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L E T T E R

ON

THE PRESENT CRISIS;

ADDRESSED TO

HON. GILMAN MARSTON,

Member of Congress from New-Hampshire,

BY NATHANIEL G. UPHAM,

FEBRUARY 20, 1861.

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LETTER.

CONCORD, February 20, 1861.

HON. GILMAN MARSTON ;

My dear Sir—I partly promised I would write you, on my return, in reference to the impressions received from my visit to Washington, and as to the present crisis in our National Affairs. There has been no time since the organization of the government when a full and free interchange of opinion has been of more importance than now, or when greater unanimity of sentiment was to be desired in regard to the course of action to be pursued.

LOVE OF THE UNION FORGOTTEN IN THE GROWTH OF SECTIONAL PARTIES.

You will readily agree with me, I think, that the love of the Union is deeply implanted in the hearts of our people: yet it is manifest that, for a series of years, a course of political policy has been adopted in different sections of our country, whose practical consequences have been in open conflict with this feeling.

Parties, sectional in their character, have grown up at the North and South, and a new confederated government has been recently installed, claiming to exercise an independent sovereignty, and ready for the issue of war with the remaining States.

Under these circumstances the inquiries—How this state of things has been brought about, and What is to be the remedy, are questions which deeply agitate the public mind.

It is quite clear that there has been no deliberate, preconceived design, on the part of the North to originate any system of measures to destroy the Union—nothing intended to effect such a result; and yet the calamity is forced upon us by the South as a retaliatory measure, and we are now awaiting the sober, deliberate judgment of the people whether such an act shall be permitted.

But, admitting there was no such design, it is contended by the South that measures have been taken of such oppressive character, and so destructive of the equal rights of their section, as to compel a separation.

ADEQUATE REMEDIES WITHIN THE CONSTITUTION FOR ALL COMPLAINTS MADE.

It is a sufficient answer to such allegations, that, if any wrongs have been committed, the Constitution itself furnishes a remedy. There are at least two sufficient means of redress of such grievances, before it can be necessary to resort to the measure of an overthrow of the government. We can appeal to the calm, deliberate decision of our National Judiciary, whose duty it is to construe the Constitution according to the original intent and design of its framers. We also have the power of frequently recurring appeals to the people, the ultimate effect of whose suffrages may be relied upon to insure redress of every wrong which is now complained of

Over and above these reasons for forbearance from violent action, the section of country from which these complaints originate had, for the time being, the power of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the claimed judgment of the Judiciary to support them in the practical enjoyment of their rights. There was, therefore, no great emergency pressing upon them, and no immediate danger that could arise from delay. The rendition of fugitive slaves had, for the most part, been enforced, and up to the period of secession the entire territory of the Union was open to the occupation of the slaveholders where there was the least probability that slavery could ever prevail.

Under such circumstances as to the nature of the grievances complained of, the absence of all immediate necessity of action, and the plain and evident means of redress yet unexhausted, there can be no question but history and posterity will pronounce their deliberate judgment that there was no justifiable pretence to cause a dissolution of the Union.

ALIENATION OF FEELING.

But there is another view of the existing controversy, that tends far more, in my belief, to justify and sustain the Southern people in their course than any ground yet alleged. They contend, with great force and justice, that in order to constitute *United States* we must be a *united* people.

They say they participated with us in the war of the Revolution, and in the subsequent formation of the Constitution, on terms of perfect equality, and with mutual feelings of union and harmony. That

this union of feeling has passed away ; that an habitual crusade has been preached against them as slaveholders, to destroy their political equality ; that murderous raids have been promoted within their States ; that their servants are stolen through the agency of regularly organized northern associations ; that they are denounced extensively at the North as thieves and murderers, and the rising generation are taught to regard them as such ; and that the whole spirit and tenor of the farewell words of Washington, inculcating union and love among us as one people, has been persistently and wantonly violated by inspiring sectional divisions and hatred : and thus the Union has been virtually dissolved by us, and is now merely declared to be so by them, after all hope of mutual peace and harmony has ceased.

They omit to say, that very many of these acts were occasioned by their own unwarrantable and aggressive spirit on the subject of slavery ; but, independent of this, and of the fact that slavery must always constitute a subject of moral consideration, there is very much for serious consideration in these assertions ; and if in the future, as recently in the past, political harangues on slavery are to keep the public mind in a constant state of excitement and anxiety, and are to form the continual theme and element of party strife and commotion, it is indeed time that a Union composed of such discordant materials should be dissolved, and that there should be a final separation between us, as hopelessly conflicting and irreconcilable communities. But we think a careful examination of the circumstances under which these feelings have been caused, and of the crisis through

which the country is now passing, will satisfy us that there is no necessity of any such result.

CAUSES OF ALIENATION OF FEELING PASSING AWAY.

It should be borne in mind that the whole question of slavery, so far as it has been made a matter of political discussion, has originated from our acquisition of new territories, and that, precisely so far as the position of those territories has been settled and determined, the causes of such discussion have, to that extent, been diminished.

The occasions, then, for controversy on this subject are rapidly passing away, with a result as favorable to Southern acquisition of power as could reasonably have been anticipated. From our newly acquired territories, the South has gained the States of Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri and Texas; the latter embracing sufficient area for three or four States. It would seem as if these acquisitions should be satisfactory to her. The location and topographical formation of our remaining territory, exclusive of the portion of country guaranteed to our Indian population, present a final barrier to the farther extension of slavery within our present limits, and it may be regarded as a fixed fact—that there will never be a second tier of slave States west of the Mississippi, or north of the present limits of Texas.

There has been no basis of compromise presented to heal our present dissensions that would, in the end, prevent this result. The bounds and limits of farther slavery extension in this country are fixed by laws and circumstances anterior to and superior to the mere effect of legislative enactment. The territory

adapted to slavery is now so reduced, if indeed any be left, that hardly any final arrangement which can be made in the adjustment of our present difficulties, can help the South or harm the North.

Under such circumstances, with a reasonable degree of conciliation, it might seem that the bitter personal and party feuds that now exist would cease, as soon as it became fully, and clearly understood, that the causes of them had terminated.

We may hope much, moreover, from the fact that we have learned something of the exceeding danger of bitter sectional denunciation. Its injustice and fearful consequences are becoming recognized, and the words of Washington are beginning to be heard, as he points, over the long vista of our history, to the yawning gulf to which we are hastening. Our people, who have been so prone to repent of other people's sins, are beginning to realize that, placed in the position of our Southern brethren, they would be very much like them, and that they can hardly exult much longer in their self-righteousness, that they are not like this slaveholder. They begin to see that measures of Christian reform must be supported with a Christian feeling and spirit; and already symptoms are apparent that charity and brotherly love are about supplanting a reign of discord and hate.

SOUTHERN SECTIONAL FEELING.

Our Southern brethren should also remember, while complaining of the North as sectional, that the controversy has not been on one side merely. As the strength of the Democratic party declined in the Free States, its power became concentrated at the South,

so as to be almost entirely under Southern governance and lead. Its control, therefore, was sectional, and its sectional antagonism has, more than any thing else, called forth a like spirit at the North. Both parties have been alike in fault.

TRUE POLICY OF THE SOUTH AS TO SLAVERY EXTENSION.

It was a great mistake in Southern policy to attempt to carry the institution of slavery into debatable territory. It should be a maxim of the true slaveholder every where—to scorn the desire of the introduction or maintenance of slavery in any section of territory where the spontaneous will of the people is not ready to sustain and encourage it. It was a blunder, and, so far as fraud was put in requisition to sustain it, a crime, to attempt to fix on Kansas an institution where its growth could only be weak and sickly, and it could never exist except by a continual, and, in the end, hardly doubtful conflict. It is by fighting the battle unnecessarily and impolitically, in such remote outposts, that slavery has been compelled to tremble in its very citadel and strongholds, where, without such foolish peril, it had been politically impregnable. We have mutual lessons to learn from the sad teachings of our present experience, and it is to be hoped that neither party is so Bourbon-like as not to profit by them.

TENDENCIES OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

Alarm has been expressed at the general tendencies of the Republican party, and there would be ground for alarm if, in the new phase of its position, it should attempt to govern and control in the ultra sectional

spirit in which it has won its way to power. But much toleration must be extended to the aggressive movements of an attacking party. When such a party assumes the reigns of government and the responsibilities of power, it necessarily changes its character; its tendencies and necessities become conservative; it stands by, and acts with, and under the Constitution; and with such tendencies, and with the manifestly large mass of conservative men in the Republican party, who, from choice, will aid in giving it this direction, it may well be questioned whether there is any just ground of apprehension. At any rate, very soon the only actual strife and issue before the people will be, What party shall first gain the hearts and confidence of the people as a truly National Union party; and, unless the Republicans shall attain to that position, their hold on power is lost.

There is nothing, then, in the acts complained of, in the apprehensions excited, or the alienation that exists, to justify the awful calamity that is bringing unparalleled distress upon this country, and that appalls the whole civilized world with its crime and wrong.

TRUE CHARACTER OF SECESSION.

But it is said, by the present head of the new Confederacy, that this is a mere "secession" of States that have reverted back to their right of self-government, and "that it is by an abuse of language that their act has been denominated a revolution," and "that within each of the States its government has remained."

No one denominates this movement, as yet, as a

revolution, and no one is deceived as to the character of the movement, by the assertion that the exercise of the *local* power of the State is continued. The fact still remains of the denial of allegiance to the general government, and the disruption and overthrow of all the duties and obligations that bind these States to the Union, and the assertion, by force of arms, if need be, of an entire, independent sovereignty, and these acts make a rebellion which it is far better openly to acknowledge, than to attempt covertly to disguise, under the assumed name of secession.

Then, again, for mere secession it is said there can be no coercion. This new array of words, to conceal illegal acts on the one hand, and to stay their punishment on the other, is not the bold language usually adopted by men who strike openly for conscience and liberty.

CAUSES OF PRESENT EVILS A NEGLECT TO CHERISH FEELINGS
OF LOVE FOR THE UNION.

Whatever evasive words may be used, the crisis of disunion is upon us, brought upon us by the common thoughtlessness and willfulness of our people; by a disregard of the value of that priceless inheritance left us by our fathers, and achieved for us by an immense expenditure of blood and treasure. We have failed to remember that the blessings of liberty are to be purchased only by moderation, charity and a watchful eye against all dissension, and the cultivation of a common spirit of national union and love. We have forgotten the wise cautions of the Father of our Country, who held it "of infinite moment that

we should properly estimate the immense value of our National Union to our collective and individual happiness; that we should cherish a cordial, habitual and immovable attachment to it; should accustom ourselves to think and speak of it as the palladium of our political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest."

MEANS OF PRESERVING THE UNION.

What, then, is to be done? We must act at once, according to the emergency of the crisis, and with a wise reference to the entire future. It may be a long and painful journey to retrace our steps, but the government of this great country is not to be surrendered, or its destinies thwarted.

The immediate salvation of the country rests, under Providence, in the action of the party coming into power. If its rulers take their position on the standpoint of a dismembered, divided people, and act up to the necessity of the occasion, they may save the country; if they look back to the mere narrow lines of party, adapted to other circumstances, as their guide, they will lose, for the time being, both party, and country.

There is but one way, in the present crisis, to preserve the Union, and that is the adoption of a policy that shall secure a united North, and at the same time gain the sound, conservative strength of the border States, until, gradually, confidence shall be

restored, and the Union shall again be consolidated and perfected. To do this, every measure of conciliation, not really inconsistent with the honor of the North as men and citizens, should be granted, that tends in any way to quiet the excited apprehensions of the South, and reassure their confidence in us as a people.

The most exaggerated attacks and bigoted views that have at any time been put forth by misguided zealots here, have been freely and actively circulated at the South, until they have become regarded there as the common expression of the Northern public mind. If the sentiments there attributed to us, as our common belief, were fully known here, our people would rise *en masse* to repel them with scorn and indignation. For this reason, expressions of opinion that might seem wholly immaterial to us, may be of vital importance in correcting erroneous impressions prevailing elsewhere; and we should be careful to repeat them over and over again, in resolutions, in platforms and in statutes, until such erroneous impressions are thoroughly refuted and eradicated. Thus we should continue to refute, in every way in which it can be done, all idea of our power or desire of interference with the local institutions of other States; should, agreeably to the provisions of the Constitution, enact all suitable laws to protect any State from invasion, and discontinue in every way any sympathy with or aid in promoting raids on their territory; should discharge fully the provision of the Constitution that all persons, held to service or labor under the laws of one State, escaping into another, should be delivered up on claim of the party

to whom service or labor is due, and should repeal at once all acts conflicting with such provisions.

With regard to the future extension of slavery, we should accurately weigh any possible contingency of evil that might arise from any of the various suggestions that have been made for the settlement of this question, with the known and certain evils of a dissolution of the Union, and the strife and bloodshed of civil war. Acting on this principle, matters of mere pride, form, or party spirit would vanish, and whatever would best promote the good of the whole country would be adopted. A kind Providence has taken this matter into its own keeping, and has marked as surely the laws and character that limit the growth and progress of slavery, as it has the bounds of the sea; how far its proud waves shall come, and where they shall be stayed.

MEASURES FOR MAINTAINING THE GOVERNMENT.

But connected with these acts, and sustained at the same time with them, must be all necessary acts for the maintenance of the government of this country; and there is but one limit to the power and efficiency to be put forth for this end—the consideration that we should rely mainly for our best hope of success on the returning affection and regard of our friends at the South.

We should collect our duties; we should control the fortifications at our principal Southern ports, and on the Gulf of Mexico, and the outlet of the Mississippi, and Washington should be retained: beyond this, except to repel invasions, or in retaliation of any piratical crusades that might be made, the result should be left to time.

Coupled with these measures, every means should be taken kindly to correct the erroneous impressions existing as to the advantages of a separate Southern government. Acquisitions of new territory, pride of power, and increased influence of the main staple of the South, have passed as dazzling visions before the eyes of our Southern brethren, and will continue to do so, until more thorough examination shall fully satisfy them of the futility and fallaciousness of any such ground of advantage.

IMPOLICY OF FARTHER EXTENSION OF THE GOVERNMENT IN
MEXICO OR SOUTH AMERICA.

An increase of territory to a Southern republic, or to our own, would be an increase of burdens and trouble. It would bring us in conflict with the present possessors of the country, and excite the jealousy, if not hostility of the nations of Europe. Possibly if our own country should make conquest of portions of Mexico or Central America, it might be tolerated. It certainly would not be, if done by a Southern Confederacy, as a propagandist of slavery.

The Anglo-Saxon race may, in the end, control these countries. It is perhaps desirable they should. But a government of those regions, adequate to the control of their present population, with its large mixture of bigoted and ignorant subordinate races, would not be of a character which would harmonize in spirit with the States of our Union; and these people could hardly be allowed to share with our free and enlightened citizens in the common choice of our rulers. Their interest and ours would be better promoted by a distinct and independent government, in

close alliance, and on terms of friendship and amity with us, but not identical. Safe and sure passages across the isthmus should be guaranteed, but it will be a happy day for us when the public mind, North and South, shall settle upon the fixed determination of limiting our boundaries permanently by the Rio Grande.

MISTAKEN VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS OF A SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY.

The impressions of new pride and consequence to be attained by the Southern States as an independent Sovereignty, will never be realized. The respect of foreign governments, as meted out to us, has been entirely in proportion to our power. A new Southern government, based on its position exclusively as a slaveholding power, whose fundamental law refuses all admission of free States, would be a dark spot in this enlightened era of the world. If it could be sustained at all as an independent sovereignty, it must be at great and ruinous expense, and subject to continued uneasiness and alarm.

Secession is not only secession from territory, but from all the glorious common recollections of the Revolution. The sons of the South could never look back to the early struggles of their fathers, except with feelings of humiliation at the noble birthright they had parted with. It would be secession from our star-spangled banner that has floated, and will continue to float, in honor on every sea, while a palmetto flag or vessel would be so rarely seen as to be a wonder and mystery. Their country, hemmed in by comparatively narrow limits between the Alleghanies and seaboard, with no prior history to excite

their pride, and no diversity of pursuit or association to awaken their interest—except to work negroes and raise cotton—would be in striking contrast with their former situation as free and equal members of a great Republic, with all its hallowed memories and diversified interests, extending from sea to sea, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Northern Lakes; a country regarded as the home and birth-place of freedom, and whose memory throughout the world is blessed.

WELCOME RETURN OF THE SOUTH TO THE UNION, WITH ITS
FULL SHARE OF POLITICAL POWER.

It has been said that return would be humiliating to the South, and that our present dissensions would deprive them of all hope of future political power. This is a mistake. The North, though measurably united now, will often hereafter be divided as to matters of policy, when the element of slavery has been removed from political discussion, and the South, coming in as a third interest, will ever be likely to retain more than its fair share of power. Present political distrust will soon be removed, and the deep regret of separation will be more than paralleled in the joy of their return, and the settled conviction of an ultimate permanent Union.

EFFECT OF THE PRESENT MOVEMENT ON THE CULTIVATION OF
COTTON ELSEWHERE, AND THE CIVILIZATION OF AFRICA.

The peculiar product of the Southern States has been greatly relied upon to sustain them in their position. Its production will always be valuable to them, but its value as a monopoly is greatly overrated. While the South claim cotton as king, they should

remember that an American king can never reign over Europe. Louis Napoleon, who is practically the wisest man of Europe, has well said that "Cotton may be king, but he is not crowned yet." The present excitement in this country has settled that question. Neither cotton or the black man are indigenious to this country. They are both so to Africa. Discoveries made within a few years have just prepared the way for a movement in Central Africa that will awake that country at once to civilization; and Cotton, if ever king, will be crowned there.

The influence of the cultivation of cotton in Africa will be as rapid and certain on the destinies of that country, as the discovery of gold in California. The movement at the South has hastened this crisis a century. It has started a revolution in this respect which will not go backward, and the great secret of this unhappy commotion with us may be the providence of God pointing to the civilization of a continent. Ten years hence will show the certainty of its fulfillment. Europe will never consent to be limited, as to the great staple of her manufactures, to a supply from a single country that arrogantly asserts for it, in her hands, its despotic control as king. She is now awake to the danger, and will never sleep till that danger is removed past all contingency. In various other countries, also, the supply of cotton will at once become vastly increased.

NECESSARY CLAIMS AND POSITION OF A NORTHERN GOVERNMENT IN CASE OF A DISSOLUTION OF THE UNION.

There is another difficulty, and a most serious one to be encountered by the new government. The

Northern Republic consists of a manufacturing and commercial people. It must ever constitute a great people even if the entire South should leave us. In that case there would be certain national necessities that must govern our policy. We should control the sea, and we should never rest until along all the great lines of our commerce the great fortresses of the country were held for our protection. We should not permit our progress through the highways of the ocean to be placed in jeopardy, or suffer any border government to control them. This would be our right rather than that of the South, and it would be our duty to maintain it. We should also demand, as a strategical necessity, a safe and well defined border line adjoining any Southern Confederacy, and that line would never be north of the Potomac.

But any such contingencies need hardly be looked forward to. It can not be, that, with the deep-seated love of the Union that lives alike in the hearts of our countrymen North and South, these evils, which so fearfully loom up in the distance, can ever be experienced.

NECESSITY OF UNION AT THE NORTH.

Many years may pass by of trial and suffering, and, perhaps, of bloodshed, ere wisdom assumes her reign ; but the love of the Union, compelling a just spirit of mutual concession and conciliation, will in the end prevail. The great difficulty lying immediately athwart our path, is the jealousy of party. Conciliation, so far as conciliation may justly be demanded, can alone unite the North so as to present that moral power and influence that can insure success. The

South is already united, and with a divided North we shall be held hopelessly at bay, till the South shall be strengthened and consolidated as with bands of steel.

The Republican party can save us from this calamity. Should they place themselves in a position so that all national conservative men can act with them, we can harmlessly pass through this fiery trial. All that is necessary, is, that, under a just and kind rule, Time, the healer of all dissensions, may be permitted to come to our aid, and Truth, the daughter of Time.

INFLUENCE AND POWER OF THE INCOMING PRESIDENT.

The Chief Executive Magistrate of the Nation has, in his single hand, the power to roll back, in a great degree, the tide of dissension and alarm. By a wise, conciliatory, and yet energetic course, he may render greater service to his country than has ever yet been rendered by any man save Washington, and may obtain a hold on the affections of the people, such as no one but him has acquired. The difficulty of his position entitles him to the earnest sympathy and prayers of the people, and their generous confidence, until such time as he can be fairly judged of by his acts.

With high regard,

I am, very truly, yours,

N. G. UPHAM.

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