



The first Confederate Cabinet in Montgomery. From left to right: Attorney General Judah P. Benjamin, Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Treasury Christopher G. Memminger, Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens, Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker, President Jefferson Davis, Postmaster General John H. Reagan, and Secretary of State Robert Toombs

By Thomas C. DeLeon

The head of the cabinet was, in constructive sense, Secretary of State Robert Toombs, of Georgia, but popular belief said it was really Mr. Benjamin, voicing Mr. Davis's views. Burly, rough, emphatic in his own opinions as his chief himself, the Georgian was a brainy and experienced politician and a born disputant. What he was not in remotest degree was a diplomat, and the early wonder grew why Mr. Davis had selected an ingrained aggressor, one whose method was to force a point rather than go around it, for the most delicate and possibly the most vital of all cabinet procedure. Mr. Toombs was, moreover, very strong in his prejudices, and they doubtless swayed his judgment, so it was asserted that he was unstable of tenet. Disputatious as Sydney Smith's missionary, who "*disagreed with the cannibal that ate him*", the secretary was not always of the same mind. A governmental wag once said: "*Bob Toombs disagrees with himself between meals!*"

Vigorous, able and well posted he certainly was, but perhaps his weakest point as a minister was his hyper-Southern under judging of the men opposed to him in the North, men with whom he should have been familiar from long and close contact in the public service. At the moment of his selection the foreign policy of the Confederacy was unborn. The busy bureaus were those of war, finance and subsistence. Mr. Toombs had nothing to do but talk politics, tell stories and say some very clever things. Profane enough to have delighted Sterne's "Army in Flanders", he larded his jokes with things not in the church service, but they were usually to the point. In Montgomery I recall one retort, not new, but too characteristic to omit. A man of influence and loaded with recommendations applied to him on the street for a clerkship in his department. The secretary demurred; the man of influence insisted. Jerking off his well-worn

Washington hat, the official held it up; pointed into it as he roared: "*Blankety blank, sir! There is the State Department of the Confederacy, by blankety blank! Jump in, sir!*"

When the secretary resigned, avowedly to take a brigade in the field, there was little surprise among the initiated. There were however, varied rumors of ruptures between him and the President and other of his associates in council. None of these were probable, for General Toombs was restless under thwart of impracticable views, and he was doubtless sincere in preference for active service.

Secretary Toombs was succeeded, in July, 1861, by Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter. No Virginian of the older activities had been more prominent than he, and his experience had been earned in service as state legislator, congressman and United States senator. His unfinished term in the upper house would have ended, had he retained it, about the time when General Grant was arranging to accept the parole of Robert Lee. Mr. Hunter held the portfolio of state but a few months, resigning to take up the more congenial duties of Confederate senator from Virginia. In February, 1862, his place was temporarily filled by Mr. Benjamin, who was already becoming the *Pooh-Bah* of the cabinet.

The social side of the cabinet was scarcely affected by Mr. Toombs's withdrawal. His only daughter, Miss Sallie Toombs, had long before married Dudley M. Du Bose, and had given up Washington belleship for domesticity. She died shortly after the war, in Virginia, leaving a son and daughter, Toombs Du Bose, of Athens, Ga., and Camille, Mrs. Henry Calley of Washington, Ga. An older daughter, Lula, had married Felix Alexander, but had died in 1855, leaving no children.

The Mallory household was an interesting one to all sorts of people, and from many aspects. General curiosity prevailed as to the naval future of the Confederacy, and that centered in the man who was to control at least its details.

Mr. Mallory was known to all as a tried publicist, who had headed the then infant effort of floating the starry flag triumphantly in long service as senator. Personally, he was little known on his arrival in Richmond; but his quick perception, decided cultivation, and especially his wit, genial nature and frank courtesy, soon placed him high in the estimate of even the severest critics of men in position.

In two things Mr. Mallory took genuine pleasure: good cheer and a good joke. He was *gourmet*, while no whit *gourmand*, and one had but to note the twinkle in his eye and the placid curve of his full lips to know that the Irish blood in him had taken no yellow tinge from American rush. The color of his humor was not scarlet, but his quaint turning of an idea was often more effective than an epigram had been. The two salient sides of character noted were concreted in a brief love song he dedicated to "Gumbo File", the ambrosia of the Creole and the dietetic delight of the earnest Northern pilgrim. Brief, with a touch of genuine poetry, and as full flavored with humor as its delicate godmother potage with the bay leaf, the poem took at once. The press reprinted it; young ladies clipped it - often with but part conception of its quality - and it was sung frequently, and notably by Mrs. Mallory's brothers, Stephen and James Moreno. We may meet Mr. Mallory later, in his aspect as maker and manager of a navy on which opinions varied, as they did on all things governmental. But as a host there were no two views of the jovial secretary.

The Mallory home was not a very gay one, and there were no grown children to add the whirligig to its quiet, hospitable round. But the instincts of both husband and wife - for Mrs. Mallory's descent was pure Spanish - combined to make the crosser of their threshold at home immediately. There were rounds of informal droppings-in, where the intellect, wit and cultivation of the nervous and varied population could be found. Mr.

Mallory brewed a punch as good as his stories and *mots*, and Mrs. Mallory knew tricks of Southern salads and of *daube a la Créole* that made many Northern eyes wink and mouths water. And almost always the little daughter of the house was allowed to sit out the stay of guests and often to aid in their entertainment.

Mrs. Mallory's long Washington experience as a senator's wife had quite Americanized her manner, but her pure Spanish taste lingered in the lady who had been Senorita Angela Silveria Moreno. Her family has many and influential ramifications in the Creole South, and notable members of it will be encountered by the patient one who follows these pages. The most familiar descendant was the late Senator S. R. Mallory, who filled his father's old chair in representing Florida until his death in 1907.

Little Ruby Mallory was about seven years old when the move to Richmond was made. She was one of the most intelligent and precocious children I ever knew, but there was nothing uncanny or irritant in her exceptional outstripping of her years. The darling of parents so informed, so careful, she absorbed and understood unusual things, and her magnetism was wonderful even at that age. Her natural elocution was the talk of Richmond and prophecies were freely hazarded that she would surely be a great actress some day. What she really did become, while still in her teens, was the facile queen of young society, in her native Pensacola, and her belleship continued until her marriage with Dr. T. S. Kennedy, of New Orleans. There the young wife had wider field for her tact, cleverness and inborn power to lead, all tempered and fused into general popularity by the warmth of a true woman's heart. She was long at the head of a gay and brilliant circle, but it is not of record that she ever willfully misused her power or hurt the pride or the feelings of an associate, though she was absolutely fearless, a consistent hater of shams and prompt to spur to the rescue of a friend in distress.

With examples of this trait New Orleans drawing-rooms were rife. One of them I recall. Miss Lee was visiting the city about carnival time. There was one especially fine function among the many in honor of the great General's daughter. When its main motif was satisfied the ladies sat over coffee and - I had almost written cigarettes for - salted almonds! Miss Lee drew off a quaint old ring, an heirloom from the centuries, and probably worn by Martha Washington. It was eagerly seized and passed around, amid chorused "*How sweet!*" and "*Lovely!*" and "*So nice!*" Then family pride flared up, and one *mondaine* showed a ring left by a triply great-ed grandmother, who had flirted with Bienville. Another trumped that centuried trick with the Court of Charles the Bold, another still, straight from the Crusades. Miss Lee sat smiling but slightly flushed. Mrs. Kennedy noted the awkward situation of discounting the guest's social advance. Slowly drawing off a magnificent but most palpably latest style ring, she said demurely.

"Here is a trifle of mine, ladies. That ring was presented by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba!"

Then family pride went to roost again.

Mr. Mallory's eldest daughter, Margaret, had married early in life Mr. Bishop, of Bridgeport, Conn., and her quieter life left her less in public view than her little sister. This, and the early maturity of the latter constantly made an absurd "Buttercupping" of the two, and many bright sayings of the younger were ascribed to the senior.

Some grave actions of the latter have been ascribed to Mrs. Kennedy while still a child. Mrs. Bishop called on Andrew Johnson to protest against her father's unjust imprisonment and demand his release. Later I heard the statement, which has apparently misguided some, that this visit was made the president "by little Ruby Mallory!" At the date of its making she was just twelve years old.

In 1901, a lecture engagement called me to New Orleans. Looking to her for much of the pleasure of the visit, I wrote her. The letter arrived just as the fiat incomprehensible had gone forth, and I met a sorrow, deep and universal, for her untimely death. Very vividly came back memories of that delightful, if not gay, Richmond home in which the Reaper had meantime been so busy.

The pleasantest houses of the "official set" were not always those of the cabinet. That body is somewhat Arabian. A secretary would fold his official tent, and steal away sandalshod and in silence; sometimes, as one wag put it, "*Ungloved, unborrowed and - unhung.*" But even were these changes explicable to the tyro in cabinet-making, this is not the proper place to seek their cause or their results. The retiring officials were rarely beaux or their families belles.

The most kaleidoscopic department was the war office. The first and provisional secretary was promptly replaced, on the regular formation of the government, but not before that Montgomery speech, in which he pledged to carry the new flag to Boston and plant it on Faneuil Hall. Leroy Pope Walker was scarcely permitted to "tote" it to the James. He was at that day the most prominent of four well-known Alabama brothers of whom the two least noted were the most popular. Hon. Percy Walker was perhaps the least so. A speech made to him by the learned and eccentric Judge Edmund Dargan was long-lived in the Gulf State. Returning with him from the convention in Montgomery, the old jurist noted that his junior was gloomy and wrath. Asked the cause, Walker cried: "*Why, judge, they threatened to hang me in effigy!*"

The old man shifted his invariable quid, solemnly peered over his glasses and drawled: "*Which party did, Percy?*"

John J. Walker and "Billy" were not publicists, but stead-fast comrades and good soldiers. The latter was a "high roller, of the strictest sect."

Several successive shakes of the kaleidoscope, and the peephole showed the "rearrangement" of Hon. James A. Seddon, with his thin, grave face and monkish skullcap; General George Wythe Randolph, self-contained, decisive and ordained not to stay; General Braxton Bragg and Judge John A. Campbell, both as ad interim time-fillers; Mr. Benjamin temporarily acting as a "stop-gap," and General John C. Breckinridge finally withdrawn from more congenial field service to aid Mr. Davis's real control of that most vital department of the government.

Next in importance if not actual twin with the war office was the Confederate treasury. This was given into the trust of the Mother of Secession, its conduct being reposed in the hands of Hon. C. G. Memminger and George A. Trenholm, of South Carolina. This is not the place to consider its results. Later I may show what was claimed as the crucial error of Confederate finance, and how the non-acceptance of some foreign concessions and proffers left the South the first essayist in a "cheap" money experiment, and "demonetized" the true and potent "white money" - cotton. These may come under review later. Here it need only be noted that neither of these officials added much to the general social aspects of the capital. Courtly and cultured families in Richmond needed houses and chefs to make them notable.

Grim, grave and steadfast General John H. Reagan held the post-office portfolio with the same tenacity and quite the same satisfaction to his chief as did Mr. Mallory his secretary ship. Loyal, blunt and outspoken, he was the tried friend of Mr. Davis through good report and ill, and the latter trusted in his honesty even as he possibly overrated his judgment. To his recent death, which swept away the one remaining vestige of the Richmond cabinet, General Reagan was the quick and ardent champion of his dead chief, against every assault on plan or performance. Neither was the department of

letters conducive to added sociality; but the head and family of the assistant postmaster-general were so in large measure, as will be seen.

Good men and true, doubtless, were all of these, but they scarcely counted in the sociality of the war, save one. General Randolph was a charming host, hospitable, frank and cultured. His wife was one of the most charming women of her day, graces of person, mind and heart blending in her to form a resistless personality. She had been Miss Mary Elizabeth Adams, of Mississippi, and had first married Mr. Pope, of Mobile. When still a brilliant young widow she married the noted Virginian. She was the soul of hospitality and an accomplished entertainer, so hers early became the most popular of official homes. She had the knack of making young and old, simple and high-placed alike, feel ownership. Mrs. Randolph was assisted by her niece, Miss Jennie Pollard; and the philosophic youth of war-time, knowing a good thing when they saw it, flocked to Mrs. Randolph's house as it had been a shrine curative of the blue devils. There reception, dance and theatricals followed in quick succession. In the last named the hostess promoted this writer to a post that has enabled him to rebuild from the debris of recollection a gilded structure, if it has some resemblance to the sand-projected palaces of Suleiman the Magnificent.

One ubiquitous and most acceptable social factor of the official circle was that polished and smooth brevet bachelor, Hon. Judah P. Benjamin, attorney-general with the plus sign. There was no circle, official or otherwise, that missed his soft, purring presence, or had not regretted so doing. He was always expected, almost always found time to respond, and was invariably compensating. He moved into and through the most elegant or the simplest assemblage on natural rubber tires and well-oiled bearings, a smile of recognition, for the mere acquaintance, a reminiscent word for the intimate, and a general diffusion of placid bonhomie. A Hebrew of Hebrews, for the map of the Holy City¹ was traced all over his small, refined face, the attorney-general was of the highest type of his race. Small and rotund, he was yet of easy grace in manner; and his soft voice was not only pleasant of sound, but always carried something worth hearing. That he was a great and successful lawyer all knew, and that he was an omnivorous devourer of books and of wonderful assimilative capacity. Astute and best informed, he was greatly regarded by Mr. Davis as an adviser. With his conduct of foreign affairs we may differ later, perhaps. He may have missed silver-lined opportunities in the over-reach for impossible golden ones. He may have deceived himself and the people at once, in his optimistic utterances as to intervention by the Powers, and he may have played the Confederates' pawn abroad in a fool's "gambit." But socially the man was delightful and many-sided, and as popular with the young as with the older set about him. After the war Mr. Benjamin repeated the triumph of Disraeli, and by the same force of personality and brain. He achieved, alone and as the best known representative of a lost and a disaster-strewn Cause, the quickest advance to a barrister ever known to the most conservative legal system of the planet.

Hebrew in blood, English in tenacity of grasp and purpose, Mr. Benjamin was French in taste, *jusque au bout des ongles*. So were his family, and they never visited Richmond. In-deed, in a knowledge of him extending to a decade before the war I recall but one visit made by them to this side of the water. Mrs. Benjamin had been Mlle. de St. Martin and she lived with her two grown daughters, permanently in Paris where the girls married. But the secretary's brother-in-law, Jules de St. Martin, was awhile in

¹ The Arabs call Jerusalem "El Khuds" (the Holy City).

Richmond and later quite a toast in Baltimore society. Very small, faultlessly groomed and well equipped by travel and association, this gentleman was very much of a man. He was suave and decided and an expert in the code, as I chanced to learn.

The second Confederate attorney-general was a noted Alabamian, though of Virginia-Georgia descent. His father, Thomas Hughes Watts, of Fauquier county, Va., married in 1818, Miss Prudence Hill, of Clarke county, Ga., and immediately moved to Butler county, Ala., then the wild and lonely home of the Creek Indians. There in the next year, was born his son, Thomas Hill Watts.

In a log but school house with a puncheon floor that received light and air through crevices of its sides and roof, the youth got its first education. Thence, at fifteen years he went to Airy Mount, in Dallas, and equipped for the University of Virginia, where he graduated with distinction in 1840. The next year he began practice of law in his home, and in 1847 removed from Greenville to Montgomery.

Prior to the war he was an extensive plantation and slave owner, and he was a staunch supporter of Harrison against Van Buren, when a mere youth. Then, for three terms he was in the legislature. In later years, he was both representative and senator from the Montgomery districts. In 1848, he was a Taylor elector at large; and eight years later Know Nothing candidate for congress, but was defeated by a narrow margin.

In the hot triangle of 1860, he labored for the Bell-Everett success. Vigorous in opposition, the election of Lincoln determined him to "go with his people."

With William L. Yancey, he represented Montgomery County in the Secession convention of January 7th, 1861; and, as chairman of its judiciary committee, did much toward taking his state out of the Union.

Showing his faith, as did many an "original Union man" the lawyer changed Chitty for Hardee, raised the 17th Alabama Infantry and became its colonel. While commanding it at Corinth, Mr. Davis chose Colonel Watts to succeed Mr. Benjamin as law chief of the permanent cabinet. He preferred the field to the office, but he accepted the duty offered. In the following year, against his earnest protest, he was chosen governor of Alabama and held the office from 1863 to 1865 - the most trying epoch of the war.

Post-bellum, Governor Watts returned to law practice; but, largely through assisting friends, soon found himself in debt for over \$100,000. Of white integrity and indomitable courage he bent every energy and every mastery of his profession to lifting the load; paying the debt in full before he died in 1892.

Governor Watts was twice married: first, in 1842, to Miss Eliza B. Allen, who died in 1873, leaving six children. The second marriage was to the widow of J. F. Jackson, after two years of widowerhood; and she died in 1887.

The six children of Thos. Hill Watts and Eliza B. Allen were: Florence S., Kate P., John W., Thomas H., Jr., Alice and Minnie G. Watts.

The first married Col. Daniel S. Troy and left this family of five: Thos. W. Troy, married at Macon, Ga., and now resident in Honduras, C. A.; Florence Troy married Charles E. Hails, residing at Montgomery; Mary Troy, unmarried and residing at Philadelphia; Daniel W. Troy married Janie B. Watts and resides at Montgomery. Robert E. Troy married a Cuban lady named Trigi and lives at Honduras, C. A.

Kate P. Watts, the second daughter of the governor, married Robert M. Collins and left a family of six children: Robert M. Collins, a bachelor, of Montgomery; Lida B. Collins, living unmarried at Washington City; William H. Collins, of Montgomery, unmarried; James Collins, single, of Washington, D. C.; Florence Collins married

Albert J. Pickett, and residing at Montgomery; as does her sister, Miss Catherine Collins.

Hon. John W. Watts is today a leading member of the Montgomery bar and has a family of seven living children: Miss Gabriella Watts and Marion A. Watts, residing at Montgomery; Marghereta, who married Gaston Scott, also resides there, as do Sophia W., Annie Campbell and Flournoy S., all single and residing in Montgomery. John W. Watts, Jr., lives in Jacksonville, Fla., and is a bachelor.

Mrs. Johnness B. Watts (widow of Thos. Hill Watts, Jr.) has five children: John W. Watts, who married Miss Reid and lives in Birmingham; Ed. S. Watts, who married Miss Norwood and lives in Montgomery, as does his brother, Hugh K., who married Miss Pitcher; Troy Watts, a bachelor, and Janie B. Troy, wife of Daniel W. Troy.

The youngest sister, Alice B. Watts, married Hon. Alexander Troy, resides in Montgomery with her son, Gaston; Alexander Troy having married Miss Thames, of New York.

Even the most intense Virginian monopolizer will not hold that there are not families of Scriptural length in other states.

The third and last attorney-general of the Confederacy - the one who was the last of the cabinet to leave the flying president, in Georgia; and who survived him and the Cause until 1896 - was another example of the force of Welsh blood in the arteries of the short-lived young government. In common with Jefferson Davis, G. T. Beauregard, and the President's brother-in-law, Robert Davis, the attorney-general was of good Welsh stock in paternal descent. On his mother's side he was English.

George Davis was born at Wilmington, N. C., his father being Thomas F. Davis, a well-respected citizen of that old city.

The young man was educated carefully and graduated, entering on the practice of law in his native town, when only twenty-one. He promptly made his way both in his profession and in politics, as an old-line Whig; gaining the confidence of all classes, and the respect of his political opponents. Yet, in a long life, he never sought a political office. He was a prominent member of the convention that took his state out of the Union, in 1861 and was elected senator from North Carolina to the provisional congress. Re-elected in 1862, he was serving his term when selected by the President to fill the seat in his cabinet, vacated by the election of Governor Watts to the head of Alabama's affairs. Conscientious, prudent and an excellent lawyer, he held the confidence of his chief until the very last gasp of the moribund government; accompanying the cabinet party in the evacuation of Richmond, with Breckinridge, Mallory, Benjamin and Clement C. Clay.

It was on his advice that the President acceded to the re-quest of General Breckinridge, that the silver bullion should be saved capture by pro rata distribution among the soldiers of the escort. And, parenthetically, there was no wilder one of all the wild "yarns" of that rumoriferous moment, than that which placed the "Confederate treasure" high up in the millions. Including the security fund deposited in the treasury by the Richmond bank - and later returned to them by the government as private property - the gross amount of the bullion brought from Richmond by Treasurer Trenholm was not the quarter of a million. After the distribution to the soldiers and when the pressure of pursuit forced dispersion of the presidential party, Attorney-General Davis and the treasurer became custodians of the "treasure wagon," moving it toward Augusta.

Nominally for this participancy, but really in punishment for steadfast adherence to his cause, Mr. George Davis was later arrested as a "state prisoner" and held endurance at Fort Hamilton, New York.

After his release (on parole not to leave the State of North Carolina), the ex-official resumed the practice of his profession: prospering in it and regaining in part the losses from his adherence to public duty. He was general counsel for the several lines that consolidated in the Atlantic Coast Line; and then for that system. Then, in 1878, he was offered the chief-justiceship of his state, but was forced to decline for business reasons. His death, in his native city, in 1896, brought regret and sorrow to his whole state and section.

Judge Davis was twice married: first to Miss Adelaide Polk, of Holly Springs, Miss. Of this union came six children, of whom only two survive, the eldest Hon. Junius Davis, of Wilmington, and Meeta Alexander, who is now Mrs. George Rountree, of Wilmington, and has a family of four.

Junius Davis has himself illustrated the old Welsh name and "has done the state some service." He is a prominent citizen and lawyer, with a fine practice, in which he has his son as partner, and he finds leisure for literature and general study, being president of the State Historical and Literary Society. He has, like his father, been twice married: first, to Miss Mary Orme Walker, who died leaving eight children. His present wife is Mary W. Cowan, and they have three children.

The children of George Davis who died were Mary Eliza, Isabel Eagles, Emily Polk and Louis Poisson. The second Isabel, became Mrs. Spencer P. Shotter, now of Savannah, and has one child living. Emily Polk, the next sister, married John E. Crow, of Petersburg, Va., and left five children to her husband, now of Wilmington.

The second wife of Hon. George Davis was of historic Virginia family, Miss Monimia Fairfax, of Richmond. Her two daughters are Mary Fairfax (now Mrs. M. F. H. Gouverneur, of Wilmington, and the mother of three children); and Cary Monimia (now Mrs. Donald Mac Rae, of Wilmington, and also the mother of three children). These Davises have never seemed a self-illustrative family, but they have plainly borne their parts in the private and public life of their Southland.

The above article is extracted from "Belles, Beaux and Brains of the 60's", by Thomas C. DeLeon, New York, 1907. It is reproduced as initially published with its original spelling, punctuation and formatting.



Thomas C. DeLeon