

Of Spiders and Entrails

In Montgomery, Mary Chesnut immersed herself in the social scene, hosting delegates and their families at her boarding house. On the evening of March 11, she noted a gathering of “judges, governors, senators, generals, congressmen” in her drawing room, where lively stories and gossip circulated. One anecdote shared by her uncle, Judge Withers, was particularly striking: a married couple's quarrel on a bridge escalated to a dramatic point where the man offered to drown himself if his wife didn't take the baby, to which she coldly responded that she wanted none of his lineage left.

As the evening wore on, Mary's husband, James, grew impatient with the lengthy storytelling and retreated upstairs. Despite his frustration, Mary engaged in discussions with a group of women about divorce laws, revealing their deep understanding of the topic. One particular woman, Mrs. Lafayette Borland, abruptly silenced herself when the conversation shifted to the consequences of leaving one's spouse, a reflection of her own past actions.

Mary reflected on the dynamics within her marriage, noting a comment from a Georgia man who suggested James was secretive. This prompted James to inquire whether he was indeed perceived this way. Mary candidly admitted that she remained largely oblivious to his thoughts and feelings, expressing the renewed sense of distance in their relationship, which she likened to an "Iron Wall."

In a moment of introspection, Mary considered her dedication to journaling. She expressed concern that chronicling her thoughts had become time-consuming, drawing a metaphor comparing her writing to a spider weaving webs from its entrails. This idea was inspired by a line from John Dryden's play, *Marriage à la Mode*, where he pondered the silent intimacy and isolation of souls, suggesting a complex interplay between connectivity and distance in human relationships.