THE MINISTRY TO RUSSIA

OF CASSIUS M. CLAY

1861 - 1869

A Thesis

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by

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LINES TO C. M. CLAY

Bold Champion of the poor! a thorny road
before thee lies; for thou hast bared thy breast
and nerved thine arm, to lift load,
and break the chains from long oppressed,
Tyrants and Custom's Dupe may strive in vain;
Truth yields a weapon mightier than they.
Huge bars and gates of brass are rent in twain
touched by the magic of her peaceful sway.
Hold then thee course, nor bate a jot of hope.
Lo! the day dawns along our eastern shore:
Soon shall the night of prejudice be o'er
and a bright morning give thee freer scope
to rouse thy countrymen to deeds of good:
And just and peaceful laws shall save the land from blood.

John H. Bryant
Princeton
November 7, 1845
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Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much; such men are dangerous.

Julius Caesar, Act I Sc 2

INTRODUCTION

The period 1861-1869 saw the United States involved in the Civil War. The Union was beset on all sides by hostile foreign powers. Only one major power stood by the United States during this trying period. This country was Russia. Throughout the two hundred years of our diplomatic relations with the Russian Government these eight years reflect the high point of good relations between these two countries.

The question is easily raised as to what made this eight year period different from others. The purpose of this paper is to show that one major reason for these good relations was the ministry of Cassius M. Clay. Cassius Clay has always been a controversial figure. His fights with William Seward and Jeremiah Curtin have been reported at length by the biographers of these two men. Despite the fact that Clay was one of the leading political figures of his day, there has been little or nothing written in defense of his ministry in Russia.

There have been two biographies of Clay's life. The first, Lion of White Hall, by David Smiley, covers Clay's entire life but devotes only one full chapter and parts of two others to the period in question. Smiley used the diplomatic material available to him only sparingly. The second, A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars, by James Rood Robertson covers the major diplomatic correspondance, but does not touch areas unmentioned in the relevant diplomatic dispatches. Robertson is unconcerned with the less tangible activities
of Clay during his ministry and the effect of these upon the era of
good feeling between Russia and the United States.

This paper will deal with Clay's ministry and life during the
eight year period of his mission to Russia. This topic will be
covered in three chronologically overlapping sections: The first,
Clay the Diplomat, is concerned with the major diplomatic events
of the period. The second, Clay the Patriot, deals with the efforts
of Clay to help the Union win the Civil War and to emancipate the
slaves. The third section covers the areas of Clay's ministry which
affected him personally.

The object of this study is to discuss major aspects and motives
of Clay and to show that he was partly responsible for the mutual
understanding between the two countries which led ultimately to the
cession of Alaska. These accomplishments have seemingly been
concealed because of Clay's sympathy for the black man and his
association with the Russian nation.
The promise written on the nation's scroll
The pledge that in the country of the free
Men shall have equal rights! Courage O ardent soul!
Press onward - onward still! and thou shall reach the goal!

Mrs. E. J. Eames

BIOGRAPHY

Before examining the period 1861-1869, it is important to know something of Clay's background in American life before he served in Russia as ambassador. Cassius Marcellus Clay was born in Kentucky on October 19, 1810. He graduated from Yale in 1832. Even before he had finished his studies at New Haven, he embarked on the crusade to eliminate slavery. On Washington's birthday 1832, the youthful Clay gave a speech attacking slavery as an American institution. Returning to his home state Clay was elected to the Kentucky Legislature in 1835, 1837 and 1840. Clay was an outspoken advocate of anti-slavery and this twice caused him to lose his seat in the Kentucky House.

Shortly before the Mexican War Clay freed his own slaves and devoted himself to the publication of an anti-slavery newspaper, the True American. Despite the hostile reactions of the pro-slavery forces which forced Clay to move his press first to Cincinnati and then to Louisville, Clay continued to print his paper until the outbreak of the war. Clay then felt that his duty was to join the army. He hoped to bolster his political position with this military duty. ¹ Unfortunately, he was taken prisoner in his first engagement and saw the capital of Mexico as a captive.

Returning from the war Clay renewed his attacks on slavery. In an over-heated campaign to elect anti-slavery delegates to the Kentucky Constitutional Convention, he killed Cyrus Turner in a fight following a debate between the two men.\(^2\) Partially due to the publicity generated by this incident the campaign was a dismal failure. Disillusioned with the soft line taken by the Whigs, Clay abandoned this party and in 1851 ran for governor of Kentucky on an anti-slavery ticket. Again, probably because of his radical views, Clay suffered political defeat. Clay continued his attack on slavery despite these setbacks. Although he was a violent man, often faced with violent threats and personal attacks, Cassius Clay generally sought a legal means to promote his causes.

Clay proved a dedicated campaigner for the anti-slavery forces. He traveled far and wide to speak at meetings, and if he could not attend he sent long letters which were read for the enjoyment of the assemblage. In 1856 Clay supported Republican John C. Fremont's bid for president. As a reward for his services Clay became a member of the Republican National Committee in 1856. In 1860, Clay was sought out by many of the candidates for his support in their bid for the presidency. Clay supported the radical candidate, Abraham Lincoln. This support led to an early break with William Seward; the major reason for the break being Seward's stand on slavery.\(^3\) Clay felt that he could not support Bates, after Bates' supporters tried to gain Clay's political support by offering him the job of Secretary of War.\(^4\) Although Clay did not personally attend the convention,

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 186
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 242
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 245
he was nominated for president and lost the vice-presidential nomination to Hannibal Hamlin, Seward's nominee, 181 to 101-1/2.

Clay states in his memoirs that Lincoln wrote and promised that he would be the new Secretary of War. Clay campaigned at great length and personal expense for Lincoln. Because of his radical background, Clay avoided being in Washington during the inauguration and waited "... to be called to the responsible post to which public sentiment and the President himself had pointed, Secretary of War." Upon learning of being left out of the cabinet and being appointed minister to Spain instead, Clay blamed this failure on Seward. Seward had stated that Clay's appointment would be a declaration of war. Clay immediately went to Lincoln and complained of this treatment; he refused to take the Spanish post. Clay felt that the appointment was an injustice and did not wish to serve "... an effete government like Spain." Senator Edward Baker of Oregon prevailed on Clay to take the Russian post that Lincoln still had not filled. Clay assented to the wishes of Lincoln and Baker and took the Russian ministry. Clay was told by Lincoln, "you have relieved me from great embarrassment."

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5 Ibid., p. 259. Clay notes on p. 359 that a letter to this effect is in possession of the Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.
6 Ibid., p. 253
8 Cassius Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 254
10 Ibid., p. 158
Clay thus embarked on his mission to Russia at swords point with his immediate superior, William Seward. Clay already felt that Seward was doing everything in his power to break the political strength of Clay and the Radical Republicans, who had been the most faithful supporters of Lincoln.
"A Friend in Need is a Friend in Deed."

Ben Franklin

CLAY THE DIPLOMAT

Several authors have contended that very little was accomplished in the period 1861-1869 in Russian-American relations. The purpose of this section is to show that the ministry of Cassius Clay was both productive and beneficial. This was the period of cooperation and good will between the United States and Russia. The other areas of Clay's career will be discussed in later sections.

The most pressing diplomatic objective given to Clay when he left for Russia was to gain a Russian-American agreement supporting the Declaration of Paris. The United States had refused to be a signator of this Declaration in 1856. The provisions of the Congress of Paris that were open to all nations to sign and was known as the Declaration of Paris were:

I. Privateering is and remains abolished.

II. The neutral flag covers enemy's goods, with the exception of contraband of war.

III. Neutral goods, with the exception of contraband of war, are not liable to capture under enemy's flag.

IV. Blockades in order to be binding must be effective. That is to say, maintained by forces sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy.

Any state could adopt these terms under two conditions: 1. That the Declaration should be accepted as a whole or not at all. 2. That the states acceding should enter into no subsequent arrangement on maritime law in time of war without stipulating for a strict observance of the four points.1

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The United States wished to add a fifth point exempting all private property, not contraband, from capture at sea. This would prevent seizure of ships. England was opposed to this provision. Because of this and the reluctance of the United States to denounce privateering the administration of James Buchanan simply let the issue slide and thus at the outbreak of the Civil war the United States was not a signatory of the Declaration of Paris.

In 1861, Seward feared that the South would use privateers, and he wished to gain British, French, and Russian support in the suppression of this type of warfare. However, at the same time, Seward refused to view the South as a belligerent. But the Declaration of Paris could have no application for the Confederacy unless the powers recognized the Confederacy as a nation. In his action Seward was following contradictory paths by pressing the powers to withhold recognition of the Southern States.

France and England wanted nothing to do with Seward's plans and refused to sign an agreement with the United States. However, in Russia, Clay found a power sympathetic to the Union position for Russia wished to keep the United States strong in order to balance England's power. Clay was soon able to conclude a treaty with Russia covering the points outlined in the Declaration of Paris.

At the same time Seward was taking a bellicose attitude toward England, and there was a real possibility of war between the nations. Edward "Baron" de Stoeckl, the Russian minister to the United States

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 8}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 27}\]
asked Seward if the United States would use privateers against England in case of war. Seward replied, "That is a matter of course." Stoeckl then pointed out that Russia would be bound by the Clay treaty to treat the Americans as pirates. \(^4\) Since the treaty had not been ratified, it was allowed to drop. Thus the first diplomatic effort of Clay, in which he had so quickly achieved success, came to nothing due to Seward's lack of understanding and judgment concerning the problems involved in the area of privateering.

Another problem facing Clay was that of possible Russian recognition of the Confederate States. Prince Alexandre Mikhailovich Gorchakov, the Russian Foreign Minister, had assured John Appleton, Clay's predecessor, that the Union was the only commercial counterpoise to Great Britain and that Russia desired it's perpetuation. \(^5\) On several occasions Clay was able to write Lincoln of meeting with the Czar and of being reassured of the continued support of Russia for the United States in the Struggle against the slave states. \(^6\)

The problem of retaining Russian friendship became more acute as England and France discussed intervention and a possible breaking of the Union blockade. \(^7\) Bayard Taylor, acting minister until Clay reached the post, was reassured that the Russians would have no part of such activities. Further, Gorchakov told Taylor that if there was a conference of powers, as France proposed, "... if it should


\(^5\) John Appleton to Seward, St. Petersburg, 1 July 1861, in Despatches-Russia, vol. XVIII no. 16.


\(^7\) This question is covered in Carl Bock, Prelude to Tragedy, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966).
take place the United States can have no objective to Russia being
represented since they will then be certain of having a friend in
council."

Gortchakov also told Charles De Arnaud, who had just returned
to Russia after being wounded in the war,

I shall find out whether they have vessels enough
to maintain the blockade and if they haven't, we have! the
Emperor, my August Master will not permit anyone to interfere
with this blockade, even if he has to risk another allied war."

At one point Clay asked Gortchakov if L. Q. C. Lamar, the
Confederate minister appointed to Russia, had tried to see him.
Gortchakov replied, "no, he dare not come here." The Confederate
never was recognized in St. Petersburg nor was the Confederacy.

When Clay was suddenly recalled, the Emperor, through Gortchakov,
gave Clay reassurances of Russian friendship both toward the United
States and toward Clay. This friendship between Russia and Clay
was real and Gortchakov and Clay continued to correspond after Clay's
return to the United States.

Cassius Clay had been a Colonel in the Kentucky Volunteers and
at the start of the war refused to accept a major general's commission
because of a lack of formal military training. Yet Clay had felt

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8Bayard Taylor to Seward, St. Petersburg, 16 Oct. 1862,
Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 8.

9Charles A. De Arnaud, The Union and Its Ally, Russia, (Washington:
Gibson Brothers, 1890) p. 21.


11Prince Gortchakov to Clay, St. Petersburg, letters of 1st Feb.

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confident on many occasions to offer military advice to Seward, Lincoln, and Simon Cameron. Clay had also praised John Fremont's emancipation of the slaves in his theater of operation, this was not likely to endear him either to Lincoln or to Seward. Clay had failed to press claims that Seward had wished to collect from Russia. Seward seized this chance to remove Clay and his radical influence on Lincoln by having him promoted to major general and by ordering him to return to the United States. The Russians were displeased with this action and with Carl Schurz, Clay's proposed replacement. Schurz was a native German who had fled Europe following the uprisings of 1848. His socialistic views, fluency of German, and reputation as revolutionary, made him totally unacceptable to the Russian government. Prince Gortchakov stated:

...that Clay himself was especially acceptable to the Russian Government and he hoped he could be retained, Schurz was unacceptable because he was naturalized and Russia had no objection to a real native American no matter how radical.

At the same time Gortchakov gave De Arnaud, who was returning to America, instructions to tell Lincoln that Russia wished Clay's return.

Clay was reluctant to return home. He felt that he would return to Russia and left much of his personal property there. On his return to Washington, Clay proclaimed that "Never, so help me God, will I

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13 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 299

14 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 12 March 1862, Despatches—Russia, vol. XIX no. 20.

draw a sword to keep the chains upon another fellow-being. Clay saw the Civil War as a struggle to free the slaves. This simplistic view had no place for any other issues. Clay would not fight without the Emancipation Proclamation. The question of slavery was still foremost in Clay's mind. Upon receipt of a letter from Lincoln promising him reappointment to Russia, Clay was able to continue his radical campaign calling for the emancipation of all slaves.

Simon Cameron was sent to Russia after his fall from grace as Secretary of War. Cameron asked to be relieved of this position in his very first dispatch from Russia. Cameron left Russia before being officially relieved and left the ministry in the hands of his secretary of the Legation, Bayard Taylor. Taylor wished to keep the job of minister to Russia. Despite the promise of Lincoln to Clay and the desires of the Russians, Seward supported Taylor and the pro-Seward New York newspapers attacked the possible appointment of clay. But Lincoln kept his promise, and Clay returned to Russia on the second anniversary of the Russian emancipation of the serfs in March, 1863. Taylor's weak ministry left little impression of the Russians. Taylor was not enthusiastic in regard to the slavery issue or to the war.

18 Simon Cameron to Seward, St. Petersburg, 20 June 1862, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 1.
19 Robertson, Kentuckian at Court, p. 112.
Clay's stand on slavery was more popular in Russia than in the United States. Clay had pressed Lincoln for the Emancipation Proclamation, but Seward's moderation in this area served as another irritant to the radical Clay.

Clay found politics astir in Russia, as in America, upon his return as minister. Early in the 1860's rebellion had been fermenting in Poland. The Catholic Poles were at odds with the Orthodox rule of Russia. The liberal elements in Poland wanted to form an independent nation. They received the encouragement of the Catholic regime in France. These efforts for independance were undercut by Alexander's reforms which gave Poland virtual autonomy within the Russian empire. When the young radicals were called into the army the Poles seized on the new Russian conscription law as an excuse for violence. By 1863, open warfare had erupted in Poland. France and England moved quickly to exploit this weakness of the Russians. Clay was in exactly the opposite role in this crisis. He was obliged to treat the Polish uprising as an internal affair of Russia and to try to keep United States opinion in line with this theme.

An outgrowth of the Polish rebellion is one of the most controversial subjects in American-Russian relations. On September 21,

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20 Robertson, Kentuckian at Court, p. 117

21 Clay's views and efforts on this measure will be amplified in the second section of this work.

22 For a more detailed account of the Polish uprising of 1863 and the European diplomatic ramifications see: Rene Albrecht-Carrie, A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna, (New York: Harper and Row, 1858) or Barbara Velavich, A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, (New York: Lippincott, 1964) or George Vernadsky, Political and Diplomatic History of Russia, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1936).
1863, two large Russian warships, the Alexander Nevski and the
Poresvet, sailed into New York. They were followed by four other
warships. On October 12th, the Russian Pacific fleet arrived at
San Francisco. At the time there was much speculation on the reasons
for the Russian visit. The Russians were welcomed with open arms
and were shown most of the naval hardware of the latest designs. If
there was still any thought of French and English intervention in
either American or Poland, this gesture and its reception ended it.

George Vernadsky in his history of Russian diplomacy explains
the Russians' motives:

In order to parry British aggressiveness, it had been
decided to demonstrate friendship with the United States,
and thus, in the midst of the American Civil War a Russian
squadron visited New York while another one called at San
Francisco. This demonstration produced a very favorable im-
pression in the United States.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1915, Frank Golder published the translation of documents
he found in the Russian archives. These documents showed that the
Russians had sent their ships to America to avoid the possibility
of their becoming bottled up in port in case of hostilities over
Poland.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1904, both Henry Clews and Rush Hawkins attacked the visit
of the Russian fleets as a basis for friendship with the Russians.
That the Russians had acted for their own benefit was the contention
of these two writers. As relations between Russia and the United
States became more and more strained, more and more authors attacked
the friendliness of the visit. Finally in 1951 (at the height of

\textsuperscript{23} Vernadsky, History of Russia, p. 328

\textsuperscript{24} Frank Golder, "The Russian Fleet and the Civil War", American Historical Review, XX, (July 1915).
McCarthyism), Thomas Bailey attempted to prove, by citing contemporary new stories, that the public has not been fooled in 1863 and that the myth of friendship was a Russian trick.\textsuperscript{25}

The facts remain that the sending of the fleets was beneficial to both nations and it was thought by Americans an expression of friendship between the two nations. There were at least three more visits by Russian and American ships as a result of this first visit.

The first of these visits was narrated by Joseph Loubat. Loubat, the personal secretary of Gustavus Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, stated in 1866 that this trip was primarily a return of the Russian wartime visit. Those on board the ships at least, thought that they were returning the visit that the Russians had paid to the United States in its hour of need.\textsuperscript{26} The speeches made by the officers of this trip while in Russia also reflected this spirit.

Clay's own evaluation of the visit is clearly shown:

When the Russians sent their navy into New York harbor it was generally believed that there was an understanding of mutual aid. The ships could either there be safe or assist the Americans; whilst Russia could advance toward India by land. Many attempts were made to sound me upon the subject, but I looked wise and said nothing. Whatever may have been the ultimate purpose, Russia made a masterly exhibition, which broke up the Mexican invasion and prevented foreign recognition of the Confederate States.\textsuperscript{27}

Because of the overpowering welcome given the Russian sailors in New York, Washington, and San Francisco, Clay was much in demand

\textsuperscript{25}Thomas Bailey, "The Russian Fleet Myth Re-examined." Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 38, (June, 1951)

\textsuperscript{26}J. F. Loubat, Narrative of the Mission to Russia of Honorable Gustavus Fox from Journals and Notes, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873) pp. 32-36

\textsuperscript{27}Clay, The Life of Clay, pp. 394-5
in Russia as a dinner guest. Never were relations better between
the countries than at this time.

In 1866, the Congress of the United States was shocked to
learn of an attempt on the Czar's life. Congress quickly drafted
a resolution congratulating the Czar on his narrow escape and renewing
the ties of friendship between Russia and the United States. Gustavus
Fox, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was sent with three ships
to St. Petersburg personally to deliver the resolution. The most
remarkable aspect of this trip was that the flagship was a monitor
type ironclad with a revolving turret. This trip was the first
attempt to cross the ocean with this type of ship. The English
were impressed with this ship which was superior to any in their fleet.\textsuperscript{28}

The Russians had been closely following the building of ironclads
and, with the help of Clay and several Americans living in Russia,
had converted a large portion of their fleet to ironclads.\textsuperscript{29} The
Russians were overjoyed to be the first country visited by this type
of ship. Loubat's Journal is the tale of one party or celebration
after another. The crews of the ships were feted by the Czar, the
Russian Navy and the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The following year Admiral David G. Farragut with a four ship
squadron visited Russia, and the reception was extremely enthusiastic.
Farragut was supposed to be searching for United States bases in the

\textsuperscript{28}Loubat, Narrative, pp. 57-9

\textsuperscript{29}The subject of Clay's interest in ironclads will be discussed
in the second section of this work.
Mediterranean. The Russians welcomed any action by the United States which might hurt British interests.

In 1871, the Russians again visited the United States. Prince Alexis was very well received everywhere except at the White House. The Czar was hurt by this snub and commented on Grant’s rudeness, that it followed “... after our service to the United States in their hour of it's need.”

The most irritating of Clay’s diplomatic duties was his being required by Seward to press the so called Perkins Claims. These claims arose during the Crimean War when Benjamin Perkins attempted to supply powder and arms to the blockaded Russians. This attempt never took form due to the lack of capital available to Perkins. Following this war, Perkins sued the Russian minister to the United States, "Baron" Stoeckl, for the cost of his efforts in behalf of the Russian Government. The case was taken to court in New York, and when Perkins received $200, the matter seemed settled. However, in 1860, Perkins again pressed his claim. This time he took it to Secretary of State Lewis Cass. Perkins claimed that he had made an oral contract with Stoeckl which the court decision had not settled. Perkins’ new claim was for $300,000.

Cass asked the minister to Russia, Appleton, to present the claim to the Russian Government in an unofficial manner. The Russians held that the New York court had settled the matter and,

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further, that oral contracts were illegal in Russia and could never be held to be binding.\textsuperscript{31}

When Seward came into office, he analyzed the case and decided that the Russian reply was not satisfactory. Seward asked Clay to press the claims. Clay expanded and refined Seward's arguments and presented them to Gortchakov, but the Russian refused to reconsider the claims.\textsuperscript{32} Perkins' lawyers attempted to bargain and reduced the claims to $130,000.\textsuperscript{33} Clay finally told Seward that he was

\ldots . heartily tired of the whole thing and I feel that its prosecution would damage my capacity for usefulness at this country. \ldots . The claim is against the authorities of a proud and impatient autocracy.\textsuperscript{34}

In his memoirs Clay states that the reason he was recalled from Russia was this failure to press the Perkins Claims.\textsuperscript{35}

Following the war Perkins' widow approached Seward and pressed the claims. Seward instructed Clay "to use your unofficial good offices in recalling the attention of the Emperor's Government to the Claim."\textsuperscript{36} Clay did not at this time press the claims.

\textsuperscript{31}This is also true in the State of New York under the Statue of Frauds. This Statute holds a verbal contract for more than $50 invalid unless accompanied by performance.

\textsuperscript{32}Clay to Seward, St. Petersberg, 8 April 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 21.

\textsuperscript{33}Robertson, \textit{Kentuckian in Court}, p. 209

\textsuperscript{34}Clay to Seward, St. Petersberg, no date, received 7 May 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 23.

\textsuperscript{35}Clay, \textit{The Life of Clay}, p. 364.

\textsuperscript{36}Seward to Clay, Washington, 5 Sept. 1865, Instructions-Russia, vol. XV no. 168
By 1867 Perkins' widow had sold the claims to Joseph B. Steward who proceeded to form a joint-stock company capitalized at $800,000 to try to recover the claims. This group pressed the claims on the Congress. Seward again sent a long detailed claim against the Russian Government to Clay for presentation. Clay felt that he must present the claim or face recall. The claims were now presented for nearly $800,000.

I took the document and handed it to Gorchacow. He read the whole long argument with great patience. I observed him closely. After a while the veins upon his forehead began to swell; and as he finished, he rose up, and making several quick steps toward me said: "I will go to war before I will pay a single copeck." 37

The claims had become a sore point indeed with the Russians. In America Stoeckl's honor was attacked when he dismissed the validity of the claim. Any acceptance of the claim by the Russian Government would now discredit Stoeckl, and he was the agent for the Russian government. If Russia paid the claim then Stoeckl was a liar because he had stated that he never made any contract with Perkins.

Congress attempted to withhold $800,000 from the payment for Alaska. This attempt failed and has been linked by Woldman, Shiels and others to the payment by Stoeckl to congressmen of certain sums of money. 38

In 1868, both Seward and Stoeckl had retired from the scene of action. However, Hamilton Fish, the new Secretary of State,

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37 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 406

once again reopened the affair. The new Russian minister to the United States was ordered by Gortchakov to make a complete investigation. Catcazy filed the results of his investigation with Chief Justice Samuel Chase. Although Catcazy's personal reputation tends to cast doubt on anything he says, these findings seem valid and completely refute any validity of the Perkins claims. Fish presented documents to Catcazy accusing him of withholding payment of the Perkins claims. Catcazy protested this to Gortchakov. Because of this conflict and other troubles Catcazy had ensnared himself in, he was recalled to Russia. The relations between the two countries had rapidly deteriorated following Clay's departure from the scene.

The Perkins claims had been pressed by both Seward and Fish even after Clay had told the Secretaries the Russians would never pay and that to press for payment would strain the relationship. Gortchakov had gone so far as to tell Clay that Russia would sooner go to war than pay the claims. Thus despite Clay's efforts to promote the friendship of the two countries, as he was twice ordered by Seward, the friendship was undermined by the actions of the Secretary of State.

A more positive venture was the attempt by McDonald Collins to construct a telegraph line across Alaska to connect with a Russian

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39 Clay, The Life of Clay, pp. 365-87

10 Ibid., pp. 367-9

line in Siberia. This would unite the United States and Russia, and connect the New World with the Old. In 1862 after Clay had returned to the United States, Collins arrived in St. Petersburg to attempt to gain permission to construct the telegraph. When Clay returned to Russia, he pressed for the negotiation of the line. By the 19th of May, 1863, Clay was able to send a copy of the proposed agreement of Collins and the Russian Government. On the 17th of June, Clay was able to announce that the parties had agreed to these terms.  

Work was delayed while permission to build the line through British Columbia was negotiated in London. By late 1867, 850 miles had been constructed, the material was on hand for completion of the line, the connecting line to New Westminster was finished, and the Russians had prepared a fleet to lay the line across the Bering Sea. The Russians had completed the Siberian section of their line.

Two events doomed the telegraph to failure. The first of these was the completion of the transatlantic cable and the second was the cession of Alaska. Clay played an important role in the negotiations for the telegraph. He was criticized by Jeremiah Curtin for his methods and accused by Curtin of making vast sums of money

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12 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 May 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 5 and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 28 June 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 11.

13 Robertson, Kentuckian in Court, pp. 222-3.

from the affair. Smiley reprints these stories in his work on Clay, but the letters referred to by Curtin are not in either Clay's despatches to Seward or in Seward's instructions to Clay. These despatches are not the ones noted in Smiley's footnote no. 10 of Chapter XIV.

The Russian-American telegraph centered the interest of both Seward and Clay on Alaska. As Seward's role in the purchase of Alaska is well known, it will be omitted from this work.

Clay was first introduced to the interest of American citizens in Alaska on his return voyage to Russia. He discussed the possibility of the purchase of Alaska with R. J. Walker, who was connected with a California group interested in acquiring Alaska. Clay had some unofficial talks with the Russians and reported these talks to Seward.

In 1865, California congressman and later Senator Cornelius Cole was the legal advisor to the California Fur Company. Cole was encouraged by Stoeckl to press for American rights in Alaska. Cole asked Clay to negotiate in Russia with the aim of obtaining a lease for the California Fur Company. Clay was unsuccessful and advised Cole that nothing could be accomplished until the lease of the Hudson Bay had expired.

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46 The feud between Curtin and Clay is discussed in the third section of this work.

47 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 5 April 1866, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 133.

48 Shiels, Alaska, pp. 11-12
Clay negotiated with the Governing Board of the Russian-American Company and:

... made an oral offer to pay more per year for the territory leased by the Hudson Bay Company than the company had been paying. In the event that his offer was rejected, Clay expressed his readiness to initiate negotiations at least for the island which were not under lease to the Hudson Bay Company.49

In the winter of 1864-5 Hiram Sibley, president of Western Union Telegraph Company, visited St. Petersburg on behalf of the Collins project. Shortly after his arrival Clay presented him to Gortchakov and to the Emperor. Gortchakov told Sibley according to a tradition in the Sibley family, that Russia was willing to sell Alaska and through Clay this news was transmitted to Seward.50

No official record of Clay's sending this information to Seward has been found. Clay did advise Seward of the need and interest of the United States in Alaska: "The time will come when it will be to the interest of Russia to sell and our interest to buy out their properties in America."51

Cassius Clay was not totally unaware of the desires of both countries in wanting to negotiate for the transfer of Alaska. The Russians wished to keep the bargaining secret inside of Russia due to political considerations. Therefore Gortchakov instructed Stoeckl to have the action initiated by Seward and the bargaining conducted


51. Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 14 Nov. 1864, Despatches—Russia, vol. XX no. 62.
in the United States. Thus the principal figures in the Alaskan episode were Seward and Stoeckl rather than Clay and Gortchakov.

Clay handled many minor diplomatic chores with great ability. He handled numerous small claims of Russia against the United States for services rendered to Americans in Russia. He also attended royal weddings, congratulated new parents and mourned the deaths of notables.

Clay was always the first to congratulate the Czar on any liberal enactments. He often was the guest of honor at Russian banquets. He was well known for the patriotic speeches which he gave at these affairs for these were pleasing both to Americans and Russians. Clay was on excellent terms with Czarina and received autographed pictures of each member of the Royal Family when he left Russia. 52

The official duties of minister to Russia were carried out by Clay in such a manner that he failed only in the Perkins claims to accomplish the aims of the State Department. During his tenure in office, the official relations with Russia reached the zenith of good will. There was an exchange of visits of warships, the American position in the Civil War was supported by the Russians and the intervention of England and France in the affairs of Russia and the Union was prevented. During the time that Clay was absent from Russia, relations were somewhat strained. Upon Clay's return to the United States, Fish continued to press the Perkins claims, and the relations of the two powers quickly cooled.

The circumstances of this period dictated considerable influence on the relations between the Union and Russia. But it took Clay at

52 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 337.
least a month to get official replies to any question which arose. Thus the combination of the events and the action of Clay independent of Washington led to only one factor remaining constant in the diplomatic relations between Russia and America from 1861 to 1869, and this factor was the ministry of Cassius Clay. War and peace, threats of England and France, made this a period of kaleidoscopic events. Only the friendship established between Clay and the Russians remained firm. As soon as Clay returned to the United States, this "Era of Good Feeling" between Russia and the United States quickly came to an end.
If slavery could be rooted out of our system I think any sacrifice of life and money would not be too much to pay for such consummation.

C. M. Clay

Clay the Patriot

Cassius Clay was a firm believer in the fundamental principles enumerated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Clay believed in those principles on which the American nation had been founded. Cassius was a fighter; for eighteen years he had fought for the end of slavery. He did not wish to see the Union dissolved over the slavery issue, so he fought for the unity of the country. Clay also fought to keep the Union strong against her foreign enemies.

Even before Clay left for Russia, he was involved in the fight to save the Union. In April, Washington was alive with rumors of a southern coup. Several battalions of volunteers were formed to keep order and to protect the city. The most illustrious of these units was the Clay Battalion. As Clay recalled:

There never were so many distinguished men in one small body of troops before - Ex-congressmen, governors of states and other men of mark, who happened to be in Washington all rallied to my banner.¹

Because of these efforts to protect Washington Clay received national attention. This publicity boosted his stock for the job of Secretary of War. Even the usually hostile New York newspapers were loud in their support for Clay's appointment.²

¹Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 270.
Clay was not appointed Secretary of War, and he blamed the statements made by Seward to Lincoln for this failure. Clay felt that his radical views were preventing him from securing this type of public office. In fact, Lincoln told him as much.

Who ever heard of a reformer reaping the rewards of his work in his life time? I was advised that your appointment as Secretary of War would have been considered a declaration of war upon the South. 3

Clay settled for the appointment as minister to Russia. This setback did not convince Clay that he should not give military advice to those who had secured the position he had wanted so badly. Arriving in Russia, Clay felt compelled to give every one advice on how to run the war. During the first period he served as minister, almost every one of his despatches carried some suggestion concerning the conduct of the war. These letters have often been ridiculed by modern commentators. 4 But Clay had been considered for Secretary of War, and he was not without some knowledge of military affairs. Clay simply felt that he was being helpful. The Union needed all the help it could get. Seward kept all his diplomats informed about military developments, and it was natural for Clay to respond to these messages. Seward had Clay’s despatches duly filed with the proper departments and wrote back to Clay that they "... were most interesting." 5

3 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 182. However, David Smiley, Lion of White Hall, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), attributes the original warning to Daniel Breck and not to Seward.


Clay could not have wanted further encouragement. Clay also sent private letters to everyone in Washington. These letters fill the wartime correspondence of most men of Civil War prominence.

The most important information Clay sent to Washington and the item which was the most rewarding was the information concerning ironclad ships. Clay wrote twenty-five despatches from Russia during his first tour of duty; of these, ten carried extensive information, details and plans of the development of Russian ironclads. Since the introduction of iron armour plating in the Crimean War, the Russian Navy had been attempting to develop successful ironclad ships. There were several American inventors and shipbuilders in Russia at the time of Clay's arrival in St. Petersburg.

Clay was allowed by the Russian Government to send the official reports of the tests of new type of armour plating. Clay was able to secure the official, detailed plans of the American inventor, William Winans, and to send these to the United States Navy. Clay was vitally interested in all phases of the construction of the new ironclads. Soon after his arrival in St. Petersburg, Cassius became a member of the Naval Club. At the Naval Club Clay was able to talk with the Russian naval commanders as well as the veterans of the Crimean War. From these talks he was able to relay the European

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6 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 17 Jan. 1862, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 16.

theories on uses of ironclads to Washington. 8

By the time Clay returned to Russia in 1863, the American Navy had adopted ironclads. This development did not keep Clay from continuing to send information concerning the development of ironclads to Washington. Clay came to believe that the future of the United States lay in continuation of a strong naval policy. This policy would counter an English or French ambitions in the New World. 9 Clay considered the problems of coastal defense and the expense of maintaining a high seas fleet, and the effect each type of defense would have on England. 10 Cassius was also interested in the actual methods used in the construction of Russian ironclads; he was able to observe the Russian construction and sent the details to Washington. 11 Clay kept constantly abreast of the development of all phases of naval warfare in other European countries and duly forwarded new developments to Seward. 12

Clay was on good terms with the Russian Minister of Marine, Admiral Crabbe. Consequently, Clay was able to send to the United

8 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 22 Oct. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 9, Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 13 Nov. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 11, Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 8 April 1862, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 21, Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, no date, received 7 May 1862, private letter included in Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 23.


10 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 20 Oct. 1864, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 58.

11 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 15 Nov. 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 30.

12 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 5 Dec. 1866, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 126.
States Crabbe's judgements and opinions on the use of monitors in American waters. On the 24th of October 1864 (old style), Crabbe sent Clay the official results of a naval experiment that Clay had witnessed.

The generosity of the Russian was not to go without some form of compensation. Clay was able to secure some valuable aid and good will for the Russians. When the Russian fleet visited New York in the fall of 1863, the officers were allowed to visit the Naval yards and view the latest secret developments. When the ship visited Washington, the younger officers were given a tour of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. The guns on board the ships were "of American make, being cast in Pittsburgh." Clay was able to supply the Russian Navy with the compass, used aboard American ironclads, which was not affected by the presence of so much iron. The Russian Navy had already developed many ties with the American Navy. These ties were strengthened by the receptions attended and the speeches given by Clay upon the return of the fleet to Russia.

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13 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 16 Jan. 1865, Despatches—Russia, vol. XX no. 69.

14 Admiral Crabbe to Clay, St. Petersburg, 24 Oct. 1864 (old style), Cassius Clay Letters.

15 Hawkins, "Russian Ships", p. 540.


17 Woldman, Lincoln and the Russians, p. 142.

18 Crabbe to Clay, St. Petersburg, 18 Jan. 1865 (old style), Cassius Clay Letters.

19 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 22 Aug. 1864, Despatches—Russia, vol. XX no. 51 and accompanying program of the dinner.
of Fox and Faragut were received in Russia with this spirit of friendship which had sprung up between the two navies. It would be more than one hundred years before the Russians would send another fleet into American waters.

Clay was also interested in the development of a modern cannon. The American inventor, George Broadwell, was engaged in the construction of a breechloading gun for the Russian armed forces. Clay was able to send information concerning the Broadwell project to Washington. Clay also sent details and the plans of the testing of pointed projectiles, which were more efficient and more accurate than cannon balls, to Seward. Clay also forwarded information about the development of French ordnance.

Clay was worried about naval action and a possible invasion of the Pacific coast. He recommended that Portland be fortified to prevent either the British or the Confederates from taking the town.

In these military matters Clay simply felt that he was carrying out his duty to the Union. Clay felt that he must do all in his power to help the union prevail in its struggle.

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20 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 21 July 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 4, Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 8 Oct. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 7, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 13 Nov. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 11.


22 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 8 Nov. 1863, vol. XX no. 29, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 20 Oct. 1864, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 58.

Clay had been taken prisoner while serving in the Mexican War. He developed a life-long interest in Mexico and Mexican affairs. Early in his first term as minister to Russia, Clay warned Seward of the possibility of English and French action in Mexico. Clay sent detailed reasons for the need of care in our relationship with these European powers.\(^{24}\) Clay twice again warned Seward of the Union's need to take an interest in the developments in Mexico.\(^{25}\)

On his return to Russia, Clay reminded Seward that his earlier warnings had gone unheeded and that Maximilian was on the Mexican throne. Clay blamed Seward for these developments.\(^{26}\) Clay again outlined his strategy for recovering Mexico from the French.\(^{27}\) Clay was typically impatient with the more prudent Seward. Clay believed that Seward's cautious attitude toward the French-led intervention in Mexico was leading to a disregard for the Monroe Doctrine. Clay felt that the United States' interest in the Latin American areas was being undermined and that this would make it more difficult for the United States advances in the future.\(^{28}\)

\(^{24}\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 3 Aug. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 5.

\(^{25}\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 8 Oct. 1861, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 7, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 8 April 1862, Despatches-Russia, vol. XIX no. 21.

\(^{26}\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 May 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 4.

\(^{27}\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 2 Sept. 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 19.

\(^{28}\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 24 June 1864, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 47.
Clay's patriotic views of the United States and its place in history are well illustrated by his efforts to aid the war effort of the union. But to Clay the war had been caused by one thing - Slavery! As long as there was slavery, there could never be the true freedom promised by the Constitution of the United States. As long as there was slavery, the fight could never end. Clay's entire life was a battle against slavery and the suppression of personal freedom.

Simply because Clay was not in the United States was no reason for him to cease working for emancipation. Czar Alexander had freed the serfs in March 1861, an action debatable as to its merits among historians, but Cassius Clay was impressed by this action taken as he was about to embark on his diplomatic mission. On reaching England Clay was unable to find any sympathy for his radical views partly due to the political cautiousness of the government toward the American situation. Clay resorted to writing to the editor of the London Times. In a long letter Clay appealed to the British people to support the Union in the fight against slavery and warned England that it would be prudent for her to be friendly to the Union cause.  

In France, Clay staged a debate with George Francis Train, on the institution of slavery. Train, the eccentric railroad millionaire, was traveling in Europe promoting the Union cause. The two demagogues debated on the morality of slavery and not on the war. Clay repeated this debate with Train in 1862, when he had returned to New York.

When Clay arrived in Russia his views on slavery and emancipation were well received. His arguments that slavery was economically

29 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 290
unsound found favor with the Russian upperclasses. His radical views appealed to the intelligentsia. And his praising of the Czar as Liberator and his attacks on England were pleasing to the Russian Government. Clay’s stand on slavery gave him an unprecedented chance to gain the friendship of Russia for the United States.

Clay was chafing for Lincoln to free the slaves. Lincoln was moving too slowly to suit his old friend. When General Fremont emancipated the slaves in his military district in Missouri, Clay quickly wrote Lincoln that this was a step in the right direction. Clay was also quick to applaud the emancipation of the slaves in the District of Columbia.30

On Clay’s return to the United States, he pressed Lincoln for a declaration of emancipation. Lincoln was advised by Seward that the time was not right for this action. Seward contended that this delay was necessitated by political and military considerations.31 Lincoln sent Clay to Lexington to drum up support to keep Kentucky from deserting the North. Lincoln felt that if Kentucky could be kept with the Northern States, then he would be able to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.32 Clay was quickly able to return to Washington with the news that Kentucky was favorably inclined toward the issuance of the declaration.33

30 Clay to Lincoln, St. Petersburg, 27 Sept. 1861, Despatches-Russia, unnumbered inclusion.
32 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 190.
33 Ibid., p. 192
the Emancipation Proclamation. Clay was openly enthusiastic in his support of Lincoln. A massive parade of the supporters of emancipation ended its march in front of Clay's hotel in Washington to salute his effort. 34

The result of the issuance of the Proclamation is well known. Both Smiley and Woldman belittle the role played by Clay in the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, but they both feel that one of the prime reasons for Lincoln's decision to issue the proclamation at this time was to quiet Clay and his radical followers. 35 Clay had finally achieved the goal for which he had dedicated his life.

Clay did not hesitate to tell Washington when he did not feel that they were not following a progressive policy in reconstruction. Clay felt that the slave should become citizens. "Political right of universal suffrage is the destiny of America." 36 Clay outlined amendments to the Constitution and forecast the slowness of society to become truly egalitarian. 37

Clay was dedicated to the principles of American freedom. Again and again he rejoiced at the words of Lincoln, only to be disappointed by the slowness of Lincoln's implementation of policy. Clay believed that this delay was due to the moderation of Seward.

34Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 192.


36Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 18 Aug. 1865, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 84.

37Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 18 Aug. 1865, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 84, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 29 Oct. 1865, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 91.
Finally on the 22nd of September, Clay's fondest dreams were fulfilled. This date and the end of the war were the high points of Clay's life. Clay had often sacrificed political fame and fortune in his fight for his radical views. The Union was maintained and slavery was ended. What more could Clay have wanted? The rest of his life was an anticlimax.
Even 'midst the slanders of fierce enemies
shalt thou be armed with hero-courage still
t' oppose the wrong, and pray god speed the right.

Mrs. E. J. Eames

Clay the Man

The personal activities of Cassius Clay in Russia have been
the subject of many sensational accounts. As the relations between
the United States and Russia cooled, the attacks on Clay became
stronger. Because of his condemning radical attitude toward recon-
struction, and the place of the black man in America, Clay became
an embarrassment to his friends in the 1880's. Whenever the relations
between the United States and Russia became strained Clay's career
was brought forth and attacked again. These attacks occurred following
the Russian revolution and the "Red Scare" of the early nineteen-
twenties, and at the start of the "Cold War" and the advent of
McCarthyism in the early fifties. Clay suffered from the twin
stigma of being both a Russophile and a civil libertarian concerned
with black affairs.

Throughout his ministry to Russia, Clay was engaged in a
running quarrel with Seward. This quarrel is generally blamed on
Clay. But it is easy to find evidence of Seward's unwarranted
antagonism to Clay. The best example of this hostility is shown in
Seward's activities in the fight between Clay and his secretary of
the legation, Jeremiah Curtin.

Jeremiah Curtin was a gifted young man who had the ability to
learn languages. 1 When the Russian fleet visited New York, he tested

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1Curtin, Memoirs, in these Memoirs, Curtin mentions, at various
places, that he could speak Russian, Spanish, French, Polish, Danish,
Hungarian, German, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Icelandic, Swedish, Italian,
Hebrew, Gaelic, Finnish, Serbian, Hindustan, and at least seven
American Indian languages (Seneca, Creek, Modoc, Sac, Fox, Wintu, and
Wasco).
his self-taught Russian on the crews. 2 Curtin's interest in Russia
was kindled and by 1864 he was in Russia. Due to Seward's slowness
in finding a secretary to replace Henry Bergh, Clay seized at the
chance to acquire a Russian speaking secretary. Curtin had traveled
to Russia to work in the diplomatic corps, but due to a mix-up in his
age Curtin could not hold the position for which he was appointed.
Curtin gladly became Clay's secretary in December of 1864.

For almost two years these two men got along very well, except
for one or two small incidents which both seized upon later to show
the stupidity of the other. The major break between the two occurred
because of Curtin's leave. Seward had forbidden all diplomatic
personnel from taking any leave and stated that they would not be
paid for any unauthorized leaves. 3 When Clay originally received
this departmental circular in 1863 he took it as a personal insult,
because he had asked for a leave which Seward did not grant him. 4

In October of 1866, Curtin received word of the death of two
relatives and applied for leave in order to return to the United
States. 5 This leave was approved by Clay. 6 Seward did not bother
to answer this request. In January 1867, Clay again asked that Curtin

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2 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 201

3 Seward to Clay, Washington, (n.d.), Dept. of State Circular
no. 35, Instructions-Russia, vol. XV.

4 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 27 Dec. 1863, Despatches-
Russia, vol. XX no. 35.

5 Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 15 Oct. 1866, with Despatches-
Russia, vol. XXI no. 122.

6 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 13 Oct. 1866, Despatches-
Russia, vol. XXI no. 122.
be granted a leave of absence. On the 21st of January Curtin wrote Seward:

I would most respectfully request leave of absence from my post of duty at this location, for the space of three months in order to return to the United States. Deaths in my family renders my presence at home most necessary and I trust it may be possible to visit my home for a short period of time.

On January 24th, Curtin wrote Seward two more letters, the first stating that Curtin had originally asked for leave in October and the second referred again to the deaths of two members of his family.

Seward finally granted Curtin his leave, contrary to Circular number 35, on the 18th of February 1867. Curtin was to return to his post by the 10th of May. Curtin did not immediately take his leave. In a private letter to Seward, Clay mentions that Curtin was about to take his leave at the end of May. On the 25th of May, Curtin left St. Petersburg.

By December Curtin had not returned to his post at St. Petersburg. Clay angrily wrote to Seward asking Curtin's whereabouts. Clay also reported that Curtin was not entitled to his pay for the past six months. Clay quickly became even more angry when work suddenly

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7 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 21 Jan. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 130.

8 Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 21 Jan. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered.

9 Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 24 Jan 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered.

10 Seward to Clay and Curtin, Washington, 10 Feb. 1867, Instructions-Russia, vol. XV no. 284

11 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 May 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI private unnumbered letter.

12 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 18 Nov. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 162.
began to pile up:

It is now the middle of December and Mr. Curtin has not yet returned to this legation. I hope the Department will lose no time in sending me another secretary.\(^{13}\)

Clay asked for Curtin's immediate replacement. Clay felt that Seward was once again trying to deprive him of his secretary.\(^{14}\) By Christmas 1867 Curtin reappeared in St. Petersburg; he had been on an extended tour of Russia.\(^{15}\) Curtin, sensing trouble, wrote to Seward and informed Seward that he would now take his leave.\(^{16}\) Clay was very upset by this action and again requested that Curtin be replaced.\(^{17}\) On the 23rd of January, Curtin wrote Seward to tell him that he was leaving for Washington to explain the situation personally.\(^{18}\) This letter was in answer to Seward's letter directing Curtin to explain his absence.\(^{19}\)

Curtin returned to the United States and started a campaign to remove Clay from office and to return to Russia as Clay's replacement. In his \textit{Memoirs}, Curtin states that Clay had been disloyal.

\(^{13}\)Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 14 Dec. 1867 Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 168.

\(^{14}\)Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 24 Dec. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 169. In connection with Seward's reluctance to grant Clay a secretary see: Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 7 May 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 3, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 17 July 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 13.


\(^{16}\)Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 24 Dec. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered.

\(^{17}\)Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 3 Jan. 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 171.

\(^{18}\)Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 23 Jan. 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered.

\(^{19}\)Seward to Curtin, Washington, 3 Jan. 1868, Instructions-Russia, vol. XV unnumbered.
to the Union. This idea is so ridiculous that Joseph Schafer, the editor of the Memoirs, footnotes these statements and defends Clay's loyalty. During his stay in Washington, Curtin twice spent an evening with Seward; he also met with Cameron and dined with Sumner. Curtin was able to drum up considerable political support and on April 4, 1868, Curtin sailed for Russia. He had been unsuccessful in having Clay replaced, but he still was secretary of the legation. Curtin did find time to return home for a week to attend to the pressing business that had caused him to request leave some eighteen months earlier.

When Curtin left Russia, he left behind some unpaid bills. These debts were forwarded by Clay to Washington for payment. When Curtin returned to Russia in May Clay refused to acknowledge him as secretary. Following this rebuff Curtin proceeded to tour Russia and eastern Europe; he never again attempted to carry out his duties as secretary. By this time Curtin had run his debts to 1400

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20Curtin, Memoirs, p. 178, footnote no. 5.
21Ibid., p. 179.
22Ibid., p. 180.
23Ibid., p. 179.
24Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 31 March 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 186, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 11 May 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 188.
25Curtin to Seward, St. Petersburg, 29 May 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered. Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 181, states that Curtin never returned to the legation after 25 May 1867.
26Curtin, Memoirs, pp. 185-207
rubles, Clay duly reported this to Washington. 27 During his travels Curtin asked the State Department to publish a book of his adventures. 28

In December, Curtin requested another leave of absence and left Russia for the United States before receiving any reply. 29 Clay wrote to the Senate Financial Committee and protested the payment of Curtin's salary. 30 Clay again and again asked for Curtin to be recalled, replaced and not paid. After almost two years of not having an assistant, Clay telegraphed Seward in code, "Where is my secretary?" 31 It is difficult to establish exactly where Curtin was during this period; even in his Memoirs, Curtin does not mention exactly where he was. It would seem that he was leisurely traveling through Europe. 32

Seward was unconcerned with Curtin's activities and did not reply to Clay's inquiries. Each quarter Clay filed the payroll report and stated that Curtin had not been in St. Petersburg and

27 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 30 June 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 195.

28 Curtin to Seward, Moscow, 12 Oct. 1868, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered.


31 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 15 April 1868, telegram in Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered, "I AC WIT RAI AG", decoded by department staff in margin.

32 Curtin, Memoirs, p. 206.
that he was not entitled to any pay. By early 1869 Curtin's bills were again piling up and Clay sent them to Washington, this time they reached 2200 rubles. Smiley states that the only bill outstanding was one for two pounds four shillings, but the State Department records include the bills sent by Russian merchants and prove that Curtin left considerable debts of at least 3,000 rubles when he left Russia the second time.

Clay was adamant in his request for a new secretary. When Fish was appointed Secretary of State the battle was ended and Clay was finally given a new secretary. Several other incidents concerning the feud between Clay and Curtin must be included. First, Curtin advised people in Russia to present claims against Clay directly to Seward or the Senate and bypass Clay. Second, Curtin took the petty cash fund of the legation.

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34 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 12 July 1869, Despatches—Russia, vol. XXI no. 261.

35 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 211.

36 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 12 June 1869, Despatches—Russia, vol. XXI no. 248.


38 Department of the Treasury to Clay, Washington, n.d., Despatches—Russia, vol. XXI no. 261, inclusion "B".
Curtin was a man with a vivid imagination. His Memoirs are filled with self-congratulation and boasting. Even his editor cannot believe the stories told by Curtin concerning Clay's disloyalty and dishonesty. Curtin complained of Clay's supposed business deals in Russia while he was engaged in this very type of practice.

Clay may have been harsh in his official treatment of Curtin, but Curtin never was really interested in working at the legation. Curtin wished to study Russia and Europe and took advantage of opportunity to do so. When he ran out of funds he wrote bad notes against his future salary or lived off acquaintances.

The interest in the Curtin case lies in the fact that Seward allowed Curtin to continue in this manner for two years despite the continued and documented protests of Clay. The only reason for Seward's behavior, at least from Clay's standpoint, was to inconvenience and enrage Clay. Curtin's behavior was contrary to Seward's stated policy and the continued payment of Curtin's salary without the approval of the minister was illegal. One possible explanation of this matter is that Seward was deliberately persecuting Clay.

A second example of this type of persecution is the case of the passport of Edward Rudolph. Because of the Civil War the United States started to issue passports. One Edward Rudolph was a Russian

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39 Joseph Schafer, Introduction to Curtin, Memoirs, pp. 24-5. Smiley, Lion of White Hall, repeats these stories without notice of Schafer's comments.

40 Curtin, Memoirs, p. 207

41 Until 1914 a United States citizen was not required to carry a passport. Only during the period 1863-1866 were passports issued to men of military age. The consuls of the United States were in the
citizen but presented himself to Clay in 1862 and swore that he was
a naturalized American citizen. Three times Seward officially censured
Clay for granting this passport. Seward also apparently pressed
Clay in private unrecorded letters. Clay hastened to point out
that the passport had been legally issued even under the new passport
ruling passed in 1863.

A period of time passed, but Clay's vexation did not. Finally
Clay recovered the passport and was able to report to Seward:

I hasten to inform you that the passport granted
by me in 1862 to Edward Rudolph, who turns out to be a
Russian subject, has been, through the Russian Foreign
Office, returned to me and consigned to the fire! Con-
gratulate me! The Republic is safe.

The tone of this report is far different from the official
character of Clay's other despatches. This was the only time Clay
ever showed a sense of humor in his despatches or was even slightly
risque in his respect for the United States. Only the continued

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\(^1\) Habit of issuing passports for the convience of travelers, but
these were not required by the United States government. The pertinent
acts on passports during the Civil War are the Act of 18 Aug. 1856,
sec. 23, the Act of March 1863, sec. 3 and the Act of 30 May 1866.
Further information is located in Passports and the Right to Travel,

\(^2\) Seward to Clay, Washington, 12 Sept. 1867, Instructions-
Russia, vol. XV no. 261, Seward to Clay, Washington, 31 Oct. 1867,
Instructions-Russia, vol. XV no. 261, Seward to Clay, Washington,

\(^3\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 April 1867, Despatches-
Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered private letter.

\(^4\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 12 Jan. 1868, Despatches-
Russia, vol. XXI no. 161.

\(^5\) Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 16 March 1868, Despatches-
Russia, vol. XXI no. 182.
hounding of Seward could have affected Clay in this manner.

A third point of conflict between Clay and Seward was the Chautems affair. Eliza Chautems ran a restaurant in St. Petersburg. Madame Chautems and her husband, Jean, went bankrupt and were sent to prison. John Lumley, the first secretary of the British legation, bailed them out of prison and gave them 300 rubles. Clay loaned Madame Chautems money to rent and furnish a house for the winter.

"Every charitable christian man would do what I and Lumley did."[46]

When it became apparent that Madame Chautems was not going to repay the loan and that she was selling the furniture which belonged to him, Clay took her to court and recovered what remained of the money that he had loaned her.[47]

The angered Madame Chautems commenced to blackmail Clay. She first tried to have Gustavus Fox present a letter to the Czar.[48] Curtin advised the Chautems[49] to write directly to Seward. This petition was received by the Foreign Relations Committee; the committee never read the petition and eventually pigeon holed it.[50] At the same time an anonymous pamphlet attacking Clay's morals in the affair appeared in Washington. Seward took advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Clay and sent him a copy of the Chautems[51]

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[47] Ibid., p. 467
[48] Ibid., p. 468
[49] Curtin, Memoirs, p. 174
petition and the "Synopsis of Forty Chapters upon Clay", with the
following order:

Your attention is respectfully invited to all these
papers, in order that the request of the House of Repre-
sentatives may be properly complied with.51

Clay was shocked and angered by this Instruction. He immediately
defended his name. First he wrote to Schuyler Colfax, who was supposed
to have presented the documents to the Foreign Relations Committee,
and received the following reply:

All I know of the matter is that my secretary presented
the petition, with hundreds of others of all kinds directed
to me officially, and this one was referred to the committee
on Foreign Relations. I never read it, nor even heard of it
till my colleague, Hon. G. S. Orth of Lafayette, Ind., a
member of that committee told me he had read it, and that
it was referred to the State Department. Congress therefore,
ever heard of it; nor do I know anything of it except what
my colleague incidently told me and he did not have any
faith in it.52

Clay realized that Seward was trying to embarrass him and that
the "Synopsis of Forty Chapters upon Clay" had not even been brought
before the committee. Clay was able to quickly assemble proof of his
innocence of all charges. The famed Russian Third Section cleared
Clay of any misconduct.53 Each person named by Madame Chautems
presented sworn statements of the falseness of her Claims.54 The

51 Seward to Clay, Washington, 1 April 1867, Instructions-
Russia, vol. XV no. 242.

52 Colfax to Clay, New York, 18 May 1867, Cassius Clay Letters.

53 Nicholas Mazenoff to Clay, St. Petersburg, 18 April 1867
(old style), Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 238, inclusion.

54 D. C. Pierce to Joshua Nunn, London, 2 May 1866, sworn state-
ment, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 238, inclusion, and Arthur S.
Thomas to George Pomotz, St. Petersburg, 13 May 1866, sworn statement,
Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 238, inclusion.
Russian prosecutor stated that "... I believed her object was solely to calumniate him or to extort money." Clay asked Gortchakov what he should do to recover the good graces of the Russian Government. Gortchakov assured Clay that the Russian Government had no faith in the charges and that Clay should let his past life be his defense.

Clay was justifiably angry over this slandering of his name. The fact that Gustavus Fox had informed him that "Your friends have distributed a libellous pamphlet concerning you," let Clay know who was behind the effort. Clay attributes the final break with his wife to this pamphlet and the charges of Madame Chautems. Clay's political opponents could not let the issue die and during the election campaign of 1872, they allowed the charges of Madame Chautems to be published despite the fact that these were not supposed to be released from the archives.

Clay had been humiliated by Seward and forced to defend his good name in Russia. Mary Clay had not returned to Russia with her husband in 1863. The climate oppressed her and the activities bored her. Mrs. Clay believed the worst of the stories about her husband's

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55Arkady Nicanoff to Clay, St. Petersburg, 18 April 1867, sworn statement witnessed by George Forutz U. S. Consul, St. Petersburg, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 238, inclusion.

56G. V. Fox to Clay, Washington, 3 April 1867, Cassius Clay Letters.


58Ibid., pp. 463-5.
activities. The Chautems stories lead to a permanent separation of the Clays and finally a bitter divorce. All this because of the charitable efforts in behalf of a women undeserving of them. Clay may well have been guilty of indiscretions in Russia, but the Russian police absolved him of complicity in his affairs with the notorious Madame Chautems. Clay had reason to feel persecuted once again by Seward and Fish.

It was very difficult for Clay to do anything in retaliation to Seward. However, Clay managed to achieve one small triumph; he remained in office longer than Seward. Seward had recalled Clay to the United States in 1862. On the 20th of December 1867, for apparently no reason, Seward sent Clay the following telegram, "The President directed me to say that he will accept your resignation, if properly transmitted."59 Clay well understood the new laws pertaining to the replacement of foreign officials and tendered his resignation effective upon the appointment of his successor.60 Under the new law no successor could be appointed before there was a vacancy. Thus, Seward was unable to appoint a successor and refused to accept Clay's resignation. Clay was able to outlast Seward in office and make sure that Jeremiah Curtin was not the new minister to Russia. Finally late in 1869 Clay retired.

Say to the President that I thank him for the opportunity he has kindly given me for a very pleasant episode in my rather drab life, by so long a residence at this court.61


60 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 24 Dec. 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 169.

61 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 12 Aug. 1869, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI no. 266.
Clay had reason, to be hostile to other actions of Seward and his friends. Seward resorted to publishing Clay's despatches in an effort to undercut Clay's influence at home and abroad. 62 Seward also ridiculed Clay's despatches during cabinet meetings. 63 Sumner, in a public speech, slandered Clay's relations with Gortchakov. 64 Sumner on several occasions repeated stories told by Taylor of Clay's official notes. 65 Seward sent Clay a copy of this speech with many other messages and documents along with the official despatches which are not included in the State Department Records. It would have been impossible for Clay not to have disliked Seward. Clay first fought with Seward over slavery and the nomination for the presidency in 1860. Clay blamed "The corrupt Albany school" for the problems facing the Union in the early stages of the war. 67 Clay was not used to the intrigues and financial dealings of eastern politics; he was used to fighting for a cause. Clay could never forgive the political scheming of Seward. When Seward attacked Clay,

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62 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 6 May 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 24.

63 Monaghan, Diplomat in Carpet Slippers, p. 344.

64 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 7 Oct. 1863 Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 24 and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 Jan. 1865, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 69.

65 Clay did not personally write the notes to Gortchakov; his Secretaries did this work. Gortchakov preferred to use the diplomatically proper French when he wrote Clay even though he could write and speak English.

66 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 15 April 1866, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered, and Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 19 May 1867, Despatches-Russia, vol. XXI unnumbered. These are private letters in answer to private correspondance of Seward.

67 Clay to Seward, St. Petersburg, 7 Oct. 1863, Despatches-Russia, vol. XX no. 24.
Clay believed that Seward was attacking the ideals that Clay believed in.

Two other aspects of Clay's ministry in Russia have received attention from historians. The first of these is the subject of Clay's duels while in Russia. Smiley recounts an incident in which Clay knocked out a Russian nobleman who insulted him in a restaurant. Smiley documents this story in a footnote by quoting Monaghan. Monaghan retells a story told to him by William H. Townsend (a biographer of Lincoln). There is no documented proof of this incident in any published or unpublished contemporary materials. Smiley also refers to many other bloody fights of Clay in Russia. The only documentation of these fights of Clay in Russia, is Bayard Taylor's statements that Clay was a ruffian. Taylor was not in Russia at the same time as Clay, thus these stories are obviously not first hand. In his memoirs, Clay does not hesitate to tell of fights before his Russian ministry, and after his return to the United States, Clay explained how he twice committed blunders of court etiquette, how once he became drunk at an army party, and how he was chased by his

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68 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, pp. 181-2
69 Monaghan, Diplomat in Carpet Slippers, p. 109, footnote no. 47.
70 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 182, footnote no. 25.
72 Ibid., pp. 495 and 566.
73 Ibid., pp. 436-7.
74 Ibid., p. 421.
neighbor's door. 75 Why did Clay fail to relate the aforementioned fights that were supposed to have occurred in Russia? Probably because there were no fights.

Clay was accused by Jeremiah Curtin of making money through shady business dealings while in Russia. 76 Smiley amplifies these stories in his work, 77 and cites pages 420 and 538 in Clay's memoirs as proof. The first of these references is an account of how to be frugal in giving a fancy party. 78 And the later relates Clay's debts in 1856 and how he had paid them off before 1860. 79 Clay does mention one money making effort that his son, Green Clay, was involved with. This venture was an oil company in southern Russia and it failed. 80 Clay's estate, in Kentucky, was run by his wife while he was in Russia. When he returned he found it financially and physically ruined and Green in debt. 81 If Clay made vast sums of money, as claimed by Curtin and Smiley, he spent them all in Russia.

Clay returned to the United States and lived a long and disappointed life. Each time Clay tried to lend support to a candidate he was slandered by the renewal of the charges concerning Madame Chautems or claims of irregularity about the Perkins claims. Clay was also hounded by the Ku Klux Klan. 82 His wife left him and his

76 Curtin, Memoirs, pp. 176-7
77 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, pp. 176-7.
78 Clay, The Life of Clay, p. 420
79 Ibid., p. 538.
80 Ibid., p. 539.
81 Ibid., pp. 540-2.
82 Ibid., p. 532.
servants turned against him. Clay's only real service to his country was during his ministry to Russia. The rest of his life was spent in defending his friendly feelings for Russia, his conduct while in Russia and Russia herself.

Clay helped to achieve all that he could reasonably have asked for: emancipation, preservation of the Union, and friendship with Russia. The price that Clay paid for these achievements was high; he was attacked and slandered while in office. These attacks were to continue after Clay's return to the United States. Even after he died, Clay was belittled. It is only the flashy undocumented accounts of Clay's life that are remembered. The good that Clay accomplished died even before he died. Even his request for a one word epitaph on his gravestone was denied him.  

83 Smiley, Lion of White Hall, p. 212.

84 Clay, Oration of Cassius Clay before the Students and Historical Class of Berea College, (Berea: 16 Oct. 1895), p. 10.
As to my diplomacy I leave that to history, what reason was there why Russia should stand by us when other monarchies desired to destroy us? Who shall say how much all this is owing to myself.

Cassius M. Clay

Conclusion

During the war era the Russian minister to the United States, Baron Stoeckl, was sympathetic to the southern way of life and thought that Lincoln was a second rate politician.\(^1\) Stoeckl expressed his contempt of America and American democracy when he resigned and returned to Russia.\(^2\) Seward was busy with domestic problems and was occupied with the constant struggle for power within the Republican administrations. The Russians were worried about England and France. Gortchakov and Alexander were engaged in a wholesale reformation of Russian life. Who was interested in promoting friendship between Russia and the United States?

Cassius Clay, fresh from a life-long struggle to free mankind from slavery and for the strengthening of the Union, was ordered to go to Russia to improve the friendship of the two countries.\(^3\) When he arrived in Russia, Clay discovered that not only had the Czar liberated the serfs, but that he liked the English even less than Clay did. Clay immediately gained the friendship and admiration of the Russians by his truthful statements complementing the Czar's political program. A firm friendship was established through Clay's good offices. Only with the removal of Clay was this relationship to deteriorate.

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\(^1\)Frank Golder, "The American Civil War through the eyes of a Russian Diplomat", American Historical Review, XXXI (April 1921).

\(^2\)Tarsсидзе, Czar and Presidents, pp. 260-1

\(^3\)Robertson, Kentuckian in Court, p. 260
Clay's term of office was marred by political attacks against his personal activities. The Russians refused to have any faith in these charges. In distant America the stories of his inconstancy cost Clay his wife and his political future.

Clay, bitter and aged, continued to fight for the political freedom he had always believed in. Reconstruction was a failure. Equality was only a word. Clay died a bitter, cantankerous old man in July 1903. Because of the fame of Seward, the radical value of Clay's political fight for the rights of the black man and the growing dislike of Russia, Clay's career was quickly belittled and overlooked.

It is hoped that in this time of a growing awareness of the role of the black man and his friends in the history of this country and a period of new understanding of Russian-American relations, that Cassius Clay can be given some of the recognition that so long eluded him. Perhaps someone else in the same place at the same time could have secured the friendship of Russia, which created the aura of goodwill that enabled Seward to purchase Alaska, and undermined the English and French efforts of intervention. But Cassius M. Clay was the man who was there and did achieve the friendship with Russia and for that he deserves the credit.
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