

# Russell, of the Times

On March 17, during his first day in New York City, William Russell of the London Times was struck by the city's peculiarities. He described the sight of forty or fifty Irishmen in green sashes, marching to mass, contrasted by the fashionable attire of domestics and free Blacks. Despite the vibrant public life, the city bore the scars of winter—dirty snow and slush marked Broadway as people crowded the streets. Russell noted particularly the prevalence of chewing tobacco residue, a habit he found distasteful, reminiscent of Charles Dickens' descriptions from two decades earlier, which he now observed to still infect public spaces, including elegant hotels.

As an esteemed correspondent, Russell was welcomed by influential New Yorkers, leading to discussions about the secession crisis. Despite being in the North, he discovered a pro-South sentiment in the city, where commerce and credit were tightly interwoven with Southern plantations. At one dinner, a former governor declared secession a right, while others supported the South against Lincoln's government. Russell perceived the administration as adrift amid Southern leaders' decisive actions, prompting his desire to travel south to gain firsthand knowledge of the situation.

On March 25, Russell departed from New York, facing discomfort as he navigated poor city streets to board an uncomfortably crowded train. After an arduous journey, he arrived in Washington, where he was overwhelmed by the bustle of the Willard Hotel, a hub of political maneuvering. While there, he dined with Henry S. Sanford and met William Seward, Secretary of State, who dismissed the seriousness of the secession movement. Russell noted Seward's condescending view of the South's cultural and social standing, revealing a profound disconnect from the escalating tensions.

Seward's optimism seemed misplaced, as Russell recognized slavery as the core issue at hand—an enduring "curse" tying the Southern states to a former world, seemingly blind to impending conflict. This discussion highlighted the inefficacy of the Lincoln administration, as Russell gathered insights vital to understanding the nation's precarious position. The interaction gave him a clearer perspective of the challenges facing the government, paving the way for his anticipated meeting with President Lincoln.