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Skedaddle e-journal

January 1st to 7th, 1861

Issue 1861—1

ARTICLES, IMAGES, & MORE FROM NEWSPAPERS, JOURNALS AND DIARIES, &C, OF THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Re-Publication Note:

This issue, 1861—1, was originally published January 7, 2005 as Volume 2, Issue 1. Originally intended to be published weekly, it was to have news from the time of the war along with reminiscences about those times from after the war as well as other occasional items.

Since the first issues were published, *Skedaddle* e-journal has evolved. Issues 1861—17, 18, and 19 have virtually no material other than news and related materials from the dates covered by each issue. More importantly, with each of these issues, I included an index of names of individuals mentioned in that issue. After making that change, I decided that the index added enough value to warrant republishing the Volume 2 issues. All material originally included will be retained. There will be no new material other than this note and the name index.

Mike Goad, October 13, 2005

“When this war comes we are to be the borderers; whether it takes the form of a regular and organized contest between governments and sections, or the more dread shape of social and anarchic butchery, this region will be the debatable ground. These fair and fertile fields will be laid waste. Bleak chimneys rising from an ash heap will mark the site of these pleasant homes. Kindred will be divided by the sword. Ancient friendships changed to bloody feuds; peace, security, and plenty give place to war, watchfulness, and famine. And yet no upright and sound-thinking man can give a human reason why this war should be.”

“The party press of the country is helping

on the quarrel famously, while our gray-beards at Washington are tapping their venerable cocoa-nuts with the hope of extracting a few drops of the milk of human kindness wherewith to assuage the flames. The newspapers are standing at either end of the furnace heaving in tar, pitch, rosin, petroleum, and bacon-sides, with most indefatigable and intelligent industry. Chateaubriand, who had seen revolutions enough to give his opinions some weight, was asked the cause of the periodical revolutions in France. He replied, ‘Journalism.’”

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE WAR. BY A. VIRGINIAN.

[First Paper.]

IT is with unfeigned reluctance that I have undertaken to write upon subjects which have been so recently and exhaustively treated by contemporaneous pens and pencils; to pass over ground which has been illuminated by the calcium light of the American press; or to touch on questions which have been subjected to



THE TWO-FACED SHIELD.

the intelligent scrutiny of Congressional Committees; yet I am encouraged by the hope that views taken from an original and somewhat peculiar standpoint may still possess sufficient attraction to justify their publication, and that a personal narrative, with all its incidental trivialities, errors, inconsistencies, and egotism, may find an acceptable apology in the superior interest of the grand historic drama with which it is interwoven. A native of the valley of the Shenandoah, I have passed the greater part of my life on the Northern border of Virginia—a region which, from its geographical position and mixed population, has always been debatable ground between the contending opinions of the age, and which eventually became a most important theatre of the war, resulting from these opinions. It is thus that I became, almost from necessity, an interested observer of many of the opening scenes of the contest, and subsequently an active participant in its armed solution.

During the winter of 1860-61 I was residing at my father's house in Martinsburg, occupied with my private affairs and arranging plans for a future of peace and seclusion. These dreams were disturbed from time to time by the indications of the approaching storm, but I resolutely closed my eyes and stopped my ears, determined not to be disturbed. I had never taken any active interest in the party politics of the day, and was the less disposed to mingle in the present strife, as I sympathized with neither of the extreme factions which, from opposite quarters, seemed to be mutually intent on breaking down the Government and destroying the peace and prosperity of the country. I saw nothing in the contest but the rage of adverse dogmatisms, sharpened by the baser lust for official plunder—that party spirit, which, Addison says, “robs men, not only of all honor and decency, but of every particle of common sense.”

In the rapid progress of events, however, it became manifest that the questions before the country were not to be put aside with this cynical and superficial observation. Under a monarchy a subject may be permitted to seclude himself from the political storms that shake thrones and menace dynasties. Even amidst the fury of war he can calmly pursue some favorite science with reasonable assurance that his motive and character will be respected. The citizen of a free Republic can claim no such privilege. “The price of his personal liberty is eternal vigilance.” Under whatever pretext he may seek to hide himself or evade the responsibilities of his condition, when the storm rises he is sure to feel his neighbor's hand upon his shoulder, and hear the cry of warning and reproach: “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God.”

It was, indeed, high time that the Border Virginians should awake, for the gulf that was opening between the adverse sections yawned beneath their very hearths; and the sword which was drawn to divide the nation must also cut their hearts in twain. When, at length, impelled to the serious consideration of the impending crisis, I can not boast, as many do, that I clearly appreciated the merits of the quarrel or foresaw its results. Preferring to preserve a reputation for frankness to the doubtful honor of being enrolled among the ex post facto prophets, I am fain to acknowledge (in the phraseology of tobacco planters) that I had very few opinions “ready cut and dry” for the occasion. I heard nothing but a confusion of tongues such as followed the destruction of Babel. I saw nothing but political chaos which seemed about to swallow up government, law, life, and property together. There had been a prevalent and growing conviction among what were called Conservative men, especially at the South, that the experiment of popular Government was a failure. Macaulay had written a letter to some one prophesying that the American system would break clown on the first serious trial. I shared this belief to some extent. The revolutionary anarchy which was spreading like a fire from State to State, the seeming helplessness of the General Government, the chaos of opinion—all combined to convince me that the predicted day of trial had arrived, and that it needed no Daniel to interpret the handwriting on the wall.

Impressed at the same time with the belief that we were entering upon an era which would figure in history, I determined to take advantage of my position to observe the progress of events and to keep a Diary.

This promise, however, was but negligently performed at first. During the winter of 1860-61 I find nothing recorded beyond an occasional comment, opinion, or anecdote suggested by the current news, and these jotted down hastily, without date or continuity. In time my journal became more methodical, and after I entered the military service was as full and accurate as possible under the circumstances.

In preparing these notes for the press I have endeavored to preserve all the freshness and personal-ity which pertain to the original manuscript. If some things have been omitted (that might be worth the telling, in place and season), and certain obscure passages made clearer by the light of after-knowledge, in the main the recorded facts and opinions of the day remain unchanged. There will appear the uncertain groupings, the vacillations, the inconsistencies of opinion, the errors of hasty and partial observation, the vain hopes, the causeless fears, the embittered preju-

dices, and excited passions which necessarily accompany the progress of a political revolution, so radical and comprehensive, accomplished through a social war so bloody and vindictive as that which has recently ended.

It will be also seen that in writing these individual experiences it is not proposed to emulate the dignity and comprehensiveness of history, but to give closer and more detailed views of characters and events, a series of photographic pictures hastily caught, during the action of the changing drama. Scenes where the greatness of little things, and the littleness of great things, will sometimes be strikingly illustrated by juxtaposition, where tragedy and comedy, laughter and tears, frenzy and farce walk arm in arm together. And it may be that a more thoughtful class who would look behind the creaking machinery and tinsel actors of the drama, may find in these crude and unskillful observations suggestion of queries which will be found as difficult to answer as those of the poet laureate :

—Shall error in the round of time
Still father truth? O shall the braggart shout
For some blind glimpse of freedom work itself
Through madness, hated by the wise, to law,
System, and empire? Sin itself be found
The cloudy porch, oft opening on the sun?"

Having thus indicated the geographical and political stand-point from which my opening views of the war were taken, I commence transcribing from my Diary.

South Carolina has actually seceded! and what of that? South Carolina is a great way off; and has been threatening Secession for thirty years or more. The Toryism of 1776 has never died out in South Carolina, nor have her gentry ever fully acquiesced in our republican form of government. It is high time the questions between her and the country were settled. I wish she had made up her mind to try conclusions with Andrew Jackson, when she had her hand raised to pluck the forbidden fruit. Does she think it more nearly ripe now? or that the present "Old Man" won't throw stones? I'll vouch for it, that if he does not, somebody will.

I am rather glad South Carolina has taken this decisive step. Her arrogance and rashness have arrayed even her Southern neighbors against her. She will not be supported by a single State. I have not heard a voice raised in her behalf. Even those who have heretofore been most vociferous about Southern rights unite in condemning her premature presumption. A ship of war in the harbor of Charleston, and a battal-

ion of national troops thrown into the forts, will quench South Carolina as briefly as one may snuff out a tallow dip with his thumb and finger.

"Sedition is like fire, easily extinguished at the commencement, but the longer it burns the more fiercely it blazes."

South Carolina is not quenched, and there seems to be no disposition on the part of those in power to put the extinguisher on her.

As she pursues her course of presumptuous madness with impunity other States are following her example.

Each day brings tidings of fresh outrages and humiliations heaped upon the Government, seizures of arsenals, arms, forts, dock-yards, and vessels—of traitorous officers surrendering their charges without defense—of faithful officers arrested and thrown into prison, besieged in forts where they are cut off from supplies and assistance—our national flag hauled down and trampled in the dust, with all its glorious historic memories, to be replaced by some tawdry rag flaunting an obscure device known only to local office-holders and militia-men.

The effect of this state of things is distinctly perceptible in the tone of opinion around us. State Sovereignty dogmatism is becoming daily more open and arrogant. County court metaphysicians are modifying their Unionism with ifs and ands and peradventures—small anglers in the mud-puddle of village tavern opinion are drawing in their lines and changing their bait—petty politicians are craftily trimming their sails that their cock-boats may run with the rising wind. But while the weak-kneed are thus tottering, and trimmers fluttering in the breeze, the storm serves to fan to fiercer flame the indignation of all true men. All eyes and hearts are now turned toward Washington, expectant, eager, hopeful. There centres the power which in its infancy has met and twice foiled the giant of Great Britain, which in the very wantonness of its lusty youth made a holiday frolic of throttling poor Mexico. What will the Government do in this crisis?

Is it secret sympathy with treason or, mere driveling that tells the American people "the Government has no right to coerce a State?"—a nation that for more than eighty years has maintained fleets and armies, has waged wars and made peace, has collected customs and coined money; whose commerce covers the globe, whose flag is known and honored wherever the sun shines; whose power and civilization are acknowledged by the proudest and most enlightened peoples; whose future promises to surpass in grandeur all that history has yet recorded. Such a nation has not the right to suppress domestic insurrection! So vast an aggregation of power, prosperity, and hope must sub-

mit quietly and unresistingly to perish at the bidding of a local faction, a confederacy of visionary schemers, conceited dogmatists, self-deluding and self-stultifying economists—base huxters, who unblushingly pretend to barter the national honor and safety for the advantage of cheap negroes and a good cotton market; unprincipled politicians, whose vulpine instincts have warned them that the power and places which they have so long abused and so deeply corrupted are about to be withdrawn from their keeping!

Is nothing lawful or constitutional but the outrages of revolutionary mobs, the violation of solemn oaths, the plundering of national property, and the babbling of seditious orators?

Is the Government we have loved and trusted indeed so pitiable and impotent a sham? Have the founders, whom we have been accustomed to regard as wise and good men, really put such a scurvy trick upon us? Have we built houses, laid up wealth, begot children, acquired honors, and recreated in boasting and self-glorification under the delusion of a Political Idea that would disgrace a council of Pottawatomies?

Such are the questions that loyal Virginians in the bitterness of their humiliation now ask each other, as the daily mails bring in the accumulating details of rebel outrage, arrogance, and menace, responded to only by governmental acquiescence, deprecatory remonstrance, and despicable compromise.

“Ah, God! for a man with heart, head,
hand,

Like some of the simple great ones gone

For ever and ever by—

One still strong man in a blatant land,

Whatever they call him, what care I,

Aristocrat, Democrat, Autocrat—one

Who can rule and dare not lie.”

DEBOW'S REVIEW

JOURNAL OF THE WAR—ENTERED UP
DAILY IN THE CONFEDERACY.

REPRESENTING THE VIEWS AND
OPINIONS WHICH PREVAILED, AND THE
CONDITION OF THINGS WHICH
EXISTED AT THE TIME OF EACH DAY'S
ENTRY, IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES
OR IN PORTIONS OF THEM. —BY THE
EDITOR.

This Journal was not commenced until April, 1862, and thus a very interesting and instructive year is necessarily omitted. A condensed statement of events will however be presented prior to its opening, and in this, and in future numbers of the REVIEW for the

next two years the journal will be given complete, together with very full notes and extracts from the leading newspapers of the South, upon all subjects which would be likely in the most interesting degree to illustrate the text. Several large volumes of clippings were made at the time and are fortunately preserved by us.

1860. NOVEMBER (6,) Lincoln elected President of the United States on a clearly recognized abolition platform, supported by nearly the entire Northern, and by no part of the Southern vote. (8) Flag of Independence unfurled at Charleston—great excitement among the citizens; federal court resigns. (17) Authorities of South Carolina ask for the possession of the forts.

DECEMBER (20,) South Carolina Convention passes the ordinance of secession and declares the State an independent Republic. (26,) Major Anderson dismantles and evacuates in the night fort Moultrie, and takes position at fort Sumter, (27,) South Carolina troops take possession of forts Moultrie and Pinkney. (29,) Floyd, Secretary of War, resigns; President Buchanan sustains Major Anderson.

January 1, 1861

CHARLESTON MERCURY

Military Movements

THE MILITARY MOVEMENTS are progressing rapidly all around us. The brave sons of Carolina, cheered by the encouragement of her equally courageous daughters, are earnestly and silently doing all that men can do towards putting our State in a position to defend herself against the world. For the present, we refrain from giving the particulars of the various works that are progressing. We will only say, for the benefit of anxious friends, that the gallant volunteers stationed at the various posts around us, are, one and all, devoting themselves to fill the exigencies of a noble cause, and that they are and will doubtless continue in high spirits and as comfortable circumstances permit.

RICHMOND ENQUIRER

Resignation of the Secretary of War

The resignation of Secretary Floyd, which was tendered on Saturday night last, will be deeply regretted by the people of Virginia. Under the circumstances, Secretary Floyd has done only what every high toned gentleman would have done.

The Administration had given an unqualified pledge, to the Representatives from South Carolina, that no reinforcements should be sent to the Forts,

and that their status should not be changed, if the authorities and people of South Carolina would make no attempt to seize the Forts. South Carolina gave the pledge, and, what is more, honorably observed it. Under its operation peace was preserved, and the peace commissioners from that State were in to violate that pledge, to change the ownership of the forts, and to hazard the peace of the country. Gov. Floyd considered this action of Maj. Anderson as violating the pledge of the administration, and ruinous to the policy which, under the pledge of the President, had preserved the peace. The reoccupation of Fort Moultrie by Major Anderson, Secretary Floyd considered just and proper, and made it the condition of his longer remaining in the Cabinet. The President admitting the pledge, yet refused to order Major Anderson to Fort Moultrie, and Secretary Floyd would no longer remain a member of the Administration which would permit its subordinate officer, by violating its pledge, to ruin its policy and involve the country in civil war. He, therefore, resigned; and the people in Virginia, while deeply regretting his loss to the War Department at this time, will yet sustain him in his action. If the rumor be true that Gen. Scott has been appointed to the War Department, with his previous declarations against the South, it will speedily involve the country in civil war—indeed, we should not be surprised if individual action did not precipitate Virginia into collision with the Federal Government.

DIARY OF A YANKEE IN THE PATENT OFFICE

by Horatio Nelson Taft

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 1861. —The old year passed away in gloom and sadness and the new one opens today without affording one hopeful ray of light in regard to the future. There seems to be a determination on the part of nearly the whole south to break up the Government. The Comrs from S.C. are still here and little is known in the City about what is taking place between them and the President & Cabinet. The “receptions” today as well as the “Calls” were few and rather solemn affairs. Pleasant day, just freezing

January 2, 1861 NEW YORK HERALD

The Crisis.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 2, 1861.

The President's reply to the Commissioners of South Carolina has just been communicated. They

demand, as a preliminary step to the initiation of negotiations, that the troops be withdrawn from the forts in Charleston harbor.

The President positively refuses to do this, and reiterates his views in reference to the public property as set forth in his message to Congress, and informs them that he not only intends to collect the revenues and execute the laws, but to defend the property of the United States with all the power at his command.

He does not recognize the Commissioners officially, but regards them as distinguished citizens of the United States from South Carolina.

The orders to Major Anderson are given in full.

From them it appears he could only have acted as he has done, and certainly, if he had any tangible evidence that South Carolina designed taking Fort Sumter.

The policy pursued and the understanding had with the people of South Carolina up to the evacuation of Fort Moultrie are given, and the people of the United States will now understand what kind of pledges existed between the President and the authorities of South Carolina, and whether South Carolina will be sustained, even by the South, in taking possession of property which does not belong to her.

The position taken by the President has produced the utmost consternation among the Commissioners and their friends.

Instructions have been sent to the commander of the steam frigate Brooklyn, to put her in readiness and be prepared to leave at a moment warning.

The question of reinforcement has not yet been fully determined upon, but should an attack be made upon Fort Sumter a large force will at once be dispatched.

The Commissioners have telegraphed Governor Pickens all the particulars of the President's letter, and also that they are satisfied that the President had determined to reinforce Major Anderson. They further urge upon the Governor to put the State upon a war footing, and to concentrate all his force at once.

A brief though earnest address to the people of the United States has been prepared, recommending them to rally a compromise on the basis of the propositions of Senators Crittendon and Bigler; it has already been signed by a number of members of both houses of Congress.

The members of Congress who have just returned from visits to their homes in the border slave States express their alarm at the progress of the secession movement, while others from some of the non-