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SEWARD AND THE SECESSION WINTER OF 1860-1861

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During the campaign of 1860, Seward had not foreseen the crisis that burst upon the Union in December. His attitude had been one of confidence that, after the election turmoil was over, things would quiet down and southern threats of secession would cease. His remarks to a Midwest audience — "Who's afraid?" — well illustrated his state of mind. Once election day (November 6) was past, he planned to remain at his home in Auburn, New York, until after the Christmas holidays, but by the middle of November the signs of conflict were too ominous to be ignored. Five days after the election, Adams wrote to him of southern threats and fury, and of the necessity for his taking command of the incoming administration, and Seward replied, though rather enigmatically, that he too was anxious about the course of events. On November 18 he wrote to Weed that the "southern disturbances" made him feel that he should be in Washington for the opening of Congress, though as for himself, he was "without schemes or plans, hopes, or desires or fears . . ." [1]

Seward reached Washington on November 30. Cases in the Supreme Court kept him busy for several days, but the blindness of Republican members to the danger threatening the Union was all too evident. Weed was another problem. Frightened by the dour look of things, on November 24 he had sent up a trial balloon in the *Journal*, suggesting a strengthening of the fugitive slave law, and restoration of the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30′. Six days later, while emphasizing that he had spoken and was speaking only for himself, the Albany editor added the proposal of a constitutional convention with delegates appointed by the states. This clearly portended constitutional amendments safeguarding slavery.

Busily revolving in his mind ideas for saving the Union "without sacrifice of principle", Seward found Weed's action well-intentioned but impulsive and embarrassing, and he made it clear to Weed that this was the case. He, himself, felt that compromise was not the answer; and that any constitutional amendment satisfactory to the South could not pass Congress. He believed that South Carolina and the Deep South would go out of the Union, but that then passion would be succeeded by perplexity as to whether to conciliate the Union or fight it. The

[1] Adams, "Diary", Nov. 11, 17, 1860; WP, Seward to Weed, Nov. 18, 1860.

best policy, he felt sure, was one of moderation, kindness and reticence, always with a view to reconciling southerners to the incoming Administration. He did his best to scotch rumors, emanating from the *Tribune* office, that Weed on compromise was really Seward; he prevailed on a Republican Senatorial caucus to keep the excitable John P. Hale from making a speech, and to drop the idea of a Force Bill. When they asked him what he proposed to do, he told them that they would know when he knew himself. [2]

Such was the position Seward took during the first two weeks of December. Then, suddenly, he left the capital for Albany. Lincoln had offered him the post of Secretary of State.

Ever since the Chicago convention there had been rumors about Seward's subsequent role in the party. There was talk of his remaining in the Senate, of being Minister to England, of the State Department, and of retirement. After the election was over, many of his friends were convinced that the first post in the Cabinet would be his. It seemed a logical choice, not only on account of his position as a party leader but also because, since 1857, he had been a member of the Senate committee on foreign relations. Cameron wrote that the offer was certain and its acceptance essential, both for Seward's future and for the success of the Administration. Adams declared that his opinion and that of everyone he had spoken to in Boston was that the post would be offered and that Seward must accept in order to give the country confidence in Lincoln's Administration.[3]

Such arguments were hard for a man of Seward's temperament to combat, but he preserved a waiting attitude and was careful not to indicate any open interest in the post. Old Democrats, such as Chase, could scarcely be expected to enthuse over him as premier, reports from Maryland indicated that the Blairs were intriguing against him, and the future seemed at best uncertain. New York had done well in the election, he told Patterson. The retreat from Chicago had so far been conducted safely, but it was not yet ended. "I shall await the development of events and act as wisely as I can." [4]

As for Lincoln, there were some who thought that he was lukewarm toward Seward, and was reluctant to take him into the Cabinet. The weight of evidence, however, indicates that he wanted Seward to head the State Department; that he was sincere when he assured the New Yorker on December 8, in a warm letter accompanying his formal offer,

[2] Fish Papers, Seward to Fish, Dec. 11, 1860; Seward, F. W. *Seward*, II, 478-481, letters to Frances, Dec. 1-10, 1860; New York *Herald*, Dec. 4, 1860; WP, Seward to Weed, Dec. 2, 3, 1860.

[3] SP, Adams to Seward, Nov. 11, 1860, Cameron to Seward, Nov. 13, 1860.

[4] SP, W. G. Snethen to Seward, Nov. 26, 1860; Patterson Papers, Seward to Patterson, Nov. 14, 1860.

that the rumors of his lack of interest were false, and that Seward's position, integrity, learning and great experience "all combine to render it an appointment preeminently fit to be made".[5]

Now Lincoln's invitation had come, and Seward was excited. He told Preston King about it, intimating that, in view of the present state of the country, which people ascribed mainly to him, he could not refuse the offer. Lincoln's letter had requested his cooperation in handling patronage matters "with justice to all", and in reply Seward promised his "hearty concurrence". As for the State Department, he asked for a few days so that he might consult with his friends. Then he posted off to Albany and Weed. The two men agreed that Weed, who had received an invitation to come to Springfield, should go, find out how the land lay and, among other suggestions, propose Charles Francis Adams for the Treasury. Seward, meanwhile, would wait at Auburn for the Dictator's report.[6]

Weed went West, taking his own compromise proposals with him. He had a six hour interview with Lincoln on December 20, and found that Chase and two other Old Democrats, Gideon Welles of Connecticut and Montgomery Blair of Maryland, were being seriously considered for Cabinet posts. Lincoln showed no interest in Adams for the Treasury.

As for the compromise proposals, Lincoln was opposed to any move that would give slavery freedom to expand southward. He presented Weed with a short draft of three propositions that he felt would do much good and that he wanted Seward to introduce. They were (1) a constitutional amendment forbidding alteration of the Constitution in such a way as to allow Congress to abolish or interfere with slavery in the states, (2) amendment of the fugitive slave law by granting a jury trial to the fugitive and (3) a recommendation from Congress to the states that they revise their personal liberty laws and repeal all that were in conflict with the Constitution.[7]

Weed came back from Springfield, Seward joining him on the cars at Syracuse, and between there and Albany they discussed the situation. Seward was willing to accept Lincoln's three proposals and champion

[5] As to Lincoln's "lukewarmness," see Beale, H.K., ed., *The Diary of Edward Bates* (hereafter, Bates, *Diary*) (Wash., 1933), 164-165; Beale, H.K., ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles* (hereafter, Welles, *Diary*) (3 vols., N. Y., 1960), II, 388-389; Adams, "Diary", Nov. 27, 1860. *Per contra*, see Bates, *Diary*, 166, note 11; Basler, *Works*, IV, 147-149; Hamlin, C.E., *The Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin* (Cambridge, 1899), 367-370; Weed, *Autobiography*, 605, 606; Carman H.J. and Luthin, R., *Lincoln and the Patronage* (N. Y., 1943), 12-15.

[6] Bigelow, "Diary", May 8, 1861; WP, Seward to Weed, Dec. 13, 1860; RTL, Seward to Lincoln, Dec. 13, 16, 1860; Barnes, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed*, 301-302.

[7] Basler, *Works*, IV, 154, 156-157, 158; Bancroft, *Seward*, II, 10; New York *Times*, Dec. 21, 1860; Carman and Luthin, *Lincoln and the Patronage*, 24.

them in the Senate, but the Cabinet was not shaping up as he and Weed had hoped it would.

What to do was a problem. Weed was doubtful. Vice-President-elect Hamlin thought Seward should refuse. Seward consulted Adams, avowing his dissatisfaction with the Cabinet, where, he felt, he would lack support. Adams advised him to accept. Finally, on December 28 Seward wrote to Lincoln that he would serve. He told Frances of his decision, adding, "I will try to save freedom and my country." After the news became public, Chase sent a gracious note of congratulation — "The post is yours by right and you will honor the post. My best wishes go with you." [8]

On December 22, after conferring with Weed on the train, Seward had gone on to New York and the Astor House, arriving there late in the evening. The New England Society was holding its annual meeting at the hotel. Seward had been invited to this gathering and had declined, but on hearing of his arrival the diners literally forced him to come to the banquet hall. South Carolina had formally seceded two days before, and they wanted to hear what he had to say.

Seward couched his remarks in a light, humorous vein, and his audience loved it. He had just told Weed, he said, that he repudiated all compromises that New York, Pennsylvania and New England couldn't stand upon. The New England Yankees had invented confederation, and now South Carolina invented secession. This put the Union in some peril, but when one state went out they would see Canada and the Mexican states rush in (applause). Secession was unwise and unnatural. It was not surprising that attempts should be made to alter such a complex government as ours, or that one or two states should think they could do better by seceding, but he believed that no state could long exist out of the Union. Neither did he believe southerners when they said all love was lost between North and South. This was a family quarrel. He suspected that South Carolina liked the North tolerably well, and he was sure that if Louis Napoleon or the Prince of Wales or his mother made a descent upon New York City tomorrow, all the hills of South Carolina would come to its rescue (loud and prolonged applause), "just as they would go to the rescue of Charleston and South Carolina". Everybody knew that. South Carolinians didn't humbug him with their secession and they wouldn't humbug themselves much longer. Sixty days from then things would look a lot brighter. [9]

[8] SP, Weed to Seward, Dec. 25, 1860, Chase to Seward, Jan. 10, 1861; Adams, "Diary", Dec. 27, 1860; RTL, Seward to Lincoln, Dec. 28, 1860; Hamlin, *op. cit.*, 368-369. The Cabinet was shaping up along Old Whig, Old Democrat lines. Hamlin, also an Old Democrat, was for Blair in the Cabinet.

[9] New Yord *Times*, Dec. 24, 1860; New York *Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1860; Seward, *Works*, IV, 644-650.

This speech was meant as reassurance, not as a sober analysis of the situation. As an indication of Seward's frame of mind, its significance lay in its assertion that a threat of danger from outside would produce a tempest of patriotic ardor that would end all thought of disunion. This represented a belief that Seward found singularly attractive during the months that lay ahead.

Seward said nothing specifically to the New England Society about compromise, but the subject was on his mind, and others wondered about his attitude toward it. He was in Albany when Weed wrote his second editorial supporting compromise, and the rumor spread that Weed was indeed speaking for him, and even that he was frightened and had taken his family and gone home. There is no real evidence, however, that Seward agreed with Weed's stand, and he was at home because he was waiting for the results of Weed's visit to Springfield. He had spent his time in Auburn evolving a policy for dealing with the fast-developing crisis. [10]

Seward's efforts to save the Union developed along three lines. First, he sought means and methods that would conciliate the South without abandoning his principles, that is, his determination to keep slavery within the limits where it already existed, thus putting it in the way of ultimate extinction. Second, he undertook to bring into the scope of this effort Lincoln's three propositions transmitted to him by Weed. [11] Third, since he felt sure that the rebellion taking shape was the work of a relatively few hotheads, rather than the desire of a majority of southerners, he sought means of gaining time during which he might arouse southern loyalty to the Union. This was all very well, but in his overweening confidence that he was to be the real head of the incoming administration, he did not consult Lincoln before publicly outlining his own policy. [12]

Seward went back to Washington a member of the Senate Committee of Thirteen appointed to consider means of dealing with the crisis. In the committee he voted against the Crittenden Compromise, and offered the Lincoln resolutions prohibiting interference with slavery in the states where it already existed, guaranteeing a jury trial for fugitive slaves, and requesting the repeal or modification of personal liberty laws. The committee adopted the first of these by a vote of eleven to two, but rejected the others. Seward voted steadily against all proposals fostering the expansion of slavery into newly acquired territories, and one proposed

[10] Albany *Evening Journal*, Dec. 17, 1860; WP, Seward to Weed, Dec. 2, 3, 1860; SP, I. Washburn to Seward, Dec. 19, 1860; Ford, W. C., ed., *Letters of Henry Adams, 1858-1891* (Boston and N. Y., 1930), 83.

[11] Basler, *op. cit.*, IV, 154, 156-157, 158; Fish Papers, Seward to Fish, Dec. 11, 1860; Boutwell, G. S., *Reminiscences of Sixty Years* (2 vols., N. Y., 1902), I, 270-271.

[12] Schafer, Jos., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz* (Madison, 1928), 247.

by Douglas that would have prohibited voting or holding office by Negroes.

The New Yorker worked closely with Adams, whose policy, too, was delay so that passion might have a chance to cool and the new administration have time to take over the government. Seward was willing to accept the Adams proposal for admitting existing territories as two states, New Mexico coming in as a slave state, for he had no fear of slavery being established permanently in that area. Nevertheless, when it became apparent that there was southern opposition to this project, he urged Adams to abandon pushing for its consideration.[13] These were basically time-gaining moves, as was his policy of keeping in as close touch as possible with southern statesmen, using for that purpose southern-born Senator Gwin of California and a fast-talking New York bon vivant and adventurer named Sam Ward.

While preaching everywhere coolness and moderation, Seward also tried in various ways to stiffen Buchanan's Administration and to prepare the North for any possible contingency. When southerners and southern sympathizers left the Cabinet, he supported John A. Dix for Secretary of the Treasury, and when Edwin M. Stanton became Attorney General the New Yorker, who was still persona non grata at the White House, quickly established confidential relations with him, receiving information as to Cabinet proceedings and providing for Stanton a connecting link with Congress.[14] As for preparedness, Seward urged the governors of New York and Massachusetts to begin preparations so that, in the event of a crisis at the Capital, they would be able to furnish troops, and by February 1861 New York was gathering between 5,000 and 10,000 militia. Concerned over the falling price of government bonds, he proposed that Treasury notes be sold in small denominations so that the ordinary citizen could lend money to the government, and urged the New York legislature to put the credit of the state behind the federal six per cents. A delegation of twenty-five New York merchants and bankers who had come to Washington looking for salvation was taken aback when told that the best thing its members could do to save the Union was to lend it money at seven per cent, rather than increasing the panic and its difficulties by extorting twelve per cent.[15]

[13] RTL, Seward to Lincoln, Dec. 26, 1860; Senate *Reports*, 36th Cong., 2d. sess., No. 288; Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 486; Adams, "Diary", Dec. 27, 28, 1860, Jan. 15, 25, Feb. 4, 17, 1861. Adams's New Mexico proposal was later introduced in the committee of thirty-three by Henry Winter Davis. See Adams, H., "The Secession Winter, 1860-1861", Massachusetts Historical Society *Proceedings*, XLIII, 675.

[14] Adams, "Diary", Jan. 3, 1861; Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 491-492; Thomas, B. P. and Hyman, H. M., *Stanton* (N. Y., 1962), 100, 106.

[15] *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d. sess., 1019-1020; Morgan Papers, Seward to Morgan, Jan. 30, 1861; SP, Morgan to Seward, Jan. 5, 1861, F. W. Seward to F. A. Seward, Jan. 30, 1861; Adams, "Diary", Jan. 3, 1861.

While Seward sought preparation against a coming storm, he was busily preparing a major speech on the crisis. This was done in the midst of a welter of conflicting advice, some, like Salmon P. Chase, begging him to avoid compromise while others, like Gilbert C. Davidson, an Albany businessman and close to Weed, telegraphed him to propose measures that would hold the border states and so save the Union. [16]

When Seward rose on January 12, Mississippi, Florida and Alabama had followed South Carolina out of the Union, and the increasing gravity of the situation brought over 2,000 men and women to the galleries of the Senate, anxious to hear what he had to say. He began by avowing his "adherence to the Union in its integrity and with all its parts . . ." Congress, he said, ought, if possible, to redress any real grievances, and then it should furnish the President with all the means necessary to maintain an undivided nation. How was the Union to be saved, he asked, and answered that it was not by eulogiums, or recriminations, or by endless debates. Neither could he agree with those who advocated separation with a view to eventual reconstruction. Congressional compromises were not likely to save it. Yet it could not be dissolved by the action of individual states, but only by the people of the nation and in the manner prescribed by the Constitution. Then he pictured the chaos that would follow secession and evoked the specter of slave uprisings. Organization of a distinct confederacy was "obviously impossible of execution".

Since the Union was all-important, some basis for preserving it must be found. To save it, he was willing to see all personal liberty laws repealed; to see a constitutional amendment forbidding forever to Congress the power to abolish or interfere with slavery in any state; with Kansas admitted as a free state, he could accept the admission of the remaining territory of the Union as two states [His statement here was qualified and not clear, but he apparently meant with slavery, if the inhabitants so desired. He was sure they would not so desire]; he would vote for laws safeguarding states against invasions such as that of John Brown; and finally he urged as a powerful means of strengthening the Union the building of two railroads, one north, one south, to the Pacific. He closed with a plea for calmness, moderation and conciliation. [17]

It was a moving speech, and at times during its delivery more than one Senator bowed his head and wept. But its most remarkable feature was its susceptibility to a wide range of interpretation. Some thought that it offered real concessions to the South, and Frances wrote in sorrow that its "compromises", as she called them, put Henry "in danger of

[16] SP, Chase to Seward, Jan. 10, 1861, Davidson to Seward, Jan. 11, 1861. Davidson told him that both houses of the state legislature had passed unanimously strong conciliatory resolutions. This was not so. See the Journals of the New York State House and Senate, Jan. 10, 11, 1861.

[17] *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d. sess., 341-344; New York *Times*, Jan. 14, 1861.

taking the path which led Daniel Webster to an unhonored grave ten years ago". New York merchants praised its concessions, and border state Congressmen were pleased, though not ecstatic. On the other hand, Israel Washburn wrote from Maine that people there interpreted the speech as offering no practicable compromises or concessions, and so they liked it. Still others thought it "cautious", or "foggy", and Edward Everett declared that it disappointed almost everyone and amounted to nothing. Whittier, who had pilloried Daniel Webster for his Seventh of March speech, wrote a poem praising Seward's effort as a noble and courageous attempt to preserve peace and the Union, though he, himself, was

> constrained to hold even Union less
> Than Liberty, and Truth, and Righteousness.

One informed judgment on Seward's effort was that of Baron Stœckl, the Russian Minister at Washington, who felt that the speech made only a few slight concessions, but no compromise. Stœckl, after talking with Seward and his friends, believed that the New Yorker wanted to rally behind him conservative Democratic-Republican support for leading the South back into the Union by giving it satisfactory guarantees, but that he hesitated through lack of courage to make the necessary moves.[18]

Seward professed to be amused by this diversity of opinion, and was in high spirits after his speech. Frances would see, he assured her, that what looked like compromises were only explanations meant to disarm the enemies of Freedom and Union. "Once for all, I must gain time for the new Administration to organize and for the frenzy of passion to subside. I am doing this without making any compromise whatever, by forbearance, conciliation, magnanimity." He believed that he had moderated the crisis, and that now a reaction favorable to the Union would surely come. Frederick, on a brief visit at the capital toward the end of January, found his father overwhelmed with letters and visitors pleading with him to save the Union, but "patient with each, unconverted by any and confident, cheerful & hopeful about the result".[19]

The senior Senator from New York felt himself to be on a pinnacle of power. He could not come home now, he told Frances. "It seems to me that if I am absent only three days, this Administration, the Congress,

[18] Central Archives, Moscow. Russia. For. Aff. 49, Stœckl à Gortchakoff, Jan. 21, 1861; SP, F. A. Seward to W. H. Seward, Jan. 19, 1861, R. M. Blatchford to F. A. Seward, Jan. 13, 1861, A. T. Stewart to Seward, Jan. 14, 1861, I. Washburn to Seward, Jan. 22, 27, 1861, Weed to Seward, Jan. 19, 1861; Seward Corresp. (Univ. of Chicago), S. Colfax to —, Jan. 12, 1861; E. B. Washburne Papers, G. W. Southwick to Washburne, Feb. 14, 1861; Everett Papers, E. Everett to Wm. Everett, Jan. 21, 1861; Gardiner Collec., E. P. Smith to H. C. Carey, Feb. 7, 1861; Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 493-494, 496; Schafer, Jos., ed., *op. cit.*, 242-243.

[19] Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 496-497, W. H. Seward to F. A. Seward, Jan. 18, 23, 1861; SP, F. W. Seward to F. A. Seward, Jan. 30, 1861.

and the District would fall into consternation and despair. I am the only hopeful, calm, conciliatory person here." And he told Weed that now everything depended on Lincoln's inaugural : "I shall write to him about that." [20]

There was conceit here, but there was some justification for it. Henry Adams believed that the speech inspired hope and confidence; that Seward had become "virtually the ruler of the country", and George William Curtis thought Seward greater at that moment than ever before. [21]

All during late January and February, Seward continued his policy of playing for time, while he strove to damp the desires and stifle the impulses of ultras, both North and South. He told Frances in February that "the Republicans must give up their ultra sentiments as belonging to an issue on which they have already won the administration of the government", an observation that disturbed his wife. Various possible courses of action shaped in his restless mind, and he aired them to his friends and associates. There were times when he felt that it would be best to give the seceding states full opportunity to see that the new administration meant to deal with them fairly, and that secession meant for them only evils and hardships. Then, perhaps in three months or, at the latest, by the end of the year, Union sentiment in the seceded states would swell into an irresistible tide. Seward told Stœckl that, if Lincoln could not carry the Republican radicals with him, he should cut loose from them and save the country by rallying conservatives of all parties to his standard. This made the Russian sure that Seward was bent on compromise. [22] With an eye on the situation in the Old Dominion, where he was working hard to bolster Union sentiment, he twice intimated to a Virginia friend that, in substance, he favored the Crittenden Compromise. Again, his thought would veer in another direction. Why wouldn't it be a good thing if the Administration cashiered Major Anderson for moving from Moultrie to Sumter, he flung out one evening at an Adams dinner. It might be still better if Scott, too, were forced to resign. Then the North would get mad, and this would loosen the ties that bound northern Democrats and the great cities to the South. Screw up the North to a war pitch and the South would learn manners. Foreign policy as a means of ending the internal crisis attracted him. Twice he told Rudolf Schleiden, Minister Resident from Bremen, that he would welcome war with England, France, or Spain, for it would unite the country in a burst

20 RTL, Seward to Lincoln, Jan. 15, 1861; Adams, "Diary", Jan. 15, 1861; Seward, F. W., *Seward,* II, 496-497.

21 Adams, H., *op. et loc. cit.*, XLIII, 678, 680; Cary, Edw., *George William Curtis* (Boston and N. Y., 1894), 141.

22 Central Archives. Moscow. Russia. For Aff. 49. Stœckl à Gortchakoff, Feb. 2, 1861. "Il ne néglige rien pour arriver à un compromis afin de retenir dans l'Union les Etats à esclaves des frontières et se servir plus tard de leur intermédiaire pour ramener dans la Confédération les Etats qui ont déjà sécédé."

of patriotic fervor, and he informed Lord Lyons that he could unite America by a foreign war, if foreign governments interfered to protect their commercial interests. The British Minister, who saw him a number of times that winter, thought that as Secretary of State he would be apt to adopt a violent anti-British policy so as "to divert the public excitement to a foreign quarrel". [23]

When the secessionist tide appeared to ebb, Seward's spirits were high. Then a spate of bad news would make him despondent. At the end of January, smarting under criticism from radical antislavery sources, he told Weed that he thought he would resign his seat in the Senate. He needed rest, and the animosities aroused by the radicals would render difficult his position in the State Department. Weed put an end to this idea by replying that the New York legislature was an uncertain quantity and might well elect Greeley to fill out Seward's unexpired term. [24]

Moderation, but not submission, was Seward's watchword. On January 27 he told Lincoln that he felt the proper policy was to continue collecting the revenues at southern ports and to regain the forts taken over by the Confederates, at the same time preparing to defend Washington against any attack. Four days later he made a speech in the Senate that was a mixture of conciliation and threat of war. Kansas had been admitted as a free state the day before. Seward noted that a considerable portion of the remaining one million miles of territory had a slave code, but that there were just twenty-four slaves in all that area. Slavery extension in the United States had ceased to be a practical question. He wished to consider every possible solution of the present crisis, including a constitutional convention, but if all efforts proved fruitless and the Union had to be upheld by force of arms, he had advised others and was himself ready to "stand in the breach, and stand with it or perish with it".

When Seward finished, Senator Mason charged him with supporting a war policy in order to maintain a Union that was no longer in existence. The Union was still in being, Seward replied. Some had departed from the Senate chamber, but others would take their places. If there was treason, he would fight to put it down. [25]

[23] Lutz, R. H., "Rudolf Schleiden and the Visit to Richmond, April 25, 1861," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1915), 210; Lord Newton, *Lord Lyons, A Record of British Diplomacy* (2 vols., London, 1913), I, 30; Adams, E. D., *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (2 vols., N. Y., 1925), I, 60.

[24] *British Sessional Papers*, 1861, LXII, Lord Lyons to Lord Russell, Feb. 4, 1861; Ford, ed., *Letters of Henry Adams*, 73-74, 87; *Overland Monthly*, XVIII (Nov., 1891), 465-471, "Gwin and Seward. A Secret Chapter in Antebellum History"; Bancroft, *op. cit.*, II, 32; Lutz, *op. et loc. cit.*, 210; WP, Seward to Weed, Jan. 30, 1861; SP, Weed to Seward, Feb. 3, 1861.

[25] RTL, Seward to Lincoln, Jan. 27, 1861; *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 657-660.

Seward was one of the promoters of the Peace Convention, summoned at the initiative of Virginia, which met in Washington during February and in which the border states were powerfully represented. It had peace-keeping value, he felt, even though it made no real progress toward settling the crisis. Henry Adams declared that Seward kept it going all through February because the Union men in Virginia and the other border states were of the opinion that no further steps toward disunion would be taken before its deliberations were completed. At the same time, through James Barbour and other prominent Virginians, Seward kept inspiriting the Unionists in the Old Dominion who were fighting a bitter battle with the secessionists. When the Peace Conference proposals, protecting slavery where it existed in almost every possible way, were brought in by a Senate committee as a thirteenth amendment to the Constitution, he and Lyman Trumbull, being on the committee, submitted a minority report in favor of a convention. This, said the Virginia *Sentinel*, was "nothingness whittled down to a point", and something of a betrayal of Seward's Virginia friends. [26]

What was the significance of Seward's role during that critical winter ? More than any other man, for Lincoln's public attitude from November to March was, as Professor Randall puts it, one of "studied reticence", Seward acted as the leader of his party. His cool, moderate, pragmatic policy was, in essence, a time-saving device. He would probably have been willing to leave the Southwest open to slavery, if that would placate the South, but there is no evidence that he was ready at any time to abandon the fundamental principle of the Republican party and leave the way clear for the expansion of slavery into Cuba, or Mexico, or Central America. Even so, his attitude aggravated extremists like Joshua Giddings and Charles Sumner. "God damn you, Seward", said a Senator to him one day, "you've betrayed your principles and your party; we've followed your lead long enough." [27]

Seward talked too much, especially when exhilarated by wine or brandy, and sometimes the ideas he threw out bred suspicion as to his designs. It is also true that he greatly underestimated the force and stamina of the secession movement. But it is equally certain that his "bridge-building", as he called it, played a significant part in keeping Virginia and the other border slave states in the Union during those critical months.

[26] Gunderson, R. G., *Old Gentlemen's Convention* (Madison, 1961), 94-95; Adams, "Diary", Feb. 4, 19, 1861; SP, Jas. Barbour to Seward, Feb. 8, 1861; Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 503-504; Adams, H., *op. et loc. cit.*, XLIII, 680-681; Gunderson, R. G., "Letters from the Washington Peace Conference", *Journal of Southern History*, XVII (Aug., 1951), 386-389.

[27] Adams, "Diary", Feb. 16, 21, 1861; Andrew Papers, C. F. Adams, Jr. to J. A. Andrew, Feb. 22, 1861; Adams, H., *op. et loc. cit.*, XLIII, 682, 684.

While Seward took the lead in formulating Washington policy toward the secessionists he was also revolving in his mind plans for the Cabinet. He forwarded to Lincoln a number of suggestions — Adams for the Treasury, Frémont for the War Department, and no less than five southerners for whom he did not venture to designate places. Lincoln, who had his own ideas about his official family, evinced interest in only one of these, John A. Gilmer of North Carolina, but this Unionist and close friend of the New Yorker bowed out of the picture. Seward urged an early choice of the Secretaries of War and Navy, but Lincoln did not want to make his final selections for those posts until he had exhausted his efforts to find suitable men from the South for Cabinet positions. Seward wanted a post for Cameron but, beyond expressing high regard for the Pennsylvanian and dread of the hostility of Cameron's friends if he were rebuffed, let Weed do the manoeuvring for the Great Winnebago Chief.

The Seward-Weed and Greeley-Bryant factions in New York State engaged in furious contentions over the Cabinet, but Seward as was his wont left such operations mainly to Weed. He wrote to the latter on January 21, "Mr. L. has undertaken his Cabinet without consulting me. For the present I shall be content to leave the responsibility on his own broad shoulders." [28]

Seward had suggestions for Lincoln on other than Cabinet appointments. He urged Lincoln to come to Washington early in February, saying that this would have a reassuring effect on the country, but Lincoln thought it unwise to appear before February 13, when the electoral vote was officially counted. When he did come, ten days after the count had been made, advices from Seward and General Scott concerning an assassination plot in Baltimore led him to take a night train through that city, a change of schedule that elicited a considerable amount of adverse comment.

Lincoln arrived in Washington at six o'clock on the morning of February 23,[29] and during the next few days Seward played the part of both friend and social secretary, taking the President-elect to the Capitol and introducing him to members of both houses, going with him to church, receiving and transmitting invitations and requests addressed to Lincoln, and arranging details for the inauguration.

Lincoln gave Seward a draft of his inaugural, asking for suggestions. Seward went over it carefully and made numerous comments, the general tendency of which was to soften its language toward the South. Lincoln

28 WP, Seward to Weed, Jan. 21, 1861; Ford, ed., *Letters of Henry Adams*, 78.

29 As to whether or not Seward met Lincoln at the station, see my "Seward and Lincoln: the Washington Depot Episode", The University of Rochester Library *Bulletin*, XX, No. 3 (Spring, 1965), 33-34.

adopted some of these, rejected others. The final paragraph, beginning "I am loath to close. We are not enemies but friends", was Seward's in thought and in the figures of speech, but Lincoln gave it a simplicity and a poetic quality lacking in Seward's draft. This may have been what prompted the New Yorker to remark to Adams that the President had "a curious vein of sentiment running through his thought which is his most valuable mental attribute".[30]

About ten o'clock on the morning of inauguration day, two or three hundred New Yorkers who had come to Washington for the inauguration gathered in front of Seward's home on F Street in tribute to their Senator. He spoke to them briefly, thanking them for this demonstration of affection, telling them that he had tried to be faithful to their trust, and finishing with a tribute to Lincoln, under whose conciliatory administration the nation would be restored to unity.[31] Then he went to the inauguration, and later attended the inaugural ball, which at his suggestion was called the "Union Ball, in honor of the Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln". He had helped to organize this festivity. His daughter-in-law, Anna Seward, was on his arm, a lady presented him with an elegant bouquet, and memory must have taken him back to the early days when as a rising young lawyer he had helped to manage dances in Auburn. On the surface all seemed harmony, but two days before he had asked to be relieved from serving in the State Department.

During February the struggle over the Cabinet had reached a feverish pitch. The anti-Seward forces were determined to put Chase in the Cabinet and, if possible, get Seward out of it, while Weed and other pro-Seward elements fought for the inclusion of Adams and Henry Winter Davis of Maryland, and the exclusion of Chase and Welles and Blair. As the month drew to its close, it became apparent that the Sewardites were in for a number of disappointments. Weed, after conferring with Lincoln in New York, warned Seward that the conference had been unsatisfactory, and a week later, at a dinner for Lincoln at Willard's, Seward told Adams that all was not well. Despite pressure, the President-elect was determined to have both Seward and Chase in his official family and he had also decided to include Welles and Blair, thus eliminating Adams and Henry Winter Davis. It was to be a "compound Cabinet", as Seward called it, one containing both Old Whigs and Old Democrats, some favoring and some opposing concessions to the South. Seward doubted that it would be viable; furthermore, a letter to the New York *Evening Post* which was obviously inspired by him and which was published just after Lincoln reached Washington,

[30] Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 511-512; SP, Wm. Hunter to Seward, Feb. 27, 1861, Seward to Lincoln, Feb. 24, 1861 (p. d.), Anna Seward to F. A. Seward, Feb. 28, 1861; Basler, *Works*, IV, 249-271; Adams, C. F., Jr., *Autobiography*, 96.
[31] Seward, *Works*, IV, 692.

showed his deep sense of frustration because of the intense abolitionist opposition to his efforts for conciliation, and because, in seeking to develop these efforts, he had not had Lincoln's support.[32] When, on March 2, he asked "leave to withdraw", he was attempting to win the battle over the Cabinet and at the same time force Lincoln's acceptance of his leadership in devising policy.

Seward and his friends promptly spread the news of this action, doubtless as a means of bringing additional pressure on the President-elect. Had the New Yorker carried through, it would have been a heavy blow to the new administration, but Lincoln was not going to let Seward "take the first trick". On the morning of March 4, he asked Seward to "countermand the withdrawal". After the inauguration ceremonies the two men had a long and confidential talk. No record of that conversation remains, but there is some evidence that they discussed the possibility of Seward's being Minister to England, and that Lincoln mentioned the name of William L. Dayton of New Jersey as his second choice for the State Department. On the following day Seward withdrew his resignation. He told his wife that he had done so because he "did not dare to go home or to England and leave the country to chance".

Many of Seward's friends regretted his decision but Weed thought he had chosen wisely, though he might be driven out by the voracity of his colleagues for the spoils. The Albany boss declared that Lincoln had begged Seward to remain, giving him to understand that whatever others might say or do, they two would not disagree. Lincoln doubtless put his request tactfully, but the significant thing was that Seward accepted the concept of a balanced Cabinet.

Lincoln had, indeed, taken the first trick,[33] but there remained one consoling thought for the still ambitious New Yorker. As Senator, he had brought one President under his spell. It seemed more than likely that he could repeat that performance with this railsplitter who, by a stroke of chance, had become President of the United States.

[32] New York *Times*, Feb. 25, 1861, which reproduces the letter to the *Evening Post*; New York *Tribune*, Feb. 26, 27, 1861.

[33] SP, Weed to Seward, Feb. 21, March 7, 1861; Adams, "Diary", Feb. 28, 1861; RTL, Seward to Lincoln, March 2, 1861; Basler, *Works*, IV, March 4, 1861; Welles, *Diary*, II, 391-392; Baringer, W. E., *A House Dividing* (Springfield, 1945), 311-329; Carman and Luthin, *op. cit.*, 48-51; Seward, F. W., *Seward*, II, 518, Seward to his wife, March 8, 1861; Bigelow, "Diary", March 27, 1861.