

# Relief

The chapter titled "Relief" unfolds in the wake of Inauguration Day, a day previously fraught with tension and anxiety. Now that March 4 has passed without incident, a sense of relief permeates the atmosphere. Correspondence between Frances and William Seward reveals both personal and political concerns. Frances writes from freezing Auburn, New York, addressing the health of a family friend, Ethan Warden, whose illness she attributes to anxiety over the inauguration. Despite the grim circumstances, she expresses hope for William, acknowledging the difficult challenges he faces in his new role.

William's response highlights the immediate pressures of his office in Washington. He details long hours spent managing a flood of office seekers seeking patronage appointments, with his son Frederick assisting him. Despite having Frederick on his team, William grapples with the enormity of the national crisis, viewing himself as a pivotal figure in the new government. He reveals his physical and mental strain, mentioning a recent breakdown and the need for medical care. The risks posed by Fort Sumter loom large in his letters, indicating an impending confrontation that could test the nation's resolve.

Amidst political turmoil, Frances expresses alarm at William's condition and promptly offers to travel to Washington. In her anxious communications, she implores Frederick to keep her informed about any developments regarding her husband's health. Meanwhile, in Charleston, Edmund Ruffin's experience recounts a mix of anticipation and boredom as he waits for war to break out. He visits Confederate-held Fort Moultrie, noting the military preparations but growing increasingly impatient for action. A wave of rumors about Lincoln's orders for fort surrender fuels his desire for conflict, as he perceives the unfolding situation as critical for rallying support for the Confederacy.

Ruffin's interactions in Charleston reflect a blend of hope and curiosity regarding the unfolding war dynamics. He navigates a landscape filled with tension yet marked by moments of social engagement, further emphasizing the peculiar calm before the storm of war. The chapter ends with Ruffin's determination to invigorate enthusiasm for secession, highlighting the prevailing uncertainties of the time.