A DIARY FROM DIXIE

MARY BOYKIN CHESNUT

EDITED BY BEN AMES WILLIAMS

With a Foreword by Edmund Wilson

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Foreword

In his brilliant study, Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War (1962), *Edmund Wilson discussed the work of writers involved in the sectional conflict. The following excerpt is from Wilson's chapter titled "Three Confederate Ladies," which discusses, in addition to the diary of Mary Boykin Chesnut, the Civil War memoirs of Kate Stone and Sarah Morgan.*

Publisher's Note

Mrs. James Chesnut, . . . whose journal has been published as *A Diary from Dixie,* . . . a woman of exceptional intelligence, was surrounded by all that the Confederacy could show of most cultivated and most distinguished. The father of Mary Chesnut's husband was a rich South Carolinian, who owned five square miles of plantations, but the son had studied law and gone into politics. Like his father, he had been educated at Princeton, and he had travelled with his wife in Europe. He had served in the United States Senate from 1858, stoutly defending slavery, and, in the autumn of 1860, even before the secession of his State, had been the first Southern senator to resign from the Senate. He had, the following year, taken part in the convention that drafted the ordinance of secession and in the Congress of the Confederate States that drafted their constitution. It was he who had been sent to Major Anderson to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter, and, as an aide with the rank of colonel on the staff of Jefferson Davis, he was close to the Confederate government all through the Civil War and was entrusted with many missions which brought him in touch with the military as well as with the political aspects of the conflict.

Mrs. Chesnut had thus the advantage of living much at the headquarters of the Confederacy, first in Montgomery, Alabama; then, when its capital was shifted, in Richmond, Virginia, where she had for her daily associates the Davises and the Lees, all sorts of incapacitated or visiting army officers — the "first families" of South Carolina and Virginia — and such literary men as the South had produced, the novelist William Gilmore Simms and the poet Paul Hamilton Hayne. Yet we are struck, as we read these two diaries, Miss Morgan's and Mrs. Chesnut's, as well as other Southern documents of the period, by the recurrence of the same family names. Sarah Morgan in Baton Rouge is related to and knows the same families as the Chesnuts in Richmond a thousand miles away. The world that we have here to deal with — the world of that fraction of the ruling class that is at all public-spirited and well-educated — is, as Olmsted says, extremely limited; and how far this element was from being capable of influencing the policy or saving the fortunes of the South may be seen in an appalling and a heartbreaking way in the chronicle of Mrs. Chesnut's diary.

This diary is an extraordinary document — in its informal department, a masterpiece; and on that account, one cannot do it justice by merely running through its record as we have done with that of Sarah Morgan. Mrs. Chesnut is a very clever woman, who knows something of Europe as well as of Washington and who has read a good deal of history as well as of other kinds of literature. Not only is she fully aware of the world-wide importance of the national crisis at one of the foci of which she finds herself; she has also, it would seem, a decided sense of the literary possibilities of her subject. The very rhythm of her opening pages at once puts us under the spell of a writer who is not merely jotting down her days but establishing, as a novelist does, an atmosphere, an emotional tone. A hundred and fifty thousand words of the four hundred thousand words that Mrs. Chesnut wrote were first published in 1904, and this book was read many years after by the late Ben Ames Williams, in preparation for a novel he was writing — *House Divided* — which was to deal with the Civil War. For his purposes, Mr. Williams, as he tells us, laid it heavily under contribution, and even introduced a character that was based on Mrs. Chesnut herself. It would seem to have been injudicious to attempt to exploit for fiction a work that is already a work of art; but Mr. Williams was not at that time in a position to appreciate fully how much a work of art it was. When his interest in Mrs. Chesnut led him to look up her original fifty notebooks, he discovered whole episodes,

including the important one of "Buck" Preston and General Hood, as well as elements of the social picture — the ignominies and cruelties of slavery — which the editors had suppressed; and he now tried to do the writer justice by bringing out, in 1949, a new edition of her diary twice as long as the original one. This still left a hundred thousand words unpublished, and the interest of the document as we know it suggests that it might be worth while eventually to print the whole text.

Mr. Williams, in thus cutting down this text, has perhaps, however, pointed it up, and his instincts as a writer of fiction may have led him, by pulling it together, to help the large canvas compose. Yet the diarist's own instinct is uncanny. Starting out with situations or relationships of which she cannot know the outcome, she takes advantage of the actual turn of events to develop them and round them out as if she were molding a novel. One of her most effective performances is her handling of the episode mentioned above — the affair of "Buck" Preston and General Hood. The teen-age belles of the South had sometimes incongruous nicknames. The elaborate chivalric gallantry of young gentlemanhood and young ladyhood was likely to have been preceded by a somewhat rough-and-tumble plantation childhood. Buck Preston had been given this nickname because one of her middle names was Buchanan (another beauty was known as "Boozer"). She was actually a lovely young girl, who had, Mrs. Chesnut tells us, "a mischievous gleam in her soft blue eyes; or are they gray, or brown, or black as night? I have seen them of every color varying with the mood of the moment." (Another Southern lady who knew the Prestons — Mrs. Burton Harrison, in her *Recollections Grave and Gay* — describes Buck and her two sisters as "like goddesses upon a heaven-kissing hill, tall and stately, with brilliant fresh complexions, altogether the embodiment of vigorous health.") Buck, Mrs. Chesnut says, was "the very sweetest woman I ever knew, had a knack of being fallen in love with at sight, and of never being fallen out of love with." But so many of her soldier lovers have been killed in battle or fatally wounded — "Ransom Calhoun, Bradly Warwick, Claude Gibson, the Notts," Mrs. Chesnut enumerates them — that people are beginning to feel that it is bad luck to fall in love with her. Colonel "Sam" Hood from Kentucky (his real name was John Bell Hood), a West Pointer just turned thirty, has already served in Texas and California and has been seriously wounded in fighting the Indians. He has been put in command of the "Texas Brigade" and, as the result of distinguishing himself at Gaines's Mill and Antietam, has been advanced

to the rank of major general. But he has lost his right leg at Chickamauga, and he is obliged to retire to Richmond. He had "won his three stars," says Mrs. Chesnut, under the formidable and uncouth Stonewall Jackson, and it was Jackson who had requested his promotion. "When he came in with his sad face," she writes, " — the face of an old crusader who believed in his cause, his cross and his crown — we were not prepared for that type as a beau ideal of wild Texans. He is tall, thin, shy, with blue eyes and light hair, a tawny beard and a vast amount of it, covering the lower part of his face. He wears an appearance of awkward strength. Someone said that his great reserve of manner he carried only into the society of ladies. Mr. Venable added that he himself had often heard of the light of battle shining in a man's eyes, but he had seen it only once. He carried orders to Hood from General Lee, and found him in the hottest of the fight. The man was transfigured. 'The fierce light of his eyes,' said Mr. Venable, 'I can never forget.' "

Hood, too, falls in love with Buck Preston, and his long and adoring suit becomes a great subject of interest to their friends and a source of suspense for the reader. Will she or will she not marry him? Her parents are opposed to the match, for reasons which are not made clear, though one gathers that he is somehow not suitable, certainly not "first family." "He does not," says a fellow officer, "compare favorably with General Johnston, who is decidedly a man of culture and literary attainments." And, besides, he has only one leg. There follows a scene in which the girls of the neighborhood, rather gruesomely, complain of their mutilated lovers: "After some whispering among us, Buck cried: 'Don't waste your delicacy! Sally is going to marry a man who has lost an arm, so he is also a maimed soldier, you see; and she is proud of it. The cause glorifies such wounds.' Annie said meekly: 'I fear it will be my fate to marry one who has lost his head!' 'Tudy has her eye on one who lost an eye!' What a glorious assortment of noble martyrs and heroes! The bitterness of this kind of talk is appalling." Yet everybody has to respect Sam Hood, who, with his tough Texas training, contrasts with many other of the Confederate officers by reason of his professional pertinacity — what the officer quoted above speaks of as his "simple-minded directness of purpose"; and this he brings, also, to the courtship of Buck.

One gets, in general, from Mrs. Chesnut an impression that is not reassuring of the leaders of the army of secession. She quotes General Winfield Scott, the hero of the Mexican War, a Virginian who had stood by the Union, on the qualities of Southern soldiers: Scott feels, she says,

that "we [the Southerners] have courage, woodcraft, consummate horsemanship, and endurance of pain equal to the Indians, but that we will not submit to discipline. We will not take care of things, or husband our resources. Where we are, there is waste and destruction. If it could all be done by one wild desperate dash, we would do it; but he does not think we can stand the long black months between the acts, the waiting! We can bear pain without a murmur, but we will not submit to being bored."

Even the high officers share these qualities: they have carried into the army the same disposition that has made the young men fight so many duels. They mostly belong to the same social world, and they know each other too well. They are touchy and jealous of one another. If they don't like the way they are treated, they are apt to get angry and sulk, and to try to get themselves transferred. The rich planter Wade Hampton, who is not a West Pointer, complains to Mrs. Chesnut that one of his brigades has been taken from him and given to Fitzhugh Lee, Robert E. Lee's nephew, and that when he had appealed to Robert E., threatening to resign from the service, the latter had "told him curtly: 'I would not care if you went back to South Carolina with your whole division.' Wade said that his manner made this speech immensely mortifying . . . It seems General Lee has no patience with any personal complaints or grievances. He is all for the cause, and cannot bear officers to come to him with any such matters as Wade Hampton had come about." She does not approve of this pettiness; yet she betrays, in an account of a visit to the Richmond fortifications, how difficult it is for the Southerners of the stratum to which she belongs to realize their responsibilities, as members of a collective enterprise, to take one another seriously: "Mr. Mallory offered me his arm, and we set off to visit and inspect the fortifications of this, our 'Gibraltar of the Jeems,' of whose deeds they are so proud. It holds its own against all comers. Everywhere we went, the troops presented arms, and I was fool enough to ask Mr. Mallory why they did that. With a suppressed titter he replied: 'I dare say because I am at the head of the Navy Department.' "

General Hood's adoration of Buck Preston and the uncertainty of her final acceptance of him become, in this situation, a kind of symbol for the general failure of the South; and it is significant that Mrs. Burton Harrison, the wife of Jefferson Davis's secretary and a friend of Mrs. Chesnut's, should also treat the wooing of Buck Preston, a "fair and regal being," as a subject of major interest. Fascinated, like these ladies, we follow Mrs. Chesnut's account of Buck's vacillations between hot and

cold. "Buck saw me sending a rice pudding to the wounded man — it seems he cares for no other dainty — whereupon she said, in her sweetest, mildest, sleepiest way: 'I never cared particularly about him, but now that he has chosen to go with those people [we are not told who they were], I would not marry him if he had a thousand legs, instead of having just lost one.' " Yet somehow she becomes engaged to him: "Such a beamingly, beautiful, crimson face as she turned to me, her clear blue eyes looking straight in mine. 'Do you believe I like him now?' 'No.' She did not notice my answer." But Buck long continues to sustain her role: "Mrs. Preston was offended by the story of Buck's performance at the Iveses'. General Breckenridge told her 'it was the most beautifully unconscious act I ever saw.' The General was leaning against the wall, Buck standing guard by him. The crowd surged that way, and she held out her arm to protect him from the rush. After they had all passed, she handed him his crutches, and they, too, moved slowly away. Mrs. Davis said: 'Any woman in Richmond would have done the same joyfully, but few could do it so gracefully.' Buck is made so conspicuous by her beauty, whatever she does cannot fail to attract attention." Their story runs all through the frivolities — the dinners and the suppers and the amateur theatricals — with which, at once desperate as their situation worsened and unwilling to face its dangers, they continue to amuse themselves. As the result of an evening party cut short by the cook's getting news that her son has just been killed at the front — "Instead of a tray of good things, came back that news to the Martins!" — Mrs. Chesnut, like Kate Stone, is reminded of the French Revolution and says that they now understand the French prisoners who continued to flirt and dance while they were waiting for the tumbril to come for them.

But the devotion of the crippled Hood still persists through all the intrigue and quarrelling which, in the final phases of the war, demoralize the Confederate government. In this government, the fatal incapacity of the Southerners for agreeing or working together becomes even more apparent than in the conduct of the war itself. The passion for independence which with masters of a subject race so often takes the form of wrongheadedness, of self-assertion for its own sake, of tantrums, this self-will that has made an issue, and that is now making a cult, of states' rights, is now provoking certain elements to rebel against the Confederacy itself. President Davis is constantly opposed and denounced in a way that Mrs. Chesnut thinks scandalous, and the various departments of the government have now become quite insubordinate. The great irony is

that the recalcitrance of the Southerners against any sort of central control, which has led them to secede from the Union, is also — since they refuse to submit to the kind of governmental coercion that will enable the North to win — obstructing their success with the war. President Davis is doing his best to put through the same war measures as Lincoln — conscription, the suspension of habeas corpus, and even, in the final year, the emancipation of the slaves — but all these are either burked or evaded. The big planters will not allow the government to interfere in any way with their Negroes, even to send them, as James Chesnut advocates, to work on the fortifications. When the crisis becomes alarming, when the need for taking a stronger line is a matter of life or death, the cry goes up at once that Jefferson Davis wants to make himself a dictator, a despot like Abraham Lincoln.

We come to feel that Hood's patient unwavering purpose to induce Buck Preston to marry him is doomed as the Confederacy is. It is like one of those relationships in Chekhov that we know can never come to anything and that, with Chekhov — and we cannot be sure that Mrs. Chesnut is not just as much aware of what her story implies — are meant to imply the impotence and the impending ruin of Russian society. General Hood is sent back to the Army at the beginning of 1864, and he is obliged to retreat, under Johnston, before Sherman, who is marching on Atlanta. When the insecure Jefferson Davis, against the advice of Hood, decides to remove Johnston and put Hood in his place, the latter is left to face Sherman alone. We have already seen him, helpless but proud, exchanging polemics with his terrible opponent over the latter's deportation of the people of Atlanta. The supplies that are needed do not arrive, and the morale of the army is lost. After defeat in a couple of battles, the General is obliged to give up the campaign, and he resigns his command in January, 1865. "The Hood melodrama is over," Mrs. Chesnut ambiguously writes in March, "though the curtain has not fallen on the last scene. Hood stock going down. When that style of enthusiasm is on the wane, the rapidity of its extinction is marvellous, like the snuffing out of a candle; one moment here, then gone forever."

In May, after Appomattox, Buck Preston makes a rather queer attempt to explain things to Mrs. Chesnut — "The music and the moonlight, and that restful feeling of her head on my knee, set her tongue in motion" — though she cautions the older lady that if she should write about the affair in her diary, she must say, "This is translated from Balzac." It had begun with "those beautiful, beautiful silk stockings." Buck had exposed

them to view by warming her feet at the fender. Her admirer had always raved about his mistress's foot and ankle (*mistress* in the gallant old sense), but up to now he had treated her with reverence, had never gone further than to kiss her hand. Now he seized her and kissed her throat. She was shocked, and poor Hood had been humble. "He said it was so soft and white, that throat of mine," and put "a strong arm" around her waist so tight that she could not leave the room. "He said that, after all, I had promised to marry him, and that that made all the difference." But the girl could not see it that way, and now she makes a point of wearing boots and never warming her feet, and she wears, also, "a stiff handkerchief close up around my throat." "You see," she says to Mrs. Chesnut, "I never meant to be so outrageously treated again . . . Yet now, would you believe it, a sickening, almost an insane longing comes over me just to see him once more, and I know I never will. He is gone forever. If he had been persistent, if he had not given way under Mamma's violent refusal to listen to us, if he had asked *me!* When you refused to let anybody be married in your house, well, I would have gone down on the sidewalk, I would have married him on the pavement, if the parson could be found to do it. I was ready to leave all the world for him, to tie my clothes in a bundle and, like a soldier's wife, trudge after him to the ends of the earth."

But now it is too late. When we get our last glimpse of Buck Preston, she is travelling in Europe with her married sister; they are going to spend the winter in Paris.

Another of Mrs. Chesnut's main subjects is the plantation of her husband's parents at Camden, South Carolina, where she is sometimes obliged to stay and where she suffers acutely from boredom. She suffers also from the irking constraint imposed upon her by her ninety-year-old father-in-law, an opinionated austere old man who, even when deaf and blind, still keeps such a strong hand on his immense domain that he never has trouble with his slaves. This household of the old-world Chesnuts reminds one of the Bolkónskys of *War and Peace* (comparisons with Russia seem inevitable when one is writing about the old South). The father, presiding at dinner, as "absolute a tyrant as the Tsar of Russia," with his constantly repeated axioms and his authoritarian tone, is a less piquant Bolkónsky *père*. James, Jr., is an equally distinguished and equally conscientious, if not equally dashing, André; Miss Chesnut, his sister, may figure as a cool-headed and penurious, a less sympathetic

Princess Marie. But there is also a dowager Mrs. Chesnut, originally from Philadelphia, who was married in 1796 and falls easily into telling people about "stiff stern old Martha Washington" and describing the Washingtons' drawing room. The younger Mrs. Chesnut likes her mother-in-law, who has evidently more human warmth than the other members of the family and who, though never buying books herself, borrows them from other people and reads them in enormous quantities; but, in general, the younger woman finds Mulberry, the Chesnut estate, both oppressive and melancholy. "My sleeping apartment is large and airy, with windows opening on the lawn east and south. In those deep window seats, idly looking out, I spend much time. A part of the yard which was once a deer park has the appearance of the primeval forest; the forest trees have been unmolested and are now of immense size. In the spring, the air is laden with perfumes, violets, jasmine, crab apple blossoms, roses. Araby the blest never was sweeter in perfume. And yet there hangs here as on every Southern landscape the saddest pall. There are browsing on the lawn, where Kentucky bluegrass flourishes, Devon cows and sheep, horses, mares and colts. It helps to enliven it. Carriages are coming up to the door and driving away incessantly."

The Chesnut Negroes are faithful; they have been well trained and well treated. Yet everyone is rather uneasy. Mrs. Chesnut the younger herself has, like Kate Stone, a horror of slavery. When she sees a mulatto girl sold at auction in March, 1861, "My very soul sickened," she writes, and a few days later, when, with a visiting Englishwoman, she is again passing the auction block, "If you can stand that," she says to her companion, "no other Southern thing need choke you." And "I wonder," she is soon reflecting, "if it be a sin to think slavery a curse to any land. Men and women are punished when their masters and mistresses are brutes, not when they do wrong. Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes, yet an abandoned woman [a white one, she means] is sent out of a decent house. Who thinks any worse of a Negro or mulatto woman for being a thing we can't name? God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an iniquity! Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own."

This problem of the mixture of white and black blood, so systematically suppressed by Southern writers — "the ostrich game," Mrs. Chesnut

calls this — she treats with remarkable frankness and exclaims at the hypocrisy of the Chesnuts in locking up the novels of Eugène Sue, and even a Gothic romance by the Carolinian Washington Allston, when the colored girls of the household are more or less openly promiscuous. "I hate slavery," she writes at the beginning of the war. "You say there are no more fallen women on a plantation than in London, in proportion to numbers; but what do you say to this? A magnate who runs a hideous black harem with its consequences under the same roof with his lovely white wife, and his beautiful and accomplished daughters? He holds his head as high and poses as the model of all human virtues to these poor women whom God and the laws have given him. From the height of his awful majesty, he scolds and thunders at them as if he never did wrong in his life. Fancy such a man finding his daughter reading *Don Juan*. 'You with that immoral book!' And he orders her out of his sight. You see, Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot. She makes Legree a bachelor."

Encountering such passages, we wonder whether the prudery of Buck Preston with her fiancé may not be something more than a curious local development of the nineteenth-century proprieties, something more than a romantic convention derived from the age of chivalry. That Buck Preston was not unusual in her reluctance to let men see her feet is shown by another anecdote, this time about James Chesnut's young nephew: "Today he was taking me to see Minnie Hayne's foot. He said it was the smallest, the most perfect thing in America! Now, I will go anywhere to see anything which can move the cool Captain to the smallest ripple of enthusiasm. He says Julia Rutledge knew his weakness, and would not show him her foot. His Uncle James had told him of its arched instep and symmetrical beauty. So he followed her trail like a wild Indian, and when she stepped in the mud, he took a paper pattern of her track, or a plaster cast; something that amazed Miss Rutledge at his sagacity." And Mrs. Chesnut herself, though she is not disinclined to flirt as the younger ladies do and occasionally provokes jealous scenes on the part of Mr. Chesnut, is offended by risqué stories and horrified by current French novels (which, nevertheless, she continues to read); will not allow legs to be mentioned; and cannot digest the news, brought back by a traveller from Europe, that the sternly moralistic George Eliot has been living in sin with George Henry Lewes.

One is forced to the conclusion that the pedestalled purity which the Southerners assigned to their ladies, the shrinking of these ladies them-

selves from any suggestion of freedom, were partly a "polarization" produced by the uninhibited ease with which their men could go to bed with the black girls. There is an atmosphere of tittering sex all through Mrs. Chesnut's chronicle, yet behind it is a pride that is based on fear and that sometimes results in coldness. Mrs. Chesnut, who was married at seventeen, has obviously no passionate interest in her husband, yet though Chesnut has, we gather, amused himself with occasional love affairs — not, so far as one is told, with blacks but with white women of inferior social status — she has never dared to take a lover. To allow oneself to weaken in this direction would be to associate oneself with the despised and dreaded slave girls who were bearing their masters' half-breeds, to surrender one's white prestige. The gaiety and ease of these ladies must have always masked a fundamental, a never-relaxing tension.

Mrs. Chesnut, in this intimate record, drops the mask and expresses herself with more candor than was usual for Southern ladies, even, as one imagines, in the working of their own minds. Her attitude toward Harriet Beecher Stowe is strikingly different, for example, from that of most Southerners of Mrs. Chesnut's own day or, indeed, of any day. Grace King, the New Orleans historian and novelist, born in 1852, writes in her autobiography of the "hideous, black, dragonlike book that hovered on the horizon of every Southern child" but which in her own family was never allowed to be mentioned. Mrs. Chesnut takes this horror more coolly and shows a strong interest in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In March of 1862 she rereads it, and at any instance of cruelty to slaves she is likely to mention that Mrs. Stowe would be delighted to hear of it. "I met our lovely relative," she writes in May, 1864, "the woman who might have sat for Eva's mother in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Beautifully dressed, graceful, languid, making eyes at all comers, she was softly and in dulcet accents regretting the necessity of sending out a sable Topsy to her sabler parent, to be switched for some misdemeanor. I declined to hear her regrets as I fled in haste." She says of the grandfather of one of her friends that he used to "put Negroes in hogsheads, with nails driven in all round, and roll the poor things downhill."

Her own point of view is vigorously expressed in November, 1861, in an outburst against Mrs. Stowe. Mrs. Stowe, she declares, and Greeley and Thoreau and Emerson and Sumner "live in nice New England homes, clean, sweet-smelling, shut up in libraries, writing books which ease their hearts of their bitterness against us. What self-denial they do

practice is to tell John Brown to come down here and cut our throats in Christ's name. Now consider what I have seen of my mother's life, my grandmother's, my mother-in-law's. These people were educated at Northern schools, they read the same books as their Northern contemporaries, the same daily papers, the same Bible. They have the same ideas of right and wrong," while they of the South are doomed to "live in Negro villages," the inhabitants of which "walk through their houses whenever they see fit, dirty, slatternly, idle, ill-smelling by nature. These women I love have less chance to live their own lives in peace than if they were African missionaries. They have a swarm of blacks about them like children under their care, not as Mrs. Stowe's fancy painted them, and they hate slavery worse than Mrs. Stowe does. . . . The Mrs. Stowes have the plaudits of crowned heads; we take our chances, doing our duty as best we may among the woolly heads. My husband supported his plantation by his law practice. Now it is running him in debt. Our people have never earned their own bread. Take this estate, what does it do, actually? It all goes back in some shape to what are called slaves here, called operatives or tenants or peasantry elsewhere. I doubt if ten thousand in money ever comes to this old gentleman's hands. When Mrs. Chesnut married South, her husband was as wealthy as her brothers-in-law. How is it now? Their money has accumulated for their children. This old man's goes to support a horde of idle dirty Africans, while he is abused as a cruel slave-owner."

In this she is unfair to the New Englanders: she forgets that Elijah Lovejoy has been murdered for his Abolitionist agitation, that Garrison has been dragged through the streets of Boston and Whittier stoned by a mob in New Hampshire, and that Sumner has had his head broken and been incapacitated for two years by a furious South Carolinian; and she of course had not the least idea of the years of anxiety and hardship which, in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe, had produced her explosive book. Yet there is plenty of evidence in Mrs. Chesnut's diary that slavery had become to the Southerners a handicap and a burden. At one point she makes the assertion that "not one third of our volunteer army are slave-owners" and that "not one third of that third fail to dislike slavery as much as Mrs. Stowe or Horace Greeley."

Mrs. Chesnut notes again and again the apparent impassivity of the Negroes in relation to what is going on. "We have no reason to suppose a Negro knows there is a war," she is still able to write in November, 1861. "I do not speak of the war to them; on that subject, they do not believe a word you say. A genuine slave-owner, born and

bred, will not be afraid of Negroes. Here we are mild as the moonbeams, and as serene; nothing but Negroes around us, white men all gone to the army." Yet one of their neighbors, a Cousin Betsey, has been murdered only a few weeks before. This old lady, whose domestic servants are said to have been "pampered" and "insubordinate," has been smothered in her bed by two of them after her son has promised them a thrashing. The elder Mrs. Chesnut, a Northerner, had been frightened in her youth by the stories of the Haiti rebellion, and, as a result, now treats every Negro "as if they were a black Prince Albert or Queen Victoria." She makes her daughter-in-law uneasy by incessantly dwelling, as the younger woman says, "upon the transcendent virtues of her colored household, in full hearing of the innumerable Negro women who literally swarm over this house," then by suddenly saying to the family at dinner, " 'I warn you, don't touch that soup! It is bitter. There is something wrong about it!' The men who waited at table looked on without a change of face." But the staff of the Chesnut household finally begins to crack in an unexpected place. James Chesnut is very much dependent on his Negro valet Lawrence, who is always at his side, always, says Mrs. Chesnut, with "the same bronze mask," who darns socks and has made Mrs. Chesnut a sacque, who is miraculous in his resourcefulness at producing, despite wartime shortages, whatever is wanted in the way of food — even to that special rarity, ice for mint juleps and sherry cobblers. But in February, 1864, while the Chesnuts are living in Richmond, Lawrence turns up at breakfast drunk. When he is ordered to move a chair, he raises it over his head and smashes the chandelier. His master, whose self-control is always perfect, turns to his wife and says, "Mary, do tell Lawrence to go home. I am too angry to speak to him!" But Lawrence "will soon be back," Mrs. Chesnut confides to her diary, "and when he comes he will say: 'Shoo! I knew Mars' Jeems could not do without me!' And indeed he cannot."

In the meantime Colonel Higginson and his fellow Yankees were exploring the abandoned plantations of the South Carolinian Sea Islands. We hear something from Mrs. Chesnut of the families to which these had belonged. Of the Middletons, on whose place Charlotte Forten had admired the magnolia tree and from whose house she had taken the bathtub, Mrs. Chesnut writes as follows: "Poor Mrs. Middleton has paralysis. Has she not had trouble enough? . . . Their plantation and house at Edisto destroyed [it had actually been plundered but not destroyed], their house in Charleston burned, her children scattered, starvation in Lincolnton, and all as nothing to the one dreadful blow — her