

Russell, of the Times

Russell, of the Times, arrived in New York City on March 17, eager to observe the contrasts that the city presented. As he walked through the bustling streets, he was struck by the sight of forty or fifty Irishmen in green sashes marching towards mass, a sharp contrast to the more fashionable attire of domestics and free Blacks that he saw around him. The streets were crowded with people, and though there was much activity, the remnants of winter were still clear to see—dirty snow and slush covered Broadway, a stark reminder of the harsh weather that had recently passed. However, it was the presence of chewing tobacco residue that particularly caught his attention. This unsightly habit, which he found deeply distasteful, seemed to permeate the public spaces he visited, including elegant hotels. Russell was reminded of Charles Dickens' observations from two decades earlier, and was surprised to find that the habit had not only persisted but remained a defining part of the public scene in New York, even in areas that prided themselves on their refinement.

In his role as a correspondent, Russell quickly made connections with influential figures in New York, where he was soon engaged in conversations about the secession crisis. Despite being in the North, Russell discovered a significant undercurrent of pro-South sentiment within the city. The city's economy, heavily intertwined with the Southern plantations, created a strong business relationship between the two regions, and this had fostered a degree of sympathy for the South. During a dinner with local elites, a former governor declared that secession was a right that could not be denied, while others openly supported the South in its opposition to Lincoln's government. This was a startling realization for Russell, as he had assumed that the North would be firmly against any notion of secession. He observed that the administration in Washington seemed to be drifting without a clear plan of action, struggling to match the South's decisiveness. This left Russell with the impression that Lincoln's

government was unprepared for the actions already taking place in the South, prompting him to plan a trip south to better understand the situation.

Russell's journey from New York to Washington on March 25 was far from comfortable. As he navigated the poorly maintained city streets to reach his crowded train, he could not shake the discomfort of the trip. When he finally arrived in Washington, he was immediately struck by the bustling nature of the Willard Hotel, a political hub where the energy was tense and palpable. The political maneuvering that seemed to dominate the city made him acutely aware of the precariousness of the national situation. During his stay, he dined with Henry S. Sanford and had an opportunity to meet with William Seward, the Secretary of State, whose views on the secession crisis only deepened Russell's concerns. Seward's dismissive attitude towards the seriousness of the South's actions stood in stark contrast to the gravity of the situation Russell had just witnessed in New York. His condescending remarks about the South's culture and social standing indicated a significant disconnect between the leadership in Washington and the growing unrest in the Southern states.

Seward's optimism, while perhaps intended to reassure, seemed completely out of touch with the reality of the situation. Russell quickly realized that the primary issue at the heart of the secession crisis was slavery, a "curse" that tied the South to an outdated and morally questionable system. Seward, it seemed, was blind to the deepening conflict, instead focusing on the hope that the situation would resolve itself without bloodshed. This conversation revealed how ineffective the Lincoln administration had become in addressing the crisis, and Russell began to understand just how fragile the Union was. The North was far removed from the realities of Southern grievances and the stark political realities driving secession. This discussion underscored the difficulty in bridging the widening gap between the two regions and emphasized the growing tensions that could not be ignored. Russell's visit to Washington, with its interactions and revelations, would help him prepare for the challenges ahead, especially his anticipated meeting with President Lincoln. It became increasingly clear that the Lincoln administration, though well-meaning, was struggling to take the decisive action necessary to preserve the Union, and that the country was

edging closer to the brink of war.