

**REMINISCENCES AND  
DOCUMENTS RELATING  
TO THE CIVIL WAR  
DURING THE YEAR 1865**

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Reminiscences and Documents Relating to the Civil War During the Year 1865 by John A. Campbell

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**JOHN A. CAMPBELL**

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# REMINISCENCES AND DOCUMENTS

RELATING TO THE

## Civil War During the Year 1865.

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**M**Y object in preparing this paper is to place in order documents that have some historical interest and to record, briefly, some reminiscences relating to events that have interest to those who were concerned in them. The period of time includes some months of the year 1865.

On the 28th of January, 1865, Mr. Benjamin, the Secretary of State in the Confederate government, informed me that the President (Davis) had decided to send a commission to Washington City to confer with the President of the United States upon the subject of peace; that Messrs. A. H. Stephens, R. M. T. Hunter and myself would compose the commission, and that

#### 4 *Reminiscences and Documents Relating to*

he came for me to go to the dwelling of the President to get information and instructions. I found the persons mentioned convened and President Davis communicated the cause of the commission and the functions which were assigned to it. He stated that there was exceeding discontent in the United States with the condition of affairs in Mexico, so much so, that it was proposed to combine the United States and the Confederate States to extrude by a union of their forces the Emperor Maximilian and his associates and allies.

We were not farther informed of the means to be used, nor what combination of force was to be made, nor what was to be done with Mexico should we succeed. We had the power (orally) to make any treaty, but one that involved reconstruction of the Federal Union. President Davis in his book on the Confederate States, and their Rise and Downfall has not informed us, more particularly, as to these questions.

Our commission authorized us to have an informal conference with the President of the United States upon "the issues involved in the war existing, with the view of securing peace to the *two countries*." The letter written by President Lincoln expressed a continuing disposition to receive agents commissioned by Mr. Davis to



confer upon the subject of securing peace to the "*People of our one Common Country.*"<sup>1</sup>

There was some detention in our progress—at Petersburg and at City Point—but not unreasonable, for on the third of February, 1865, we were brought face to face with President Lincoln, and Secretary of State Seward, in the cabin of a steamer at anchor in Hampton Roads, to confer informally, as commissioned, on the issues involved in the existing war; and we did confer for several hours, until both parties were satisfied. The intercourse was courteous, and the conversations conducted with gravity and without levity or unfairness. We separated in the afternoon and reported to President Davis the result the fifth of February, 1865, at Richmond, having been absent only eight days. The members of the commission had recognized the propriety of recording their recollection of what had occurred, separately; I did so shortly after my return home, with care. It was submitted to my colleagues and without objection. Mr. Stephens had this when he wrote his histories concerning the war. I am the survivor of all those who participated at the conference. The letter written to Mr. Hunter at his request, the memoranda of

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Davis' *Rise and Downfall*, 612-618. Mr. Francis P. Blair was the only person from Mr. Lincoln quoted by Mr. Davis.

6 *Reminiscences and Documents Relating to*

the conference, and the report of the commissioners of the result of the conference were drawn by me. These contain all that has been prepared by anyone connected, except what is contained in the message of President Lincoln to the Federal Congress and the documents with it. This message is exact.

The "memoranda" will show that the project relative to the invasion of Mexico, as disclosed by Mr. Stephens, was the subject of conversation, and that Mr. Stephens and Secretary Seward became entangled in a debate which ran into the question of a right of a State to secede. Mr. Lincoln, with a great deal of emphasis and force, hushed the debate by disclaiming all connection or knowledge with Mr. Blair's communications to President Davis. Among the Commissioners, Mr. Stephens alone had any credulity in respect to the suggestion of an arrangement of an invasion of Mexico by the combined forces of the United States and the Confederate States. Mr. Stephens thought it a rational and proper enterprise.

The conference upon the subject of the President's proclamation of emancipation of the slaves in the Southern States, enabled Mr. Seward to inform us of what had been done in Congress since the Commission had been on their journey. The thirteenth amendment to the Constitution had been proposed in Congress, and the resolution had been

adopted by the Senate. The two-thirds vote had not been obtained in the House of Representatives. On the 1st day of February, 1865, the two-thirds vote for the first time was obtained, and it was then adopted. Some newspapers informed us that on that day Secretary Seward and Chief Justice Chase were upon the floor of the House soliciting the adoption by the members of the House because it would be useful in the discussion of the subject with the Southern Commissioners, who were to meet Mr. Seward at the Hampton Roads concerning a peace. Mr. Seward took a copy of the record of the adoption of the resolution, and procured its ratification by the Legislature of Maryland at Annapolis.

While we were detained at City Point this amendment to the Constitution had been adopted by Congress and by seven States ratified. A number of members who had opposed the resolution previously had either changed their votes or had absented themselves on this occasion.

Mr. Seward handed me a printed slip stating the action of Congress, being the first information we had of the subject. I enquired of him what significance he attached to it?

He replied: "Not a great deal;" the Southern States will return to the Union, and with their own strength and the aid of the connections they will