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BETWEEN A CROWN AND A GIBBET:
BENJAMIN F. BUTLER AND THE EARLY WAR YEARS

A Thesis Presented

By

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Preface

Stout and ugly, brusque and brilliant, Benjamin F. Butler stormed across the American scene in a tumultuous career lasting nearly half a century. Able jurist, wily politician, and farsighted but sometimes luckless Civil War General, Butler devoted his life to a zealous quest for renown and success, a search matched in intensity by a passion for aiding society's downtrodden. Often a pure party man who would not go beyond that which his political affiliations demanded, he was yet often the fiery advocate of controversial social reform. Whether battling for New England's exploited factory operatives or seeking an avenue for black rights in Civil War America, Ben Butler's energies were aimed towards the uplifting of the underdog, even as those energies were directed towards the achievement of Butler's personal recognition.

History has seen but three views of Butler, flat-sided, dimensionless images that fail to encompass the enormous complexities of the man. Following the lead of many of Butler's contemporaries, most historians either have labelled him "Beast" Butler, an unyielding, unprincipled egoist, or have leaned over backwards to ignore his many faults, almost declaring him a saint. James Parton, one of the nineteenth century's most eminent biographers, wrote a laudatory work heralding Butler's controversial career as military commander of occupied New Orleans. In his introduction to General Butler in New Orleans (New York: Mason Brothers, 1864), Parton disdained any "perverse misinterpretation" of Butler's course in New Orleans. "Let us leave all lying, all delusion," Parton instructed readers, "to the malignants who know no better. For us, the TRUTH, though it blast." Parton asserted that Butler had been maligned by "the enemies of the country,

foreign and domestic" whom Butler had vanquished, and cautioned his readers to ignore that which slandered the General. For Parton, Butler could do no wrong. The historian concluded his introduction with the belief that Butler's acts in New Orleans had been "wise, just, and humane," guided solely by "an ability equal to the occasion."

One need look no further than Robert Werlich's "Beast" Butler (Washington: Quaker Press, 1962) for the antithesis of the Parton view. Calling Butler "Without a doubt one of the most incompetant Generals and corrupt politicians this nation has ever seen" Werlich ascribes each act of Butler's to premeditated passions of ego, avarice, and cruelty. For Werlich, Butler was a "demagogue's demagogue," not a friend of the common man. Butler, said Werlich, was a man who achieved prominence by "sheer bluff," by the generous financial support of his followers, and by "an oratorical ability to twist any occurrence, no matter how incredible, stupid, or shady into a vindication of himself." Werlich's Butler was, in sum, every inch the demon and thief that he was to contemporary enemies.

One might add a third view to those traditional ones, that of the "dispassionate" historians. Butler's recent biographers, particularly Howard Nash (Stormy Petrel, Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969) and Robert West (Lincoln's Scapegoat General, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) seek to present Butler's life objectively, letting the facts speak and attempting to avoid the editorializing of Parton and Werlich. Yet these men also fail to provide a clear, complete picture of Butler. Both ignore a proper emphasis on Butler's reformist bent. Both offer a presentation of evidence in bloc form that provides little facility for interpretation, and only vague insights. And Nash, in particular, is guilty of worthless digressions that foster no better perception of Butler. At one point Nash leaves his

narrative to chase the family line of Massachusetts' Lodges, even down to the current Mr. Lodge and his association with Richard Nixon. These historians, then, have not recreated Ben Butler or his times.

Benjamin Butler was neither a saint nor the devil incarnate, nor a man of uncertain philosophy. He was a strong, direct man of enviable foresight, cunning and skill--a political survivalist with a keen social conscience. He was a creature of force and guile, yet a man who paradoxically possessed amazing capacities for self-deception, vindictive hatred, and an almost childlike naivete. In short, then, it has been my purpose to depict Benjamin Butler as he was, a three-dimensional human being operating within the confines and context of his own times.

Butler's character can best be seen and understood during his first two years as a civilian General in the Civil War. For it is in these two years that Butler, as a military chieftan enjoying almost "supreme power," had the freest reign of his public career for implementing social reform and for hitting out at his assorted opponents. I have examined Butler's intensely emotional but legalistic championing of human rights as he formulated key policy in Virginia and Louisiana. I have explored his invention of contraband law. In doing so I have defined Butler as the first, true mass emancipator of slaves. Following Butler's ever maturing racial philosophy, I have made every effort to demonstrate the inaccuracy of the claims of Werlich and others that Butler was an apostate who used black rights as a political stepping stone.

In an attempt to dispel the myth of Butler's "beastliness" I have tried to explain and examine the origins of the sobriquet "Beast." I have found it to be an unjustified epithet which southern contemporaries hurled at Butler and which historians have accepted at face value. Butler may have

been more maligned than malignant. There is much to suggest that Butler, a prominent War Democrat whose popular following other political aspirants might have had reason to fear, was someone's scapegoat. His assignment to New Orleans, his course in that rebel city, and his eventual recall seem to have been manipulated by Washington political and military figures who wanted to employ Butler without enhancing his public image. If he succeeded in the Union's work in Louisiana, Washington might always pay him small due while taking the body of credit for his actions. And if the General failed somehow, or if he followed an unpopular course, the Government might easily dismiss him and try with someone else, something which actually occurred. In New Orleans without "one iota" of instruction from Washington, Butler seems to have been left to act upon his own invention and his own responsibility.

I have also pursued Benjamin Butler on another level. An attorney and politician of force, perceptivity, and immense acumen, Butler often seemed a willful child in personal relationships. Without daring a psycho-analytical study, I have yet offered a look at Ben Butler the grudging, vindictive opponent and the criminally permissive brother. To see this side of Benjamin Butler is to have key insights into the explosive controversies that marked much of his life.

There are many whose help has been invaluable in the writing of this thesis. First, I would like to thank my committee for the attention and criticisms they have given my work. In particular, Dr. Stephen Oates has been indispensable both as my friend and as my guide to the art and theory of biography. The editorial staff of "Civil War Times Illustrated" accepted for publication my version of Butler's career in New Orleans, thus giving

me a welcomed incentive to finish my work. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Susan, for her omnipresent enthusiasm, her discerning editorial eye, and her patience with Ben Butler and me.

"Political apostasy is too complex a problem
to be ascribed simply to ambition or treachery."

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.
The Age of Jackson

By early April of 1861, Maryland was a state of bitterly divided loyalties. Weeks before, the seven deep southern states had seceded from the Union. Believing that the Republican Party represented an ominous threat to the southern slave society, and anxious to preserve that profitable and traditional way of life, these states had dismembered the Union and established the Confederate States of America.

Maryland, a border slave state with extensive Northern business ties and devotions, was split by mutually antagonistic affinities for the Union and for the South. With the increased tempo of the secession movement, the fall election victory of Abraham Lincoln, and the dramatic commencement of hostilities at Fort Sumter, Maryland's Union and secession factions had torn at each other with mounting venom.

One of the eastern seaboard's most active ports and Maryland's largest city, Baltimore held interests epitomizing all that disunited the state. There were thousands of slaves laboring in the city, so many that one angry white laborer was moved to observe that a building site resembled nothing so much as "a rookery with so many blackbirds around it." Yet while there were many who owned slaves and would naturally support the preservation of the system, there were also factions in Baltimore violently opposed to both slavery and secession.¹

For months, led by the city's most prominent figures, the warring parties had used the press and the pulpit to harangue the public and each other. If on one day Baltimoreans could hear abolitionist Rabbi David Einhorn virulently railing against the iniquities of Southern aggression, they might also hear the city's highest police official, Marshal George Kane, swearing that

with the election of Lincoln, "the streets of Baltimore would run knee-deep in blood."²

After April 12 tensions had reached an even greater peak. The Union forces at Sumter, starving and without ammunition, had surrendered their battered fort to jubilant South Carolinians. Baltimore was afire with war talk. "Day after day, Union men and secessionists appeared on the streets" to vehemently debate their emotional politics. Many believed that because of Maryland's exposed position between Washington and the South the state was destined to become a pawn in the bloody contest ahead. Secessionists were especially fearful that with Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers, Union troops were bound to come through Maryland. All of Maryland, they believed, "was to be held by the North."³ The city's secessionists were jumpy. Daily expecting a Northern army to swoop down and seize Baltimore, they were determined to keep vigilance over their city. Armed and tense, they waited.

There were numerous false alarms heralding the onslaught of the "Black Republican invaders." Many times the secessionists had rallied and rushed out to do battle with Union soldiers, only to find that none had come. Finally, one thousand Pennsylvanians did attempt to cross Baltimore on their way to reinforce Washington. But they were unarmed. A noisy crowd heartily abused the men, but yet allowed them to go their way. Secessionists' nerves were taut as they awaited the real army. On April 19 came another alarm.

The Lincoln government, fearing for Washington's security after the fall of Sumter, had sent an urgent request to Massachusetts asking for a brigade of state militia to bolster the capital's defenses. Rushed towards Washington as an advance relief column, the Massachusetts Sixth Regiment was seeking a passage through Baltimore to make rail connections for Washington. Someone sighted the troops with fixed bayonets moving down Pratt

Street towards the Washington depot and quickly sounded the alarm.

In minutes an ugly crowd had gathered. Rallying around a man carrying a secession flag attached to a pole, the mob descended upon the troops. The secessionist swarm screamed epithets and vowed to kill the soldiers, every "white nigger" of them. A shower of cobblestones and debris rained down upon the troops, felling many. In but an instant, guns had crackled. Both citizens and soldiers lay dead in the street.⁴

The main body of troops was still far behind, having halted in many cities along the way to receive the prayers and praise of citizens. In command of the Massachusetts militiamen was Benjamin F. Butler, one of New England's leading jurists and an aggressive advocate of the Democracy in his Bay State. Brigadier-General Butler arrived in Philadelphia with his troops only to learn of the Baltimore riot. Further, Butler was informed that the mob held Baltimore and that railroad officials, fearing damage to their property, adamantly refused to transport more troops through the city.⁵

Realizing the urgency of Washington's needs, Butler sought another route to the beleaguered capital. Acting with dispatch he determined to land his men at Annapolis, the Maryland state capital. From there he hoped to secure a direct channel to Washington and then, when time permitted, to "call the state to account for the death of Massachusetts men."⁶

In a short time the situation in Maryland had dramatically changed. Within ten days of the riot, General Butler had landed his forces at Annapolis, established a strong base on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Academy, and had vigorously kept open a communication through which "thousands of troops" had rushed to Washington's aid. Hostile state officials had protested Butler's presence and had done much to thwart his effectiveness. This Butler patiently bore. But when Governor Thomas Hicks proposed to convene a special

session of the state legislature, one where in all likelihood secession would be debated, Butler struck back. The General made public the promise that if the legislators ever dared to approve an ordinance of secession, he would arrest "the entire body" and ship them off to prison. To insure the state's "good faith" the General sequestered Maryland's Great Seal from the Governor's office. Without the seal's imprint, no act of Maryland could be legalized.⁷

For these and other assertive acts Butler received hearty praise in the Northern press. Hailed as the "Grand Yankee of this little period of the war," Butler was applauded for his "genius" in devising "the circumvention of Baltimore and its rascal rout." The General was even credited for saving "the state of Maryland from plunging into the black depths of treason."⁸

Butler's successes also pleased the Lincoln government, which notified him that it "approved of everything" he had done. Yet the administration was still preoccupied with Baltimore. Aside from the embarrassment of having Union soldiers assaulted by a mob still active in the city, the government also wanted Baltimore for primary military reasons. In that city lay key railroad termini connecting Washington with points North and South. It was crucial to control Baltimore in the anticipation of future military movements.⁹

Winfield Scott, Mexican War hero and patriarch of the American military establishment, was the General-in-Chief of the Federal Army. Seventy-five years of age, partly disabled by old injuries and by a "vast form (that) was itself a heavy burden," old "Fuss 'n Feathers" Scott was yet a man of "exact, formal, and unpliant mind." Believing it necessary to "overawe any latent spirit of rebellion" still existing in Baltimore, Scott concocted a plan to occupy that city with twelve thousand troops. Scott firmly believed

that a great number of troops, cutting off Baltimore at all points, was the only way to subdue the city. The enactment of the plan, however, hinged on additional reinforcements to the Washington garrison to allow the numbers for the Baltimore movement.¹⁰

In Annapolis Butler was impatiently fussing over the immensities and complexities of Scott's plan. Baltimore was situated in Butler's newly created Department of Annapolis. From a spy who had just returned from several days in the city, the General learned that Baltimore was virtually undefended and that the most energetic secessionists had left to join the Confederate army. The city could easily be taken without the use of thousands of troops. Motivated by the desire to "revenge the cowardly attack" on his Massachusetts brethren and perhaps emboldened by his enhanced public image, Butler determined to act on his own.

In the predawn darkness of May 13, 1861, General Butler entrained a thousand men and artillery. To confuse enemy spies the train feinted up the railroad line towards Harpers Ferry. Then the train headed into Baltimore. In a clandestine movement that was masked by the sudden turbulence of a thunderstorm, Butler's troops marched through the city to the heights at Federal Hill. After contacting the small Union garrison at Fort McHenry one mile away, Butler ordered his soldiers to dig in for the night. The movement encountered so little opposition that Butler had the leisure to note the majesty of the event. As the soldiers tramped through the wet grass of Federal Hill, Butler turned in his saddle and observed that each lightening flash "made the point of every bayonet . . . [a] gloriously magnificent . . . glittering torch." The city was thus easily secured. Butler was no doubt pleased by the facile result. Winfield Scott, however, was not.¹¹

Having heard of the occupation of Baltimore only in a circuitous manner,

Scott was enraged. Butler had, Scott charged, taken Baltimore without his "knowledge . . . and equally without authority." When an exchange of telegrams failed to satisfy Scott, he relieved Butler and reassigned him to Fortress Monroe, Virginia.¹²

Chagrined, Butler protested his summary exile. In a bitter letter to War Secretary Simon Cameron, Butler demanded to know why his actions had been censured. "Is it because of my proving successful in bringing Baltimore to subjection and quiet?" If so, he rejected the reasoning behind his dismissal as well as the "disgrace" of being relieved of command of a department and sent to command a mere fort. Closing, Butler asked that before he be thus embarrassed he at least be granted an interview with the President.¹³

Within a short time Lincoln determined to ease the sting of Scott's rebuke by commissioning Butler a Major-General. As a prominent Democrat, Butler was indispensable to the Union war effort. He was one who might help make the conflict less partisan by encouraging other Democrats to fight on the side of the Union. But even though Lincoln promoted his over-zealous General, the Monroe assignment was to stick. Butler was undecided whether to accept reassignment or to return to private life. Whatever his decision, he felt it his "duty to call upon General Scott" while in Washington.

On May 16, Benjamin Butler stood at attention before the dour old General. Not yet forty-three years old, Butler was a short, solid man with a broad barrel chest and ample belly. It was his head that caught one's eye. Ringed by the remnants of once curly red hair was an expansive, walnut-shaped head distinguished by pouted, muddled, half-closed eyes, the left one markedly cocked. A full walrus mustache drooped below his outsized nose. He was ugly. His looks, however, were deceptive of apathy and inattentiveness. Many knew him as a man full of "bustling life, self-esteem," and proven ability. He

seemed a "quick, decided, abrupt" man who spoke assertively in a raspy, staccato voice. Friendly observers saw Butler as a forceful leader, though not a handsome one.¹⁴

But Winfield Scott was no friend of Butler's. Angered by Butler's supersession of his orders and perhaps embarrassed by the demonstrated uselessness of his own Baltimore plan, Scott was cold and unreceptive to Butler's presence. Suddenly Scott broke upon Butler "with words of angry vituperation and accusation." Ignoring the facts, Scott declared that Butler had "thwarted his intention of taking [Baltimore] without shedding a drop of blood." Scott then disgustedly spat out that Butler could be "entrusted with nothing in the army again." Withstanding all of Scott's malediction, Butler then turned and gave the old General "as good as he sent." Overwrought and embittered, Butler left Scott's office and returned to his apartment. There he threw himself on the sofa "and burst into hysteric sobs which he found himself, for some minutes, unable to repress."¹⁵

With the war still young Benjamin Butler had done much for his nation. Yet it must have seemed to him as if no one appreciated his accomplishments; as if he were forever fated to be misunderstood and maligned.

II

Benjamin never liked abuse, nor opposition of any kind. Born in 1818 at the family farmhouse in Deerfield Parade, New Hampshire, Ben passed his early years as a reclusive, quiet, often sickly child, perhaps already intensely self-conscious of his "gnomish ugliness." Despite his shyness, he had a precocious intelligence which his widowed mother coveted. A devout Baptist, Charlotte Butler began early to instruct her youngest in the strict

Calvinist doctrine of predestination, to encourage his already voracious reading and his memorization of Holy Scriptures, and to hope for the day when her perceptive child would become a man of the cloth.¹⁶

Once a reticent, withdrawn child, Ben grew into an unrestrained, demonstrative youth. Perhaps because school had forced him into greater interaction with other children, he developed an unarticulated, explosive defensiveness. Although still an intense pupil and avid learner, he became known as a "reckless, impetuous, headstrong boy . . . not particularly civil when his grain was crossed." In later years he would continue the same vindictive pursuit of opponents that as a youth, aided by older brother, Andrew Butler, he had demonstrated by pummeling schoolmates who "exercised their talent at his expense."¹⁷

Abundantly aggressive, Ben continued to excel in his studies. In 1834, although he wanted to attend West Point, it was determined that he would enroll at Baptist Waterville College in Maine to prepare for the ministry. But Waterville and Ben Butler did not mix agreeably. As he developed a consuming appetite for science and politics, Ben suffered a declining interest in religion. Calvinist theology began to seem absurd, limiting. If God truly was "self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient," and unchangeable, then how could any man believe in free thought or free action?¹⁸

Ben began to reject the confining realm of "God's mercy" and to turn to an optimistic self reliance. His interests and ambitions led to a fascination with the dynamics of the legal art. He was intrigued with power, with mastery over men. In his sophomore year he witnessed ace trial lawyer Jeremiah Mason in court. Ben was overcome by Mason's finesse, by his skilled exhibition of "professional acumen" and "varied learning." But the quality that transfixed Ben was Mason's "great and commanding insights into men's motives" and the

complete domination of their minds. This was what Ben wanted--a career with ample horizons unfettered by oppressive, inhibitive doctrines, one where the only limits were a man's capabilities and mother wit.¹⁹

In 1838 Ben graduated from Waterville and returned to Lowell, Massachusetts. Ten years earlier his mother had moved the family to this mammoth textile center to take a position as a matron in an operatives' boardinghouse. The familiar city where he had passed much of his boyhood did not offer any distractions to the aspiring attorney. He commenced a spartan life. Reading law with lawyer William Smith, Ben spent an average of twelve hours a day closeted in Smith's extensive law library, religiously digesting "Blackstone" and "Kent's Commentaries for American Law." Ben's only recreation was attending occasional sessions of the Lowell City Police Court and in late night canters through the city's darkened suburbs reciting "snatches of poetry, especially from Byron and Moore," to the listening stars.²⁰

He dreamed magnificent dreams. He wanted power, but of a kind that might benefit his own middling class. Long before, he had cast his lot with the Democratic Party of Massachusetts. It was a weak party, unable to compete with the dominant Whigs. But in Massachusetts it was the Democrats who persistently echoed the cries of a degraded laboring class despairing for health, status, and security. Ben's career ambitions included political advancement, but it must be such, he felt, that would succor the lives of the workers he had known at his mother's and in the streets. Whatever his aspirations, he felt a link--an organic kinship--with the operatives. He knew them, he felt their wants. He was deeply touched by the obvious "deterioration in their bodily health" as they grew "pallid and nervous" from their work. He was dedicated to helping them, even as he strove to uplift himself.²¹

To supplement his studies the young law student took a job in nearby

Dracut to teach the fall school term of 1839. There he met and befriended members of the Hildreth family. Fischer Ames Hildreth, near to Ben's age, was an ambitious man interested in public service and newspapers. And, delight of delights, Fischer had a twenty-three year old sister. Her name was Sarah.

Sarah Jones Hildreth, accomplished, intelligent, and graceful, was a professional actress. Striking rather than beautiful, she possessed a bold forehead, dark eyebrows, and "almond eyes set wide apart." Her long pointed nose "surmounted a sensitive cupid's bow mouth and small chin." She wore her dark hair parted in the middle, pulled back over her forehead, and alluringly fluffed up over the ears. When Ben came home with Fischer for Thanksgiving dinner, Sarah was there to serve as the family hostess. She was a woman of elegance and poise, and charm. Ben was smitten by her. He was determined to have her.²²

Sarah reciprocated Ben's emotions. But having a mind of her own and a successful stage career, she was not wont to be wooed by a penniless man. She "declined" to quit the stage until her law student proved himself capable of earning "the means of making a home for both." To the craving for mastery was added the desire for Sarah. Ben would have his courtroom "spurs."²³

Stimulated to even greater activity, Ben continued his studies and his efforts as a fledgling politico. To build a name for public service, he joined countless local organizations and volunteered to speak to any civic group that would hear him. When the Lowell City Guard militia unit was formed, he enlisted as a private, no doubt determined to survive the boredom of hot, dusty drills and to work his way up in the unit's elective offices. To climax two years' intensive labor, he passed his bar examination and on September 3, 1840, was admitted to practice before the state courts. Although the

son of a farmer and a boardinghouse matron, he was now a member of the elite. He was not yet twenty-two years old.²⁴

As an attorney Butler began to evidence traits that would serve him well in law and politics, but that were not calculated to endear him to opponents. He was a tenacious, brawling verbalist, a courtroom scrapper. His philosophy of legal practice was a simple one: A lawyer's first duty was to win for his client, bringing to bear every skill, every weapon. He preferred the grand show, the dazzling maneuver to plodding pursuit. No courtroom histrionics were above his use, no legal principle escaped his prying eye, no witness above his caustic attack. On one occasion the court asked Butler to show more respect for a witness who was a Harvard professor, a man with position. To this Butler replied, "I am aware of it, your Honor; we hung one of them the other day."²⁵

He was bright, emotive, aggressive, and often unprincipled, but he won. With his career's success assured and with an ever growing community stature, Butler finally convinced the elusive Sarah to leave off her acting and become his wife. On May 16, 1844, they formed a partnership ever dear to both of them.

The following years were busy. Ben's law practice blossomed and grew into the most respected and lucrative in New England. The early fifties were particularly active political years. Now one of the "acknowledged leaders" of the state Democratic party, Butler helped to engineer two major victories for pro-Workingmen's slates. Butler himself was elected to the state legislature in 1852, one of the two times he served. The 1852 campaign was an especially dirty one. It left Butler, who "never forgot a friend or an enemy" many political wounds to avenge. He waited years in some cases to wreck the careers of old Whig antagonists who had defamed him in '52.²⁶

A successful politician and attorney, owner of Lowell's prosperous Middlesex woolens corporation, possessor of a lively, loving family of five and a warm circle of friends, Butler nevertheless found himself troubled. The 1850's were a marked period of national strife, and Butler saw disaster on the horizon for the Union that he so dearly loved.

Alarmed by disunionist ferment, he spoke out against aggression advocated in both the North and the South. At a meeting in Lowell held in response to John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry in October, 1859, Butler pleaded for sectional understanding. He blamed abolitionists and fire-eaters alike for inflaming passions. "The mistake is mutual," he cried. "We look at the South through the medium of the abolitionist orators. . . the South sees us only as rampant abolitionists ready to make a foray upon their rights and property. Let us forget our differences, our pride. Let us proclaim to all men, that the Union, first and foremost of all the gifts of God, must and shall be preserved."²⁷

But few heard the plea for intersectional reconciliation. Even as Butler spoke, many of his southern Democrat colleagues were actively encouraging secessionist ferment at home. Although a loyal party man, Butler could not follow southern friends who would destroy the Union. He told them as much when in mid-1860 the Democrats gathered in Charleston to select nominees for national office.

Present as a member of the Massachusetts delegation, Butler had early abandoned hope for the candidacy of Stephen A. Douglas and had turned to a vociferous support of Mississippi's Jefferson Davis. Butler believed Davis a moderate on crucial issues and considered him to be one of the few whose statesmanship might yet bring accord between the sections. But the delegates were unable to unite behind Davis or any man. And as the convention had

fractionalized and split over the issues of federal controls over slavery and the western expansion of the peculiar institution, Butler took a stance that placed him inextricably with those who opposed southern desires to invigorate and expand slavery's domain. In the midst of a battle over state prerogatives, Butler announced to the convention that he would never support any faction's contention by which "the African slave trade, which is piracy by the laws of my country, is approvingly advocated."²⁸

As a final gesture towards stifling pro-secession passions, Butler travelled to Washington late in December of 1860. His purpose was to convince the Buchanan administration that firm, decisive action was critical if the secessionists were to be outdone. By now, South Carolina had seceded. Butler contended that the South Carolinians were traitors and that their peace commissioners, currently in Washington, should be tried as rebels and hanged. But Buchanan vacillated. "A quiet old gentlemen," he feared the responsibilities of sternly treating southern intransigence. Chagrined, Butler returned to Massachusetts, determined to prepare it for the impending conflict.²⁹

As one of his state's three ranking Brigadiers in the militia, Butler had helped to see to it that the militiamen were drilled and ready when war broke out. And so when Cameron had called upon Massachusetts for aid in protecting Washington after the fall of Sumter, it was Butler who was given command of directing the relief forces to that city. It was Butler who had out-manuevered pro-Confederates in Maryland and stymied secessionist ferment in that state. And now with Baltimore behind him, Butler had decided to swallow his pride and accept his new assignment. By May 21, 1861, he was on his way to Fortress Monroe.

III

Fortress Monroe, a sturdy brick bastion of 1812 vintage, was situated at Old Point Comfort on the tip of Virginia's Yorktown Peninsula. The fort, having a commanding position between the outlets of the James and York Rivers, was considered the key to all the navigable rivers and vital harbors of Virginia and North Carolina. Petersburg and Richmond, farther up the Peninsula, were also believed within range of the Fortress.³⁰

When the widely circulated New York Times learned of Butler's reassignment to Monroe, it expressed approbation of the idea to send the General to deal with unfaithful Virginia. Butler was a man already famed for brooking no secessionist opposition. The Times especially hoped that a man of General Butler's assertive caliber would be energetic in bringing rebel Virginians to quick repentance. Yearning to see Butler's men grind their feet into "the sacred soil of Virginia" so as "to leave very distinct footprints of their march," the paper confidently assured its readers that Fortress Monroe was to be "the rallying point" for major offensives against the rebels.³¹

The General passed his first week at Monroe in efforts to strengthen the fort's defenses and in moves to improve the Union footing on rebel territory. Monroe was an old installation, her condition long neglected by a nation grown comfortable in peace. There Butler found an archaic water supply system that depended on large cisterns to trap water for use in the Fortress. This the General quickly remedied, causing an artesian well to be dug within the confines of the fort. In the past the army had landed all manner of incoming supplies at a wharf nearly one mile distant from the fort. Soldiers were then required to roll the materials to Monroe in cumbersome staved barrels. To save time and labor the General ordered the construction

of a small railroad from the dock to the quartermaster's depot. Butler even ordered that the moat surrounding Monroe, clogged by debris and overgrowth, was to be cleared of all obstructions, allowing then the maximum defense to those inside.

The General was also forced to give immediate attention to the enemy forces without. Rebels from the Williamsburg-Yorkville area had moved down and occupied most of the country around Fortress Monroe. The ancient village of Hampton, only a few miles from the fort, was in rebel hands. A secession flag floated over Hampton Bridge and was plainly visible from the parapets at Monroe. Rebel pickets were known to be active in the immediate neighborhood of the fort.³²

The New York and Massachusetts troops at Monroe acted quickly to remedy their insecure position. Sent by the General to reconnoiter in the vicinity of Hampton, Union soldiers under Colonel J. W. Phelps found so little opposition that Butler immediately ordered a movement on the village. Hampton was soon occupied and secured. Acting quickly, the General also sent men to occupy the strategic heights at Newport News. Jutting out into the Hampton Roads Waterway below Fortress Monroe, Newport News would afford the United States vital control of the Confederate water traffic between Norfolk and Richmond.

Butler was working to improve the Union's military situation. Yet on another level a formidable jurist was also in a position to ease the Union out of a dilemma that had plagued her for years--the question of fugitive slaves.

On May 25, 1861, three black field hands appeared at the gates of Fortress Monroe. The slaves belonged to Colonel Charles Mallory, currently the Confederate commander in the Hampton district. Having worked on the construc-

tion of Confederate batteries on the Peninsula, the blacks feared Mallory's intention of sending them south to labor on other Confederate works. Thus they sought the protection of the Union forces at Monroe.

Forced to deal with the question of slaves fleeing the service of the rebels, Butler took a bold step. Acting upon the common law principle that property of any nature "used or capable of being used for warlike purposes. . . may be captured and held as property contraband of war," Butler decided to keep the slaves. Having a need of laborers in his quartermaster department he put the fugitives to work there.³³

Almost immediately Butler was notified that Major John Cary, Mallory's agent, had requested a parley under a flag of truce. After an exchange of formalities, Cary demanded to know if Butler would return Mallory's slaves under the dictates of the Fugitive Slave Law.

"I intend to hold them," Butler stated firmly.

Perhaps feigning incredulousness, Cary asked the General whether he meant to contravene his constitutional obligation to return the slaves.

"I mean," answered Butler, "to take Virginia at her word, as declared in the ordinance of secession. I am under no constitutional obligations to a foreign country, which Virginia now claims to be."

"But," Cary shot back, "you say we cannot secede, and so you cannot consistently claim them." The General then declared his determination to hold the blacks as contraband of war. He offered to return the slaves only if Colonel Mallory would come to the Fortress and take the oath of allegiance. Cary was forced to end the interview with the stale response that Colonel Mallory was absent.³⁴

Benjamin Butler had freed slaves. Undoubtedly comprehending the magnitude of his actions and seeking to know whether Washington would accept

contraband law or reject it as it had other military orders freeing slaves, Butler wrote the War Department. His letter was a defense of contraband law along the lines of viable military necessity. Saying that the confiscated slaves had been employed in the construction of rebel batteries, Butler told his superiors that these works "would be nearly or quite impossible to construct" if the rebels were deprived of black labor. In asking the government to consider the importance of black muscle to both the Union and the Confederacy, Butler questioned whether the rebels should be "allowed the use of this property against the United States, and we not be allowed its use in aid of the United States?"³⁵

As Butler waited for the Lincoln Administration to support or disavow his actions, news of the events at Monroe flashed across the North. At this early date the war effort aimed at preserving the Union. For most Northerners the entire question of abolishing slavery was not yet an issue in the conflict. The General's course nonetheless received widespread attention and approbation. Friends enthusiastically reported to the General that nothing in the war had "electrified the whole North" like his "contraband goods" notion. The New York Times liked the contraband act as one likely to cripple Virginia's haughty rebeldom. Abolitionists too were inspired to applaud Democrat Butler's actions along humanitarian lines. Both Wendell Phillips and Lewis Tappan praised Butler for finding "the best way out of the slavery question." Tappan in particular would soon find cause to thank the General for the "favor" he had "shown the poor colored fugitives." Tappan was anxious that Butler realize how his act had "filled the hearts of many friends of freedom with thankfulness."³⁶

The Government accepted Butler's legal and military rationale for contraband freedom. While warning General Butler not to molest the slave pro-

perties of loyal Union men for whom slavery was legal, Simon Cameron told Butler that his "action in respect to the Negroes who came within [his] lines from the service of the rebels [was] approved." Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General and Butler's political friend, also took time to tell the General of the Government's approbation of his pragmatic course. Blair assured Butler that even dowdy Winfield Scott was pleased with contraband law, having nicknamed it "Butler's Fugitive Slave Act."³⁷

Despite Butler's successes, the situation at Monroe left him little time for pleasant reflection. Within days, news of the Union Army's willingness to harbor fleeing slaves had spread over some invisible telegraph system. A flood of escaped blacks began descending upon the Fortress, seeking asylum and freedom, and giving the lie to Southern assertions that the slaves were happy, contented Sambos.

Butler was in a quandry. The original contraband decision had been designed only to deal with able-bodied men and women who were to be kept from rebel employ. Now streams of blacks were arriving at Monroe, carrying with them the aged, the infirm, and the new-born. Everyday there were more blacks.

Soon over eight hundred blacks were living at their "Freedom Fort" encampment outside the walls at Monroe. The entire question of their state of being, of the condition of their lives, was driving Butler to a reevaluation of his own racial philosophy. Formerly willing to uphold the slave system if that act would preserve the Union from destruction, Butler now privately began to express "strong convictions, . . . growing stronger each day, "that the nation could dispense with the institution of slavery altogether. Once, Butler said, the United States, "bound by its constitutional ties and the obligations of brotherhood," had "refused to interfere with slavery." "But now," Butler declared, "the nation need no longer forego slavery's destruction."

"Shall we now," asked the General, "end the war and not eradicate the cause? Will not God demand this of us now he has taken away all excuse for not pursuing the right?" All these questions ran through Butler's mind as he viewed the plight of the blacks.³⁸

Seeking to push the government to a more definite stance on questions concerning the black occupants of "Freedom Fort," Butler wrote Secretary Cameron a searching letter. Tell me, began Butler, how I am to view these contrabands. "Are these men, women, and children slaves? Are they free?" Although he had originally adopted the course of treating able-bodied slaves as property liable to confiscation, the influx of women, children, and old ones had forced a new line of thought. Those incapable of strenuous labor, Butler reasoned, "must be considered the incumbrance rather than the auxiliary of an army, and, of course, in no possible legal relation could be treated as contrabands." Thus, he asked, are these beings property? "If property, do they not become the property of their salvors?" But as their salvors, he asserted, we do not want such property. And so, he wondered, "has not . . . all proprietary relation ceased? Have they not become, thereupon, men, women, and children," human beings who ought to be free?³⁹ It would take the Lincoln Administration many months to reach the answers to such questions.

Meanwhile it was necessary that the General consider the more immediate military objectives of his command. Upon arriving at Fortress Monroe Butler had received orders from General Scott, limiting his activities to the immediate vicinity of the Fortress. Told by Scott to attempt nothing that would take him more than "a half-day's march" from Monroe, Butler had contented himself with the neighborhood operations at Hampton and Newport News.⁴⁰

On May 31, not six days after Butler's arrival at the fort, Scott suddenly changed his mind. Butler was notified that the restriction on his

movements was "removed." Telling Butler that he was not being ordered to commence more distant expeditions, Scott added that such actions were "yet not prohibited." If Butler was to move, then, the choice and the responsibility were to be his alone.⁴¹

If some may have viewed Scott's act as one of reconciliation, many of Butler's friends were wary of Scott's fluid orders. Montgomery Blair, especially scornful of Scott and suspicious of his every move, advised Butler to proceed cautiously. Although you may have been released from military restraint, Blair told the General, remember how weak your forces presently are. Blair was certain that Scott intended to treat Butler "as he . . . always treated those who he knew to be effective." Blair was sure that Scott would "never let [Butler] have any troops to make any great blow." Be prudent in everything you do, Blair concluded, never attempting "more than your means."⁴²

Gustavus Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy and Butler's old Lowell schoolmate, also felt constrained to caution his friend. Fox hoped that Butler would move only when fully prepared. "The first battle must be won," Fox urged. "All others will be easy!" Fox pressed Butler to heed this point and to ignore any impatient proddings to "quicken measures."⁴³

At the Fortress Butler's command was in shoddy condition. The troops lacked nearly everything crucial for firm military action. Requisitions made on the U.S. Quartermaster's Office had failed to bring the proper ammunition, artillery, or the dray and cavalry horses needed. The soldiers were even without basic camp equipage such as cooking kettles and durable field tents. But in spite of the deficiencies of his command and the admonishments of his friends, Butler was anxious to act.

The General had received word that the Confederates had moved down

from Yorkville. They had established a fortified post at Big Bethel, a hamlet lying about twenty miles from Fortress Monroe, and Butler feared a sustained movement against Newport News. Already small detachments of rebel cavalry were buzzing around Newport News, sometimes killing or capturing a few men, and always leaving the inexperienced Union troops on edge with piercing rebel war whoops.⁴⁴

In the early morning hours of June 9, several detachments of soldiers and artillery moved quietly out of Fortress Monroe and headed along converging routes towards Bethel. In command of the expedition was General Ebenezer Pierce, a member of Butler's staff and his longtime associate in the Massachusetts state militia.

From the start, mishap plagued the advance. Nearing Bethel, two of the columns approached each other through the moonlit woods. One, mistaking the caisson horses of the other for cavalry, and "knowing that the federal forces had no cavalry, supposed that the advancing column was the enemy." The green Yankee troops, not waiting for the password "Boston" to be answered, emitted a sharp burst of grape and musketry from their ranks. In the resulting exchange of fire two men died and over a score were wounded before the two detachments recognized each other.⁴⁵

The loud clash of arms destroyed any element of surprise. Unsure whether to proceed or withdraw, Pierce huddled in consultation with his officers. After hours of discussion, Pierce decided to continue the advance on Bethel.

Still nothing seemed to go right. Although the soldiers bravely marched out to meet the enemy, they had not adequately reconnoitered the foe. Realizing this, Pierce ordered scouts out, then drew up a hasty battle plan. At ten o'clock in the morning, Pierce sent his three thousand men against the six hundred rebels at Big Bethel.

A confused, disorderly charge, a useless fusillade of small arms fire against a barely visible enemy, and all was lost. The Union troops were unable to advance upon the Confederates. Many of Pierce's men were pinned down for a time. They were forced to accept the enemy fire, incapable of offering any effective reply. Making matters even more hopeless, General Pierce lost all semblance of control. Apparently bewildered by the intense action around him, Pierce was seen to whirl to and fro, "confused and unable to give any orders that his men could comprehend." In his befuddlement Pierce would shout, "Boston, charge!" His men, flattened by the enemy fire, could not respond. When one man did hear Pierce, he cried out in frustration, "Charge be damned! How are you going to charge that infernal fire?" With the encounter lost, the Union troops retired from the field, unable even to carry off their wounded and dead.⁴⁶

It was only a minor skirmish. But Bethel seemed catastrophic to a nation that had yet experienced no major battles. Although the Union forces had lost only eighteen men, the Northern Press bitterly decried the "disastrous consequences" of the "battle" at Bethel. The papers heatedly lambasted Butler and his subordinates, accusing them of ignorance of even the most "primary lessons of war." Butler was especially disparaged for his stupidity and inefficiency. "General Butler," chided The New York Times, "in dispatching the expedition, was evidently uninformed as to the numbers, the position, and the means of defense employed by the rebels." The Times also attacked Butler's command for leaving the battlefield without removing its casualties.⁴⁷

If Butler realized that his own administrative shortcomings may have been responsible for the lack of preparedness at Bethel, he kept it to himself. Publicly, the General insisted that a want of proper materials and

of tough discipline could be blamed for the defeat. To satisfy his military needs, Butler increased pressure on Washington for better equipment in a greater volume. And to facilitate the flow of supplies to the Fortress, the General began encouraging Washington dignitaries and their families to make weekend sojourns to Monroe. Sarah Butler, who had accompanied her husband to the fort, wrote her sister after an especially exhausting two days. Our visitors, Sarah said, included the Secretary of War, Cabinet families, and high aides to General Scott. Although fatigued, Sarah realized how necessary it was for her "to play the courtier to the people who have it in their power to send troops . . . and everything else that is needed."⁴⁸

Butler also moved assertively to tighten up the lax discipline at the Fortress. He increased company drills, sought to find more responsible men to handle his quartermaster's depot, and cashiered officers addicted to ardent spirits. Eventually, Butler outlawed the general use of alcohol within the confines of the post, except by the medical department. Accompanying this order was the General's promise that he would never "ask officers or men to undergo privation which he [would] not share with them." Butler then pledged not to exempt himself or his staff from the operation of this order."⁴⁹

As months passed, it seemed as if Washington would accept Butler's energetic efforts at repair as due penance for the blunders at Bethel. Although some had loudly demanded the recall of Butler and other inexperienced civilian generals, he was yet left in command. After the July 21 debacle at Bull Run, when thousands of federal troops ran before the storming Confederates, the Monroe command must have seemed even safer to Butler. His Major-General's commission, held up in the long summer months, finally received Senate approval only hours before the rout at Manassas.⁵⁰

But on August 11, 1861, General Butler received an order from Winfield Scott relieving him of his command. Major-General John Wool, an aged but spry New Yorker, was now assigned to lead the troops at Monroe. Caught off guard, Butler exploded. In an angry letter to the ever-friendly Montgomery Blair Butler asked for some explanation of his release. "What does it mean?" Butler sputtered. "Why this? . . . What have I done or omitted to do? Why this sudden change of policy?" Not knowing from which source he had been struck, Butler demanded to know "Is this because General Scott has got over his quarrel with Wool, or is it a move on the part of the President, or is it because my views on the Negro question are not acceptable to the government?" In spite of his quarrels with Scott and the furor over Bethel, Butler supposed that the latter reason was the cause.⁵¹

In a letter to Sarah Butler who had returned to Lowell, Butler was certain that the race issue, and not Scott's nor Lincoln's malice, was at the bottom of his release. Butler descried the "namby pamby" course the Administration had taken in regard to the blacks. "The war cannot go on without direct conflict," argued Butler. "The Negro will be free. It is inevitable," he declared, "and the government must face that fact." "We may patch it up as we please," he ended, "but the fact will work itself out."⁵²

The Lincoln Administration had taken away Butler's command but had offered the controversial General no new post. Butler was left the choice of serving under Wool or leaving the seat of war. After passing but a few hours brooding over a return to civilian garb, Butler decided not to be cowed by the turn of events. He agreed to stay and fight under Wool.

On August 18, General Wool arrived at Monroe and assumed command of the department. Soon the two Generals had reached an amiable accord. Wool was too old to lead troops in combat. He readily agreed to give Butler

command of all field operations while retaining for himself the overall command.

Earlier, Butler had conceived a plan for a dashing raid on two rebel forts at Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina. By controlling access to Pamlico Sound, Forts Hatteras and Clark were known to afford safe harbor and egress to Confederate privateers seeking to avoid a Union Naval blockade of all Southern ports. The forts also held the key to control of "the whole coast of Virginia and North Carolina from Norfolk to Cape Lookout." If a Union force could capture the forts it would deliver a crippling blow to the Confederates. And the man leading that force would be a hero.⁵³

Eagerly, Butler outlined the plan to General Wool, who gave it his full approval. On August 26, General Butler and Naval Commodore Silas Stringham embarked for Hatteras with six hundred troops and "the largest fleet that had at that time ever sailed in company under the American Flag." Two days later the expedition had effortlessly subdued the rebel "hornet's nest" at Hatteras, taking nearly seven hundred prisoners and suffering only minor losses itself.⁵⁴

With the smoke of battle barely settled, Butler hurried to Washington to inform Lincoln of the victory. Late at night Butler and Gustavus Fox rushed excitedly into the chamber where Lincoln slept. Without waiting "for any forms or ceremonies," Fox told Lincoln of the first substantial Union victory of the war. In an explosion of jubilation, Lincoln jumped from his bed into Fox's arms. The two then happily whirled around the room while the rotund Butler, overcome "with the most irresistible merriment," fell back laughing on a sofa.⁵⁵

The President's joy was perhaps out of proportion to the victory won, but what did it matter to an administration so hungry for triumph? There

was hope. As a sign of his pleasure Lincoln gave his victorious General permission to raise troops in New England for a special expedition against the Confederacy.

As autumn came and passed, General Butler worked vigorously to gather his new recruits and to school them in a rudimentary knowledge of military life and discipline. Butler's recruiting efforts often snagged on the enraged protests of Republican state officials. Perhaps because they disliked seeing a prominent Democrat invested with an important position, and because they feared that Butler's recruitment campaign might jeopardize their own state's recruiting commitments, these officials often sought to thwart Butler's success. But aided by the energetic efforts of his recruiting agents, prominent citizens who would receive rank in the new regiments commensurate with the number of recruits they raised, Butler still managed to collect and organize a sizeable force.

The government had initially desired Butler's troops for a strong movement against the rebels occupying the Yorktown Peninsula. But time lost in haggling with state authorities over recruitment procedures had cost the General his chance to return to Virginia. The War Department, however, had another plan in the offing.

Edwin Stanton, newly appointed Secretary of War, had proposed that the Confederacy's most active port, New Orleans, be subdued and occupied. It was necessary, said Stanton, to cripple Confederate commerce and communications with that city and to give the Union a crucial staging point for expeditions up the Mississippi. Liking the idea, the military had developed plans for a combined land and sea assault upon the New Orleans defenses. Naval Officers David Farragut and David Porter were to lead a powerful flotilla of mortar launches against New Orleans' two downriver fortifications.

And Benjamin Butler was to command the troops that would, if necessary, lay seige to the forts and would stay in New Orleans as an occupation force in the event of the expedition's success.

In late March of 1862, after months of administrative bickering over the precise number of troops needed for the attack force, Butler and his twelve thousand men set sail for the Gulf of Mexico.

IV

By the Spring of 1862 New Orleans was not the same city of a decade ago. Ideally situated on the broad, flat neck of land jutting out at the foot of the great Mississippi River system, New Orleans was once the queen city of American commerce. To export the produce of half a continent ships would stand eight and ten deep at her wharves, huge cotton ships throwing up a "forest of masts denser than any but a tropical forest." Shouting gangs of slaves worked constantly, cramming the holds with the staple goods craved by the North, Europe, and the Orient.⁵⁶

On the docks and in Poydras and St. Charles streets adjacent to the levee, the din and turbulent motion continued. Added to the "puffing and hissing," the "great clangor of bells," and whistles of riverboats was a frenzied throng of clerks, foreign merchants, sailors, draymen, and "bandana crowned" Negro peddlers, each pursuing his special business.⁵⁷

Life in the Crescent City was good, exciting. True, many may have worried about potential slave unrest and mounting conflict with Northern abolitionists, about business depression, or about the city's yearly bout with the dreaded "el vomito" - yellow fever. But the well being of New Orleans was based on commerce. While cotton was "King," other considerations

were secondary.⁵⁸

The Civil War changed everything. New Orleans would never cease to be an American Babylon where "polyglot vociferations" gave her streets a European flavor. But secession and war meant a stifled economic vitality, because an effective Union naval blockade halted most intercourse between New Orleans and foreign ports. Despite the blockade, some privateers did manage to slip from one of the countless Mississippi ringolets into the Gulf, to carry cotton to foreign markets and to return with food and munitions. Until May 1, 1862, conditions were bad, but not desperate. But on that Spring day, the nuisance of the blockade gave way to the humiliation of military occupation . . .⁵⁹

Late in the afternoon of May first a sullen, angry mob milled around the docks and along the levee. The people of New Orleans had come to give mean welcome to the Union troops landing to occupy the city. The war schoo-ners of U.S. Flag-Officer David Farragut were drawn up along the jetties in impressive array. One week earlier, these very ships had embarassingly brushed aside the city's highly vaunted defenses at Forts Jackson and St. Philipe seventy miles below, defenses previously considered "impassible for any hostile fleet or flotilla."⁶⁰

Everywhere were scenes of sacrifice to greet the invader. Fifteen thousand bales of cotton were burned to keep them from the Yankees. Sugar, molasses, all had been destroyed to show the invader the city's determination to resist him. The mob, seeing the Union flag once again flying in their city, boiled with outrage. One man, a German, dared to shout "Hurrah for the old flag!" He was shot, and the mob flung his battered body into the river. When others had the temerity to cheer the arrival of the Union troops, strong arms beat them with pistol butts. No one was going to spoil the show

of southern solidarity. Yet for all the violence, the mob's fury had not yet broken. The rebels were waiting for Butler.⁶¹

Benjamin Butler was working in his stateroom aboard the troop transport Mississippi. He heard the shouts of the mob and looked up. As Major General commanding the United States occupation forces, he was in the process of composing his proclamation to the captive city. As the General heard the outcries for "Picayune Butler," the "mythical" anti-hero of a southern satire recently penned, he turned to an aide. The General asked if his troop band knew the song of "Picayune Butler" and might regale the mob with it. Told that the music was unavailable, the General ordered "Yankee Doodle" and "The Star Spangled Banner" played. Then he returned to his work.⁶²

As he labored, the General must have worried over how to deal with the countless difficulties incumbent in administering a city of one hundred and fifty thousand souls. Mostly hostile, they would do all in their power to disrupt Union rule.

There was much to do but little direction for doing it. His superiors in the government had certainly been of no help, and the General could only have wondered why. The packet of "instructions" that General George McClellan handed to him in Washington contained only vacuous hints of what was expected of the expeditionary force of twelve thousand men. McClellan, who had recently replaced Winfield Snott as General in Chief of the Federal Army, vaguely told Butler to "Open . . . communication with the northern column of the Mississippi," and to bear in mind the necessity of seizing key southern cities after "the capture and firm retention of New Orleans." From the Lincoln government, itself indecisive as to dealing with captive rebels, would come equally vague directions for the "delicate" and "important" operation of "drawing back into the ark the wanderers and the deluded."⁶³

General Butler determined from the outset to impress the unruly insurrectionists in New Orleans with the hard reality of the occupation. At four o'clock a company of the 31st Massachusetts disembarked and with fixed bayonets began to push back the mob. By five, other soldiers from the 31st Massachusetts and the 4th Wisconsin Regiments had landed along with Everett's artillery battery and the General's staff. The troops and the officers grouped in preparation for a march through the city to the Custom House, deemed the most suitable place for general headquarters.

When all the troops were disembarked and in formation, their General joined them. As the procession commenced, stepping lively to the strains of "The Star Spangled Banner," the crowd followed, jeering the Union soldiers. The mob surged along the pavement with many straining and shoving to get a sight of the hated Butler. Cries of "Shiloh," cheers for "Beauregard" and "Davis" died away as the crowd sought out the squat General. "Where is he?" some cried. "Where is the damned rascal?" Then they spotted him. "There he goes, God damn him!" "I see the damned old villain." Disregarding the abuse of the mob, the General marched with his troops, occasionally double-stepping in a failing effort to keep time with the music.⁶⁴

Upon taking command of New Orleans, Butler found many of the old dilemmas facing him, compounded by new ones for which there was precious little precedent for action. Again there were judgments to be made about the futures of thousands of slaves. There was a city of rebels to tame, some delicately and with tact, others with an "iron fist." There was the Confederate army that had retreated to Lake Ponchartrain above the city, a force whose true strengths were unknown. There were difficulties peculiar to New Orleans. A large, hostile populace was starving and had to be fed, regardless of politics or the continued blockade of the city's commerce. The majority

of the city's commercial corps were foreign born. Mothered by a phalanx of consular agents, wedded to the Confederacy by sympathy and blood, the merchants and their consuls required firm but crafty handling. There were added difficulties of repairing the city's fractured money base, of restoring commerce with inland staple producers and courting their support for Unionism in Louisiana. There was even the problem of coping with the city's annual yellow fever epidemic, expected in mid-summer. And with these matters "all going on at once, each pressing upon the other and each interfering with doing the other," the General had not one iota of instruction.⁶⁵

The second Saturday of the occupation: With martial control but a few days old the city seemed to some rebel observers "tranquil and peaceable, as in the most quiet times." Union authorities, however, would have differed. Although there had been no major outbreaks of mob violence, there was one particularly vocal element of secession sentiment that would not be stilled. The women of New Orleans, intent on insulting and provoking the Union troops to an incident, had commenced an abusive campaign of word and deed. At first they only indulged in contemptuous sneers and exaggerated "pullings in of the skirts" when they passed Union soldiers in the streets. If a Union officer entered a streetcar, a cluster of women would exit "with every expression of disgust." The women reached even greater heights of insult and provocation when they spit on officers attending church services. The soldiers had little recourse against these "bejewelled, crinolined, and laced creatures." Retort would only lead to a riot. The entire city might rise to defend a southern woman ill-treated by a Union soldier. So the insults went unabated.⁶⁶

The incident that probably spurred the military's determination to suppress these noisome and humiliating demonstrations occurred on the Saturday

in mid-May. Sixty-three year old David Farragut, Flag-Officer of the Fleet, was back in the city for a formal review of the occupation forces. With an aide, Farragut strolled down one of the city's principal thoroughfares: both men were in full dress uniform. As they walked, they probably failed to notice an open window. From that window someone poured "not too clean water" from what seems to have been a douche. The filth drenched Farragut and his companion.⁶⁷

Forced to act, General Butler had to find a solution that would stop the insults but avoid the arrest of any women. Physical coercion must be avoided. "No order could be made," the General knew, "save one which would execute itself." Sarah Butler, who had accompanied her husband on the expedition, helped him pen an order aimed at the southern ladies' abundant self-esteem. The General's "Woman Order" declared that "when any female shall by word, gesture or movement insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier . . . she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation." To those who feared that a soldier's improper abuse of the order might result in a scandal, the General replied that if that case occurred, he would deal with it so that it would "never be repeated."⁶⁸

Although that one case of aggression was never reported, the "Woman Order" was nevertheless a Pandora's box. True, cases of female militancy ceased immediately. But the Yankee General had misjudged the Southern chivalric sense. The very wording of the order, delicate as it may have seemed to its authors, desecrated Southern honor, the worse crime of all. In "mute agony," the women of New Orleans cried out to their Southern men to avenge "these bitter, burning wrongs," these "untold sufferings."⁶⁹

Fantasy or not, the image of Butler as the "merciless foe," the "panderer to lust and desecrator of virtue," provoked a widespread cry of outrage. Even in the North and in England the General's pragmatism received scant notice as public and press sternly castigated him for his act. Although some merely termed the Order's wording "unfortunate," others considered the Order the "infamous" act of a brute. Even the General's friends reported the undesirable repercussions of the "Woman Order." Charles Sumner told the General that even in France the name of Butler was used to frighten small children. He became known as "Beast Butler," "fiend," and "felon." To the contempt and reprobation the General could only privately reply that while he desired the good opinion of all, he would stand behind his order as the most tender, yet effective vehicle for disciplining those "fair, feeble, fretful, and ferocious rebels."⁷⁰

But few in the South cared for Butler's rationale. Butler, they said, had defamed the women, the same Butler who had unceremoniously freed the slaves of their Virginia brethren, inciting rebelliousness among the blacks and perhaps causing many whites to dread the bloodbath of another Nat Turner slave revolt. Some actually feared that Butler would resort to "a servile insurrection" in New Orleans as a final solution for "crushing the indomitable energy" of that city's secession fervor. Butler was a Beast. He defied Southern honor, ignored tradition and mores, and would wreck utter havoc on the Southern civilization.⁷¹

In these days of strife, New Orleans' Mayor John T. Monroe was particularly perplexed. A short, fat, nervous man, trapped between his Confederate sympathies and his desire to remain the mayor, he was already at odds with the military command. With the yellow fever season approaching, the General had called for an all-out clean up of the city's putrid canals and

sewer system, clogged with offal and organic decay. The General wanted to employ idle white labor for this work, thus cleaning the city's waterways and injecting some money into the impoverished working class. But street cleaning was traditionally "nigger work," and Monroe hesitated to facilitate an order that seemed to degrade white labor, even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of General Butler . . . And now this Woman Order.

Saturday, May 16, was a long day for John Monroe. Forced by attitude and politics to echo New Orleans' outrage over the "Woman Order," the Mayor indignantly went before General Butler. "Your order," the Mayor told the General, "is of a character so astounding and extraordinary" that the city government could not order its promulgation without a protest "against the threat it contains." But when the General responded with a threat to suspend Monroe's civic office and to declare martial law, Monroe's indignation withered and he meekly retracted his protest.⁷²

The pressures on Monroe to defy the Union General were still strong. Again he appeared before the General, this time to retract his apology and to reassert his views on the impropriety of the "Woman Order." But the General was not to be cowed. Again they jostled and again John Monroe retired from the field, apologetic and thoroughly browbeaten. Meanwhile there was another problem pressing the General: the case of the "Monroe Life Guards." Six soldiers, paroled in late April after the Union victory at the forts downriver, had "deliberately organized themselves in military array." "Upon promises of prominent citizens for a supply of arms," they planned to break out of Union lines and make their way to the Confederate forces above the city. The General also had information that Mayor Monroe had donated twenty dollars towards the support of the "Monroe Guards," named in his honor.⁷³

Knowing all this, the General readied himself for his next encounter with the vacillating Mayor. On Sunday Monroe came again to withdraw all apologies. But the General had tired of Monroe's naggings. After sternly lecturing Monroe on the civil government's failure to cooperate with the military and divulging his knowledge of the "Monroe Guards," Butler suspended all duties of the civil authorities. Martial law was declared, and John Monroe was sent to ponder his fate as a prisoner at Fort Jackson. Maine's dashing War Democrat, Colonel George Shepley, assumed the mayoral duties.

The military assumption of civil control came at an opportune time. The city which seemed calm on the surface seethed with hate for the occupation forces and their Union. The mob that had met the troops in the streets had gone underground, having formed "violent, strong, and unruly" secret clans. Daily the General received anonymous threats on his life. There were threats to Union sympathizers by organizations that vowed "to mark every man who even speaks to a U.S. soldier." But for all its anonymous fulminations, the underground had yet to act. It was waiting to see how strong, how forceful, how committed the Butler regime was to the "iron fist."⁷⁴

On May 31st, the "Monroe Guards" had been sentenced to death. Four days later the General signed a reprieve and shipped the men off to prison. No one knew if the reprieve was an act of conciliation or fear. Was Butler afraid that if the "Monroe Guards" died his city garrison of only twenty-five hundred troops could not contain the rebels' fury? Was he scared? The city would soon find out. Mumford was coming to trial.

William Mumford was the leader of four men who had defied a Union order not to molest United States flags that flew over the U.S. Mint and other government buildings. On Sunday, April 27, while the fleet was at its prayers, Mumford and three others climbed the Mint, tore down the flag, shredded

it, and scattered the pieces among a cheering crowd. The city's papers hailed Mumford for his "patriotic act." The General felt differently. When Mumford was caught, he was tried for the treasonous act of desecrating the flag and for seeking to incite "other evil-minded persons to further resistance to the laws and arms of the United States." There was never any doubt of Mumford's guilt. A military court convicted him and sentenced him to die on June 7. But the question before the city was whether Butler would dare to hang Mumford. Would Butler back down to the mob? Would he disguise fear with mercy?⁷⁵

A secret service man had attended a clandestine meeting held somewhere in the city. Confederate sympathizers, he told the General, would assassinate him if Mumford died on the gallows. On the morning of June 7, the General received some fifty anonymous death threats. At 11 a.m. William Mumford stood on the gallows in front of the Mint. A large crowd waited. A scant few minutes passed and Mumford was dead. For the General there had never been any question of reprieve. "I thought I should have been in the utmost danger if I did not have Mumford executed," reasoned Butler, "for the question was . . . to be determined whether I commanded that city or the mob did."⁷⁶

But again, what was pragmatism and civil order for the General was murder and outrage to an infuriated South. In Southern eyes, Mumford was no traitor. He was a patriot, a martyr to a glorious cause. It was Butler who was the public enemy, the fiend. The Confederate government instituted an investigation into Mumford's death. Jefferson Davis' administration would soon find reason to condemn Butler as an "outlaw and common enemy of man," a "felon" who, when captured, deserved instant death without a trial.⁷⁷

Although the General may have felt that every day boiled with momentous decisions, there were pleasurable moments. He liked to rule, enjoyed having "supreme power." He delighted in each morning's sumptuous breakfast where, hosted by Sarah, he and his staff ate, quipped, and girded themselves for another day's haggling encounters. Often the General's work day might be lightened by a pleasant stroll with his wife in the shopping district.

In the General's office his favorite motto hung on a sign prominently placed behind his massive wooden desk. The sign read, "There is no difference in a he and a she adder in their venom," and was undoubtedly an intimidating frame for the General's harsh, crooked features. Opposite the General's desk was a visitor's chair tied to the leg of a table. Many among his daily stream of petitioners were habitual garlic eaters and the General deemed it indispensable to clarity of thought that suppliants might not draw too close for intimate entreaty. With a work day that often ran fourteen hours, even following him into the early morning, the General nevertheless had the time and the appetite for a good laugh, especially when it was on himself. Late in the muggy summer he wrote home to tell his family of the blessed devotion of his new servant. She is so loyal, he said. She quarrels with the other servants for stealing my cigars. Why, he said, she is so concerned about me that she insists that I wear a "fresh pair of white pantaloons every day." If that was not "proof of attachment," he asked, "what is?" For she, dear girl, has to "wash them."⁷⁸

The few diversions, however, did not allow the General an escape from his duties. He still had to bring the "wanderers" back in to the "ark." Mumford's death and Butler policy had only served a kind of purpose. The military had suppressed the mob's fury. The General could walk unescorted and unmolested through the streets. But the General knew that anger con-

trolled by fear was not enough. Aiming at reconstruction, not isolation, he sought solutions for reconciling the city to her return to the Union fold.

He had made concerted efforts to encourage Union sentiments. But New Orleans' pro-Unionists feared future mob retaliation, especially if the time should come when the Confederacy again ruled the city, and hesitated to give the Union their open support. There had been "Union Clubs" and "Union Ladies' Associations," but they had failed. Propaganda, demonstrations, and pro-Union pageantry all came to nought, some skillfully sabotaged by secessionist cunning.⁷⁹

In the early weeks of the occupation some fourteen thousand persons did take the oath of allegiance, but these were known to be the propertyless dregs of society. In that highly property-conscious age, Union authorities took little interest in the renewed allegiance of people who had no property to be risked to the mob's retaliation, and no community influence to exert for the Union.

The General had decided that the most fertile ground for reconstruction would be among the working classes of the city. He strongly desired that these people recognize what he saw: that they had been used as pawns by a malevolent, grasping propertied class. The "landed aristocracy," he believed, had feared the workers' inclination to rise and overthrow their society's patrician rulers.

Therefore, the aristocrats had encouraged the war effort to siphon off the energies of a working class in ferment. The "middling classes," the General declared, recognized the aristocrats' perfidy and looked upon the Union authorities "as friends." It was the workers who would be courted for pro-Union expressions. And it was the workers who would be counted on

in the battle to crush the haughty rebellion of the aristocrats.⁸⁰

Butler's administration took decisive action to divide the city's loyalties. It posted ordinances requiring the oath of allegiance for any public official who wished to keep his office. Most chose to resign. It also called upon all former citizens to renew their allegiance if they ever hoped to have "any favor, protection, privilege, passport or any benefit of the power of the United States extended to them." In reaction to the demand for renewed allegiances, civilians and paroled Confederate soldiers took the oath at a rapid rate. There was even an outburst of pro-Union feeling when four hundred people jammed City Hall to cheer the General and the Union.⁸¹

But the pro-Union surge was illusory. Despite the cheers and the oath-taking, an observer could see little evidence that there was "a shadow of progress toward reconciling to the Union those who were ever really hostile to it." It was painfully evident that most who took the oath did so merely to protect property and self, rather than as a heartfelt return to the "ark."⁸²

Regardless of his apparent lack of success, General Butler was convinced that the class approach to reconstruction was the most viable one. The power, the will of the aristocrats, had to be broken. The workers' class consciousness must be encouraged; they must see that their war and their hunger did not "pinch the wealthy and influential." He must show the mechanics and artisans of New Orleans that their interests lay with the Union and that it would seek redress for the "flagrant wrongs" done them.⁸³

For the General, war on the aristocrats became a kind of controlled mania. In authorizing the collection of a poor relief fund, Butler assessed liberal fines of those whose names appeared on a captured contribution list for a Confederate "City Defense Fund." When Congress finally approved the second Confiscation Act, which declared the property of persons supporting

the rebellion subject to forfeiture to the United States, Butler prosecuted it with vigor and dispatch. Recalcitrant rebels who persisted in defying the order to declare their allegiance or lose their property saw their possessions taken and auctioned away for a fraction of their value. If the General was creating divisions in the city, he was also making powerful enemies among those of the propertied class who believed him guided not by patriotism, but by graft and viciousness.⁸⁴

The aristocrats despised Butler for his financial policy. But on a higher plane they hated and feared him for his race policy. Butler, after all, had freed slaves in Virginia. This fanatic would surely do the same in New Orleans. Already he had corps of White men working in the gutters. Already former slaves were riding in streetcars usually reserved for Whites only. Butler even had those black rascals testifying in court against White men. It was blasphemy, said the Louisianans. The man was no better than Lincoln and those damned "Black Republicans." But those who believed that the General would encourage "the sack of our houses and the slaughter of our women and children by the hand of our own . . . infuriated Negroes," and who feared him as an unprincipled abolitionist, perhaps did not know of the trouble with Phelps.⁸⁵

Brigadier General J. W. Phelps, a "tall, saturnine, gloomy" man who placed John Brown "on a level with the great martyrs of the Christian World," was the Union Commander at Camp Parapet, seven miles above the city. Phelps, who "seemed at times a man of one idea" on the abolition question, had early commenced a policy of indiscriminately freeing every slave he could. He supported them at his camp and even organized them into military units. Far from concurring with Phelps' actions, General Butler tried everything to make him see his mistake. But Phelps refused to recognize that by law the

slave property of loyal citizens was still sacrosanct and would be so until Congress and the President might otherwise rule. Phelps also failed to see that with the city's burgeoning relief rolls, the army was incapable of feeding Union troops, citizens, and slaves. The latter would fare better back on the plantations. We cannot take all, the General bitterly complained. There are "women and children in New Orleans . . . actually starving in spite of all that I can do." If all the slaves were allowed "to quit their employment and come within the lines," the state of things, he concluded, would be one "not to be conceived by the imagination."⁸⁶

But Phelps, blinded by his abolitionist zeal and deafened to the General's pleas for a less radical and disruptive policy, refused to listen. He continued freeing slaves. When Butler suggested that Phelps employ idle Blacks at jobs originally designed for Union troops, Phelps snapped back. He would not become a "slave driver." In protest, he resigned.⁸⁷

Butler, for his part, did not oppose Phelps on principle, but on law. Although the General was not the rabid abolitionist that the South envisioned, he did agree with Phelps that slavery was a "curse" to master and slave and a "doomed" system. He too saw "the importance of freeing . . . the colored people," but his support of Black rights, unlike that of Phelps, had limits. Whatever its reasons, the Lincoln Government had authored precious little policy on the race issue. General Butler would not, could not, alter his official course of action until those in Washington changed theirs. It was only upon notification of the Administration's approbation that Butler finally felt free to organize military units of free blacks and former slaves and to institute a system of black wage labor.⁸⁸

Militarily, Butler's Department of the Gulf was weak. Although the General repeatedly begged the War Department to augment his meager force

of twelve thousand men, punchless and withered by disease, his pleas were to no avail. The war in Virginia is going badly, he was told. Men cannot be spared to your Department. Even when he finally received permission to raise both black and white "Native Guard" units, the General's Department remained primarily an administrative one. The troops found themselves much more concerned with fighting off the fever and ague than with attacking Vicksburg, Mobile, or the disorganized, similarly weakened "Partisan" guerilla forces immediately above the city. Perhaps if Washington had sent him more men and equipment, the General would have passed more time in the field. In fact he might have preferred the rigors of camp life, leaving to others the nightmare of civil and commercial imbroglios.

Almost immediately upon entering New Orleans, Butler found himself grounded on the shoals of administrative necessity. Regardless of the terms of the blockade that forbid commerce with areas under rebel control, food and produce were crucial to relieve the city's physical and commercial poverty. Butler noted that even former cotton barons "who, in peaceful times would have spent the summer at Saratoga," were "essentially" without food and income. With the wealthy in such decline the magnitude of the common man's plight could barely be imagined.⁸⁹

In the early weeks of May, the General authorized emergency measures to relieve and revive the city. While petitioning Washington to lift the blockade, he approved a controlled trade with the Confederates. The Union army gave safe passage to Mobile flour and Texas beef, and the initial starvation crisis was averted. In an effort to revive trade the General sought to convince upriver planters who had hidden their cotton and sugar that the United States would not confiscate their property if sent to market at New Orleans. Butler guaranteed that any man, were he Louisianan and rebel ad-

administrator John Slidell "himself," would receive a fair price for his goods.

In spite of the trade with the enemy the Lincoln Administration seemed more concerned with the General's personal commerce than with the supercession of the blockade. Circumventing army regulations in what he considered the practical necessities of revitalizing New Orleans, Butler had become financially involved in some early commercial ventures. In one case he had purchased a large quantity of staple goods and had shipped them north aboard otherwise empty, unballasted troop transports. His acts, he told Washington, had not been motivated by hopes for personal gain, but by a desire to demonstrate the existing market for and the reliable security of Southern products in Northern hands. The General insisted that he had little interest in the produce itself. In fact, he hoped that the government would "take it and reimburse" him. If the government chose not to, he offered to keep the articles shipped "and pay the government a reasonable freight." Whatever the government decided, though, he was anxious that "neither motives nor action be misunderstood."⁹⁰

The government eventually decided to keep the produce and reimburse the General for his expenses. In ruling his actions "wise and patriotic," Washington nevertheless cautioned him that "as a public officer, he ought not to be involved in private trade and profits arising out of his official power and position." Such operations, Butler was told, were only to be undertaken upon "absolute and overwhelming necessity."⁹¹

On June 1, 1862, the federal government lifted the blockade of New Orleans. Now the city was "open to the commerce of the world." Within days of the announcement hordes of monied speculators had descended upon the city. Hoping that the city's trade base was soon to be rejuvenated and already

alerted to the government's disapproval, Butler ceased all personal involvement in commercial ventures. But a hint of corruption had already tainted his reputation. Even as he sought to extricate himself from the entanglements of personal commerce, he was increasingly and almost unconsciously ensnared in questionable dealings of those closest to him.⁹²

Sarah Butler had never really liked or trusted her husband's brother, Andrew. A year before while they were at Fortress Monroe, Sarah had tried to warn Ben of Andrew's guile, of his self-centered concern with profit and advancement. But Butler, in the simplicity of his devotion to an older brother, would "never . . . see it." Andrew was his friend, his advisor and protector, who had fought his battles with him since schoolboy days. And to Sarah's great distress, Andrew was in New Orleans.⁹³

Andrew Jackson Butler, a massive, fleshy man, had accompanied the New Orleans expedition with a temporary appointment as Chief Commissary. When the Senate rejected his appointment Andrew stayed on in the city. The blockade was gone, and a wide field for profitable trade beckoned those with cash reserves and the necessary courage for speculation. Andrew had both.

In a short time rumor had linked the Butler brothers in a series of foul commercial dealings. It was believed by many in New Orleans that Andrew Butler in particular had acquired immense profits. Some said that one million dollars from an illicit trade of medicines and foodstuffs with the needy Confederates had gone into his pockets. Andrew was the brother of the commanding General. Many people naturally expected one to share in and facilitate the profits of the other. George Denison, a customs official who reported directly to Salmon Chase, the Union Secretary of the Treasury, did not believe that the General was "interested" in Andrew's speculations. But Denison did see that Andrew's "sole purpose" was making money. "I regret

his being here at all," Denison told Chase. "It leads to the belief that the General himself is interested" in his brother's activities. "The effect," Denison concluded, "is bad."⁹⁴

Sarah Butler, afraid that people would think her husband was speculating "from Jackson's (Andrew's) being engaged in it," left New Orleans in early June. In leaving to escape the epidemic season, she was also fleeing an emotional drain and ennui that seems to have been the result of haggling with her husband about Andrew. Even from the quiet repose of Belvidere, the Butler mansion at Lowell, she pleaded with Ben to see what even his friends saw, that Andrew was doing him "vast injury." "He is utterly hated, and all his deeds are reflecting on you," she wrote her husband. "You think you control him and know his acts. On the contrary," she felt, "though subservient to your face, he controls where he wishes." The question, she said, was simply how far her husband was willing to "suffer in estimation and position" for Andrew's advancement. Even the General's friends warned him of the dangers of an association with Andrew's financial endeavors. Beware, the General was cautioned, lest the specter of Andrew be forever "raised" above you, "a spectacle for public comment" ready to "topple" you down.⁹⁵

But the General refused to listen. He chided Sarah for her "foolish notions," asserting that he was perfectly capable of taking care of his "own honor among women or men." He refused "to speak of Andrew, or what he may or may not do," and finalized his stubborn rejection of Sarah's pleas with a blunt acknowledgement of her wishes and the gruff assurance that he would be guided by them "only so far as I may."⁹⁶

Finally, an earnest warning arrived from Salmon Chase, the General's political friend. You owe it to yourself and your future, Chase scolded him, "not to be responsible, even by toleration," for your brother's acts. The

General was told that many in the capital did "not scruple to express their conviction" that he and Andrew were working together. Alerted by the Secretary's warning Butler answered Chase with a letter defending the legality and morality of Andrew's business. The General added, however, that he had asked his brother "to close up his business and go away from New Orleans" so as to leave the General "entirely untrammelled to deal with the infernal brood of slandering speculators" who had perpetrated these rumors because he "would not allow them to plunder the government." But even as he spoke, he was vacillating. Andrew Butler was never sent from the city. He stayed, in fact, longer than his brother.⁹⁷

Despite the hint of corruption, the people and press at home still loudly applauded Butler's administration in New Orleans. He was known as a "rebel tamer." He had shown the South that the Union did not fear the "iron fist" in rebuilding the nation. "Butler is the only live General we have got," cried people in his home state. "Butler is the right man in the right place." "Butler had the ring of a good General." "Butler is the only General that has done anything." The New York Times believed that of all the men sent to deal with Southern treason, "none has manifested the wisdom, firmness, and skill of General Butler." But even as the General was being praised in the streets, even as his name began to be mentioned in connection with the Presidency, his acts were earning him the displeasure and concern of important persons in Washington.⁹⁸

Throughout these summer months the General had found himself "troubled" with "no specific instructions" from the Lincoln Administration. Told by newly appointed War Secretary Stanton of the government's confidence in his "ability to meet the exigencies" of his command better upon his "own judgment than upon instructions from Washington," Butler was left to his own devices.

But despite the government's faith in Butler's abilities, his administrative innovations were making Secretary of State William H. Seward very nervous. Seward, anxious that Europe have no cause to meddle in American affairs, feared the foreign reaction to an unrestrained war that Butler was waging on the consuls.⁹⁹

Upon arrival in New Orleans the General had found that most of the members of the propertied class opposed to him were either foreign born or naturalized citizens. Almost immediately there had been evidence of the overwhelming proclivity of these merchants and their highly vocal, highly protective consular agents for aiding the Confederacy. There was proof, solid proof, that merchants and consuls alike had secretly smuggled goods, money, and documents for the rebels. In some cases they had also concealed Confederate and stolen U.S. properties in hidden vaults to keep them from the invader. Many of the consuls were guilty of such acts, and the General knew it. The truth was, he said, that "as a rule" the consuls had "aided the Rebellion by every means," especially by facilitating the transfer of specie to Europe for the purchase of munitions.¹⁰⁰

The General's approach to the consuls was direct. "When . . . I find a consul aiding the rebels," said Butler, "I must treat him as a rebel." Without regard to international law or diplomatic amenities, the General tracked down funds hidden in consular offices and seized them. In one instance, the General's spies learned that \$800,000 in specie belonging to the Citizens Bank of New Orleans was hidden in a vault rented by Amadie Conturie, the Dutch Consul. On May 10, the General sent a squad of soldiers to the Consulate of the Netherlands. Disregarding Conturie's invocation of diplomatic immunity and his claims that his vault held only personal property, the soldiers forcibly took the vault keys from the consular person

and entered the vault. Conturie's "personal property" amounted to one hundred and sixty kegs of silver specie, as well as the dies and plates of the Citizens Bank. Despite a joint consular protest against the clear violation of diplomatic rights, the General held firm. Where in other issues he chose to scrupulously adhere to the letter of the law, one of the nation's premier jurists nevertheless decided to ignore the dictates of law in the pursuit of a wily, intractable opposition.¹⁰¹

In Washington, Seward was in a panic. He spent much of his time fretting that "any insult to a foreign authority" might result in a recognition of the independence of the Confederacy. Already enmeshed in the delicate maneuverings with the English over the "Trent Affair," Seward had no stomach for the enraged protests of the Dutch Minister or those of other ambassadors who complained of the arbitrariness of the Union authorities in New Orleans. Accordingly, Seward convinced Edwin Stanton to appoint Colonel Shepley as "Military Governor of Louisiana" with the hope that he would assume the duties of consular supervision. Butler, however, was not to be sidetracked. Still Shepley's military superior, the General sent him off on an ambiguous mission "to press the government on the Negro question." Then Butler resumed his harassment of the consuls.¹⁰²

Although some observers managed a wry comment on the lack of accord between consuls and General, Seward could not. Unable to tolerate further collisions with foreign powers, he appointed Reverdy Johnson, the Maryland lawyer and legislator, as the State Department's "special agent." Johnson was ordered to New Orleans to examine the consular complaints and to arbitrate a final ruling on the propriety and legality of the commanding General's acts.¹⁰³

Johnson, known to dislike Butler, arrived in New Orleans on July 10,

and presented his credentials to the military authorities. Given an office in the Custom House, he proceeded to review all the grievances and to make rulings. Perhaps guided by Seward's wish that he "pour oil on the waters of consular discontent," Johnson proceeded to reverse eleven of the General's thirteen decisions to fine alien merchants for blockade running or to confiscate funds hidden by consular agents. He returned the \$800,000 in silver to Conturie on the ruling that the silver was actually a debt owed by the Citizens Bank to a Dutch trading firm, one for which Conturie was acting as a middleman. The dies and plates remained with the Union authorities, with no questions asked.

When Butler read Johnson's decisions, the General was livid. Not only had Johnson ignored the extensive legal justifications for his acts which Butler had spent hours preparing, but the man had acted "without investigation," Butler charged, "and without knowing anything of the transactions, and without even inquiring" about them. In a controlled blast of hurt and anger, the General wrote Seward. The complete abnegation of a hard line policy, wrote Butler, had left the city "untenable." The result of Johnson's mission, he firmly stated, had "caused it to be understood" that the commanding General lacked his government's support, that all his acts were to be "overhauled," and that he was "soon to be relieved." The General bitterly complained that Johnson's findings had suppressed "every fact . . . which would form a shadow of justification" for the General's acts. If, he told Seward, it is important for you to crucify me on the cross of "state necessity," to "impugn the motives and disown the acts of a commanding officer," then I accept my fate. But, he concluded, the rebels had been given the hope that they would "soon be released from the government which has ever held the city in quiet order." They must be shown, he asserted, that

a rejection of his administrative acts did not mean a rejection of his rule in New Orleans.¹⁰⁴

On December 14, 1862, Major General Nathaniel Banks arrived in New Orleans, with orders to relieve Butler of command. Butler was taken completely by surprise. Only a few days before, he had again received assurances from friends in Washington that rumors of his recall were "without foundation." General Banks, he was told, was coming to New Orleans not to supercede him, but to use the city as a base for an expedition into Texas. So little was known about the recall that even as Banks was arriving in New Orleans, Salmon Chase was writing Butler that the President had "acknowledged fully" his capacity for service and seemed friendly to his cause. But the General's friends were also fooled. Stunned, undoubtedly embittered, the General nevertheless spent a week graciously orienting Banks to the mechanisms of military and civil rule in New Orleans.¹⁰⁵

When he departed the city for Lowell, Massachusetts, the General spoke for the last time to the citizens of New Orleans. When I came among you, he began, "I saw that this rebellion was a war of the aristocrats against the middlingmen - of the rich against the poor." He had felt, therefore, no hesitation "in taking the substance of the wealthy . . . to feed the innocent poor." He asked the people to see the rashness of their rebellion, and to return to the Union. "There is," he told them solemnly, "but one thing that stands between you and the government - and this is slavery." The subject of slavery had caused him much consternation. "I came among you by teachings, by habit of mind, by political position, by social affinity, inclined to sustain your domestic laws." But months of observation had persuaded him "that the existence of slavery is incompatible" with the safety of all people, Yankee, Rebel, and Negro. It was far better, he con-

cluded, that slavery "should be taken out at once" than that it should any longer disrupt the nation.¹⁰⁶

The General's final act in New Orleans was to order stone chislers to adorn the city's statue of Andrew Jackson with the inscription: "The Union must and shall be preserved." And even as he prepared to depart New Orleans malicious rumors still hounded him. There was talk that he was absconding with a coffin full of silver spoons belonging to the St. Charles Hotel. While there is no real evidence that Butler ever filched spoons or any other private property, rumors of his "base thievery" were to pursue him for years thereafter.¹⁰⁷

The months in New Orleans gained Benjamin Butler enormous support in the North. Despite the rumors of his misconduct, he was cheered at testimonial dinners for his abilities as a "rebel tamer," as the one man so tough that the Confederacy had outlawed him. Once again, abolitionist Wendell Phillips found reason to applaud Butler's actions. In a speech in Boston, Phillips hotly rebuked the Lincoln government for Butler's recall. Phillips called Butler the only Union General who had decisively "organized victory."¹⁰⁸

In those early months after the recall there was much talk of the Presidency. Everywhere he went the General was feted, praised, and toasted as a man with the courage and firmness needed to deal with disunion. Butler was even receiving flirtations from the radicals of Lincoln's party. They saw him as the "coming man." Whatever his future plans, Butler's head swam with visions of the White House. He set off on a prolonged speaking tour, hoping to encourage pro-Butler forces and to tell the electorate about his changed views on reconstruction and race. Many had charged him with using the new mood of the Emancipation Proclamation for his own political devices. Butler denied the charges saying that his effort to elevate the Blacks was "an attempt" on his part to demonstrate that he "had acted upon a theory". . .

and not from caprice with a 'change of base' upon change of circumstance."

There were those who called him a political apostate. Butler attempted to show them that his politics had not been prostituted to base motives, but had undergone a process of maturation. "I am not for the Union as it was," he told a cheering audience in New York. True, he said, I was by training and politics for the old Union. But with the nation "having undergone those troubles, having spent all this blood and treasure," I have no desire to be "cheek by jowl" with the South again. "The old house," he concluded, "was good enough for me, but the South pulled the 'L' down, and I propose, when we build it up, to build it up with the modern improvements."¹⁰⁹

His political fortunes were changing, his national stature greatly enhanced. But Benjamin Butler was still an unemployed General in a nation at war. Fame and glory lay not in Northern meetinghalls or in political backrooms, but on the battlefield. For redemption, for self-esteem, and for politics, Butler needed another command. Simon Cameron, another Butler booster, urged him to seek a field command. "Remember," warned Cameron, "the next President will be a military chieftan." Benjamin Butler obviously agreed.¹¹⁰

Epilogue:

After New Orleans, as before, controversy and conflict marked Butler's career. Because Lincoln saw Butler's importance to a bipartisan war effort both as a former Democrat and as a newly enlisted abolitionist, he gave Butler another field command. But again accusations of chicanery followed him, accenting a singular flair for military ineffectiveness that he had demonstrated. Twice Butler had blundered, once with Grant at Petersburg, Virginia, and again with Porter's expedition against Fort Fisher in North Carolina. As a result, Butler never recaptured the forceful military image of the early war years. Even after the war in Congress, as Governor of Massachusetts, and as Presidential candidate of the Greenback and Anti-Monopolist parties his foes questioned his motives and held his course of action suspect. Although to some people he was a brilliant social visionary, an honest champion of degraded humanity, to many others he was and always would be the "Beast." But Benjamin Butler was neither a saint nor the devil incarnate. The real man lay somewhere between the two extremes.

Notes

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15. Butler's Book, 237-239; Parton, 119.
16. Francis Russell, "Butler the Beast?," American Heritage, XIX (April, 1968), 49; Butler's Book, 57.
17. Robert West, Lincoln's Scapegoat General (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965),
10. Hereafter cited as West.
18. Butler's Book, 60-62.

19. Ibid., 63.
20. Ibid., 72.
21. Ibid., 90.
22. West, 19.
23. Butler's Book, 79.
24. Ibid., 75-77. Ben appeared before Judge Charles Henry Warren of the Lowell City Police Court. After answering all the Judge's searching questions, Ben bravely proceeded to differ with an earlier decision of the Court's. The Judge asked Ben for his sources. The next day in court Ben had the double pleasure of receiving notification of having passed his bar exam, as well as hearing the Judge reverse his prior ruling, giving Ben credit for the new decision.
25. Parton, 28.
26. Greswold to Butler, December 2, 1852, Butler Papers, Series A, container 1. See also Butler's Book, 99; Butler to Dwight Foster, September, 1862, Benjamin F. Butler, Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler. Jessie Ames Marshall, ed. (5 vols. Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1917) 284-285. Hereafter cited as Correspondence; Robert Werlich, "Beast" Butler: the incredible career of Major General Benjamin F. Butler. (Washington, D.C.: Quaker Press, 1962), 11.
27. Parton, 42-44. Butler gave this speech in February of 1860.
28. Stephen Allen to Butler, May 26, 1890, Correspondence II, 595-598.
29. Butler's Book, 152-155.
30. Parton, 122.
31. The New York Times, May 20 and 19, 1861.
32. Parton, 123.
33. Butler's Book, 258.
34. Ibid., 257-258; John Cary to Butler, March 9, 1891, Correspondence I, 102-103; Butler to Winfield Scott, May 25, 1861, Butler Papers, Series A, container 1.
35. Ibid.
36. Simon Cameron to Butler, August 8, 1861, Correspondence I, 201-203. Said Cameron, "The war now prosecuted . . . is a war for the Union, and for the preservation of all constitutional rights of all states." See also Leon Litwak's North of Slavery for a brilliant discussion of Northern attitudes towards black skin in the pre-war era; Grey to Butler, May 31, 1861, Butler Papers, Series A, container 3; Lewis Tappan to Butler, August 8, 1861, Correspondence I, 199-200.

37. Simon Cameron to Butler, May 27, 1861, Butler Papers, Series A, container 3; Montgomery Blair to Butler, May 29, 1861, ibid.
38. See Correspondence I, 183, for a breakdown as of July 29, 1861, of the nearly one thousand contrabands at Monroe, according to sex and age; Butler to Edward Pierce, August 15, 1861, ibid., 215
39. Butler to Simon Cameron, July 30, 1861, ibid., 185-188.
40. Winfield Scott to Butler, May 18, 1861, ibid., 94-95.
41. Winfield Scott to Butler, May 31, 1861, ibid.
42. Montgomery Blair to Butler, June 8, 1861, Butler Papers, Series A, container 3.
43. Gustavus Fox to Butler, June 8, 1861, Correspondence I, 130-131.
44. West, 89.
45. The Evening Star, Washington, D.C., June 12, 1861.
46. The New York Times, June 13, 1861.
47. Ibid., June 12, 1861.
48. Sarah Butler to Harriet Heard, July 6, 1861, Correspondence I, 162-163.
49. Ibid., 190-191. General Orders #22, was issued August 2, 1861.
50. The New York Times, July 9, 1861. The Times accused Butler of not proving himself "conspicuously equal to the . . . important duties of preparing our troops for active service."
51. Butler to Montgomery Blair, August 11, 1861, Butler Papers, Series A, container 5.
52. Butler to Sarah Butler, August 14, 1861, Correspondence I, 215.
53. Parton, 177; Butler to John Wool, August 30, 1861, Correspondence I, 229-235.
54. Ralph J. Roske and Charles Van Doren, Lincoln's Commando (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 103; The Evening Star, September 3, 1861.
55. Butler's Book, 287-288.
56. Wade, 7; Parton, 225.
57. Ibid.
58. For a reasonably comprehensive study of slave-cotton economy see the

Meyer and Conrad article in Harold Woodmen, ed; Slavery and the Southern Economy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966).

59. Thomas Butler Gunn, in Parton, 592.
60. The New Orleans Picayune, April 5, 1862. ibid., 209.
61. Butler's Book, 437.
62. West, 131.
63. George McClellan to Butler, February 23, 1862, Correspondence I, 360-362; Gustavus Fox to Butler, May 17, 1862, ibid., 501-502.
64. Parton, 281.
65. Butler's Book, 414.
66. The New Orleans Bee, May 8, 1862, in Parton, 300; ibid., 325. See also Butler's Book, 416, for anecdotes on the Woman Problem; Butler to James Carney, July 2, 1862, Correspondence II, 35-36.
67. Butler's Book, 417.
68. Butler to James Carney, July 2, 1862, Correspondence II, 35-36; OR Series I, vol. XV, 426. General Orders #28, Department of the Gulf, was issued on May 15, 1862; Butler's Book, 418-419.
69. Parton, 339.
70. Ibid., 341; Charles Sumner to Butler, December 5, 1862, Correspondence II, 520. See also the Butler-Carney Correspondence previously cited and West, 142 (incorrect citation).
71. Pierre Soule to George Randolph, May 8, 1862, OR, Series I, vol. VI, 887-888.
72. John Monroe to Butler, May 16, 1862, Correspondence I, 497-498.
73. OR, Series I, vol. XV, 467. General Orders #36 was issued on May 31, 1862.
74. Edwin Stanton to Butler, May 8, 1862, Correspondence I, 452-455; Anonymous to Butler, May 15, 1862, ibid., 484-486.
75. The New Orleans Picayune, April 28, 1862, in Parton, 275; OR, Series I, vol. XV, 469. Special Orders #70 was issued June 5, 1862.
76. Butler's Book, 440.
77. Parton, 587.

78. Ibid., 588-589; Butler to Sarah Butler, September, 1862, Correspondence II, 248-249.
79. See West, 173-174.
80. Butler to Stanton, June 28, 1862, OR Series I, vol. XV, 502-504; The Boston Journal, January 4, 1863, in West, 172.
81. Correspondence I, 574-578. General Orders #41 was issued on June 10, 1862.
82. The New York Tribune, June 19, 1862, in West, 173.
83. Correspondence I, 457-459. General Orders #25 was issued on May 9, 1862.
84. For the complete copy of Butler's "Soak the Rich" Order #55, see Parton, 309-311. Also see OR, Series I, vol. VI, 575, for background on the "Committee of Public Safety" that solicited and administered the "City Defense Fund."
85. Parton, 493; Pierre Soule to George Randolph, May 8, 1862, OR Series I, vol. VI, 887-888.
86. Parton, 125; Butler to Edwin Stanton, May 25, 1862, Correspondence I, 516-521.
87. John Pehlps to Butler, July 31, 1862, Correspondence II, 126-127.
88. Butler to Abraham Lincoln, November 28, 1862, Correspondence II, 447-450; George Denison to Salmon Chase, October 16, 1862, ibid., 378-380; Abraham Lincoln to Reverdy Johnson, July 26, 1862, ibid., 135-136; Salmon Chase to Butler, July 31, 1862, ibid., 131-135. See also George Denison to Salmon Chase, October 16, 1862, ibid., 378-380.
89. Butler to Henry Halleck, September 1, 1862, in Parton, 321.
90. Ibid., 408-409; Butler to Edwin Stanton, May 16, 1862, Correspondence I, 490-495.
91. P.H. Watson to Richard Fay, Jr., June 18, 1861, Correspondence I, 612-613; Edwin Stanton to Butler, (date?), OR, Series I, vol. XV, 493-494.
92. West, 188.
93. Sarah Butler to Butler, August 12, 1861, Correspondence I, 209-210.
94. George Denison to Salmon Chase, August 26, 1862, Correspondence II, 228-230.
95. Sarah Butler to Harriet Heard, May 15, 1862, Correspondence I, 486-489; Sarah Butler to Butler, September, 1862, Correspondence II, 319-321; Sarah Butler to Butler, September 17, 1862, ibid., 304-305.

96. Butler to Sarah Butler, September 9, 1862, ibid., 271-273; Butler to Sarah Butler, August 14, 1862, ibid., 190-191.
97. Salmon Chase to Butler, October 29, 1862, ibid., 422-423; Butler to Salmon Chase, November 14, 1862, ibid., 423-425.
98. Paul George to Butler, November 25, 1862, ibid., 499-501; The New York Times, October 25, 1862.
99. Edwin Stanton to Butler, June 23, 1862, Correspondence I, 627.
100. Butler to Edwin Stanton, June 17, 1862, ibid., 595-596.
101. Butler to Edwin Stanton, October, 1862, in Parton, 406.
102. Butler's Book, 522; West, 199.
103. Parton, 453. It was said in New Orleans that "if General Butler rides up Canal Street, the consuls are sure to come in a body and 'protest' that he did not ride down. If he smokes a pipe in the morning, he is sure to have a deputation in the evening, asking why he did not smoke a cigar. If he drinks coffee, they will send some rude messenger with a note asking, in the name of some tottering dynasty, why he did not drink tea."
104. Parton, 379; Butler to William Seward, September 19, 1862, Correspondence II, 306-309.
105. Salmon Chase to Butler, November 14, 1862, ibid., 468-470; Salmon Chase to Butler, December 14, 1862, ibid., 541-543.
106. Butler's Book, 538-541. A complete copy of the New Orleans "Farewell Address."
107. The New York Times, December 18, 1862.
108. J.O.A. Griffin to Butler, January 18, 1863, Correspondence II, 580.
109. J.M. Shaffer to Butler, May 28, 1863, Correspondence III, 77-79; Butler to Salmon Chase, April 27, 1863, ibid., 59-64; Butler's Book, 563-564.
110. Simon Cameron to Butler, April 23, 1863, ibid., 58.

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I have mentioned in this listing only those sources specifically cited in the footnotes. The list does not include the many other works on Butler and his era which have contributed to my general knowledge of the period.

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