

Richmond “Whig”, part II

Excerpts from the April 27th edition of the Richmond, Virginia newspaper continue. [I have not added nor deleted any of the text that was copied from this paper. Quotation marks and italics appear as originally printed. R.L.G.]

“The value of Confederate notes. On evacuation morning, the value fell rapidly at a rate that was astounding, and the premium on gold, silver and greenbacks rose in proportion to a height that must have made speculators dizzy. Ten thousand dollars could not have hired a ‘nigger and cart’ for one hour that morning. We will illustrate by an instance. Major John H. King, revenue officer, was instructed to save the records and papers of the Custom House. The major, at a late hour, when the heavens were aglow with the conflagration, went in search of an ambulance, but no ambulance could he find; they were all gone toting away the government. At last he met a “Nigger” *Jehu* upon the street, mounted upon a dilapidated cart, and apparently awaiting a customer. [The word “Jehu” originally was one of the Biblical Kings of Israel, known for his furious chariot attacks. The meaning here is a driver of any wheeled vehicle.] ‘Come on, Boy’ shouted the Major, ‘I’ll give you fifty dollars.’ The Ethiopian, with an exhibition of financial acumen that did him credit, remarked: ‘Why dat won’t pass, Massa, what use is dat to me?’ ‘Well then, Buck, here’s a hundred; that’s worth something. Come on, don’t you see my place burning down?’ ‘Have to let it burn, Massa, but I can’t take a hundred.’ Was the still financial and philosophical retort of the ‘Nigger.’ With that the Major, as well he might, grew desperate, for the fire was approaching his office, and he shouted: ‘Here, take three hundred, five hundred, a thousand dollars,’ and enforced compliance by the presentation of a pistol. The tripod of the cart wilted, and went along, and as he did so, compromised with the Major in this wise: ‘Haven’t you got any old clothes you’d give me instead dat Confederate trash? Any little trick you have about ye in the shape of a watch-guard or a ring, or somethin’ to eat?’ The Major compromised, but the papers of his office were destroyed.”

“The Markets. There was a moderately good supply of fish, butcher’s meat and vegetables in the markets yesterday. Prices continue exorbitantly high, but as the quantity of supplies increases, as they will do with the approach of summer, this evil will rectify itself. The whole North and West is now open to us, whence to draw supplies, and they will assuredly flow in if prices keep up. It is not now as in Confederate times, when all the products of the earth were scarce and daily growing scarcer, and the Government officials seized upon everything of value that was started to our markets. We were in danger of famine then; indeed, we partly experienced it. Now, with open ports, and the people of the country devoting themselves to the production of food instead of cutting one another’s throats, we must soon be blessed with abundance.”

“Fish, which now constitute the staple food of the people of this section, are as abundant as could be expected considering the stoppage of the York River Railroad. In former times that road brought to the city daily many thousand pounds of fish and oysters. Herring yesterday morning were worth forty cents a dozen, though we heard of contracts made to deliver considerable quantities on the 1st of May at one dollar a hundred. Shad were worth a dollar a

pair or a dollar and a half for extra large ones. Butcher's meat, mostly indifferent, was held at twenty-five cents a pound. Asparagus, twenty cents a bunch; lettuce, five cents a head. Corn meal was sold at three dollars a bushel, and Irish and sweet potatoes at six."

"A Government Scattered to the Four Winds. Were the Confederate government recognized tomorrow, and were it possible for that government to resume its functions in every department, it would be a government without a record, and would speedily arrive at chaos. Documents before deemed of the highest importance are whirled about the streets upon every gust of wind; like leaves of autumn, they choke the gutters. Bundles of records are hawked about the streets, and sold in the sutler stores [A sutler store sold provisions, especially to military personnel.] for wrapping paper; old ledgers and day books from the treasury and auditor's offices, half filled, are made to perform another service in a commercial way, in the shop and counting-room."

"Payrolls of the Confederate Army, paid and unpaid, half burned, are bundled off to the paper mill to be converted into virgin paper again. The flooding of the world in the days of Noah did not more effectively drown out and wash away the record of the people that lived then, than did the evacuation and burning of Richmond destroy the Confederate claim to a government. The evacuation must have come upon the Confederate rulers as suddenly as did the flood, else more would have been saved and less put out of existence. As it is, the great problem of a separate Southern Confederacy, which Jeff. Davis and his clerks were working out over innumerable reams of foolscap, has come to naught, been dashed by the sponge of fate, and nothing remains, if the problem is to be persisted in, but to wipe out the slate and commence anew, dating the Southern Confederacy and its records from a new era and a new birth. It is an old household maxim that 'three moves are as bad as a fire'; but with the Confederate Government one move and a fire did the business."

"Removing the Dead. The work of removing the remains of Union soldiers from Oakwood and other cemeteries is continued by friends and relatives from the North. Where the graves have been marked with the name of deceased, number of regiment, etc., the removal is not a very difficult matter, but where this precaution has been neglected, as is the case in many instances, great trouble and perplexity arises."

"The Photographing Corps. The photographic corps of Mr. Brady, the New York and Washington artist, have left Richmond for Petersburg, where they expect to revel in 'fresh fields and pastures new' for a time, and then return to the North with the fruits of their tour."

"President Johnson is preparing a proclamation appointing a day of national mourning for President Lincoln. It will probably be the 25th of May or 1st of June. The first day of national mourning was on the death of General Washington."