

Some Good Thing in the Wind

In the chapter "Some Good Thing in the Wind," occurring between March 24-27, Lincoln sought to gauge the extent of pro-Union sentiment in South Carolina, particularly Charleston. He dispatched two emissaries, Stephen A. Hurlbut and Ward Lamon, to ascertain the local mood following Captain Fox's assessment of Fort Sumter. Hurlbut, a former resident with a dubious past, traveled under the guise of visiting family but reported back to Lincoln about the heightened war preparations in the region, including armed shipments and mortars at the rail depot.

During his brief stay, Hurlbut interacted with several prominent locals, notably Judge James Petigru, South Carolina's leading unionist, who confirmed a strong local sentiment favoring separation from the Union. Hurlbut's report highlighted that the spirit of national patriotism in the state had faded, replaced by an overwhelming allegiance to South Carolina itself. He warned Lincoln of the impending consequences if any federal action was taken in the seceded states, predicting that such moves would instigate war.

Lamon, Lincoln's other envoy, met with Governor Pickens and conveyed a message of supposed federal withdrawal from Fort Sumter, despite his lack of official authority. This meeting hinted at an effort to prevent conflict, with Lamon suggesting to Pickens that an evacuation was imminent. Lamon's conversations with Major Anderson at Fort Sumter revealed concerns about a formal military surrender, which Anderson deemed dishonorable.

The tension escalated when Beauregard sent a note to Anderson to clarify that no surrender was expected, but also referred to rumors of a potential explosion of the fort upon abandonment. This infuriated Anderson, who vehemently rejected any implication of dishonor. As this drama unfolded, General Winfield Scott in Washington reprimanded Anderson for his supposed intentions regarding the fort, further complicating motivations and expectations.

In Washington, Secretary Seward met with William Russell from the London Times, recognizing the latter's influence on public opinion as the government confronted the secession crisis. Seward's discussions hinted at an ambiguous strategy concerning Fort Sumter, ultimately reflecting the administration's hesitation while Lincoln prepared for his first official state dinner amidst growing pressures related to the brewing conflict.