From John A. Campbell, Reminiscences

"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 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

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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.'[1]

"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 the conference, and the report of

[1] 2 Davis' Rise and Downfall,612-618. Mr.Francis P.Blair was the only person from Mr.Lincoln quoted by Mr.Davis.

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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

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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 form with other States, this amendment will be defeated.

"I append to this statement

"(1) A letter addressed to Mr.Hunter.

(2) A memorandum of the conference at Hampton Roads.

(3) A copy of the report made to the President of the Confederate States" (Campbell's Reminiscences, pp.3-8).

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(2) Memorandum of the Conversation at the Conference in Hampton Roads.

The conference was opened by some conversation between Mr. Stevens and President Lincoln relative to their connection as members of a committee or association to promote the election of General Taylor as President in 1848.

The composition of the association, the fate of different members (Truman Smith and Mr. Toombs and others)- the time that the parties had served in Congress together, when Mr. Hunter and Mr. Seward became members of the Senate, and other personal incidents were alluded to.

After this the parties approached the subject of the conference.

At a very early stage in the conversation Mr. Lincoln announced with some emphasis that until the National authority be recognized within the Confederate States, that no consideration of any other terms or conditions could take place.

Mr. Stephens then suggested if there might not be some plan devised by which that question could be adjourned, and to let its settlement await the calm that would occur in the passions and irritations that the war had created. That it was important to divert the public mind from the present quarrel to some matters to which the parties had a common feeling and interest, and mentioned the conditions of Mexico as affording such an opportunity. Mr.

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Lincoln answered that the settlement of the existing difficulties was of supreme importance, and that he was not disposed to entertain any proposition for an armistice or cessation of hostilities until they were determined by the re-establishment of the National authority over the United States- that he had considered the question of an armistice fully- he would not consent to a proposition of the kind.

Mr.Campbell asked in what manner was reconstruction to be effected, supposing that the Confederate authorities were consenting to it?

Mr.Seward requested that the answer to this question might be deferred until Mr.Stevens could develop his ideas more fully as they had a philosophical basis. He had proposed to divert the mind from the existing troubles.

Mr.Stephens then proceeded at some length to express his opinions upon the so-called Monroe doctrine and his assent to it. That the establishment of an empire in Mexico was in hostility to that doctrine, and was offence against the Confederate States as much as against the United States. That he was favorable to the appropriation of the whole of the North American continent by the States of the two Confederacies, and exclude foreigners from a control over it. That there might be a union of power for that object, and in the course of that union fraternal feelings would arise and a settlement might be acceptably made. That the conquest of Mexico would introduce a new element and would require modifications of the existing system, etc.

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Mr.Seward interposed and made enquiries as to what would be the status quo during the period employed in the consummation of this enterprise? He referred to the managements concerning the tariffs- the government of the territory of the Confederate States in the occupation of the respective authorities- the case when two governments existed in the same State, one recognized by the United States, and the other by the Confederacy.

This was answered by statements that a military convention might be entered into which would provide for all these subjects.

That the troops on either side might be withdrawn into ascertained stations or ports, and that the duties collected might be arranged in the agreement, and that the government of the State recognized by the Confederacy should be supreme in the States. This branch of the discussion was closed by Mr.Lincoln who answered- that it could not be entertained. That there could be no war without the consent of Congress, and no treaty without the consent of the Senate of the United States. That he could make no treaty with the Confederate States because that would be a recognition of those States, and that this could not be done under any circumstances. That unless a settlement were made there would be danger that the quarrel would break out in the midst of the joint operations. That one party might unite with the common enemy to destroy the other. That he was determined to do nothing to suspend the operations for bringing the existing struggle to a close to attain any collateral end.

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Mr.Lincoln in this part of the conversation admitted that he had power to make a military convention, and that his arrangements under that might extend to settle several points mentioned, but others it could not. The question was renewed as to how the reconstruction was to be accomplished, supposing that the Confederate States were consenting?

He answered- by disbanding the troops and permitting the National authorities to resume their functions.

Mr.Seward said: That Mr.Lincoln could not express himself more aptly than he had done in his message to Congress in December last, and recited a portion of that message and specified the mode by saying that where there was a custom house, that officer would be appointed to collect duties, and appointments to the postoffice, courts, land offices, etc.,etc., should be made, and the laws submitted to. It was replied that the separation and the war had given rise to questions and interests which it would be necessary to provide for by stipulations, and to adjust before a restoration of former relations could be efficiently made. That the disbandment of the army was a delicate and difficult operation, and that time was needed for this. That confiscation Acts had been passed, and property sold under them, and the title would be affected by the facts existing when the war ended unless provided for by the stipulation.

The reply to this was, that as to all questions involving rights of property, the Courts could determine them, and that Con-

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gress would no doubt be liberal in making restitution of confiscated property, or by indemnity, after the passions that had been excited by the war had been composed.

Special reference was made to the effects of the President's Proclamation of Emancipation of slaves. He said that there were different opinions as to its operation. That some believed that it was not operative at all; others, that it operated only within the circle which had been occupied by the army, and others believed that it was operative everywhere in the States to which it applied. This this would be decided when cases arose: that he could not modify any part of it.

Mr.Seward produced the proposed amendment to the Constitution that had been adopted the 31st of January, and which had not been seen by the Commissioners.

He said: that these were passed as a war measure, and under the predominance of revolutionary passion, and if the war were ended, it was probable that the measures of war would be abandoned.

He alluded to the power of such passions in precipitating emancipation measures in Maryland and Missouri. That the most extreme views in a revolution were sure to acquire predominance, and that the more moderate parties were always overborne, as they were in those States.

Mr.Hunter spoke of the cruelty of such measures to the slave population, especially in localities in which the men had been removed. That the women and children were a tax upon their mas-

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ters, and if emancipated, would be helpless and suffering.

To this Mr.Lincoln replied with a story, of a man who had planted potatoes for his hogs, and left them in the ground to be rooted for; the ground froze, but the master said the hogs must root nevertheless.

Mr.Seward was asked if he supposed the slavery agitation would end with emancipation? He assented that it was quite possible. Mr. Hunter enquired of Mr.Lincoln, if the State of Virginia were to return to the Union, would it be with her ancient limits? The answer to this was, that the question would have to be settled by other departments of the Government, but that, in his opinion, Western Virginia would remain as she is.

In the course of the conversation Mr.Hunter remarked that there had been numerous instances in which parties to contests, similar to this, had conferred through Commissioners, and had made agreements in reference to matters in dispute, and instanced the case of Charles I. and the Parliament of Great Britain. Mr.Lincoln replied, "all he knew of Clares I, was, that he lost his head." To another instance cited by Mr.Stephens in another connection, he expressed unfeignedly his ignorance of history, and referred him to Mr.Seward, for that kind of discussion. In conclusion Mr.Hunter summed up what seemed to be the result of the interview.

That there would be no arrangement by treaty netween the Confederate States and the United States, or any agreements between them. That there was nothing left for them, but unconditional

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submission. Mr.Seward remarked that they had not used the word submission or any word that implied humiliation to the States, and begged that it should not be noted. Mr.Lincoln, in the course of his remarks, had said, that the laws relative to confiscation and pains and penalties, had left the matter in his hands, and that he could express himself as freely as to them. That he would say, that the power granted to him would be very liberally exerted. That he could not answer what Congress would do, as to the admission of members of Congress. That it was their business to decide upon that, and that they had rejected members who, in his opinion, ought to have been admitted. Reference was made to Mr.Blair. It was said by Mr.Lincoln, that doubtless the old man meant well, but that he had given him no authority to make any proposition or statement to any one. That he had stopped him from proceeding when he commenced to tell him of his business in Richmond.

Mr.Hunter stated that in candor he should say that upon the subject of Mexico, there was a diversity of opinion in the Confederate States, and that it was not probable that any arrangement could be made for her invasion without much opposition.

Mr.Seward had evidently encouraged Mr.Stephens in his remarks upon the general subject, and sympathized apparently in his general views, and represented that there was a very strong feeling in the Northern States on this subject. He or Mr.Lincoln had remarked that there never was a question upon which the Northern mind seemed to be more harmonious.

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Upon the observation of Mr.Hunter before stated, they qualified what had been previously said on that subject, and stated that there was a strong feeling in the North, that the affairs in Mexico were not right, and that something ought to be done.

Mr.Seward remarked that their foreign relations were complicated, and that the feeling of the United States was as strong against England as against France. That they were in the situation that they were in, prior to the war of 1812. With a cause of war against both nations, and uncertain against which to proceed. That it might be, that they would be decided by the ancient grudge against Great Britain.

I have stated the import of the conference generally, without introducing what was said by the different members of the commission, except when their remarks were direct and pointed to some particular subject.

My own purpose was to ascertain, if possible, the precise views of Messrs.Lincoln and Seward, as to the manner in which reconstruction would be effected, and the rights that would be secured to the Southern States in the event that one should take place.

I expressed the opinion that an agreement to go upon an enterprise against Mexico, leaving the strongholds of the Confederacy in the hands of the enemy, would lead inevitably to reconstruction. Mr.Hunter expressed the opinion that it might lead to independence with a close alliance, sufficient to arrange satisfactorily all questions of trade and intercourse, and for defence against foreign aggression.

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Both agreed that in the present temper of both nations, that a re-union would not be profitable to either, and should not be desired by either. Mr.Seward at one time said, that the Northern States were weary of war, and would be willing to pay what they would probably be required to pay on account of its continuance, but did not explain himself further on this subject.

Mr.Lincoln stated that he regarded the North to be as much responsible for slavery as the South, and that he would be rejoiced to be taxed on his little property for indemnities to the masters of slaves. Mr.Seward remarked that the North had already paid on that account.

These observations were incidently made and did not seem to have any reference to the general subject. They were not intended apparently as the ground of any proposition.

Mr.Stephens requested President Lincoln to reconsider his conclusions upon the subject of a suspension of hostilities.

Mr.Lincoln replied that he would reconsider it as asked, but as at present advised he could not promise any consent to such a proposal: that he had maturely considered of the plan, and determined that it could not be done.

At the commencement of the conference, it was understood that it was to be free and open, that none of the parties were to be held to anything that was said, and that the whole was to be in confidence.

(Signed) J.A.Campbell.

February,1865.

(Campbell's Reminiscences,pp.11-17)

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The report made to the President of the Confederate States by the commissioners was received with expressions of surprise in Richmond,- and then of indignation, disdain, denunciation, defiance. A mass meeting was held within a few days in one of the churches at mid-day where all of these expressions were echoed. The President, Secretary of State, and prominent Congressmen participating in the meeting. The public feelings were excited and pledges were given that the war would be continued to the last extremity. The public hope was encouraged and stimulated; but this was of short duration. The march of events had become quick and their progress subdual. The army of General Sherman had crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina, and the cities and towns of Branchville, Charleston, Columbia, Cheraw, Fayetteville and Wilmington were captured and marauded. Sheridan completed another raid north of the James River, and the James River Canal and other works were dilapidated, and his cavalry rejoined the Army of the Potomac.

The Army of the Potomac which had reached the James River several months before with so much of difficulty and such enormous losses, had been recruited so as to number more than it had been at any time before. It had every equipment, and all supports and supplies which could impart strength or infuse confidence of success. The Army of Northern Virginia at this date was destitute of much which was important, even to the ordinary support of an army upon which no responsibility rests, or from which no arduous service is

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expected. During the autumn of 1864, the hospitals, workshops, factories, plantations; the rolls of exempts, and of men detailed, were diligently examined to find persons to perform military duty without accomplishing any effective result. At the commencement of 1865, there was no connection between the government in Richmond and the Trans-Mississippi department; the defeat of the army at Nashville had opened the West and the South-west to invasion in every part; Sherman's army had devastated Georgia, and all the railroad communications in the South and South-west. The war was on the part of the Confederates limited to the defence of Richmond and its dependencies. The army of General Sherman was moving toward Richmond, and another army was moving from Wilmington.

The war had so diminished the resources of the Confederacy to recruit their armies was not practicable. A Northern report informs us that the Confederate dead amounted to 133,821 men killed in battle or who had died in hospital; the prisoners paroled on the field amounted to 248,599. There were in Northern prisons soldiers able to supply three armies as large as the Army of Northern Virginia. The Army of Northern Virginia after January, 1865, could not obtain recruits west of the Savannah river. At that date the United States had more of colored troops enlisted than the Confederate States had in the field in Virginia and the Carolinas. The state of the Commissariat had been a subject of anxiety during all of the war. Congress did not, until the month of March, 1865, pass any law to take possession and control of the the railroads.

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The blockade during the first years of the war was easily evaded. The reports of a few cases in the English law reports show that the profits were marvellous. One vessel (the Robert E. Lee) in a few months saved the Confederate States about $30,000,000 of their currency.

Finally the blockade was complete. The Confederacy suffered because of the inferiority of arms, munition, clothing, medicines, and hospital stores, and other necessaries. The destruction of animals impaired the cavalry and artillery service. There was, in my opinion, full justification for the opinion that peace on the precise terms offered at the Hampton Roads Conference, if none better could be obtained, should have been accepted. The precise grounds assumed by the executive department was that nothing could be done on the basis disclosed in the report for want of any authority on the part of the Confederate administration. A convention of the States could not be assembled by any means within the reach of the Government of the Confederacy at this period.

Without any consultation with the Secretary of War (General John C.Breckenridge), I addressed to him a letter dated 5th March, 1865, after hearing from the deputation or committee of Senators the conclusion of the President. The Committee was composed of Messes. Orr, Hunter, Barnwell, and W.A.Graham- two senators from South Carolina, one from Virginia, and one from North Carolina. These were all men of conspicuous ability and character. A copy of this letter I have submitted attached to this paper. With the

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letter addressed to the Secretary of War there was evidence of the entire exhaustion of the Treasury department, and a copy of the memoranda of the Hampton Roads Conference (Campbell's Reminiscences, pp.19-22).

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Richmond was evacuated the 2d of April, and was captured on the 3d of April. I informed the Secretary of War that I should not leave Richmond, and that I should take an opportunity to see President Lincoln on the subject of peace and would be glad to have an authority to do so, but that I would do so if an occasion arose. President Lincoln came to the city on the 4th of April, in less than forty-eight hours from the departure of the President and his Cabinet. Richmond had experienced a great calamity from a conflagration. I represented the conditions to him and requested that no requisitions on the inhabitants be made of restraint of any sort save as to police and preservation of order; not to exact oaths, interfere with churches, &c. He assented to this. The General Weitzel and Military Governor Shepley cordially assenting.

On the following day I visited him on the Malvern gunboat on which he had come into Richmond upon the 4th. He had prepared a paper which he commented on as he read each clause. The paper was not signed nor dated. This paper he handed to me, and on the 13th of April I returned it to General Ord by direction of the President. I retained a copy as I informed that General I should do. This is a copy (Campbell's Reminiscences, pp.38-9).

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On the 13th of April, the day before the assassination of the President, General Ord addressed me a letter, stating that by the instructions of the President he wrote, that since the paper was written on the subject of reconvening the gentlemen who, under the insurrectionary government as the Legislature of Virginia, the object had in view and the convention of such gentlemen is unnecessary; he wishes the paper withdrawn. I sent to General Ord the only paper I had ever received, being that I have copied.

After the President had read and expounded the paper he delivered it to me. It was not dated nor signed, nor directed to me or other person. When he had concluded this he said he had been meditating a plan, but had come to no conclusion upon the subject; that he should not do so till he returned to City Point. That if he was satisfied he would write to General Weitzell.

This had reference to a convention of the Legislature which had been sitting during the preceding winter, and recognized the Confederate States. The President said: "He had a government in Virginia- the Pierrepont government. It had but a small margin, and he was not disposed to increase it. He wanted the very Legislature which had been sitting 'up wonder' - pointing to the capitol- to come together and to vote to restore Virginia to the Union, and recall her solaiers from the Confederate army."

The suggestion came from the President, and its object was plainly stated. As the suggestion had some tolerance for the existing State governments, I was pleased to hear it, and strongly supported the suggestion. I told him 'there had been discussions

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during the winter in respect to both peace and union; none could be found to make peace. Each man would now make his own peace." My opinion has been that his assassination was a very great calamity, and that this, among other calamities, would most probably have been averted had there been sober-minded views on the part of those charged with administration of affairs in the Confederate States.

It appears that Edwin M.Stanton was examined in relation to this intercourse before the committee appointed for the examination of charges preferred against President Johnson in 1867. He testified before that committee, "that President Lincoln went to the city of Richmond after its capture and some intercourse took place between him and Judge Campbell, formerly of the Supreme Court of the United States, and General Weitzell, which resulted in the call of the Rebel Legislature to Richmond. Mr.Lincoln on his return from Richmond reconsidered that matter."

The policy of undertaking to restore the government through the medium of rebel organizations was very much opposed by many persons, and very strongly and vehemently opposed by myself. I had several earnest conversations with Mr.Lincoln on the subject, and advised that any effort to reorganize the government should be under the Federal Government solely, and to treat the rebel organizations as null and void.

On the day preceding his death, a conversation took place between him, the Attorney-General and myself, upon the subject at

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the Executive mansion.

An hour or two afterwards, and about the middle of the afternoon, Mr.Lincoln came over to the War Department and renewed the conversation. After I had repeated my reasons against allowing the Rebel Legislatures to assemble, or the Rebel authorities to have any participation in the business of reorganization, he sat down at my desk and wrote a telegram to General Weitzell and handed it to me. "There," said he, "I think this will suit you." I told him no, it did not go far enough. That the members of the Legislature would probably come to Richmond; that General Weitzell ought to be directed to prohibit their assembling. He took up his pen again and made that addition to the telegram and signed it. He handed it to me. I said it was exactly right. It was transmitted immediately to General Weitzell, and was the last act ever performed by Mr.Lincoln in the War Department. General Ord had succeeded General Weitzell and communicated the intelligence to me. There was no sort of disappointment nor surprise at this proceeding. It was perfectly obvious that the dissolution of the Confederate States and government would immediately ensue the capture of the army (Campbell's Reminiscences pp.41-44).

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