Edwin M. Stanton

STANTON, Edwin McMasters, statesman, b. in Steubenville, Ohio, 19 Dec., 1814; d. in Washington, D. C., 24 Dec., 1869. His father, a physician, died while Edwin was a child. After acting for three years as a clerk in a book-store, he entered Kenyon college in 1831, but left in 1833 to study law. He was admitted to the bar in 1836, and, beginning practice in Cadiz, was in 1837 elected prosecuting attorney. He returned to Steubenville in 1839, and was supreme court reporter in 1842–'5, preparing vols. xi., xii., and xiii. of the Ohio reports. In 1848 he removed to Pittsburg, Pa., and in 1857, on account of his large business in the U. S. supreme court, he established himself in Washington. During 1857–'8 he was in California, attending to important land cases for the government. Among the notable suits that he conducted were the first Erie railway litigation, the Wheeling bridge case, and the Manney and McCormick reaper contest in 1859. When Lewis Cass retired from President Buchanan's cabinet, and Jeremiah S. Black was made secretary of state, Stanton was appointed the latter's successor in the office of at-

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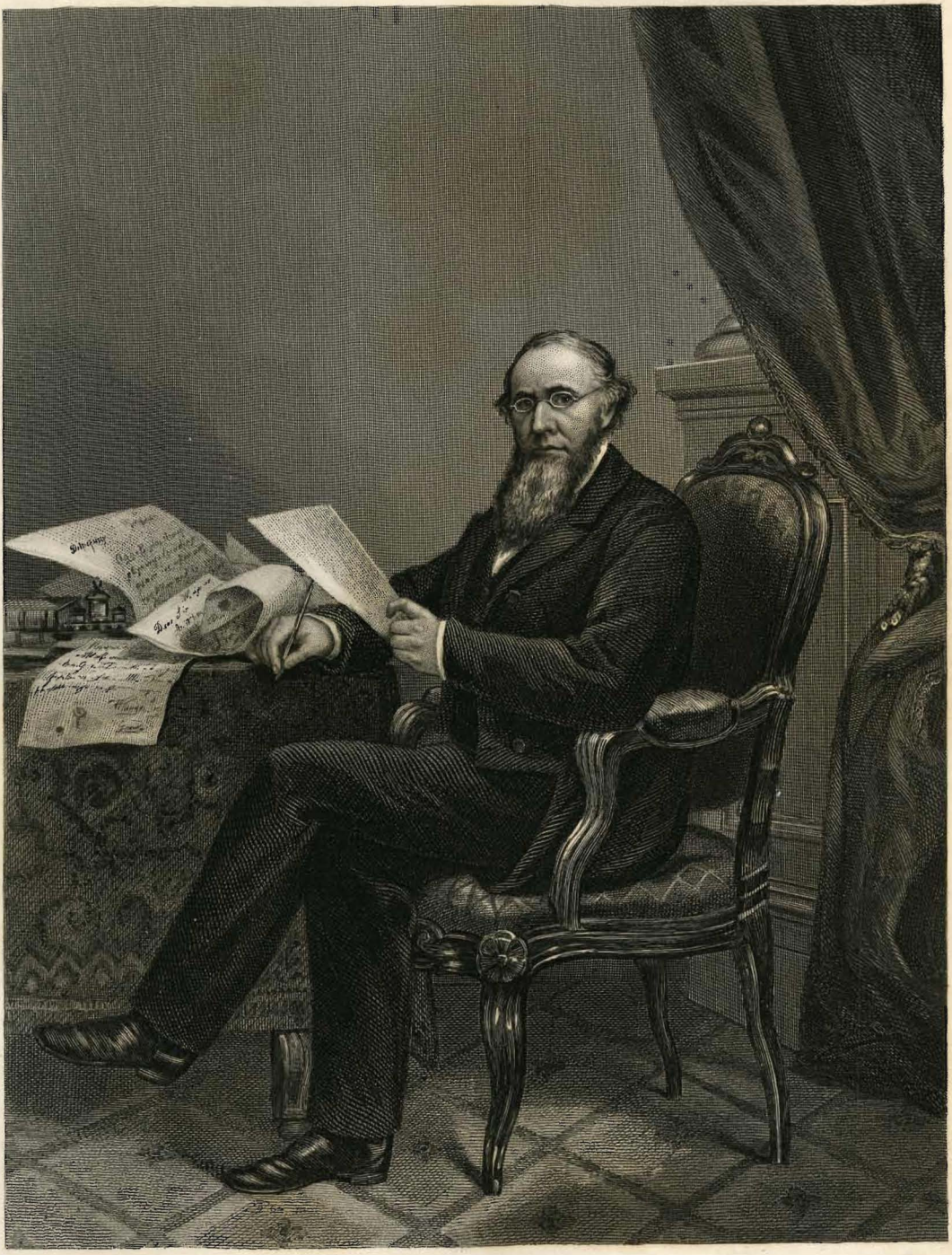
torney-general, 20 Dec., 1860. He was originally a Democrat of the Jackson school, and, until Van Buren's defeat in the Baltimore convention of 1844, took an active part in political affairs in his locality. He favored the Wilmot proviso, to exclude slavery from the territory acquired by the war with Mexico, and sympathized with the Free-soil movement of 1848, headed by Martin Van Buren. He was an anti-slavery man, but his hostility to that institution was qualified by his view of the obligations imposed by the Federal constitution. He had held no public offices before entering President Buchanan's cabinet except those of prosecuting attorney for one year in Harrison county, Ohio, and reporter of the Ohio supreme court for three years, being wholly devoted to his profession. While a member of Mr. Buchanan's cabinet, he took a firm stand for the Union, and at a cabinet meeting, when John B. Floyd, then secretary of war, demanded the withdrawal of the United States troops from the forts in Charleston harbor, he indignantly declared that the surrender of Fort Sumter would be, in his opinion, a crime, equal to that of Arnold, and that all who participated in it should be hung like André. After the meeting, Floyd sent in his resignation. President Lincoln, though since his accession to the presidency he had held no communication with Mr. Stanton, called him to the head of the war department on the retirement of Simon Cameron, 15 Jan., 1862. As was said by an eminent senator of the United States: "He certainly came to the public service with patriotic and not with sordid motives, surrendering a most brilliant position at the bar, and with it the emolument of which, in the absence of accumulated wealth, his family was in daily need." Infirmities of temper he had, but they were incident to the intense strain upon his nerves caused by his devotion to duties that would have soon prostrated most men, however robust, as they finally prostrated him. He had no time for elaborate explanations for refusing trifling or selfish requests, and his seeming abruptness of manner was often but rapidity in transacting business which had to be thus disposed of, or be wholly neglected. As he sought no benefit to himself, but made himself an object of hatred to the dishonest and the inefficient, solely in the public interest, and as no enemy ever accused him of wrong-doing, the charge of impatience and hasty temper will not detract from the high estimate placed by common consent upon his character as a man, a patriot, and a statesman.

Mr. Stanton's entrance into the cabinet marked the beginning of a vigorous military policy. On 27 Jan., 1862, was issued the first of the president's war orders, prescribing a general movement of the troops. His impatience at Gen. George B. McClellan's apparent inaction caused friction between the administration and the general-in-chief, which ended in the latter's retirement. He selected Gen. Ulysses S. Grant for promotion after the victory at Fort Donelson, which Gen. Henry W. Halleck in his report had ascribed to the bravery of Gen. Charles F. Smith, and in the autumn of 1863 he placed Grant in supreme command of the three armies operating in the southwest, directed him to relieve Gen. William S. Rosecrans before his army at Chattanooga could be forced to surrender. President Lincoln said that he never took an important step without consulting his secretary of war. It has been asserted that, on the eve of Mr. Lincoln's second inauguration, he proposed to allow Gen. Grant to make terms of peace with Gen. Lee, and that Mr. Stanton dissuaded him from such action.

According to a bulletin of Mr. Stanton that was issued at the time, the president wrote the despatch directing the general of the army to confer with the Confederate commander on none save purely military questions without previously consulting the members of the cabinet. At a cabinet council that was held in consultation with Gen. Grant, the terms on which Gen. William T. Sherman proposed to accept the surrender of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston were disapproved by all who were present. To the bulletin announcing the telegram that was sent to Gen. Sherman, which directed him to guide his actions by the despatch that had previously been sent to Gen. Grant, forbidding military interference in the political settlement, a statement of the reasons for disapproving Sherman's arrangement was appended, obviously by the direction of Sec. Stanton. These were: (1) that it was unauthorized; (2) that it was an acknowledgment of the Confederate government; (3) that it re-established rebel state governments; (4) that it would enable rebel state authorities to restore slavery; (5) that it involved the question of the Confederate states debt; (6) that it would put in dispute the state government of West Virginia; (7) that it abolished confiscation, and relieved rebels of all penalties; (8) that it gave terms that had been rejected by President Lincoln; (9) that it formed no basis for peace, but relieved rebels from the pressure of defeat, and left them free to renew the war. Gen. Sherman defended his course on the ground that he had before him the public examples of Gen. Grant's terms to Gen. Lee's army, and Gen. Weitzel's invitation to the Virginia legislature to assemble at Richmond. His central motive, in giving terms that would be cheerfully accepted, he declared to be the peaceful disbandment of all the Confederate armies, and the prevention of guerilla warfare. He had never seen President Lincoln's telegram to Gen. Grant of 3 March, 1865, above quoted, nor did he know that Gen. Weitzel's permission for the Virginia legislature to assemble had been rescinded.

A few days before the president's death Sec. Stanton tendered his resignation because his task was completed, but was persuaded by Mr. Lincoln to remain. After the assassination of Lincoln a serious controversy arose between the new president, Andrew Johnson, and the Republican party, and Mr. Stanton took sides against the former on the subject of reconstruction. On 5 Aug., 1867, the president demanded his resignation; but he refused to give up his office before the next meeting of congress, following the urgent counsels of leading men of the Republican party. He was suspended by the president on 12 Aug. On 13 Jan., 1868, he was restored by the action of the senate, and resumed his office. On 21 Feb., 1868, the president informed the senate that he had removed Sec. Stanton, and designated a secretary *ad interim*. Mr. Stanton refused to surrender the office pending the action of the senate on the president's message. At a late hour of the same day the senate resolved that the president had not the power to remove the secretary. Mr. Stanton, thus sustained by the senate, refused to surrender the office. The impeachment of the president followed, and on 26 May, the vote of the senate being "guilty," 35, "not guilty," 19, he was acquitted—two thirds not voting for conviction. After Mr. Stanton's retirement from office he resumed the practice of law. On 20 Dec., 1869, he was appointed by President Grant a justice of the supreme court, and he was forthwith confirmed by the senate. Four days later he expired.

The value to the country of his services during the civil war cannot be overestimated. His energy, inflexible integrity, systematized industry, comprehensive view of the situation in its military, political, and international aspects, his power to command and supervise the best services of others, and his unbending will and invincible courage, made him at once the stay of the president, the hope of the country, and a terror to dishonesty and imbecility. The vastness of his labors led to brusqueness in repelling importunities, which made him many enemies. But none ever questioned his honesty, his patriotism, or his capability. A "Memoir" of Mr. Stanton is at present in preparation by his son, Lewis M. Stanton.



Edwin M. Stanton

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IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOLUME II.

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The popular enthusiasm was doubtless much encouraged by the cheering and impulsive bulletins of the new Secretary of War, who entered upon office, at a happy moment for his reputation, just at the time when the doubt and impatience of the public were to be dispelled by the brilliant series of achievements of the army. On the 15th of January, Edwin M. Stanton was confirmed by the Senate Secretary of War, as the successor of Simon Cameron, who resigned to accept the appointment of Minister to Russia, in place of Mr. Clay, who retired from the office. Born at Steubenville, Ohio, a graduate of Kenyon College in that state, he had adopted the legal profession, and become known in its ranks as one of the

authors of the Reports of the Supreme Court of Ohio, and by his engagement in important cases in Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, and before the Supreme Court at Washington. He removed in 1848 to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where he was called from the active pursuit of his profession to succeed Attorney-General Black in the Cabinet of President Buchanan. His services, in the preservation of the Government in the last months of that memorable administration, will be remembered by the reader; when by the side of Holt and Dix he aided in rescuing the fortunes of the falling State. In those dark days, when people were trembling for the fate of the Capital, he wrote to an old friend, who had given his advice as to the measures to be pursued: "You are right in supposing it to be my determination to do everything in my power to preserve and maintain this Government, and the Constitution under which the United States have been so prosperous. I have an undoubting faith that this Government cannot be overthrown—that it was ordained of God, and that the powers of hell connot prevail against it. We have trouble; the city of Washington may be captured; but every effort will be made to prevent that catastrophe, and even if it does happen, the revolutionists will be as far as ever from accomplishing the destruction of the Government—but much nearer to their own destruction."*

The new Secretary who had thus recorded his faith in the life of the Republic in its hour of greatest peril was not the man to shrink, when he was placed, in the prime of his manhood and maturity of his powers, at the head of the military department of the Government, from the exertions necessary to make his prophecy a reality. He promptly availed himself of every occasion to infuse a spirit of loyalty and determination in the conduct of the war. Immediately on his appointment as Secretary, at a reception at his house in Washington, he is reported to have said to a group of Brigadier-Generals, "You must fight. If we are defeated, it can not be helped: if victorious, so much the better. But you must fight." The battle of Mill Spring, occurring immediately upon his occupancy of his office, afforded him an opportunity to give *éclat* to his opening administration by the cheering, animated proclamation recorded on a previous page, in the relation of that engagement.* The invitation to the use of the bayonet in storming intrenchments indicated a development of the aggressive policy in the conduct of the war. Vigor, energy, were his watchwords. To General Lander, who wrote to him from Virginia for instructions respecting the misconduct of an officer under his command, he replied: "If General Lander is satisfied that Colonel Anstanzel was guilty of cowardice or misbehavior before the enemy, he may be tried on the spot, and, if found guilty, the sentence of death may be executed on the spot, or he may be cashiered by his commanding General at the head of his regiment. The former course is recommended as the preferable one. Cowardice in an officer, exhibited on the field of battle, should receive the swift punishment of death."† When an article—"a special tribute of affectionate admiration"—appeared about this time in the *New York Tribune*, speaking of him as the chief promoter of the recent victories, Secretary Stanton took occasion, in a letter to the editor, while modestly thrusting aside the panegyric, still further to animate the invigorated spirit of the people and infuse into their minds the earnestness of a religious conviction. "Sir," he wrote, "I can not suffer undue merit to be ascribed to my official action. The glory of our recent victories belongs to the gallant officers and soldiers that fought the battles. No share of it be-

* E. M. Stanton to General William Robinson, Washington, January 16, 1861.

* Ante vol. ii. p. 209.

† Letter dated War Department, February 16, 1862.

longs to me. Much has recently been said of military combinations and organizing victory. I hear such phrases with apprehension. They commenced in infidel France with the Italian campaign, and resulted in Waterloo. Who can organize victory? Who can combine the elements of success on the battle-field? We owe our recent victories to the Spirit of the Lord, that moved our soldiers to rush into battle, and filled the hearts of our enemies with terror and dismay. The inspiration that conquered in battle was in the hearts of the soldiers and from on high; and wherever there is the same inspiration there will be the same results. Patriotic spirit with resolute courage in officers and men is a military combination that never failed. We may well rejoice at the recent victories, for they teach us that battles are to be won now and by us in the same and only manner that they were ever won by any people, or in any age, since the days of Joshua, by boldly pursuing and striking the foe. What, under the blessing of Providence, I conceive to be the true organization of victory and military combination to end this war, was declared in a few words by General Grant's message to General Buckner—'I propose to move immediately on your works!'"*

Among the orders issued by Secretary Stanton regulating the business of his office, appeared one in relation to the system of contracts which had recently become the subject of much animadversion. In an order dated January 29, he recalled and annulled "all outstanding orders, agencies, authorities, and licenses for the purchase of arms, clothing, or anything else in foreign countries, or of foreign manufacture." It was subsequently, however, found that a regulated supply of arms from abroad was convenient to the due prosecution of the war, as it assumed larger proportions.

One of the foremost subjects which engaged the attention of the new Secretary was the welfare of the Union prisoners of war in the Confederate States. A limited system of exchange was already in operation, under which several hundred captives, taken at Bull Run and elsewhere, had been received from Richmond at Fortress Monroe. Numbers remained, scattered through the South. In an order issued January 21st, Secretary Stanton, declaring that "this department recognizes as the first of its duties to take measures for the relief of the brave men who, having imperiled their lives in the military service of the Government, are now prisoners and captives," announced that two commissioners would be appointed "to visit the city of Richmond, in Virginia, and wherever else prisoners belonging to the army of the United States may be held, and there take such measures as may be needful to provide for the wants and contribute to the comfort of such prisoners at the expense of the United States, and to such extent as may be permitted by the authorities under whom such prisoners are held." A few days after, two persons, of elevated position, of the highest integrity, and of excellent discretion—the Rev. Bishop Ames, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Hon. Hamilton Fish, ex-governor of New York—were elected for this delicate mission. In a patriotic spirit they accepted the charge, and, presenting themselves at Fortress Monroe, on their errand, opened correspondence with the Confederate authorities at Richmond. On motives of policy, doubtless with a distrust of the influence or powers of observation of two such influential supporters of the Union, they were refused admittance to the Confederate territory; but negotiations were effected for a general release of prisoners. This included even the excess of prisoners—three hundred—held by the Confederates. These were liberated on agreement that a like number were to be released in case of future captures by the Government at Washington.

* *New York Tribune*, February 18th and 20th, 1862.

By another executive order from the War Department, dated February 14th, the political prisoners held under arrest at Fort Lafayette, and elsewhere, were generally directed to be released on their simple parole. The order set forth the position in which the rebellion had found the nation, and the circumstances under which the arrests had been made. "Every department of the government was paralyzed by treason;" when "the Capitol was beleagured and its connection with all the States cut off;" when, "even in the portions of the country which were most loyal, political combinations and secret societies were found furthering the work of disunion; while from motives of disloyalty or cupidity, or from excited passions or perverted sympathies, individuals were found furnishing men, money, materials of war, and supplies to the insurgents' military and naval force. Armies, ships, fortifications, navy-yards, arsenals, military posts, and garrisons, one after another, were betrayed or abandoned to the insurgents."

The situation was unprecedented, and little or no provision had been made, or was in working operation for its requirements. "Congress had not anticipated, and so had not provided for the emergency. The municipal authorities were powerless and inactive. The judiciary machinery seemed as if it had been designed not to sustain the government, but to embarrass and betray it. Foreign intervention was openly invited, and industriously instigated by the abettors of the insurrection, and it became imminent, and has only been prevented by the practice of strict and impartial justice, with the most perfect moderation in our intercourse with other nations. The public mind was alarmed and apprehensive, though, fortunately, not distracted or disheartened. It seemed to be doubtful, whether the National Government, which one year ago had been thought a model worthy of universal acceptance, had indeed the ability to defend and maintain itself. Some reverses, which perhaps were unavoidable, suffered by newly-levied and insufficient forces, discouraged the loyal, and gave new hope to the insurgents. Voluntary enlistment seemed to cease, and desertions commenced. Parties speculated upon the question, whether the conscription had not become necessary to fill up the armies of the United States. In this emergency, the President felt it his duty to employ with energy the extraordinary powers which the constitution confides to him in cases of insurrection. He called into the field such military and naval forces authorized by existing laws as seemed necessary. He directed measures to prevent the use of the post-office for treasonable correspondence. He subjected passengers to and from foreign countries to new passport regulations; and he instituted a blockade; suspended the *habeas corpus* in various places, and caused persons who were represented to him as being engaged, or about to engage in disloyal and treasonable practices, to be arrested by special civil, as well as military agencies, and detained in military custody, when necessary, to prevent them, and deter others from such practices. Examinations of such cases were instituted, and some of the persons so arrested have been discharged from time to time, under circumstances or upon conditions compatible, as was thought, with the public safety."

From this explanation of the course which had been pursued, the Secretary, turning to the indications of safety at the present time, proceeded to set forth the motives for the relaxation of the previous rigor, and the terms proposed by the government for the opening of the prison doors. "Meantime, a favorable change of public opinion has occurred. The line between loyalty and disloyolty is plainly defined. The whole structure of the government is firm and stable. Apprehensions of public danger, and facilities for treasonable practices, have diminished

with the passions which prompted the heedless persons to adopt them. The insurrection is believed to have culminated, and to be declining. The President, in view of these facts, and anxious to favor a return to the normal course of the administration, as far as a regard to faith and the public welfare will allow, directs that all political prisoners, or State's prisoners, now held in military custody, be released on their subscribing a parole engaging them to render no aid or comfort to enemies in hostility to the United States. The Secretary of War will, however, in his discretion, except from the effect of this order, any persons detained as spies in the service of the insurgents, or others whose release at the present moment may be deemed incompatible with the public safety. To all persons who shall be so released, and shall keep their parole, the President grants an amnesty for any past offences of treason or disloyalty, which they may have committed. Extraordinary arrests will, hereafter, be made under the direction of the military authorities alone."

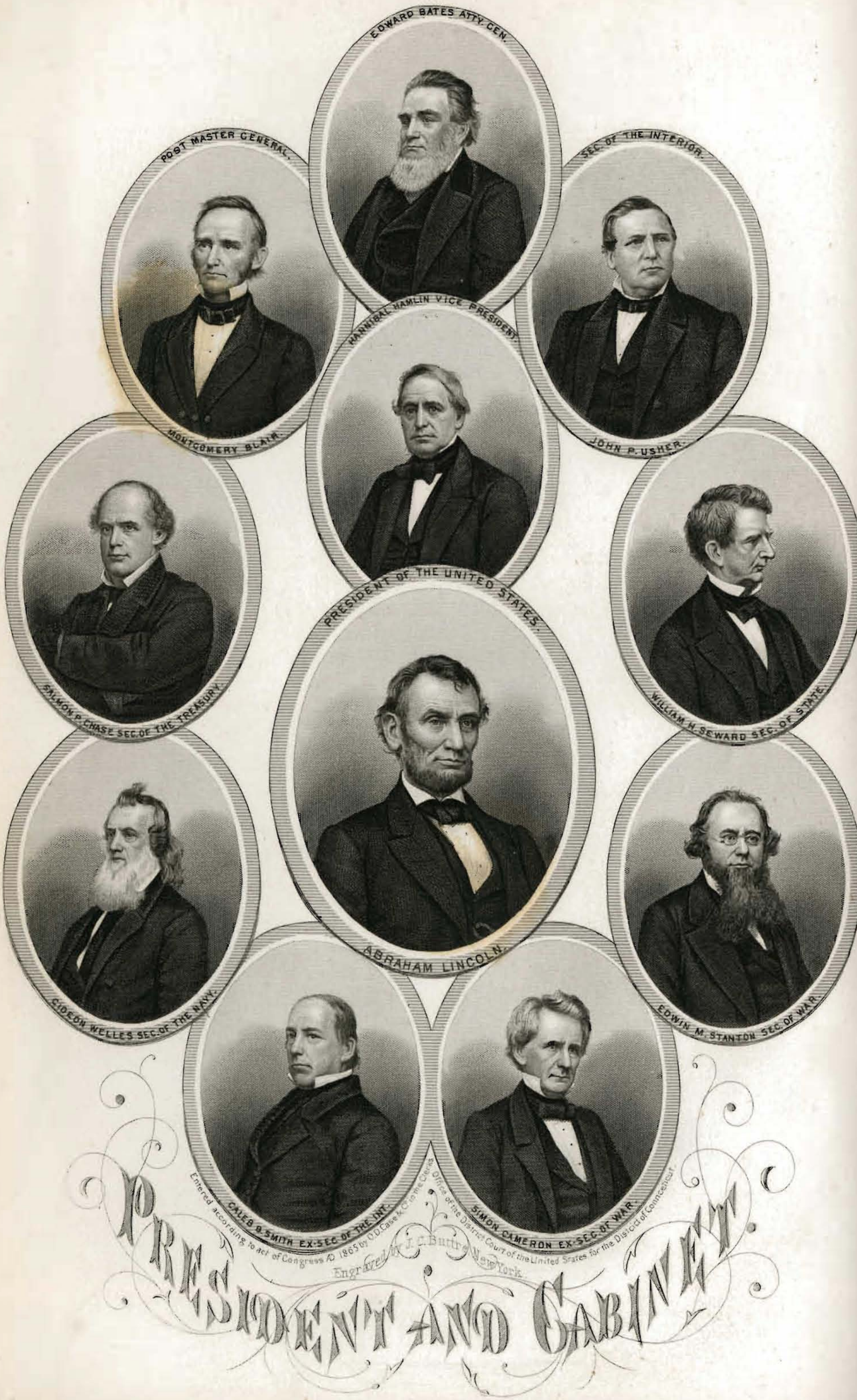
To carry this order into effect a special commission was appointed, consisting of Major-General John A. Dix, commanding in Baltimore, and the Hon. Edwards Pierrepont of New York, who were authorized to examine the cases of the state prisoners, and summarily determine whether "they should be discharged, or remain in military custody, or be remitted to the civil tribunals for trial."

By the side of this order appeared another, announcing that, "on and after the 26th of February, the President, by virtue of the act of Congress, takes military possession of all the telegraph lines in the United States. All telegraphic communications in regard to military operations, not expressly authorized by the War Department, or the proper officers, were absolutely forbidden, and newspapers publishing intelligence in violation of the regulation, were excluded thereafter from receiving information by telegraph, or from transmitting their papers by railroad."

Military operations in January and February were chiefly confined to the navy and the forces in the West. The great army on the Potomac, under the command of General McClellan, remained in the vicinity of the forts before Washington, exercised in drills and parade, gathering its enormous equipments, waiting the signal for an advance upon the enemy, who were in force at Manassas, with their outposts extending to within a few miles of Washington. While they held this advanced position their batteries were erected at commanding points below, along the Potomac, seriously interfering with the navigation of the river. So adroitly were their counsels kept that little was known of the actual numbers of the army confronting Washington. The greatest exaggeration prevailed on the subject, raising the estimate to two or three hundred thousand, when eighty thousand, at any time, would probably have been a very liberal calculation. Schooled in hardships, and encouraged by the memories of Bull Run, they would doubtless, however, acting on the defensive, have proved themselves formidable antagonists to superior numbers of assailants. The farewell address of General Beauregard, from his camp near Centreville, on taking leave of his command, on the 30th of January, previous to his departure to the Southwest, was confident and spirited:—"Soldiers of the First Corps, Army of the Potomac,—My duty calls me away, and to a temporary separation from you. I hope, however, to be with you again, to share your labors and your perils, and in defence of your homes and our rights, to lead you to new battles, to be crowned with signal victories. You are now undergoing the severest trial of a soldier's life: the one by which his discipline and capacity for endurance are thoroughly tested. My faith in your patriotism, your devotion and de

HON. EDWIN M. STANTON.

SECRETARY OF WAR.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