THE FORTRESS MONROE CONFERENCE.;

An Inside History What was Done and What was Said The Terms Offered the South Mr. Lincoln’s Suggestions.

The following article, from the Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle & Sentinel, says the Baltimore American, was authorized, if not prepared, by Mr. STEPHENS, the late rebel Vice-President, and one of the Southern Commissioners to the Fortress Monroe Conference. It gives an interesting inside view of the negotiations there, and confirms the suspicions that have been entertained of the bad faith of JEFF. DAVIS:

We have before stated that Mr. DAVIS, late President of the States engaged in the rebellion, had not communicated to the people who had elected him, and trusted him, the truth in regard to the famed Fortress Monroe Conference.

Now that the aforesaid DAVIS has no longer power to arrest and confine persons without the benefit of habeas corpus; or his organs to instigate mobs of soldiers and irresponsible men to threaten destruction to life and private property; or for officials to arrest persons and suppress papers for publications without his sanction—it may be as well to let the people know the truth.

We will now give the history of that convention as nearly as we can remember it from the statement of Mr. STEPHENS to us, directly after his return.

Mr. DAVIS sent for him to communicate the information that Mr. BLAIR desired a conference between the authorities of the United States and the Southern States upon the subject of peace, and Mr. STEPHENS’ advice was asked. He promptly replied that if Mr. BLAIR spoke by authority of President LINCOLN he most earnestly advised the conference. But that, as the terms of peace, if favorable to the South, would awaken angry debate from the radical men of the North, and a failure to get terms but dishearten our own people, he recommended, first, that the strictest secrecy should be used; second, that the parties to the conference be President LINCOLN and Mr. DAVIS, and that Gens. GRANT and LEE be the only ones to even know of the meeting. The advice was taken as usual in Richmond -- disregarded altogether -- and by officially telegraphing the news to every corner of the so-called Confederacy.

Two days later Mr. STEPHENS was surprised by the information from Mr. BENJAMIN, that a committee of three was to go, consisting of ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS, Vice-President, R.M. T. HUNTER, Senator from Virginia, and JOHN A. CAMPBELL, Acting Secretary of War. Mr. STEPHENS saw at once that to refuse to go would subject him to unfriendly remarks, and that probably he would have the responsibility of failure to make peace thrown upon his shoulders. So he went, merely remarking to Mr. CAMPBELL, “that the old story of the monkey that took the paw of the cat to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, was not without some modern illustration.” To which Mr. CAMPBELL said that “he thought so, too, and did not like it.”

The flag of truce and the loud and prolonged cheers of both armies that gave the lie to the statements of Southern administration organs that the veterans were opposed to peace, and the two days’ enjoyment of the hospitality of that glorious old soldier, GRANT, are history well known. Probably but for the indorsement of the peace wishes of STEPHENS and HUNTER by Gen. GRANT, the interview would not have been granted.
The reason why the General did not include Mr. CAMPBELL in his indorsement, was that Mr. CAMPBELL was perfectly satisfied that the country was whipped then, and prepared to take what he could get, and, therefore, did not talk. While Mr. HUNTER, who was not much for reconstruction, talked the most.

The three Southern gentlemen met Mr. LINCOLN and Mr. SEWARD, as is known, and after some preliminary remarks, the subject of peace was opened. Mr. STEPHENS -- well aware that one who asks much may get more than he who confesses to humble wishes at the outset -- urged the claims of his section with that skill and address for which the Northern papers have given him credit. Mr. LINCOLN, however, holding the vantage ground of conscious power, was, however, perfectly frank, and submitted his views almost in the form of an argument.

We can best give the facts by giving the report of the Commissioners, and the facts in regard to each statement.

RICHMOND, Feb. 6, 1865.

To the President of the Confederate States:

SIR: Under your letter of appointment as commissioners, of the 28th ult., we proceeded to week an informal conference with ABRAHAM LINCOLN, President of the United States, upon the subject mentioned in the letter. Conference was granted, and took place on the 30th December, on board a steamer anchored in Hampton Roads, where we met President LINCOLN and Hon. Mr. SEWARD, Secretary of State for the United States. It continued for several hours, and was both full and explicit.

[The only statement of moment in this first paragraph is that the conference was both full and explicit.]

We learned from them that the Message of President LINCOLN to the Congress of the United States in December last, explains clearly his sentiments as to the terms, conditions and modes of procedure by which peace can be secured to the people, and we are not informed that they would be modified or altered to obtain that end. We understood from him that no terms or proposals of any treaty or agreement, looking to the ultimate settlement, would be entertained or made by him with the authorities of the Confederate States, because that would be a recognition of the South as a separate power, which under no circumstances would be done. And for like reasons, that no such terms would be entertained by him from the slave States; that no extended truce or armistice, as at present advised, would be granted or allowed, without satisfactory assurances in advance of the complete restoration of the authority of the constitution and laws of the United States over all places within the States of the Confederacy.

The first paragraph of the above simply means that reconstruction of the Union was the only basis of peace or of conference; and no desire for peace would be allowed to overrule that sine qua non. The words which we have italicized were the principal subject of discussion, for as in Mr. DAVIS’ instructions to Mr. STEPHENS at the time of his first attempt to reach Washington City. Mr. DAVIS insisted upon his rank, either as Commander or President, and would have no conference without that being recognized.

Mr. LINCOLN stated fairly that the only ground upon which he could rest the justice of the war —either with his own people or with foreign Powers —was that it was not a war for conquest, but that the States never had been separated from the Union. Consequently, he could not recognize another government inside of the one of which he alone was President, nor admit the separate independence of States that were yet a part of the Union. That, said he, would be doing what you
have so long asked Europe to do in vain, and be resigning the only thing that the armies of the Union are fighting for.

To that Mr. HUNTER replied at length, in rather Congressional style, urging that the recognition of Mr. DAVIS' power to make a treaty was the first and indispensable step to peace, and referring to King CHARLES I, and his Parliament, as a reliable precedent, of a constitutional, ruler, treating with rebels.

Mr. LINCOLN's face then wore that indescribable expression which generally preceded his hardest hits, and he remarked: "Upon questions of history I must refer you to Mr. SEWARD, for he is posted in such things, and I don't propose to be bright. My only distinct recollection of the matter is, that Charles lost his head." That settled Mr. HUNTER for a while.

There was little said about the fact that an armistice would be of no benefit, unless it preceded that which the North must have, if her armies stopped from the tide of victory, to wit: the restoration of the Union and its laws.

Mr. LINCOLN remarked that whatever consequences may follow from the reestablishment of that authority, it must be accepted; but individuals subject to pains and penalties under the laws of the United States, might rely upon a very liberal use of the powers confided to him to remit those pains and penalties and peace be restored.

He also stated in the above connection, that limited as he was by the constitution, he could not change or impair the power of Congress, nor abolish its laws, nor stay the judgments of the courts; for the legislative and judicial power had coequaled in distinction with the executive. But he did offer all the power of mercy, and pardon and influence, both as the Chief Magistrate and as a popular party leader, and that is a better offer than rebels on the eve of destruction and ruin ever had before from a victorious power.

Mr. HUNTER stated that he had never entertained any fears for his person or his life from so mild a government as that of the United States. To which Mr. LINCOLN retorted that he, also, had felt easy as to the rebels, but not always so easy about the lamp-posts around Washington City—a hint that he had already done more favors for the rebels than was exactly popular with the radical men of his own party.

During the conference the proposed amendments to the Constitution adopted by Congress on the 31st, were brought to notice; these amendments provide that neither slavery or involuntary servitude, except for crime, should exist within the United States, or any place within its jurisdiction, and Congress should have power to enforce the amendment by appropriate legislation.

Mr. LINCOLN had almost assumed the tone of argument, and intimated that the States might do much better to return to the Union at once, than to stand the chances of continued war, and the increasing bitterness of feeling in Congress. And that the time might come when we would cease to be an erring people, invited back to the Union as citizens; but looked upon, perhaps, as enemies to be exterminated or ruined.

Mr. SEWARD then remarked: "Mr. President, it is as well to inform these gentlemen that yesterday Congress acted upon the amendment to the constitution abolishing slavery."

Mr. LINCOLN stated that was true, and suggested that there was a question as to the right of the insurgent States to return at once and claim a right to vote upon the amendment, to which the concurrence of two-thirds of the States was required.

He stated that it would be desirable to have the institution of slavery abolished by the consent of the people, as soon as possible—he hoped within six years. He also stated that four hundred millions of dollars might be offered as compensation to the owners, and remarked, "You would be
Mr. HUNTER said something about the inhumanity of leaving so many poor old negroes and young children destitute, by encouraging the able-bodied negroes to run away, and asked what are they—the helpless—to do?

Mr. LINCOLN said that reminded him of an old friend in Illinois, who had a crop of potatoes and did not want to dig them. So he told a neighbor that he would turn in his hogs and let them dig them for themselves. But, said the neighbor, the frost will soon be in the ground, and when the soil is hard frozen, what will they do then? To which the worthy farmer replied, “let’em root!”

Mr. STEPHENS said he supposed that was the original of “Root Hog or Die,” and a fair indication of the future of the negroes.

The finishing up part of the report of Mr. DAVIS’ Commissioners reads thus:

Of all correspondence that preceded the conference herein-mentioned, and loading to same, you have heretofore been informedy

Very respectfully, your obedient servants,
(Signed,) ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS,
R.M. T. HUNTER,
JOHN A. CAMPBELL.

We remark now, that all we know of the correspondence above mentioned we have from the report of Mr. SEWARD, as Mr. DAVIS never favored us with it.

The whole meeting was friendly, and the party cordial, as reported. Mr. STEPHENS reported to Mr. DAVIS that nothing had been done, but that nothing was determined, and that if he relied upon the sincerity of Mr. BLAIR, the conference was but a confirmation of the desire for peace on the part of the United States, and the way open for settlement. Mr. DAVIS, however, looked upon the proposals as insulting, and seemed to have the concurrence of Mr. HUNTER in that view—somewhat. He wished a statement to go before the public that only insulting toons were tendered; but the Commissioners declined to make it, on the ground that it was not true.

With some difficulty they secured the reception of the brief and perfectly truthful, but not very clear report that was published, and Mr. DAVIS put the coloring to it, and endeavored to secure his object of crushing the Great Southern Peace Party by an inflammatory dispatch all over the country, followed by the actual report, with the following ingenious preface, written by himself:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, RICHMOND, Feb. 6, 1864.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Confederate States:

I recently received a written notification which satisfied me that the President of the United States was disposed to confer informally with any official agents that might be sent by me with a view to the restoration of peace. I requested the Hon. A.H. STEPHENS, Hon. R.M. T. HUNTER and Hon. JOHN A. CAMPBELL to proceed through our lines and hold conference with LINCOLN, or such person as he might depute to represent him.

I herewith submit for the information of Congress the report of these eminent citizens above named, showing that the enemy refused to enter into negotiations with the Confederate States or any of them separately, or give our people any other terms or guarantees than those which Congress may grant,
or to permit us to have a vote on any other basis than our unconditional submission to their rule, coupled with the acceptance of their recent legislation, including the amendment of the constitution emancipating all negro slaves; and with the right on the part of the Federal Congress to legislate on the subject of the relations between the white and black populations in each State. Such is, as I understand, the effect of the amendment to the constitution which has been adopted by the Congress of the United States.

(Signed) JEFFERSON DAVIS.

This was closely followed by mass meetings in the capital and elsewhere.

How strange it is that all these bloody-minded men, who advocated the “black flag” and “no quarters” upon our street corners, contented, themselves with words, and with all this hate of Yankees, never undertook to find them at the front, where there have been lots of them to be found for four years!

Mr. D. said in one of those Richmond meetings, in his speech, “We will teach them that when they talk to us they talk to their masters.”

Mr. STEPHENS came home with but a new cause of sorrow, and those who said he talked of coming home to make war speeches and denounce the terms offered, simply lied. Before Mr. LINCOLN’s death, he thought he was doing a favor to him not to include that offer of four hundred millions in gold for the Southern slaves, in the published report, for it would be used to the injury of Mr. LINCOLN by those of his enemies who would talk about taxation and the debt.

Mr. STEPHENS has frequently expressed no apprehensions should the fortunes of war throw him into the hands of Mr. LINCOLN, and said he would not get out of the way of a raid were it not for appearances, on account of the office he held. He spoke of Mr. LINCOLN as an old friend who had generally voted with him in Congress, and who had a good heart and fine mind, and was undoubtedly honest.

This much we have written in vindication of our assertion when the terms were offered, that they “were not dishonorable.” We so remarked at the time the conference ended, and for so doing was scoffed at and reviled by the Administration press of the South, who endeavored to excite the public against us by raising the mad-dog cries of “reconstructionist,” “enemy to the Southern cause,” &c.

We have also felt it a duty to give Mr. STEPHENS’ statement to the public as evidence, that, when master of his own acts, he hid no part of the truth from any one who asked for it.