

# Sickened

In Charleston, on March 4, Edmund Ruffin read the inaugural address, which was delivered via telegraph to the office of the *Mercury*. As the crowd gathered to follow along, Ruffin noted in his diary that the address confirmed his belief that war was imminent. He looked forward to Confederate General Beauregard taking action against Fort Sumter and anticipated that Lincoln might provoke an immediate conflict by trying to reinforce the fort. The excitement in the air was palpable, as Ruffin observed no expressions of regret or fear among the crowd, only a sense of anticipation that matters would soon come to a head.

Meanwhile, in Montgomery, James Chesnut's wife, Mary, engaged in the social activities typical of her role. Her diary reflected a critical view of her interactions, labelling several women in attendance as “fat and stupid” and expressing her dissatisfaction with the quality of dinners she attended. Mary also seemed to enjoy some flirtation from former Governor John Manning, who showed a fondness for her. She was accustomed to attention and wondered why she attracted it, noting, “I never was handsome.”

Mary's call on Jefferson Davis and Varina led to an amiable encounter, with Varina welcoming her and sharing the latest news from Washington, albeit avoiding political discussions. Their conversation shifted focus to royal visits, notably that of the Prince of Wales, which added a delightful tone to their meeting.

However, on Inauguration Day, Mary witnessed a slave auction that left her deeply unsettled. Observing a mulatto woman on display at the sale, she drew a parallel between the objectification of women in marriage and the slave trade, yet the raw reality of the auction proved too distressing. Despite being a slaveholder herself, she felt her soul “sickened,” grappling with the horror of the scene before her.

The following day, upon reading Lincoln's address, she contemplated its implications for peace versus war, channeling her thoughts through an 1808 ballad referencing the character Lochinvar. Mary was skeptical of Lincoln's intentions, fearing he might aim to detach the border states from the Confederacy. As the atmosphere shifted around her, among the men were growing calls for war, which left her skeptical of the looming conflict, stating, “Still I do not believe it.”