

“Calm determination & cool brains”: Mary Chesnut’s God in the 1860s

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In August 1852 the South Carolina belle Jane Caroline North visited the town of Saratoga, New York, with her aunt and uncle. While taking in the sights, North was surprised to meet another socialite from the Palmetto State, Mary Chesnut, who was traveling with her husband, James. Demonstrating that hard-edged approach to life that was every belle’s prerogative, North was quick to judge Mrs. Chesnut. “[S]he is friendly & agreeable,” North wrote in her journal, “mais je ne l’aime pas” – I do not like her. A few days later, North elaborated on that damning indictment. Mrs. Chesnut “is certainly clever, & sometimes very amusing,” she noted, “but she impresses me as a person who having gained a reputation rather beyond her merit, makes a constant effort not to fall short.”¹ Since 1981 scholars have had similarly ambivalent reactions to Mary Chesnut – and with good reason.

Mary Chesnut and her husband were key players in the Confederate States of America, created when South Carolina and ten other states seceded from the American union during the winter of 1860-61. James Chesnut was an important figure in South Carolina politics and they were both good friends of the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, and his wife Varina. While hobnobbing with the great and good of the planter class, Mary Chesnut also kept a journal, tracing the rise and fall of the Confederacy with wit and insight. In 1905, nineteen years after Chesnut’s death, D. Appleton and Company published a version of her journal, edited by Isabella Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary. Forty-four years later,

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the novelist Ben Ames Williams produced what seemed to be a more reliable edition of Chesnut's diary, securing her reputation as the author of "an extraordinary document – in its informal department, a masterpiece . . ." ² It was left to C. Vann Woodward "partially" to destroy "Mary Chesnut's reputation as a diarist." In his 1981 edition of Chesnut's journal, Woodward revealed that she had rewritten her journal in the decades after the Civil War, rearranging events, recreating dialogue and recasting the world of the South, while maintaining the diary form. ³ In the process, according to the outraged historian Kenneth Lynn, Chesnut perpetrated "one of the most audacious frauds in the history of American literature," passing off an account written years after the fact as a genuine journal. The resulting scandal was so shocking to scholarly sensibilities that it burst the bounds of the English language, becoming "*l'affaire Chesnut*." ⁴

The debate that ensued over what exactly to call Chesnut's reworked journal took on a life of its own. Scholars tied themselves in knots trying to explain what that diary was and what it was not. ⁵ This wrangle also tended to obscure other, equally important, issues of interpretation. In particular, while defending the revised journal as a valid source for students of the Civil War, Woodward and Chesnut's biographer Elisabeth Muhlenfeld did their best to transform her into a practitioner of "heresy and paradox." Mary Chesnut became a twentieth-century liberal born out of time and out of place. She was a rebellious woman of the antebellum South who yearned for the abolition of slavery and who struggled against patriarchy, though often in oblique ways. ⁶ In response, other scholars attempted to place Chesnut more firmly in her own social and cultural contexts, arguing that she was neither an abolitionist nor a militant feminist. The moral here was plain enough: great writers can sometimes be bad people, or, at least, people who hold views that are very different from our own. ⁷

One area of Mary Chesnut's life remains untouched by this exercise in revisionism. Woodward and Muhlenfeld's interpretation continues to hold sway when it comes to religion. We are told that Chesnut was raised with "a simple faith in God," but that she was "an essentially secular-minded intellect in the midst of a deeply religious community . . ." ⁸ She went to church and made attempts at spiritual self-improvement through a combination of reading and private prayer; and yet, as Michael O'Brien has argued, she was "skeptical about God." She sometimes "lost her hold on belief" and she ended her days with "no faith in the old gods of Christianity" or "in the new ones of science . . ." ⁹ While that might be true

of the Mary Chesnut of the revised journal, it bears little resemblance to the woman of the original Civil War diary. Indeed, when we turn to the surviving volumes of her 1860s journal, covering 1861 and 1865, we encounter a South Carolinian whose life was permeated by faith.

“Jesus & his example”

I will start with what should be an easy question: what exactly was Mary Chesnut’s faith in the 1860s? Almost immediately we are faced with one of the main challenges posed by her original journal: its often-cryptic nature. What we can say with some certainty, however, is that God was rarely far from Mary Chesnut’s thoughts. Like other women of the planter class during the 1860s, she frequently asked for God’s blessing on her family and friends, as well as His forgiveness for what she saw as her own sins and the sins of the South.¹⁰ She had no respect for the deism of Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume. Where he saw history being driven by “a great deal of *accident*,” Chesnut saw “Christian Providence” at work. Whatever doubts she did have about God had more to do with His role in the war than anything else. After the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, for instance, she was certain that “our merciful God has so far protected our men” from harm. Five months later, she was equally convinced that vengeance had become the keynote of divine intervention. She wrote about “[m]en murdering each other wholesale” in battle “& *sickness & disease* God-sent, laughing their puny efforts to scorn . . .” “God shows he can *make troubles*,” she concluded, “& disregards our puny efforts to make it ourselves.”¹¹

It is tempting to put such moments of religious doom and gloom down to Mary Chesnut’s Calvinist roots, but that would oversimplify such denominational loyalty as she had in the 1860s. Chesnut’s own family, the Millers of South Carolina, were Presbyterian, as were her in-laws, the Chesnuts. Whenever she and her husband were staying in Montgomery or Richmond, however, she attended Episcopalian services with Jefferson and Varina Davis. In an era of intense sectarian conflict, she also had no trouble discussing theology with Catholic clergy and laity. “Ecumenical” might be the best way to sum up Chesnut’s denominational affiliation, though she seems to have leaned primarily in the direction of mainline Protestantism – the more mainline the better, in fact. She particularly appreciated seventeenth-century Anglican theologians like Jeremy Taylor and Joseph Hall, who emphasized the value of spiritual and temporal

moderation. But to say that a “more . . . tolerant Protestant would have been difficult to find” among the Southern planters takes us further than the evidence of her 1860s journal will comfortably allow.¹² Chesnut had no patience for the extremes of dour New England Puritanism and red-hot Methodist evangelicalism. In May 1861, for example, she is laying into “New England *piety* & love making” as depicted in the novel *Say and Seal*. “The Christian Hero quoting scripture & making love with equal *unction*,” she wrote, “Never takes a kiss without a [Biblical] text to back him . . .” Three months later, Chesnut struck harder at New England’s traditional faith, stating that she hated “puritanism by temperament & instinct . . .” She did not have any use for “love feasts & religious groaning & Methodist shouting” either. They were no more than amusement and “distraction” – not the genuine article at all. Even the Episcopal Church could not escape the lash when it departed from the middle way that Chesnut held dear. Like many of her fellow planters, she could not bring herself to shut her “eyes to the faults & sins of [the] high church party,” which wanted to inundate the Episcopal Church with the trappings of Catholic worship. If people simply learned to follow “Jesus & his example & precept solely,” as interpreted by Mary Chesnut, the world would be an altogether better place.¹³

“Their Own Bad Passions”

Given her general approach to religion, it is not surprising that Chesnut derived a great deal of comfort from “private devotion” during the 1860s; but it is equally important to note that she believed “it right & best...to praise God & thank him publicly for his great mercies.”¹⁴ Whether she was in the Chesnuts’ hometown of Camden, South Carolina, or traveling around the Confederate States of America with her husband, Chesnut went to church on a fairly regular basis. Like other planters, she sometimes attended services twice a week, though a cursory reading of her 1860s journal might suggest that the main attraction of churchgoing was the opportunity it presented for socializing. Whom she sat with during services, whom she saw in the congregation and whom she talked with afterward, is well known. At one point, she proudly recorded that “President [Jefferson Davis] came & spoke to me most cordially.”¹⁵ It would be wrong to conclude, however, that Chesnut was more concerned with chitchat than with spiritual growth. When her husband, James, refused to go to church, as many men of his time and class did, she

admitted that she felt “so sorry.” In one of her more hopeful moments, Chesnut convinced herself that James might make a good impression on the men who did show up, since he was already a “better” Christian than many of them. But, in reality, she was not much happier on those rare occasions when her husband did come to church with her: he sat through the sermon, she wrote, but “he was *bored*.”¹⁶ In contrast, Chesnut could be “stirred to the depths” of her soul by a powerful preacher. And, when she was unable to attend services, she made a point of noting why, in an effort to alleviate the guilt she felt for having failed to do her duty to God. As she put it on one Sunday in November 1861, “Stayed at home. Ought to have gone to church.”¹⁷

When Chesnut did go to church during the 1860s, she expected to be edified by whatever sermon the preacher was delivering. Like other planters, she did not anticipate that each sermon she heard would be a barnburner or a masterpiece of theological insight, but she did want to feel something. If she did not, she put her often-acerbic wit to work with devastating effect. Thomas Davis, the sickly associate pastor of Grace Episcopal Church in Camden, became a constant target of Chesnut’s wrath. “Went to church,” she recorded on 13 October 1861, “Heard Tom Davis – think he is more uninteresting from his illness – & his manner if possible more atrocious – awkward – & grotesque.” Thomas Davis might have been “*earnest*,” but his sermon was too “political” for Chesnut’s taste. She had no time, in general, for men who “mix up the Bible so with their own *bad* passions.” In this instance, it also did not help that Chesnut suspected that the sermon was aimed, at least in part, at her. The preacher “[s]aid a celebrated person . . . had refused to go to church because politics were tiresome in the week – but Sunday the Gospel only could be endured.” “Was afraid he meant *me*,” Chesnut admitted, “I have said that so often . . .” She was somewhat relieved when she realized that Pastor Davis was referring “*only*” to the politician Henry Clay.¹⁸ A troubled conscience can be a terrible thing. The next time Chesnut heard Thomas Davis speak her comments were, if anything, even harsher for their brevity. “Tom Davis preached a dull sermon at this exacting time,” she wrote, “What eloquence might have stirred us.”¹⁹

Chesnut could be equally hard on laymen who failed to live up to her exacting standards of proper Christian deportment. Even preeminent Southerners, like the old states’ rights champion John C. Calhoun and the Confederate general Joseph Kershaw, were not above criticism. In 1861 Chesnut was appalled when she heard an anecdote about Calhoun

throwing a guest out of his house because that visitor refused to take part in family prayers. She shot back with the story of “Abraham & the Angel,” that “old [Benjamin] Franklin stole from Jeremy Taylor”:

Abraham turned out a traveler for blaspheming the Lord. In the morning an angel came who said, “Where is the traveler who was with thee?” Abraham replied, “I sent him forth for blaspheming thy name,” & the angel said, “Thus saith the Lord: Have I borne with this man this many years & could you not bear with him this one night?”

From Chesnut’s point of view, Calhoun had trespassed against both “tolerance” and the “*sacred* rights of hospitality.”²⁰ General Kershaw was an even more aggravating case, with his constant hunger for publicity and his efforts to change the name of the battle of Bull Run because it would not “fill pleasantly the trump of future fame.” Kershaw, Chesnut had learned, “prayed, shut his bible, got off his knees, took his sword & went into battle – & . . . swore like a trooper & not a Christian when he got there.” For Chesnut, such “[h]ypocrisy” was difficult to bear, much less excuse, particularly among the leadership of the embattled Confederate States of America.²¹

“The Grand Smash Has Come”

To understand how the collapse of the Confederacy and its immediate aftermath affected Mary Chesnut’s faith, some context is needed. Much of her adult life can be summed up as a flight from irrelevance. She was fascinated by politics, but, as a woman, she could never be a politician; she was raised to run a plantation, but because her father-in-law and mother-in-law refused to die, she never had the chance; she was desperate to have children, but she could not – and her Chesnut relations never let her forget that fact. James’s mother, in particular, liked to brag to her daughter-in-law about “her twenty seven grandchildren.” And “me a childless wretch,” Chesnut wrote, “God help me – no good have I done – to myself or to any one else . . .” It is no shock to discover that she hated spending time at Mulberry, the Chesnut plantation near Camden; and she was no keener on the narrow society that the town itself offered. She preferred the social whirligig of the Confederate cities, such as Montgomery and Richmond, where she could host informal salons for the *grandees* of the Southern cause and at least work to improve her husband’s political fortunes.²² When Chesnut did have to spend time in

Camden, she suffered through the experience with the help of opium and her God. In late October 1861, she confessed her “sinful hatred” for the townsfolk. “God have mercy on me,” she wrote, “& keep me with Christian feeling to these people.” “Went to church & made this resolution which only with God’s help I can keep,” she noted a little over a month later, “not to be so bitter – not abuse people & not to hate them so.” The next day, she had to admit “I *fell* from my high position taken on my knees on Sunday – abused by insinuation . . . Tom Davis.” The worst fate that Chesnut could imagine for herself was what she called “plantation & *Camden* life . . .”²³ That doom seemed increasingly unavoidable as the Confederacy stumbled towards defeat in the spring of 1865.

Chesnut turned more and more desperately to God for support as the possibility of Confederate failure and internal exile grew. In early February 1865, while the Union general William Tecumseh Sherman prepared to make South Carolina howl, Chesnut begged her “[g]racious God” to “help us,” since the armies of the Confederacy were clearly not up to the task. She became convinced that a terrible “retribution” was coming to the South. “I fancy it is coming as fast as or along with Sherman,” she added, “Grant (not *U.S.* G[rant] oh Lord!) us patience good Lord.” When Chesnut managed a brief respite from the disasters engulfing the South later that month, she made sure to “thank a Divine providence – for the mercy I now enjoy. Once more I sit by *my own* fireside – in a clean room, airy, comfortable!”²⁴ The calm did not last. On 23 February 1865, Chesnut received a letter from her husband, reporting the news that South Carolina’s capital, Columbia, had fallen to Sherman’s army. “The grand smash has come . . .” she wrote, “I am so utterly heart broken . . . Oh – my Heavenly Father look down & pity us.” As the Confederacy crumbled around her, Chesnut seems to have relied heavily on the Book of Job to make sense of the South’s desperate situation. If God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith with a series of trials, perhaps He was doing the same thing to the South. The “calm determination – & cool brains” that Chesnut had called for in 1861 were a thing of the past. After General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox in early April 1865, she could no longer avoid “Camden for life.”²⁵

When Mary Chesnut returned to the shattered remnants of Camden in early May 1865 she experienced the effects of total defeat on a town and on an individual trapped in a community she hated. Chesnut glumly recorded the religious disputes that rocked Camden society. She noted that the perpetually disappointing Thomas Davis had preached “[s]ubmission

– to the powers that be,” meaning the Yankee conquerors. At the same time, a “church council” in Camden “discussed praying for the President [of the] U.S.A.” One minister said “his conscience would let him,” but “[a]nother clergyman said he would find it hard to pray for the health & prosperity of a man – when he wishes him dead!”²⁶ Such tensions affected Chesnut more directly. A religious war of sorts erupted between Chesnut and her opinionated niece, Harriet Grant. In late May, Chesnut stated, “H[arriet] Grant insulted me & all Southern women.” “She asked me if I imagined all the men who filled [Southern] patriots’ graves were going to Heaven – & spoke so harshly & flippantly. Said I called her an *idiot* – ended by calling me one.” James Chesnut had to intervene, carrying his wife away “in strong *hysterics*.” A week later, Mary Chesnut confessed that, “I did not go to Church to day. I could not take communion & feel the loathing & detestation I do for H[arriet] Grant.”²⁷ Maintaining a proper relationship with God continued to matter to Chesnut, even though the Bible itself failed to give her much comfort. On 18 May 1865 she summed up her mood by quoting Psalm 109: “I am poor & needy & my heart is wounded within.” “I can not bear to write the horrible details of our degradation,” she added, “. . . I thank God I am *old* – & can not have my life so much longer embittered by this agony.”²⁸

“Poor Women! Poor Slaves!”

Mary Chesnut’s agony in 1865 was exacerbated by one of the inescapable results of Northern victory – the end of slavery in the South. To understand why that was the case, one needs to note that her view of the “peculiar institution” had always been ambivalent, tied, as it was, to her faith and her thoughts on the place of white women in Southern society. After attending a slave auction in Montgomery in early March 1861, Chesnut suggested that Christianity condoned both slavery and the fate of any white woman unfortunate enough to marry a planter. “South Carolina slave holder as I am my very soul sickened,” she wrote. The auction had been “too dreadful.” “I tried to reason – this is not worse than the willing sale most women make of themselves in marriage,” she added, “nor can the consequences be worse.” “The Bible authorizes marriage & slavery,” she concluded, “– poor women! poor slaves!” This statement should not be read as a call for abolition or women’s liberation. Chesnut was making a judgment based, in large part, on faith, rather than some broader sense of racial or gender equality.²⁹ Thanks to the institution of

slavery, she believed, the leading men of the South were in danger of dragging their wives and their region into a moral morass. Keenly aware of her own capacity for sin, she was equally convinced that slavery opened the door for sin among the men of the planter class; it created a white society “surrounded by prostitutes” in the form of female slaves. “God forgive *us*,” she wrote in mid-March 1861, “but ours is a *monstrous* system . . .” “[L]ike the patriarchs of old our men live all in one house with their wives & their concubines,” she declared, “& the Mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children . . .” And “all the time,” Chesnut complained, those men “seem to think themselves patterns – models of husbands & fathers.” The only people coming out of this situation with clear consciences were the white women of the South, who were “as pure as angels – tho[ugh] surrounded by another race who are – the social evil!”³⁰ Men like Chesnut’s own father-in-law, Colonel James Chesnut Sr., were letting down their race and their region. Chesnut always suspected that the colonel had had children with his slaves.³¹ She never seems to have considered that he own husband might have done the same. Some possibilities were too terrible to contemplate for this childless wife.

While Mary Chesnut hated the idea of racial miscegenation, she was capable of appreciating discrete aspects of slave culture. But her self-declared “*abolitionist*” leanings went no further than that.³² Chesnut was particularly taken with the fervor that the Camden slaves brought to their worship. After listening to one of Thomas Davis’s deadlier sermons in October 1861, she went “to church again” among “a full congregation” of “well-dressed & well behaved” slaves. She was impressed by “Jim Nelson, a coloured preacher . . .” “Such a wild exciting prayer,” she later noted, “The words were nothing – but the voice & manner so madly exciting – so touching in its wild melody & passion that I wept outright.” Yet, even here, Chesnut could not bring herself fully to endorse slave culture. While undoubtedly effective, Jim Nelson’s preaching offended her finely tuned religious sensibilities: it was in the “Methodist fashion,” she declared. “A most exciting scene,” she wrote, but “purely . . . of the senses & [it] does no permanent good.”³³ In general, like most of the men and women of her class in the South, Chesnut believed that slavery was necessary for the survival of the Southern economy, especially in those areas “where rice & cotton are made . . .”³⁴ She was also convinced that the slaves on the Chesnut plantation were “well behaved & affectionate” towards their masters. They might be “a little lazy but that is no crime,” she wrote in November 1861, “& we do no[t] require more of them” than other

planters.³⁵

As the prospect of emancipation loomed larger, Chesnut found it difficult to maintain such a sanguine approach to the South's slaves. The first blow to her complaisance came near the end of September 1861. She learned that her "dear old cousin Betsey [Witherspoon], had been murdered by her negroes." "I always felt that I had never injured any one black especially & therefore feared nothing from them – but *now*." Cousin Betsey "was so good – so kind," Chesnut wrote, "the ground is knocked up from under me. I sleep & wake with the horrid vision before my eyes of those vile black hands – smothering her." By October 1861 such fears were spreading among the planter families that Chesnut knew – they feared that their slaves were poisoning them.³⁶ The next month, she wrote about "hanging negroes for fear of insurrection in Louisiana & Mississippi like black birds" and growing resistance to the Confederacy's authority among slaves elsewhere.³⁷ From that point on, Chesnut's journal recorded her growing hostility to the slave population of the South. It turned out to be easier to harbor vaguely abolitionist thoughts when there was no chance that the slaves would ever be free. Chesnut began to wish the North "had the Negroes – we the cotton." That way, what she called "this black incubus" would be removed from the land.³⁸ That did not happen, of course, and in the months after the Confederate surrender, Chesnut was haunted by visions of gun-toting former slaves disarming "all white men" as a prelude to a "Negro insurrection" perhaps "as bad as St. Domingo" – a reference to the slave revolution in Haiti during the 1790s and early 1800s. The only way Chesnut could find to cope with the sudden destruction of the South's plantation society was to turn to a combination of fantasy and reconfigured faith. "My negroes," she wrote in June 1865, "now free citizens of the U.S.A. – are more humble & affectionate & anxious to be allowed to remain as they are than the outside world . . . could ever conceive." Chesnut also had to admit, however, that, "they will all go after a while – if they can better their condition." In the meantime, she felt sure that the Yankee usurper, whether white or black, would take up with "negro women" and so "demoralize the country."³⁹ In Chesnut's mind, the main sin associated with slavery had been transferred from the plantation owners of the South to the victorious men of the North.

Conclusion

Such revisionism became the order of the day after Mary Chesnut wrote her final journal entry on 26 June 1865. That is no surprise, given that the last twenty-one years of her life read like the plot of a William Faulkner novel. Her entire world had literally been “kicked to pieces” by the war. The North’s attempts to rebuild and reform the South were no kinder to Chesnut or her husband. With the antebellum economy of the South uprooted and the political elite of the Confederacy shunted aside by the conquering Yankees, James and Mary Chesnut struggled to get by. She made a little money from a fairly successful dairy business, but all James managed to accumulate by the time he died in February 1885 were debts. It would make sense if she did turn away from her faith in these dark and aimless years, just like many other Southern women of the planter class.⁴⁰ Just a year into Reconstruction, one finds Chesnut painting a nightmarish image of her life in a letter to her friend, Virginia Clay. “[T]here are nights here” in Camden, she wrote, “with the moonlight, cold & ghastly, & the whippoorwills. [And] the screech owls alone disturbing the silence when I could tear my hair & cry aloud for all that is past & gone.”⁴¹ In the 1870s, Chesnut embarked on an effort to record and improve on “all that is past & gone.” Initially, she tried her hand at novel writing, but she realized that she had no gift for fiction in its purest form.⁴² Instead, between 1881 and 1884, Chesnut turned to the journal she had kept during the war and rewrote it over and over again.⁴³ Her biographers have tended to see this process as a triumph of the spirit: Mary Chesnut rising above the increasingly wretched conditions of her life after 1865 and producing a work of great art. It is equally possible, however, to see Chesnut’s rewriting as a continuation of her life-long flight from irrelevance. Rather than living in the present – defeated, marginalized and impoverished – she transferred her frustrations into the past, compulsively reliving the most exciting four years of her life and reshaping them to fit her post-war views.⁴⁴ In the process, she produced a mammoth manuscript, over a million words long, that revealed more about Reconstruction and its aftermath than it did about Mary Chesnut and her God at a time when her world was plunging towards destruction.

Endnotes

1. Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 202, 205.
2. For the Martin / Avary and Williams editions of Mary Chesnut's journal, see Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); and Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). The quotation is from Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 279.
3. James B. Meriwether, ed., *South Carolina Women Writers* (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1979), 267; quoted in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), xv-xxix.
4. Kenneth S. Lynn, "The Masterpiece That Became a Hoax," in Kenneth S. Lynn, *The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 51; and Walter A. McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era, 1829-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 707-8.
5. C. Vann Woodward, "Mary Chesnut in Search of Her Genre," in C. Vann Woodward, *The Future of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 251-2, 256-7, 259-62; Michael O'Brien, "The Flight down the Middle Walk: Mary Chesnut and the Forms of Observance," in Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, eds., *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 111-13. See also the sometimes-heated discussions about Mary Chesnut and the different versions of her journal recorded in Meriwether, ed., *South Carolina Women Writers*, 223-28, 263-72.
6. Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, xlvi-lxiii; Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 30, 32, 67, 109-10. See also Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, "Mary Boykin Chesnut: *Civil War Redux*," in Marjorie Julian Spruill, et al., eds., *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 1:249-51, which responds to some of the criticisms of this view of Chesnut (see footnote seven below), while also noting that she "shared the racism of her era . . ."
7. Drew Gilpin Faust, "In Search of the Real Mary Chesnut," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 1 (March 1982), 54-58; Melissa Mentzer, "Rewriting Herself: Mary Chesnut's Narrative Strategies," *Connecticut*

Review 14, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 51, 54; Thavolia Glymph, "African-American Women in the Literary Imagination of Mary Boykin Chesnut," in Robert Louis Paquette and Louis A. Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 140-56.

8. Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, xi, 52. The quotation is from C. Vann Woodward's foreword. Muhlenfeld herself states that Chesnut was "by nature a thoroughly secular person . . ."
9. Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 52; Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2:1188, 2:1190-1, 2:1196.
10. See, for example, C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, eds., *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 8, 42, 95, 110, 115, 116, 154. See also O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone*, 14, 21, 30, 39, 42, 43, for examples of the place of religion in the lives of other Southern women.
11. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 60, 161, 184. Emphasis in original.
12. Julia A. Stern, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 183.
13. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 73, 160-61 (emphasis in original), see also 30, 152, 202, 210; "Joseph Hall" and "Jeremy Taylor," in F.L. Cross and EA. Livingston, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 731, 1580-81. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 465 suggest that Chesnut's ecumenicalism was common among the planter class. For the lukewarm response of most Southern Episcopalians to the high-church movement see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 429.
14. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 176.
15. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 18, 20, 30, 60, 63; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 421, 422.
16. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 20, 30. Emphasis in original. See also Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 52 and Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 410-11 which suggests that the idea that "Church was for women" actually faded after the 1830s.

17. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 46, 70, 107, 121, 165, 202.
18. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 82, 176; and Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, 427. Emphasis in original.
19. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 198.
20. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 30.
21. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 81, 155.
22. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 44-5. See also Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, xxxvii-xli. For Chesnut's opium use see Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 128.
23. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 187-8, 192, 209, 210. Emphasis in original.
24. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 224, 230. Emphasis in original.
25. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 3, 233-4, 236. For Sherman's campaign against South Carolina and Lee's surrender see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 825-30, 848-50.
26. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 237, 251.
27. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 252, 256. Emphasis in original. For Harriet Grant see Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 129. And for similar religious conflicts in other parts of the defeated South see George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 225.
28. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 248-9. Emphasis in original.
29. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 21. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese makes a similar point, though reading Chesnut's "poor women! poor slaves!" as a more general "lament for the human condition." See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 348-49, 357.

30. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 42-3. Emphasis in original. See also Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 352-4; Mentzer, "Rewriting Herself," 51.
31. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 44-5, 82.
32. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 229. Emphasis in original.
33. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 176-7.
34. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 77.
35. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 200.
36. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 162, 164, 181. Emphasis in original.
37. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 199.
38. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 203.
39. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, eds., *Private Mary Chesnut*, 243, 254, 261. Emphasis in original.
40. Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 131-220; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 192-3, 194-5. The quotation is from Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 452.
41. Mary Chesnut to Virginia Clay, April 1866 quoted in Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 133.
42. Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 142-60, 172-83. Chesnut's unfinished novels – "The Captain and the Colonel" and "Two Years – or The Way We Lived Then" – have been published in Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, ed., *Two Novels by Mary Chesnut* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002).
43. Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 191, 197-8.
44. Mary A. DeCredico, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Confederate Woman's Life* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 158; Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 223; and Glymph, "African-American Women," 141-42.

