid.

29. Connor, Henry G., op. cit., pp. 134, 135.

was no design to reinforce. On April 7, Judge Campbell addressed a letter to Seward expressing alarm at the preparations the Government was making and asked him if his assurances were well or ill founded. Seward replied to Campbell: "Faith as to Sumter fully kept. Wait and see."³⁰ Campbell believed that Seward had been lying all along, that his "faith as to Sumter fully kept" meant that there would be no attempt to supply or reinforce; but Seward must have been referring to the promise that Governor Pickens would be notified in advance of an attempt to supply the fort. It is true that Lincoln, toward the end of March, told Seward that he might tell Judge Campbell that no attempt to provision the fort would be made without giving notice to Governor Pickens.³¹

On April 6, Lincoln sent a special messenger, R. S. Chew, to Governor Pickens with the promised notification. Chew arrived in Charleston April 8, sought an interview with Governor Pickens, and read to him Lincoln's notice of an attempt to supply Fort Sumter, as follows:

I am directed by the President of the United States to notify you to expect an attempt will be made to supply Fort Sumter with provisions only; and that, if such attempt be not resisted, no effort to throw in men, arms, or ammunition will be made without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the fort.³²

But Lincoln's special messenger was preceded by a telegram to Charleston on April 6 from James E. Harvey, Seward's protégé, who was soon after appointed minister to Portugal.

30. Ibid, p. 135

31. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 33.

32. Nicolay and Hay, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 34, 35.

Harvey telegraphed to his friend Judge Magrath:

Positively determined not to withdraw Anderson. Supplies go immediately, supported by naval force under Stringham if their landing be resisted.³³

On April 8, Crawford, one of the Confederate commissioners at Washington, telegraphed to General Beauregard:

Accounts are uncertain, because of the constant vacillation of this Government. We were reassured yesterday that the status of Sumter would not be changed without previous notice to Governor Pickens, but we have no faith in them. The war policy prevails in the Cabinet at this hour.³⁴

On April 8 also, L. P. Walker, Confederate Secretary of War, telegraphed to Beauregard at Charleston:

Under no circumstances are you to allow provisions to be sent to Fort Sumter.³⁵

On the same date, Beauregard telegraphed to Walker:

Anderson's provisions stopped yesterday. No answer from him. I am calling out balance of contingent troops.³⁶

April 9, Walker telegraphed to Beauregard:

Major Anderson's mails must be stopped. The fort must be completely isolated.

And Beauregard, in answer to the above, on the same day telegraphed Walker:

"The mails have already been stopped".³⁷

The pressure was fast on Major Anderson. On April 10 Walker, the Confederate Secretary of War, telegraphed to Beauregard to demand at once the evacuation of Fort Sumter, and if that should be refused, to proceed to reduce it. Beauregard

33. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 287

34. Ibid., p. 289

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

replied that the demand would be made on April 11 at 12 o'clock, whereupon Walker telegraphed back that unless there were special reasons connected with his condition, he should make the demand at an earlier hour. Beauregard replied that his reasons were special for twelve o'clock.³⁸ Accordingly Beauregard made the demand on Anderson. Beauregard sent three aides, Col. James Chestnut, Captain Stephen D. Lee, and Lieutenant-Colonel Chisholm, who arrived in a boat flying a white flag. As it happened, they were met by Lieutenant Jefferson C. Davis, who escorted them to the guard-room, where they met Major Anderson. In the name of Beauregard and the Confederate Government they demanded the evacuation of the fort. All proper facilities would be afforded for the removal of the garrison, with company arms and property, and all private property, to any post in the United States Anderson might name. The flag which "you have upheld so long, and with so much fortitude, under the most trying circumstances, may be saluted by you on taking it down!"³⁹

A council of officers was called by Anderson. The whole subject of the position was gone over, and for the first time the confidential order of Buchanan and Floyd of December 21, 1860, in which Anderson was told not to sacrifice his men by a useless resistance, was shown to the officers. A decision was reached to refuse the demand to evacuate, which Anderson handed to Beauregard's aides, reading thus:

38. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 297

39. Crawford, op. cit., p. 423

General: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor, and of my obligations to my Government, prevent my compliance. Thanking you for the fair, manly, and courteous terms proposed, and for the high compliment paid me, I am, etc.⁴⁰

As the aides were leaving, Anderson asked if Beauregard would open his batteries without further notice to him. Colonel Chestnut replied that he would not. Anderson remarked that he would await the first shot, but that he would be starved out in a few days anyway.⁴¹

General Beauregard immediately telegraphed Anderson's answer to Montgomery. Secretary Walker replied that it was not desired to needlessly bombard Fort Sumter. If Major Anderson would state the time at which he would evacuate, and agree that in the meantime he would not use his guns against Beauregard, unless Beauregard's were turned on Sumter, the effusion of blood was to be avoided. But Walker added, "If this, or its equivalent, be refused, reduce the fort as your judgment decides to be most practicable."⁴² The lack of provisions at Sumter was so acute that when Major Anderson asked the Assistant Surgeon for his opinion as to how long they could hold out, the latter replied that the men could hold out for five days, but for the last three they would be entirely without food.⁴³ On April 11 Beauregard sent a second time to demand evacuation. Anderson replied that

40. Ibid.

41. Crawford, op. cit., p. 424.

42. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 301, Moore, Frank, op. cit., vol. 1, Documents p. 52.

43. Crawford, op. cit., p. 425

he would, if provided with the proper and necessary means of transportation, evacuate Fort Sumter by noon on the 15th of April, unless he should receive prior to that time controlling instructions from the Government or additional supplies.⁴⁴ Beauregard's messengers considered this reply as "manifestly futile" and promptly refused it.⁴⁵ They had waited three hours for the answer, and at 3:30 A. M., on the morning of April 12, Colonel Chestnut and Captain Lee handed Anderson the following notice signed by themselves:

By authority of Brigadier-General Beauregard, commanding the provisional forces of the Confederate States, we have the honor to notify you that he will open the fire of his batteries on Fort Sumter in one hour from this time.⁴⁶

The long-postponed action was now to start at 4:30 A. M., April 12. But what of the relief expedition under Fox? The steam sloop-of-war Pawnee, with Captain S. C. Rowan commanding, with ten guns and two hundred men, sailed from Washington, with sealed orders, on the morning of April 6. The revenue cutter Harriet Lane, Captain J. Faunce commanding, with five guns and ninety-six men, on Saturday, April 6, exchanged her revenue flag for the flag of the United States Navy flag, and on April 8 sailed suddenly with sealed orders. The Powhatan, which Capt. Fox expected to be the flagship and main reliance, had eleven guns and two hundred seventy-five men, with most of the launches. As we have seen, Fox was deprived of the service of this ship because of Seward's meddling and the

44. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 14.

45. Crawford, op. cit., p. 425.

46. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 14.

refusal of Lieutenant Porter to restore it to Captain Mercer. The steam transport Atlantic, with 358 troops, sailed on the morning of April 7. The Transport Baltic, with 160 troops, sailed on the morning of April 9. The transport Illinois, with 300 troops, sailed on the morning of April 9. There were two steam tugs, the "Yankee" and "Uncle Ben". The "Yankee" left New York on the evening of April 8, and the "Uncle Ben" left on the night of April 9. The launches were carried by the transports Atlantic, Baltic and Illinois.⁴⁷

Because of haste and bungling the expedition was poorly organized, the ships leaving at different times. A storm also hindered the expedition. The Harriet Lane was the first ship to arrive at Charleston harbor at just about the time the Confederate batteries opened fire on Sumter. The Baltic was next to arrive with Captain Fox on board. The Pawnee came in about 6:00 A. M., and was shortly after boarded by Captain Fox, who informed its Commander, Rowan, of his orders from the Secretary of War, and requested him to stand in for the bar with him. This Rowan declined to do. He said that his orders required him to remain "ten miles east of the light and await the Powhatan, and that he was not going in there to begin civil war".⁴⁸ The Baltic went in, followed by the Harriet Lane. As they approached the land, the firing of the guns at Sumter was heard, and the smoke of the batteries was visible. Commander Rowan, having received his orders from the Harriet Lane, now came in with his ship,

47. Moore, Frank, op. cit., vol. 1, Documents, p. 49

48. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 416, 417.

and asked for a pilot, announcing his intention of running in and sharing the fate of the garrison. Captain Fox went at once on board and explained to Rowan that the Government did not expect such gallant sacrifice; the orders given did not require it.⁴⁹ The 12th passed without the arrival of any other vessels of the fleet. Fox was still waiting for the arrival of the Powhatan during the night, and still ignorant of her change of destination, he returned in the Baltic and signalled for her all night. Neither the Pawnee nor Harriet Lane was furnished with the proper boats to carry in supplies to the fort. The Baltic steamed towards the harbor, ran aground on Rattlesnake Shoals, and was forced to anchor in deep water, several miles from the ships of war. The Pocahontas finally arrived at 2:00 P. M. on April 12, and it was only then that Fox learned that the Powhatan had a destination elsewhere. Although Fox had not left New York on the Baltic until two days after the Powhatan had been taken by Porter, he had not been informed of it.⁵⁰ The tug "Uncle Ben" had been driven by a storm into Wilmington, North Carolina and it had been seized by the rebels. The storm had driven the tug "Yankee" to the entrance of Savannah.⁵¹ Thus the expedition failed, as almost every element that was essential to its success was wanting. The fleet remained outside the harbor helpless.⁵²

Fox felt very bitterly toward Seward for the detachment of the Powhatan. It was believed by Fox that the failure

49. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 417, 418.

50. Ibid, p. 418.

51. Ibid, p. 419, Statement of Fox.

52. Smith, W. E., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 14, (Fox Correspondence)

of the Powhatan to appear with the launches and men was responsible for his failure. He wrote to his wife of Seward's meddling:

Mr. Seward got up this Pensacola expedition and the President signed the orders in ignorance and unknown to the Department. The President offers every apology possible and will do so in writing. So do the Departments. I shall get it all straight in justification of myself and to place the blow on the head of that timid W. H. Seward, he who paralyzes (sic) every movement from abject fear.⁵³

The Blairs and Secretary of the Navy Welles actually charged that Seward's meddling was a mere continuation of his alleged complicity with the Confederates.⁵⁴ The President apologized to Fox for his failure to support him properly in his attempt to relieve Major Anderson, and immediately appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy.⁵⁵

We have noticed the reluctance of Major Anderson to do anything which would initiate civil war, his Southern sympathies, and the somewhat strange nature of his communications and conduct. We have also noted that Lincoln at one time was inclined to doubt his loyalty. He now had notice of the relief expedition, and also the orders of April 4 which authorized him to surrender in the face of an impossible situation.⁵⁶ In the face of his own feelings, and in the light of his past treatment at the hands of the Government, it is a confirmation of his loyalty to his Government that he refused to surrender without a fight. On April 10 Anderson reported to the War Department that his men were in fine spirits, but that the

53. Sandburg, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 199

54. Smith, W. E., op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 14, 15.

55. Ibid, p. 15, quoting Fox Correspondence, Lincoln to Fox, May 1, 1861.

56. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 249.

long confinement and excitement were telling on them; none of them could endure fatiguing labor for any length of time.⁵⁷ Anderson informed the men on the 10th of the expedition of relief, and that he must cooperate with it to the best of his ability. The preparations being made told the men that fighting was about to commence. According to one of their officers, the news acted like magic upon them. They had previously been drooping and dejected, but now they "sprung to their work with the greatest alacrity, laughing, singing, whistling, and full of glee". They were overjoyed to learn that their long imprisonment in the fort would soon be at an end.⁵⁸

The firing of the Confederates commenced according to schedule at 4:30 A. M., April 12. The first gun was fired by Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, who has been called the father of secession, and who, when his cause failed, took his own life. The commencement of the bombardment has been graphically told by Captain Abner Doubleday:

Almost immediately afterward a ball from Cummings Point lodged in the magazine wall, and by the sound seemed to bury itself in the masonry about a foot from my head, in very unpleasant proximity to my right ear. This is the one that probably came with Mr. Ruffin's compliments. In a moment the firing burst forth in one continuous roar, and large patches of both the exterior and interior masonry began to crumble and fall in all directions. Nineteen batteries were now hammering at us, and the balls and shells from the ten-inch columbiads, accompanied by shells from the thirteen-inch mortars which constantly bombarded us, made us feel as if the war had commenced in earnest.⁵⁹

57. Ibid.

58. Doubleday, Abner, op. cit., p. 139

59. Doubleday, Abner, op. cit., pp. 143, 144.

It was not until 7:00 A. M. that Fort Sumter opened fire. Its entire armament consisted of forty-eight available guns in casemate and barbette, with five 8-inch and 10-inch Columbiads on the parade, and so mounted as to bear upon the city of Charleston, Fort Moultrie and Cummings Point. The firing continued all day.⁶⁰

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a detailed account of the bombardment of Fort Sumter, as space does not allow it, but some facts will be briefly noted. Three times during the first day's bombardment the officers' quarters were set on fire. At midnight the making of cartridges was stopped by Major Anderson, as nearly all the extra clothing and material from the hospital had been used. On the second day, every battery around the fort opened fire. Major Anderson forbade any further attempt to control the flames which had now spread in every direction through the wooden floors and partitions of the quarters. Because of the fire all but five barrels of the powder from the magazine were thrown into the sea. The men, almost suffocated as the wind carried the cloud of hot smoke and cinders into the casemates, threw themselves on the ground and covered their faces with wet cloths, or rushed to the embrasures, where the occasional draught made it possible to breathe.⁶¹ After the fort had been reduced to ruin, and the lack of men to man the guns and the lack of ammunition and supplies making the cause hopeless,

60. Crawford, op. cit., p. 429

61. Ibid., pp. 435, 437

Major Anderson agreed to terms of evacuation and surrender. At about 7:00 P. M. of the second day of bombardment, Beauregard sent his aides, Colonel Chestnut, Colonel Roger A. Pryor, Colonel William Porcher Miles, and Captain Lee, followed soon by Beauregard's Adjutant-General Jones, ex-Governor Manning, and Colonel Alston, to Major Anderson under a white flag. The way had been prepared by the wholly unauthorized mission of Senator Wigfall, who had previously gone to the fort when he noticed the flagstaff shot down, and had arranged a truce with Anderson. It was Wigfall who waved the white flag under which the authorized agents came.⁶²

Beauregard's aides took the following message from Anderson back to Beauregard:

General: I thank you for your kindness in having sent your aides to me with an offer of assistance upon your having observed that our flag was down - it being down a few moments, and merely long enough to enable us to replace it on another staff. Your aides will inform you of the circumstance of the visit to my fort by General Wigfall, who said that he came with a message from yourself.

In the peculiar circumstances in which I am now placed in consequence of that message, and of my reply thereto, I will now state that I am willing to evacuate this fort upon the terms and conditions offered by yourself on the 11th instant, at any hour you may name tomorrow, or as soon as we can arrange means of transportation. I will not replace my flag until the return of your messenger.⁶³

Shortly after the receipt of the above, Beauregard sent to the following communication:

62. Chadwick, French Ensor, op. cit., p. 339, Official Records
 63. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 15. vol. 1, pp. 23, 24

Apprised that you desire the privilege of saluting your flag on retiring, I cheerfully concede it, in consideration of the gallantry with which you have defended the place under your charge.

The Catawba steamer will be at the landing of Sumter tomorrow morning at any hour you may designate for the purpose of transporting you whither you may desire.⁶⁴

Immediately Anderson sent back to Beauregard the following:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of this evening, and to express my gratification at its contents. Should it be convenient, I would like to have the Catawba here at about nine o'clock tomorrow morning.⁶⁵

Not one fatality had resulted on either side from the hostilities, four of Anderson's men having been slightly wounded from fragments of concrete and mortar. The casualties resulted from the ceremony of saluting the flag before Major Anderson removed his men from the fort. In this ceremony two men were killed by an accident, one severely wounded, and three more slightly wounded. The actual evacuation took place at 4:00 P. M., April 14, when the Confederates took possession of the fort.⁶⁶ Because of the accidents only fifty of the proposed one hundred guns were fired in saluting the flag. On April 18, from the steamship Baltic, off Sandy Hook, Major Anderson reported to the War Department the fall of the fort and the result of a long Government policy of "muddling through". His report was a mixture of pathos and pride:

Having defended Fort Sumter for thirty-four hours, until the quarters were entirely burned, the main gates destroyed by fire, the gorge walls seriously impaired, the magazine surrounded by flames, and its door closed from the effects of the heat, four barrels and three cartridges of powder

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Crawford, op. cit., pp. 446, 447.

only being available, and no provisions remaining but pork, I accepted terms of evacuation offered by General Beauregard (being the same offered by him on the 11th instant, prior to the commencement of hostilities), and marched out of the fort on Sunday afternoon, the 14th instant, with colors flying and drums beating, bringing away company and private property, and saluting my flag with fifty guns.⁶⁷

On April 20, the Secretary of War sent Anderson the following message of approval and thanks:

I am directed by the President of the United States to communicate to you, and through you to the officers and the men under your command, at Forts Moultrie and Sumter, the approbation of the Government of your and their judicious and gallant conduct there, and to tender to you and them the thanks of the Government for the same.⁶⁸

The period of inaction, delay, and conciliation was at an end. The firing on the fort by the Confederacy was to "strike the hornets' nest" of which the Confederate Secretary of State, Robert Toombs, had warned. Toombs had said to Jefferson Davis: "Mr. President, at this time it is suicide, murder, and you will lose us every friend at the North. . . it puts us in the wrong; it is fatal". There has been much written to affirm that Lincoln had been thinking the same thoughts as Toombs. The Southern viewpoint has been that Lincoln did not expect the Fox expedition to succeed, but that he sent it in order to force the South into firing the first shot, thus putting the onus of starting the war on the South, thereby effecting a solid support of the North in a war which he thought inevitable. There is much evidence to support such a theory. Avery Craven, in a recent study of the coming of the Civil War, has stated that Lincoln told

67. Ibid., p. 449, Official Records, vol. 1, p. 12.

68. Official Records, vol. 1, p. 16

O. H. Browning, a close friend and adviser, that he himself conceived the idea of sending supplies to Sumter without an attempt to reinforce. Said Lincoln: "The plan succeeded. They attacked Sumter. It fell, and thus did more service than it otherwise could".⁶⁹

The Southern historian, Pollard, writing in 1861, charged Lincoln with a deliberate design to initiate war, throwing the responsibility on the South. Said Pollard:

The fact was that the President had long ago calculated the result and the effect, on the country, of the hostile movements which he had ordered against the sovereignty of South Carolina. He had procured the battle of Sumter; he had no desire or hope to retain the fort. The circumstances of the battle and the non-participation of his fleet in it, were sufficient evidence, to every honest and reflecting mind, that it was not a contest for victory, and that "the sending of provisions to a starving garrison" was an ingenious artifice to commence the war that the Federal Government had fully resolved upon.⁷⁰

The fact that Lincoln knew that the relief expedition would initiate hostilities and throw the responsibility on the South might be inferred from his letter of consolation to Fox. On May 1, 1861, Lincoln wrote Fox a letter in which he clearly indicated that some other beneficial result had accrued from an attempt to supply Sumter. Said Lincoln to Fox:

You and I both anticipated that the course of the country would be advanced by making the attempt to provision Fort Sumter, even if it should fail; and it is no small consolation now to feel that our anticipation is justified by the result.⁷¹

Was the result of which Lincoln spoke the forcing of the

69. Craven, Avery, The Coming of The Civil War, p. 481
Browning's Diary, vol. 1, p. 475. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942.

70. Pollard, op. cit., p. 49

71. Crawford, op. cit., p. 420.

South to commence the war? It seems that it was, according to what Lincoln told Browning.

Craven, in his recent study, has declared that Lincoln did not deliberately choose to plunge the nation into such a war as resulted from his acts. According to Craven, Lincoln did not understand the situation, overestimated the strength of the Union forces in the South, and counted too heavily on controlling the border States; that he most certainly felt the pressure of radical Republican opinion for firm action, but hoped to save his party and escape war. Craven is probably right in asserting that an excellent case can be made out, on supportable evidence, for Lincoln either as an aggressor or as a conciliator, Craven thinks that Lincoln suffered heavily from the bad habit of "double talk" such as appeared in the inaugural.⁷² A Southerner, Archibald Rutledge, in a study made in 1935, charged that Lincoln used precisely the same policy that Bismarck later employed. Although making the fatal move himself, Lincoln managed for the moment to make it appear that the South was the aggressor.⁷³ But in all the mass of comment on the real purpose of Lincoln in sending the Fox expedition, it must not be forgotten that Lincoln was only seeking to maintain the Federal authority as he had pledged to do in his inaugural.

On April 13, while Fort Sumter was being bombarded, a committee of three delegates from the Virginia Convention waited on Lincoln to learn his policy in regard to the

⁷². Craven, op. cit., p. 480

⁷³. Rutledge, Archibald, "Abraham Lincoln Fights The Battle of Fort Sumter", South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIV, Oct. 1935, p. 370.

Confederate States. It might be well to quote his answer to this committee. Said Lincoln:

In answer I have to say that, having at the beginning of my official term expressed my intended policy as plainly as I was able, it is with deep regret and some mortification I now learn that there is great and injurious uncertainty in the public mind as to what that policy is, and what course I intend to pursue. Not having as yet seen occasion to change, it is now my purpose to pursue the course marked out in the inaugural address. I commend a careful consideration of the whole document as the best expression of my purposes.

As I then said, and now repeat: "The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the Government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what is necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere". By the words, "property and places belonging to the Government", I chiefly allude to the military posts and property which were in the possession of the Government when it came to my hands.⁷⁴

Whatever might be said of Lincoln's hidden purposes, his attempt to supply Sumter certainly was in accord with his inaugural declaration of an intention to hold and possess the Federal forts, and the resistance on the part of the Confederate forces fulfilled his promise that the South could have no war without being themselves the aggressors.

It is the writer's opinion that Lincoln had come to the Presidency with a much firmer policy than he followed after the inaugural. Like Buchanan, he hesitated to use firmness because of a desire to avoid civil war and to hold the border slave States in the Union. His concern over the Virginia Convention had persuaded him to agree to evacuate Fort Sumter provided Virginia would not pass an ordinance of secession.

⁷⁴. Lincoln's Works, vol. 2, pp. 32, 33.

He was also prevented from taking firm measures for some time because of a belief that Northern public opinion would not support him. As soon, however, as Northern public opinion had been consolidated in his support, as it had been by March 29, 1861, and when the radical Republican Senators demanded stronger action, he decided to send the expeditions to both Sumter and Pickens. From Lincoln's own statements, the writer believes that he had come to view civil war as inevitable if the Union was to be saved, and his decision to attempt to supply Sumter was in order to throw the onus of initiating war on the South. The South was forced to make the choice.

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