

Henry J. Hunt to Braxton Bragg

Fort Pickens, 23 April 1861.

Autograph letter signed. 3 pages.

Fort Pickens Apl 23 1861

My Dear Bragg:

I was much gratified by the receipt of your note of Saturday evening.

I do not doubt the nature of your feelings for I judge of them by my own.

How strange it is! We have been united in our views of almost all subjects, public and private. We still have, I trust, a personal regard for each other which will continue, whatever course our sense of duty may dictate, yet in one short year after exchanging at your house assurances of friendship, here we are face to face, with arms in our hands, with every prospect of a bloody collision. How strange!

My views on the immediate occasion of our troubles you know, they are yours, they are those too of my family, all of whom have fought in the north, the battles of the south, and now find they are left to bear the imputation there of having taken sides not merely against their section, but against their country. Yet even now I do not despair of the future. I still think, improbable as it seems, that clearer views of our interests and necessities will reunite us. I acknowledge that the people of the cotton states are apparently united but I have watched the movement closely, and have seen some of the machinery employed to bring about this unanimity of ~~opinion~~ expression. I will be frank with you. A democrat of the President's school I now believe that the party was broken up simply to bring about secession, and unfortunately the course of events in the south has enabled the leaders to drag the people with them. With all their wrongs, I think the south has not been just to themselves nor generous to their friends in the north in breaking off from them at the first partial defeat, in the loss of the executive, all other branches of government being in their hands. It is not a case in which I born under the flag can feel justified in deserting it, however much my sympathies were with my southern friends, in the immediate question at issue. And however much it pains me to be arrayed against them, I regret deeply that the secession leaders should have pursued such a course

that except by dishonoring their flag ~~and humiliating~~ degrading their government and humiliating themselves, their friends in the north could not foresee [*sic*] an amicable separation. I am not much surprised at it however. Many things hitherto inexplicable in the administration of the War Dept. in the last eight years are now explained. And I fear that war was considered a necessity to a final separation, and the consolidation of the power of the engineer and leader of the movement. And, as such, determined on long ago. - I have felt positively certain for the last six weeks that your President would force a collision (if possible under circumstances which would make the government appear to be the aggressor) before the election could take place in Virginia, and it has come to pass as I expected. Notwithstanding this, and the result which may immediately follow, I firmly believe that this unity of our people will be eventually restored. We may have to suffer much, we may separate with or without further conflict, but we will be reunited - if necessary under new institutions, strong enough to secure all our rights. We shall again be one of the great powers of the Earth and the name of American will supersede that of northerner, and southerner.

You will doubtless think all this is dreaming. I do not, no one intellect can grasp all the results of this great movement. Revolution devours her children, the plans and expectations of the leaders on both sides will fail them. Already the original cause of the quarrel is dwarfed, and become secondary. Events differ widely from what the projectors expected and are assuming forms and proportions that will place their results beyond the formulas established by those who expected to direct and profit by them. It is a great mistake to suppose, as most men do, that bloodshed will be an insuperable obstacle to ~~disunion~~ re-union. History does not teach this lesson, and our people do not value human life so highly as to make them exceptions to the general rule.- It would be a frightful calamity, therefore I [*illegible*] it but the ill effects will pass away with the immediate actors. Notwithstanding centuries of war, Scotland and England constitute one kingdom. Within one century oceans of blood has been shed in strife between the different parties and provinces of France: the french are now a united people, stronger than they ever were before and the terror of the world, formerly preeminently provincial, their nationality is now intense.

[3]You say "you may destroy but cannot conquer." My dear Bragg, I know of no one who possesses the feelings here attributed. I hear much of the desire of your people for "a fight." I have heard but one northerner express such a desire, and it met with rebuke. Yet it would be accepted as a necessity if forced upon us. Your expressed wishes and feelings are those of all of us here: That the troubles may be settled amicably is the earnest desire of all of us.

I have written at great length. In our present position it is a relief to me. And I feel it to be due to you. We must each as you say act according to the dictates of our consciences. Although you think my course a wrong one you know that I never have felt and I do not feel now hostile to the South, her institutions or her people nor can I have toward them the feelings of an "alien enemy." I trust and I believe notwithstanding the dark prospects before us, and although blood may flow like water, that the time will yet come - if neither of us fall in the struggle - when we will meet again not merely as friends, which I am sure we will continue to be, but as fellow citizens of a great, prosperous, happy and united country.

Many thanks for the newspaper slips.

H J Hunt

B Bragg

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