The Press.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1865.

PEACE.

THE LATE CONFERENCE IN HAMPTON ROADS.

Return of the President and Secretary of State to Washington.

THE RESULT OF THE INTERVIEW REPORTED UNSATISFACTORY.

No Change of Attitude on Either Side.

FIRM POSITION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

THE WAR FOR THE UNION TO BE CONTINUED WITH VIGOR.

The Way in which the Negotiations were Conducted—The Duration of the Conference Four Hours.

Rumors of an Agreement for a General Exchange of Prisoners—A Baltimore Story about an Armistice.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5.—It is difficult to procure details of the conference between the President, the Secretary of State and the rebel commissioners, but it is asserted that the President throughout the conversation insisted that he should continue the prosecution of the war on the principle heretofore declared, namely, of compelling obedience to the Constitution and on the basis of the Union, and admitting peace only on these terms. With him there was to be no deviation from this course, so the commissioners were left in no doubt whatever on this material point. The conversation was conducted in the most courteous and respectful manner, and the commissioners returned to Richmond thoroughly understanding the views expressed by the President. Therefore, if anything further is to be said on this subject, it must come from the Confederates themselves. As has heretofore been stated, there was no agreement upon any point at issue. It is asserted by the intimate friends of the President that no conclusion or promise was made by them in the least degree yielding the position, as above stated, and which he has, in public and private communication, maintained. Whatever may be the speculations as to peace movements in future, it is certain that there will be no abatement made in our military operations, but that the effort will be to prosecute the war with additional vigor, so that our successes may procure an early peace.

The *Chronicle* says: "The blind fatuity which possessed the rebel leaders, at the outset of the rebellion, rules them inexorably still, and the sword of justice must execute the work which the folly of blinded leaders would not accord to the arts of pacification."

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4—10 O'CLOCK P. M.—Much surprise was occasioned this morning by the early return of the President and Secretary of State, and it was not long before many conflicting reports were circulated regarding the result of their mission. The antagonistic positions of the two Governments were known on the return of Mr. Blair from Richmond—the one desiring peace on the basis of separate independence and recognition, and the other on the basis of unconditional submission to the Union. It was clear that the rebels themselves did not anticipate a ready compliance with their demands, which there was an earnest feeling on the part of the President to do all that was compatible with his honor and public expediency in the premises, and he evinced not a little anxiety to induce an accommodation.

It was briefly announced by telegraph this morning that President Lincoln and Secretary Seward had returned to Washington after a conference with the rebel commissioners, which resulted in no change of the attitude of either the Government of the rebels. Private telegrams have since been received making inquiry as to the truth of this statement, because the whole truth had not been stated with regard to the prospective and immediate results from Richmond. Now, that brief telegram is reliable, and was obtained from the best authority. No details have been made known, nor is it probable that they will transpire, the President and Secretary Seward being the only party present on our side, and the conference being entirely informal—more in the character of a general conversation to elicit the views of all who composed it than a grave diplomatic discussion. Beyond this, whatever may be said must be mere speculation. The conversation did not result in an agreement. The main feature, involving the questions of separation of and submission to the Union having been left undecided, of course those of a minor character could have no existence, and so the parties separated. As far as can be ascertained nothing was said as to future meetings, and the issue seems to be left precisely where it was before the conference, with the exception of the report circulating to-day that they had agreed upon a general exchange of prisoners.

PARTICULARS OF THE PRESIDENT'S RETURN—HOW THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE CONDUCTED.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4—*The Star* has the following particulars of the President's return: President Lincoln and Secretary Seward arrived in Washington at 8 o'clock this morning by a special train from Annapolis, on their return from Fortress Monroe.

The President, who left here on Thursday at 11.15 A. M., accompanied by Mr. George S. Koontz, agent of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, arrived at Annapolis at 1.15 P. M., and, in company with Mr. K., proceeded to the Naval Academy, where the steamer Collyer had steamed up, and going aboard of her, left immediately for Fortress Monroe, arriving at an early hour yesterday morning.

During yesterday morning two boats, the Mary Martin, bearing the rebel deputation to Fortress Monroe, and the River Queen, on which Mr. Seward went down, were lashed side by side, during which time the President and Secretary of State and the rebel deputation had a protracted interview. The boats remained about dusk, and the River Queen immediately steamed for Annapolis, where she arrived early this morning.

The special train, which was in waiting for the party, left that place at 7.30, and arrived here, as stated, about 9.15 this morning.

Generals Williams and Ingalls, who came up on the Cypher last night, were on the same train, as were also Mr. R. S. Chew, of the State Department, who went down with Mr. Seward; Major Eckerts, of United States Military Telegraph, and Charles Forbes, an attache of the White House, who accompanied the President.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4—The President and Secretary of State arrived this morning from Fortress Monroe, at ten o'clock. They had an important conference yesterday, with Stephens and his associates, Hunter and Campbell, on board the River Queen, in Hampton Roads.

The conference occupied four hours, and it is positively known to have resulted in no change of the attitude of the Government, or of the rebels; in other words, it is a total failure.

AN ARMISTICE RUMOR.

BALTIMORE, Feb. 4.—A special Annapolis despatch to the *American*, after announcing the arrival of the President and Secretary of State, General Grant's flagboat, says: "The prospects of an early settlement of our national troubles are bright.

"It was rumored on the boat that an armistice of thirty days would take place, but this is, of course, only a mere rumor."

A GENERAL EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS AGREED UPON.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4.—It is reported that the conference at Hampton Roads resulted in an agreement for a general exchange of prisoners, which will take place immediately.

ARMY OF THE JAMES.

MOVEMENTS OF THE REBEL FLEET.

HEAVY FIRING NEAR PETERSBURG.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE JAMES, Feb. 3.—It is reported that the rebel fleet started down the river early this morning, but, after proceeding a short distance, turned back, and anchored in their old position. It is thought they were apprehensive of not getting back as safely as they did last week if they had attempted to go as far as they did on that occasion.

A good deal of firing has been heard all the afternoon in the direction of Petersburg, one report being that some new mortars were practicing on Petersburg, while another represents an engagement of a lively character between the two lines near the Appomattox. The firing ceased about five o'clock this P. M.

GENERAL GRANT'S ARMY.

THE FIELD HOSPITALS CLEARED OF PATIENTS—THE REBELS JUBILANT FROM SOME UNKNOWN CAUSE.

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, Feb. 2.—All the hospitals in the field were cleared a day or two ago, the inmates being sent to the City Point General Hospital, where they would receive much more care and be in better quarters. This change, no doubt, gave rise to the rumors of an intended movement.

Deserters who came in to-day report the return to our front of the troops recently sent to North Carolina to meet a Union force said to be marching on Weldon.

The army in front of Petersburg have been jubilant for a day or two, indulging in frequent cheering, but on what account is not known here.

Colonel Ruggles, one of the oldest officers in the army, has been assigned to duty as assistant adjutant general at these headquarters, and from his extensive acquaintance with the duties of the position, acquired under former commanders of this army, will no doubt prove a valuable acquisition.

W. D. McG.

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SPEECH OF GEN. BUTLER AT BOSTON

The Constitutional Abolition of Slavery.

EVERY NEGRO SLAVE AN AMERICAN CITIZEN.

Massachusetts Unalterably Opposed to the Colonization System.

(Special Report for The Press.)

BOSTON, February 6, 1865.

At the public meeting held at the Music Hall, in this city, last evening, in honor of the passage by Congress of the Constitutional amendment prohibiting human slavery in the United States, Major General B. F. Butler delivered the following speech:

Almost ninety years since, amid the radiant glories of midsummer, our fathers assembled to congratulate each other upon a declaration of human rights which has since been claimed to be a charter to the white man only. Seventy-seven years ago, in midwinter, Massachusetts debated the acceptance of the Constitution of the United States—the solemn compact of assurance to those rights—the most perfect form of government ever devised by man, but which left unnamed for and unprovided safeguards of freedom and equality of right to all men, irrespective of color. Our fathers believed that the class interested in the shifting nation would protect it from the receding wedge of human slavery. But, alas! a single Massachusetts invention—the cotton-gin—opposed the present interests of the individual to the interest of the State, and made the burden—greater than that of the Pilgrim Christian—seem eternal. From that one defect of constitutional law has arisen the most gigantic national sin, followed by the most terrible national retribution with which the Divine will has seen fit to afflict the children of men. The nation brought to account for its chastisement, we are now met to congratulate ourselves upon the first step taken in supplying the omission of the crime of government of '87. Released from all constitutional obligations to protect slavery, acting upon the frame of government itself, three-fourths of the loyal people of the country will have no difficulty in erasing from their fundamental law this the last blot upon their civilization. Amid the joyous scenes of this triumph of the right which animates the hearts of all good men, even now and here, it may not be unfit to pause for a moment to consider the duties and obligations under which we find ourselves to this class, constituted and declared by this change in our organic law. Laying aside all prejudices, giving up all theories, putting away all predilections; we should approach the subject as one calling for prompt, active, and efficient justice; at least to make amends for former long-continued wrongs. By the final passage of the amendment which we celebrate, every negro slave is made a citizen of the United States, entitled as of right to every political and legal immunity and privilege which belongs to that great franchise. He may well say: "I am an American born." If he has any priority of pride with the apostle, "I was free-born," yet he can truly claim as did the chief captain, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom." Whatever may be the fate of them, no man, and no combination or confederation of men, can with justice deprive the negro. As a nation he is free, and as a citizen he has an equal right under the law. To the men of Massachusetts, in this so clear and self-evident proposition there can be no difficulty. Since 1789 the colored man in Massachusetts, under the laws thereon modified only by the laws of the United States, has enjoyed the rights and privileges of every other citizen of Massachusetts. His child goes to the same school. The man partakes of the same employments. The same learned professions, medicine, the bar, the pulpit, are open to him, and, more than all, he carries to the election of his fellows and framing of the laws the equal ballot, which,

"Soft falling
Like the snow-flake on the sea,
Executes the freeman's will
As lightning executes the will of God."

In other sections of the country, the mind warped and twisted by the influence of the institution—whose funeral obsequies we are now attending—does not at once comprehend these truths, and admit the force of the logical deductions from premises. Men otherwise just and good have been brought to believe that the negro can have no practical rights which the white man is bound to respect as a moral part of the inhabitants of the country, and is to be treated as if he were an alien—nay, more, as if he were a beast, and a dangerous beast beside; either to be sent out of the country or be herded and penned as such in some remote or unhealthy corner thereof, as not fit to live on the soil which gave him birth, and which has sucked the life-blood of his race by every tie and attachment which binds a man to that portion of earth which he calls home and country. If, from the necessity of the case, he is driven away—to herd him in rice swamps or cotton islands—where alone he may listen to the sad music of the roar of the ocean surf, not more relentless and unpeasing; for the extinction of the race which, if there to prevent any white man or white woman in the missionary labor of love to visit him; undoubtedly by the giving out, by the rice swamps, to allow his child never to know the benefit of the common school. Just released from a worse than Egyptian bondage, we are called to consider the proper elements of colonization or fostering care on the part of the mother country. To any such illogical and unjust treatment of the negro, it may be said that the people of Massachusetts will never consent. *Our material interests, the interests of the country, oppose it.* For two hundred and fifty years at least we have been improving our country, because we needed labor in this country. The necessity for labor here has caused it to be imported, even to be employed in the service of the United States. Shall we, now that four millions of strong hands and willing hearts are made free laborers, productive and profitable, that we will not have them? Shall they be filled? from the homes in which they have been reared? from their hearthstones, as dear to them as our roof-tree is to us, and send them away to some foreign land, to be hewed in some remote corner of this, where their labor, if not wholly unproductive and lost, must be unprofitable? *Our sense of justice forbids it.* The negro has shown, freely and willingly in our defence, and we have given them their freedom and rights as citizens. Shall we now say that they must be penned in a corner, or to be shut up in a rice swamp, or not allowed to see the faces of their white fellow-citizens, except it may be of a soldier sent as their guard? Shall we say to the negro that the exercise of their equal rights in the land their arms have helped to save from the fiery furnace of rebellion, and to the protection of which they are entitled, not thought to be well habitable by their white fellow-soldiers? What fair division can it be of the earth to give the white man the fruits of his own and his white fellow-soldier one hundred and sixty acres of land, to be located where he chooses—the black man, the same phone upon 1—to him and his heirs forever, while to the colored soldier, scarred perhaps with honorable wounds, but forty acres of a rice swamp to be allotted, or eight hundred feet front of marsh on a single river, and that a possessory title only? And yet life distinguished general who makes this proposition says: "The young and able-bodied negroes must be encouraged to contribute their share toward maintaining their own freedom and securing their rights as citizens of the United States." What freedom? What rights of citizenship for which to shed one's blood, if not the right to labor? What is freedom? Citizenship? Is it a simple fact of physical existence? Is it a simple fact of mere chastisement? Is it a simple fact of the power of locomotion? Is it not thought to be well habitable by their white fellow-soldiers? What fair division can it be of the earth to give the white man the fruits of his own and his white fellow-soldier one hundred and sixty acres of land, to be located where he chooses—the black man, the same phone upon 1—to him and his heirs forever, while to the colored soldier, scarred perhaps with honorable wounds, but forty acres of a rice swamp to be allotted, or eight hundred feet front of marsh on a single river, and that a possessory title only? And yet life distinguished general who makes this proposition says: "The young and able-bodied negroes must be encouraged to contribute their share toward maintaining their own freedom and securing their rights as citizens of the United States." What freedom? What rights of citizenship for which to shed one's blood, if not the right to labor? What is freedom