

From *My Diary North and South*, volume I (1863).

CELEBRATION IN CHARLESTON:
SOUTH CAROLINA, APRIL 1861

William Howard Russell:
from My Diary North and South

An Anglo-Irish correspondent for *The Times* of London, William Howard Russell had become famous for his war reporting from the Crimea and India. He landed at New York on March 16, 1861, to observe the secession crisis firsthand, and would remain in America until April 9, 1862. In *My Diary North and South* (1863), he described his visit to Charleston on April 17, three days after the surrender of Fort Sumter.

April 17th.—The streets of Charleston present some such aspect as those of Paris in the last revolution. Crowds of armed men singing and promenading the streets. The battle-blood running through their veins—that hot oxygen which is called “the flush of victory” on the cheek; restaurants full, revelling in bar rooms, club-rooms crowded, orgies and carousings in tavern or private house, in tap-room, from cabaret—down narrow alleys, in the broad highway. Sumter has set them distraught; never was such a victory; never such brave lads; never such a fight. There are pamphlets already full of the incident. It is a bloodless Waterloo or Solferino.

After breakfast I went down to the quay, with a party of the General’s staff, to visit Fort Sumter. The senators and governors turned soldiers wore blue military caps, with “palmetto” trees embroidered thereon; blue frockcoats, with upright collars, and shoulder-straps edged with lace, and marked with two silver bars, to designate their rank of captain; gilt buttons, with the palmetto in relief; blue trowsers, with a gold-lace cord, and brass spurs—no straps. The day was sweltering, but a strong breeze blew in the harbour, and puffed the dust of Charleston, coating our clothes, and filling our eyes with powder. The streets were crowded with lanky lads, clanking spurs, and

sabres, with awkward squads marching to and fro, with drummers beating calls, and ruffles, and points of war; around them groups of grinning negroes delighted with the glare and glitter, a holiday, and a new idea for them—secession flags waving out of all the windows—little Irish boys shouting out, “Battle of Fort Sumter! New edishun!”—As we walked down towards the quay, where the steamer was lying, numerous traces of the unsettled state of men’s minds broke out in the hurried conversations of the various friends who stopped to speak for a few moments. “Well, governor, the old Union is gone at last!” “Have you heard what Abe is going to do?” “I don’t think Beauregard will have much more fighting for it. What do you think?” And so on. Our little Creole friend, by the bye, is popular beyond description. There are all kinds of doggerel rhymes in his honour—one with a refrain—

“With cannon and musket, with shell and petard,
We salute the North with our Beau-regard”—

is much in favour.

We passed through the market, where the stalls are kept by fat negresses and old “unkeys.” There is a sort of vulture or buzzard here, much encouraged as scavengers, and—but all the world has heard of the Charleston vultures—so we will leave them to their garbage. Near the quay, where the steamer was lying, there is a very fine building in white marble, which attracted our notice. It was unfinished, and immense blocks of the glistening stone destined for its completion, lay on the ground. “What is that?” I inquired. “Why, it’s a custom-house Uncle Sam was building for our benefit, but I don’t think he’ll ever raise a cent for his treasury out of it.” “Will you complete it?” “I should think not. We’ll lay on few duties; and what we want is free-trade, and no duties at all, except for public purposes. The Yankees have plundered us with their custom-houses and duties long enough.” An old gentleman here stopped us. “You will do me the greatest favour,” he said to one of our party who knew him, “if you will get me something to do for our glorious cause. Old as I am, I can carry a musket—not far, to be sure, but I can kill a Yankee if he comes near.” When he had gone, my friend told me the speaker was a man of fortune, two of whose sons were in camp at Morris’ Island,

but that he was suspected of Union sentiments, as he had a Northern wife, and hence his extreme vehemence and devotion.

There was a large crowd around the pier staring at the men in uniform on the boat, which was filled with bales of goods, commissariat stores, trusses of hay, and hampers, supplies for the volunteer army on Morris' Island. I was amused by the names of the various corps, "Tigers," "Lions," "Scorpions," "Palmetto Eagles," "Guards," of Pickens, Sumter, Marion, and of various other denominations, painted on the boxes. The original formation of these volunteers is in companies, and they know nothing of battalions or regiments. The tendency in volunteer outbursts is sometimes to gratify the greatest vanity of the greatest number. These companies do not muster more than fifty or sixty strong. Some were "dandies," and "swells," and affected to look down on their neighbours and comrades. Major Whiting told me there was difficulty in getting them to obey orders at first, as each man had an idea that he was as good an engineer as any body else, "and a good deal better, if it came to that." It was easy to perceive it was the old story of volunteer and regular in this little army.

As we got on deck, the major saw a number of rough, long-haired-looking fellows in coarse gray tunics, with pewter buttons and worsted braid lying on the hay-bales smoking their cigars. "Gentlemen," quoth he, very courteously, "You'll oblige me by not smoking over the hay. There's powder below." "I don't believe we're going to burn the hay this time, kernel," was the reply, "and anyway, we'll put it out afore it reaches the 'bustibles," and they went on smoking. The major grumbled, and worse, and drew off.

Among the passengers were some brethren of mine belonging to the New York and local papers. I saw a short time afterwards a description of the trip by one of these gentlemen, in which he described it as an affair got up specially for himself, probably in order to avenge himself on his military persecutors, for he had complained to me the evening before, that the chief of General Beauregard's staff told him to go to —, when he applied at head-quarters for some information. I found from the tone and looks of my friends, that these literary gentlemen were received with great disfavour, and Major Whiting, who is a bibliomaniac, and has a very great liking for

the best English writers, could not conceal his repugnance and antipathy to my unfortunate confrères. "If I had my way, I would fling them into the water; but the General has given them orders to come on board. It is these fellows who have brought all this trouble on our country."

The traces of dislike of the freedom of the press, which I, to my astonishment, discovered in the North, are broader and deeper in the South, and they are not accompanied by the signs of dread of its power which exist in New York, where men speak of the chiefs of the most notorious journals very much as people in Italian cities of past time might have talked of the most infamous bravo or the chief of some band of assassins. Whiting comforted himself by the reflection that they would soon have their fingers in a vice, and then pulling out a ragged little sheet, turned suddenly on the representative thereof, and proceeded to give the most unqualified contradiction to most of the statements contained in "the full and accurate particulars of the Bombardment and Fall of Fort Sumter," in the said journal, which the person in question listened to with becoming meekness and contrition. "If I knew who wrote it," said the major, "I'd make him eat it."

I was presented to many judges, colonels, and others of the mass of society on board, and, "after compliments," as the Orientals say, I was generally asked, in the first place, what I thought of the capture of Sumter, and in the second, what England would do when the news reached the other side. Already the Carolinians regard the Northern States as an alien and detested enemy, and entertain, or profess, an immense affection for Great Britain.

When we had shipped all our passengers, nine-tenths of them in uniform, and a larger proportion engaged in chewing, the whistle blew, and the steamer sidled off from the quay into the yellowish muddy water of the Ashley River, which is a creek from the sea, with a streamlet running into the head waters some distance up.

The shore opposite Charleston is more than a mile distant, and is low and sandy, covered here and there with patches of brilliant vegetation, and long lines of trees. It is cut up with creeks, which divide it into islands, so that passages out to sea exist between some of them for light craft, though the naviga-

tion is perplexed and difficult. The city lies on a spur or promontory between the Ashley and the Cooper rivers, and the land behind it is divided in the same manner by similar creeks, and is sandy and light, bearing, nevertheless, very fine crops, and trees of magnificent vegetation. The steeples, the domes of public buildings, the rows of massive warehouses and cotton stores on the wharfs, and the bright colours of the houses, render the appearance of Charleston, as seen from the river front, rather imposing. From the mastheads of the few large vessels in harbour floated the Confederate flag. Looking to our right, the same standard was visible, waving on the low, white parapets of the earthworks which had been engaged in reducing Sumter.

That much-talked-of fortress lay some two miles ahead of us now, rising up out of the water near the middle of the passage out to sea between James' Island and Sullivan's Island. It struck me at first as being like one of the smaller forts off Cronstadt, but a closer inspection very much diminished its importance; the material is brick, not stone, and the size of the place is exaggerated by the low back ground, and by contrast with the sea-line. The land contracts on both sides opposite the fort, a projection of Morris' Island, called "Cumming's point," running out on the left. There is a similar promontory from Sullivan's Island, on which is erected Fort Moultrie, on the right from the sea entrance. Castle Pinckney, which stands on a small island at the exit of the Cooper River, is a place of no importance, and it was too far from Sumter to take any in the bombardment: the same remarks apply to Fort Johnson on James' Island, on the right bank of the Ashley River below Charleston. The works which did the mischief were the batteries of sand on Morris' Island, at Cumming's Point, and Fort Moultrie. The floating battery, covered with railroad-iron, lay a long way off, and could not have contributed much to the result.

As we approached Morris' Island, which is an accumulation of sand covered with mounds of the same material, on which there is a scanty vegetation alternating with salt-water marshes, we could perceive a few tents in the distance among the sand-hills. The sand-bag batteries, and an ugly black parapet, with guns peering through port-holes as if from a ship's side, lay

before us. Around them men were swarming like ants, and a crowd in uniform were gathered on the beach to receive us as we landed from the boat of the steamer, all eager for news, and provisions, and newspapers, of which an immense flight immediately fell upon them. A guard with bayonets crossed in a very odd sort of manner, prevented any unauthorised persons from landing. They wore the universal coarse gray jacket and trousers, with worsted braid and yellow facings, uncouth caps, lead buttons stamped with the palmetto-tree. Their unbronzed fire-locks were covered with rust. The soldiers lounging about were mostly tall, well-grown men, young and old, some with the air of gentlemen; others coarse, long-haired fellows, without any semblance of military bearing, but full of fight, and burning with enthusiasm, not unaided, in some instances, by coarser stimulus.

The day was exceedingly warm and unpleasant, the hot wind blew the fine white sand into our faces, and wafted it in minute clouds inside eyelids, nostrils, and clothing; but it was necessary to visit the batteries, so on we trudged into one and out of another, walked up parapets, examined profiles, looked along guns, and did everything that could be required of us. The result of the examination was to establish in my mind the conviction, that if the commander of Sumter had been allowed to open his guns on the island, the first time he saw an indication of throwing up a battery against him, he could have saved his fort. Moultrie, in its original state, on the opposite side, could have been readily demolished by Sumter. The design of the works was better than their execution—the sand-bags were rotten, the sand not properly revetted or banked up, and the traverses imperfectly constructed. The barbette guns of the fort looked into many of the embrasures, and commanded them.

The whole of the island was full of life and excitement. Officers were galloping about as if on a field-day or in action. Commissariat carts were toiling to and fro between the beach and the camps, and sounds of laughter and revelling came from the tents. These were pitched without order, and were of all shapes, hues, and sizes, many being disfigured by rude charcoal drawings outside, and inscriptions such as "The Live Tigers," "Rattlesnake's-hole," "Yankee Smashers," &c. The

vicinity of the camps was in an intolerable state, and on calling the attention of the medical officer who was with me, to the danger arising from such a condition of things, he said with a sigh, "I know it all. But we can do nothing. Remember they're all volunteers, and do just as they please."

In every tent was hospitality, and a hearty welcome to all comers. Cases of champagne and claret, French pâtés, and the like, were piled outside the canvas walls, when there was no room for them inside. In the middle of these excited gatherings I felt like a man in the full possession of his senses coming in late to a wine party. "Won't you drink with me, sir, to the—(something awful)—of Lincoln and all Yankees?" "No! if you'll be good enough to excuse me." "Well, I think you're the only Englishman who won't." Our Carolinians are very fine fellows, but a little given to the Bobadil style—hectoring after a cavalier fashion, which they fondly believe to be theirs by hereditary right. They assume that the British crown rests on a cotton bale, as the Lord Chancellor sits on a pack of wool.

In one long tent there was a party of roistering young men, opening claret, and mixing "cup" in large buckets; whilst others were helping the servants to set out a table for a banquet to one of their generals. Such heat, tobacco-smoke, clamour, toasts, drinking, hand-shaking, vows of friendship! Many were the excuses made for the more demonstrative of the Edonian youths by their friends. "Tom is a little cut, sir; but he's a splendid fellow—he's worth half-a-million of dollars." This reference to a money standard of value was not unusual or perhaps unnatural, but it was made repeatedly; and I was told wonderful tales of the riches of men who were lounging round, dressed as privates, some of whom at that season, in years gone by, were looked for at the watering places as the great lions of American fashion. But Secession is the fashion here. Young ladies sing for it; old ladies pray for it; young men are dying to fight for it; old men are ready to demonstrate it. The founder of the school was St. Calhoun. Here his pupils carry out their teaching in thunder and fire. States' Rights are displayed after its legitimate teaching, and the Palmetto flag and the red bars of the Confederacy are its exposition. The utter contempt and loathing for the venerated Stars and Stripes, the abhorrence of the very words United States, the intense

hatred of the Yankee on the part of these people, cannot be conceived by anyone who has not seen them. I am more satisfied than ever that the Union can never be restored as it was, and that it has gone to pieces, never to be put together again, in the old shape, at all events by any power on earth.

After a long and tiresome promenade in the dust, heat, and fine sand, through the tents, our party returned to the beach, where we took boat, and pushed off for Fort Sumter. The Confederate flag rose above the walls. On near approach the marks of the shot against the *pain coupé*, and the embrasures near the salient were visible enough; but the damage done to the hard brickwork was trifling, except at the angles: the edges of the parapets were ragged and pock-marked, and the quay wall was rifted here and there by shot; but no injury of a kind to render the work untenable could be made out. The greatest damage inflicted was, no doubt, the burning of the barracks, which were culpably erected inside the fort, close to the flank wall facing Cumming's Point.

As the boat touched the quay of the fort, a tall, powerful-looking man came through the shattered gateway, and with uneven steps strode over the rubbish towards a skiff which was waiting to receive him, and into which he jumped and rowed off. Recognising one of my companions as he passed our boat, he suddenly stood up, and with a leap and a scramble tumbled in among us, to the imminent danger of upsetting the party. Our new friend was dressed in the blue frockcoat of a civilian, round which he had tied a red silk sash—his waistbelt supported a straight sword, something like those worn with Court dress. His muscular neck was surrounded with a loosely-fastened silk handkerchief; and wild masses of black hair, tinged with grey, fell from under a civilian's hat over his collar; his unstrapped trousers were gathered up high on his legs, displaying ample boots, garnished with formidable brass spurs. But his face was one not to be forgotten—a straight, broad brow, from which the hair rose up like the vegetation on a river bank, beetling black eyebrows—a mouth coarse and grim, yet full of power, a square jaw—a thick argumentative nose—a new growth of scrubby beard and moustache—these were relieved by eyes of wonderful depth and light, such as I never saw before but in the head of a wild beast. If you look some

day when the sun is not too bright into the eye of the Bengal tiger, in the Regent's Park, as the keeper is coming round, you will form some notion of the expression I mean. It was flashing, fierce, yet calm—with a well of fire burning behind and spouting through it, an eye pitiless in anger, which now and then sought to conceal its expression beneath half-closed lids, and then burst out with an angry glare, as if disdainingly concealment.

This was none other than Louis T. Wigfall, Colonel (then of his own creation) in the Confederate army, and Senator from Texas in the United States—a good type of the men whom the institutions of the country produce or throw off—a remarkable man, noted for his ready, natural eloquence; his exceeding ability as a quick, bitter debater; the acerbity of his taunts; and his readiness for personal encounter. To the last he stood in his place in the Senate at Washington, when nearly every other Southernman had seceded, lashing with a venomous and instant tongue, and covering with insults, ridicule, and abuse, such men as Mr. Chandler, of Michigan, and other Republicans: never missing a sitting of the House, and seeking out adversaries in the bar rooms or the gambling tables. The other day, when the fire against Sumter was at its height, and the fort, in flames, was reduced almost to silence, a small boat put off from the shore, and steered through the shot and the splashing waters right for the walls. It bore the colonel and a negro oarsman. Holding up a white handkerchief on the end of his sword, Wigfall landed on the quay, clambered through an embrasure, and presented himself before the astonished Federals with a proposal to surrender, quite unauthorised, and “on his own hook,” which led to the final capitulation of Major Anderson.

I am sorry to say, our distinguished friend had just been paying his respects *sans bornes* to Bacchus or Bourbon, for he was decidedly unsteady in his gait and thick in speech; but his head was quite clear, and he was determined I should know all about his exploit. Major Whiting desired to show me round the work, but he had no chance. “Here is where I got in,” quoth Colonel Wigfall. “I found a Yankee standing here by the traverse, out of the way of our shot. He was pretty well scared when he saw me, but I told him not to be alarmed, but to take

me to the officers. There they were, huddled up in that corner behind the brickwork, for our shells were tumbling into the yard, and bursting like,"—&c. (The Colonel used strong illustrations and strange expletives in narrative.) Major Whiting shook his military head, and said something uncivil to me, in private, in reference to volunteer colonels and the like, which gave him relief; whilst the martial Senator—I forgot to say that he has the name, particularly in the North, of having killed more than half a dozen men in duels—(I had an escape of being another)—conducted me through the casemates with uneven steps, stopping at every traverse to expatiate on some phase of his personal experiences, with his sword dangling between his legs, and spurs involved in rubbish and soldiers' blankets.

In my letter I described the real extent of the damage inflicted, and the state of the fort as I found it. At first the batteries thrown up by the Carolinians were so poor, that the United States' officers in the fort were mightily amused at them, and anticipated easy work in enfilading, ricocheting, and battering them to pieces, if they ever dared to open fire. One morning, however, Capt. Foster, to whom really belongs the credit of putting Sumter into a tolerable condition of defence with the most limited means, was unpleasantly surprised by seeing through his glass a new work in the best possible situation for attacking the place, growing up under the strenuous labours of a band of negroes. "I knew at once," he said, "the rascals had got an engineer at last." In fact, the Carolinians were actually talking of an escalade when the officers of the regular army, who had "seceded," came down and took the direction of affairs, which otherwise might have had very different results.

There was a working party of Volunteers clearing away the rubbish in the place. It was evident they were not accustomed to labour. And on asking why negroes were not employed, I was informed: "The niggers would blow us all up, they're so stupid; and the State would have to pay the owners for any of them who were killed and injured." "In one respect, then, white men are not so valuable as negroes?" "Yes, sir,—that's a fact."

Very few shell craters were visible in the terreplein; the military mischief, such as it was, showed most conspicuously on

the parapet platforms, over which shells had been burst as heavily as could be, to prevent the manning of the barbette guns. A very small affair, indeed, that shelling of Fort Sumter. And yet who can tell what may arise from it? "Well, sir," exclaimed one of my companions, "I thank God for it, if it's only because we are beginning to have a history for Europe. The universal Yankee nation swallowed us up."

Never did men plunge into unknown depth of peril and trouble more recklessly than these Carolinians. They fling themselves against the grim, black future, as the cavaliers under Rupert may have rushed against the grim, black Ironsides. Will they carry the image farther? Well! The exploration of Sumter was finished at last, not till we had visited the officers of the garrison, who lived in a windowless, shattered room, reached by a crumbling staircase, and who produced whiskey and crackers, many pleasant stories and boundless welcome. One young fellow grumbled about pay. He said: "I have not received a cent. since I came to Charleston for this business." But Major Whiting, some days afterwards, told me he had not got a dollar on account of his pay, though on leaving the United States' army he had abandoned nearly all his means of subsistence. These gentlemen were quite satisfied it would all be right eventually; and no one questioned the power or inclination of the Government, which had just been inaugurated under such strange auspices, to perpetuate its principles and reward its servants.

After a time our party went down to the boats, in which we were rowed to the steamer that lay waiting for us at Morris' Island. The original intention of the officers was to carry us over to Fort Moultrie, on the opposite side of the Channel, and to examine it and the floating iron battery; but it was too late to do so when we got off, and the steamer only ran across and swept around homewards by the other shore. Below, in the cabin, there was spread a lunch or quasi dinner; and the party of Senators, past and present, aides-de-camp, journalists, and flaneurs, were not indisposed to join it. For me there was only one circumstance which marred the pleasure of that agreeable reunion. Colonel and Senator Wigfall, who had not sobered himself by drinking deeply, in the plenitude of his exultation alluded to the assault on Senator Sumner as a type of

the manner in which the Southerners would deal with the Northerners generally, and cited it as a good exemplification of the fashion in which they would bear their "whipping." Thence, by a natural digression, he adverted to the inevitable consequences of the magnificent outburst of Southern indignation against the Yankees on all the nations of the world, and to the immediate action of England in the matter as soon as the news came. Suddenly reverting to Mr. Sumner, whose name he loaded with obloquy, he spoke of Lord Lyons in terms so coarse, that, forgetting the condition of the speaker, I resented the language applied to the English Minister, in a very unmistakable manner; and then rose and left the cabin. In a moment I was followed on deck by Senator Wigfall: his manner much calmer, his hair brushed back, his eye sparkling. There was nothing left to be desired in his apologies, which were repeated and energetic. We were joined by Mr. Manning, Major Whiting, and Senator Chesnut, and others, to whom I expressed my complete contentment with Mr. Wigfall's explanations. And so we returned to Charleston. The Colonel and Senator, however, did not desist from his attentions to the good—or bad—things below. It was a strange scene—these men, hot and red-handed in rebellion, with their lives on the cast, trifling and jesting, and carousing as if they had no care on earth—all excepting the gentlemen of the local press, who were assiduous in note and food taking. It was near nightfall before we set foot on the quay of Charleston. The city was indicated by the blaze of lights, and by the continual roll of drums, and the noisy music, and the yelling cheers which rose above its streets. As I walked towards the hotel, the evening drove of negroes, male and female, shuffling through the streets in all haste, in order to escape the patrol and the last peal of the curfew bell, swept by me; and as I passed the guard-house of the police, one of my friends pointed out the armed sentries pacing up and down before the porch, and the gleam of arms in the room inside. Further on, a squad of mounted horsemen, heavily armed, turned up a bye-street, and with jingling spurs and sabres disappeared in the dust and darkness. That is the horse patrol. They scour the country around the city, and meet at certain places during the night to see if the niggers are all quiet. Ah, Fuscus! these are signs of trouble.

“Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus
Non eget Mauri jaculis neque arcu,
Nec venenatis gravidâ sagittis,
Fusce, pharetrâ.”

But Fuscus is going to his club; a kindly, pleasant, chatty, card-playing, cocktail-consuming place. He nods proudly to an old white-woolled negro steward or head-waiter—a slave—as a proof which I cannot accept, with the curfew tolling in my ears, of the excellencies of the domestic institution. The club was filled with officers; one of them, Mr. Ransome Calhoun,* asked me what was the object which most struck me at Morris' Island; I tell him—as was indeed the case—that it was a letter copying-machine, a case of official stationery, and a box of Red Tape, lying on the beach, just landed and ready to grow with the strength of the young independence.

But listen! There is a great tumult, as of many voices coming up the street, heralded by blasts of music. It is a speech-making from the front of the hotel. Such an agitated, lively multitude! How they cheer the pale, frantic man, limber and dark-haired, with uplifted arms and clenched fists, who is perorating on the balcony! “What did he say?” “Who is he?” “Why it's he again!” “That's Roger Pryor—he says that if them Yankee trash don't listen to reason, and stand from under, we'll march to the North and dictate the terms of peace in Faneuil Hall! Yes, sir—and so we will, certa-i-n su-re!” “No matter, for all that; we have shown we can whip the Yankees whenever we meet them—at Washington or down here.” How much I heard of all this to-day—how much more this evening! The hotel as noisy as ever—more men in uniform arriving every few minutes, and the hall and passages crowded with tall, good-looking Carolinians.

*Since killed in a duel by Mr. Rhett.