

A LETTER

FROM

HON. JAMES S. ROLLINS.

COLUMBIA, MISSOURI, Feb. 2, 1861.

R. E. Dunn, Esq., Marion county :

DEAR SIR:—In your favor of the 21st ult., you are pleased to ask my opinions, touching the present unhappy condition of the country.

With you and every other good citizen, I deeply deplore the present state of things. And without enquiring especially into the causes, which have brought on us our difficulties, I hold that it is the duty of every man to lend what aid he can in devising a remedy, which will restore that peace, prosperity and good order, now so greatly disturbed.

I say to you without hesitation, that I am in favor of preserving the Union as *it is*, and this purpose ought not to be abandoned until every remedy is exhausted, and there is not a ray of hope left that it may be accomplished.

I may over estimate the blessings which the Union has secured to us; but when I consider the proud and elevated position which the United States holds amongst the nations of the earth—their unparalleled advancement in population and wealth—in agriculture, in commerce, in

manufactures, in education, science and art—in territorial expansion, in military power; and above all when I contemplate that high degree of civil and religious liberty which our people have enjoyed, above and beyond that of any other people beneath the sun, and under the ægis of the National Union, it does seem to me that it would be the extremest act of folly, to countenance for one moment the idea of a bandoning it.

It is said that all "Government is a necessary evil," and if this be so, it is not a matter of surprise that in a country as extended as ours, embracing such a variety of interests, and diversity of institutions, and with so complex in form, we should meet at times with questions difficult of solution. But as long as we have a common Constitution in which our rights are fairly guaranteed, and an enlightened judiciary to expound it, and with the right of appealing at all times to a cultivated and patriotic public sentiment, it occurs to me that it would be far better to seek for the correction of errors and the redress of wrongs through these agencies than to break up this government and launch our vessels again on the broad ocean of doubt and experiment. We may not be able to secure promptly all that we ask or all that we are entitled to, but sooner or later I have confidence that all our rightful demands will be responded to, in a spirit of justice, fraternity and peace. And if these should fail, we have at last the inherent right of every people, when their grievances become so intolerable as no longer to be borne, to rise in the majesty of our strength, throw off the oppressor's yoke, and establish a Government better adapted to our condition, and the promotion of our peace and happiness.

I hold, however, that no such causes as yet exist with us to justify the revolution of which I speak. It is an extreme remedy to meet an extreme case, and only to be resorted to when all other efforts have failed to accomplish the desired end.

But referring more particularly to the causes of complaint which exist in the Southern States, I entertain the opinion that Disunion is not a remedy for any of the evils complained of. So far from it, and I speak especially in regard to our own State, it occurs to me that Disunion will be an aggravation of all these difficulties. Will the breaking up of Government ensure the repeal of the personal liberty bills of the Northern States? What becomes of the fugitive slave law with a broken Confederacy?

Have we any longer any claim whatever on the Northern States to restore back to us our fugitive slaves? Will we not by this act bring to our very doors a Canadian frontier of eight hundred miles, inviting the escape of all the slaves in the State, and without any power whatever to reclaim them? Will not Disunion bring upon us the necessity of a standing army to protect this extended frontier, involving us in a heavy and ruinous taxation, and all the dangers of constant collision with the people of Illinois, Iowa and Kansas? In short, is not Disunion to us, at once, an act to emancipate all the slaves of the State, and under circumstances, to keep up a constant warfare between the people of our own and neighboring free States? Will the rights of the South be better secured, in the Territories, out of the Union, than in it? As matters now stand, there is not a Territory belonging to the United States to which the slave owner has not the right to carry his slaves. In the Territory north of the line $36^{\circ} 30'$ this right is claimed under the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.

By an act of Congress, Arizona has been attached to New Mexico; and by an act of the Territorial Legislature of New Mexico, slavery is established there. And these embrace all the territories of the United States, save the Indian Territory. West of Arkansas, held by the Indians under treaty stipulations with the General Government, and even in this Territory I am informed that slavery actually exists. In what respects then, are the rights of the South in the Territories likely to be better guaranteed out of the Union than in it?

Is it mere apprehension that the present laws will be repealed, and decisions overturned and no other sufficient concessions made? But must not every man know and feel that dissolution not only cuts off the South from most of the Territories now owned by us, but most probably, even if the Southern States desire it, puts an effective check on the extension of slavery for all time to come? And this is the light in which the extreme abolitionists of the Northern States view the question. Not only so, but they look upon disunion as the death knell of slavery in the States! Being no longer upheld and protected by the strong arm of the National Government, with the prejudices of the people of the Northern States arrayed against it, without a single obligation left upon them in any way to sustain it; and besides this, encountering a still sterner

opposition than heretofore from all the Governments of the world, how else than prejudicially can Disunion operate upon this institution of the Southern States? In a speech delivered a few days since at Boston, by Wendell Phillips, the most able and perhaps the most zealous of all the Northern abolitionists, and rejoicing at the prospect of Disunion, he said :

“The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.”—“The Covenant with Death is annulled; the Agreement with Hell is broken to pieces.” The chain which has held the slave system since 1787 is parted. Thirty years ago Northern leaders sixteen years ago Northern Abolitionists, announced their purpose to seek the dissolution of the American Union. Who deemed that success would come so soon? South Carolina, bankrupt, alone, with a thousand more slaves than whites, four blacks to three whites within her border, flings her gauntlet at the feet of twenty-five millions of people in defense of an idea. I would New England could count one state as fearless among her six. Call it not madness of an engineer who places himself in front of his cannon at the moment of discharge; call it rather the forlorn hope of the mariner seizing a plank or spar in the fury of the storm. The mistake of South Carolina is, she fancies there is more chance of saving slavery outside of the Union than inside. Three states have followed her example. Probably the rest of the Slave states, or many of them, will find themselves unable to resist the infection, and then the whole merciless conspiracy of 1787, is ended, and timid men will dare to have slavery without trembling for bread or life.

“Disunion is Abolition! That is all the value disunion has for me. I care nothing for forms of Government. No foreign state dare touch us, united or disunited. It matters not to me whether Massachusetts is worth one thousand millions, as now, or two thousand, as she might be, if she had no Carolina to feed, protect, and carry the mail for. The music of disunion to me is, that, at its touch the slave breaks into voice, shouting his jubilee.”

Hear also the language of Loyd Garrison, another noted abolitionist:

“At last the covenant with death is annulled and the agreement with hell broken, by the action of South Carolina herself, and ere long by all the slaveholding States, for their doom is one. Hail the approaching jubilee, ye millions who are wearing the galling chains of slavery, for assuredly the day of your redemption draws nigh, bringing liberty to you, and salvation to the whole land.

“Justice and liberty, God and man, demand the dissolution of this slaveholding Union, and the formation of a Northern confederacy, in which slaveholders will stand before the laws as felons, and be treated as pirates.”

But again, will a dissolution of the Union, change in any respect the opinions and moral sentiments, or alter the conduct of the people of the Northern States? I think not; and hence, I am for standing by the Union as our fathers transmitted it to us, and *fighting in it*, with all the weapons of argument, persuasion and truth, and if need be with all other kinds of weapons for those rights, which are fairly guaranteed to us, in the common bond of Union, the Constitution of the United States.

I am opposed to sectionalism whether it comes from the North or the South. Washington, whilst he advised the children of the Republic, to love and stick to the Union,

at the same time warned them against the danger of forming parties upon geographical lines. I quote from his farewell address, a document that ought to be placed now in the hands of every voter in the land:

"In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs, as a matter of serious concern, that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations—Northern and Southern—Atlantic and Western; whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts, is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You cannot shield yourself too much from the jealousies and heart-burnings which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affections.

From what I have said you will readily conclude that I am opposed to the action of those States which have seceded. I deny that there is any such constitutional right as secession! The framers of that inimitable instrument provided the manner of admitting new States into the Union, but they were careful not to provide how any State once admitted could get out of it, *except by an amendment of the Constitution*. And the very object of this omission was to give permanency to the Government which they were founding. Surely it was never contemplated by them that any State upon its own motion, and for the most trivial cause, could have the power to break up the Government by withdrawing from it. Certainly it was their design to give *some sort of efficiency to the National Machine*. Suppose insurrection were to happen, or any of the States be attacked by a foreign foe, can the United States government be absolved from its constitutional duty to suppress the one or repel the other? And is not the allegiance of every State in the Union, to the general government just as obligatory as is the duty of the general government to protect and defend the States? These duties and obligations it occurs to me, are reciprocal and cannot under the Constitution be disregarded by either.

The founders of our government did not deny the doctrine of the right of revolution, for sufficient cause, for the very government which they were establishing was the result of a revolution which they themselves had started; and if those who favor secession would call it by its right name, they would be better understood. The question would then be whether there was sufficient or justifiable cause for putting on foot this revolution? And, further, whether those who are engaged in it will be able to main-

tain it. And to the nations of the world they might appeal, for an answer to these questions.

I repeat, every man who loves his country is most anxious to see peace restored, and I have an abiding faith, that it will be, and our glorious Union made stronger than ever in the hearts and affections of the people. And I view with gratitude and admiration the sublime efforts of those noble patriots all over the land, who are lending their aid in the work of pacification. "For beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him, that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" Although several states have passed ordinances of secession, and others may yet do the same thing, I cannot bring myself to believe that they intend to relinquish forever their respective positions in the Union! They must intend to come back. They surely will not take the risks which a final separation will involve. And rather than to allow the danger which an appeal to the *Ultima ratio Regum*" must initiate, the North will yield, and guarantee every Constitutional right, which the South ought to demand. This is my hope—this is my faith. The people are attached to the Union—they love it, for the great blessings which it secures to them—and they hate Disunion because of the unspeakable horrors, the loss of liberty—the destruction of happiness—the constant war—the prostration of all trade and commerce—the taxation—the bankruptcy and ruin, and the final despotism, which it will inevitably entail upon them, and their posterity! The people love the Union, because of the glorious memories connected with it, and though demagogues and mad men may shatter it to pieces their hearts will still yearn towards it—

"You may break, you may ruin the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still."

Until every effort to save it is exhausted, how is it possible for an intelligent people to give up a Government—a Constitution like ours, standing out as it does upon the records of humanity, as the noblest monument of human wisdom, and next to the miracles wrought by our Saviour when he wandered upon earth?

Suppose you that the South Carolinians feel no further interest in the names of Lexington, of Concord, and of Bunker Hill? And that in the heart of the Massachusetts man no proud emotions swell at the mention of Yorktown, and Camden, and Eutaw Springs? Why, sir, in this very Congressional District, whose kind and patriotic voters

have honored me as their humble Representative, we have in two counties the names of Warren and Marion, linked inseparably together, favored sons of Massachusetts and South Carolina, the one first to pour out the warm current of his heart in the cause of American Liberty, upon the field of Bunker Hill, and the other sealing his devotion to the same sacred cause by fighting through our entire Revolutionary conflict!

It has been well, and I have no doubt truthfully said, that there is to-day many a man in Charleston and in the piney woods of South Carolina wearing the blue cockade upon his hat but the stars and stripes in his heart. The patriotism of the American people is a living thing; and it is not so sectional as to confine itself within the narrow precincts of a single State; it is as broad as the continent, and as deep seated as their love of Liberty and as the very faith within them and upon which they stake their hopes of immortality.

In the language of that noble old Kentucky patriot, (Crittenden,) "the dissolution of this Union would be the greatest shock which could be given to civilization." In it we risk the danger of not only destroying our own happiness and liberty, but we crush out the sentiment, and take away from struggling and almost triumphant humanity in the Old World the only example of free Government based upon written constitutions, and the will and affections of the people. Destroy it! and their hopes sink within them; they will feel that the sun of Liberty has gone down, to shine upon them no more forever.—Talk not to me about a reconstruction! If we can not uphold and save the beautiful temple in all its grand and majestic proportions, it is not probable that we shall be enabled to gather up its broken fragments, and replace them again in all their strength and beauty and magnificence.

A combination of circumstances,—a combination of wonderful men, the like of whom the world had never before, and will never probably behold again, were united in that great Revolution, out of which was born the State and Federal Governments which now compose our glorious Union. Let us be cautious how we try experiments on this their almost perfect work. For one, and as an humble citizen of the Republic, I am not prepared to give up the stars and stripes, that banner of beauty and glory, the ensign of the nation now known and honored throughout the whole earth, and substitute in stead some miserable local, or

Pelican or Palmetto flag. I rather embrace and hold to the significant motto, emblazoned with the "coat of arms" of our own proud commonwealth, "*United we stand, Divided we fall.*"

All these questions of party advantage should be lost sight of—all questions of public policy, State and National, should yield, and be held subordinate to the one grand idea of the restoration of peace, fraternity, Union! The time for Missouri to risk her destiny upon the dark sea of Revolution has not, and God grant that it may never come! In this whole secession movement there has been the most marked precipitancy! The men engaged in it seemed to shun deliberate action, and were not willing to trust the settlement of these matters to the people themselves. For just in proportion as men of sense contemplate the effect of Disunion just so will they shrink from it. We hear much talk about the Northern and Southern confederacy, but no man can conjecture even, what will be the state of things which disunion actually accomplished, will bring about; for an hundred questions involving a conflict of interest and a diversity of views, and leading almost certainly to civil war, must be settled before the fact of disunion will be recognized. What about our National debt; who is to pay it?

What about the free navigation of the Mississippi River—our "inland sea;" who is to control it?

What about a division of the Territories, the common property of the people of all the States?

What about the National Capital, and all the public property and archives connected with it, belonging now to us all? Who's to own them?

What about the army of the United States? And our navy, whose canvas whitens every sea? Can these, think you, be amicably divided? What about the Washington monument? Who's to complete it, and after completion, who's to own it?

What about Mount Vernon—the home and resting place of Washington! Are any portion of the American people ready to give up their part of this precious inheritance?

What about the military defenses of the country, our dock yards, forts and arsenals?

What about a railroad to the Pacific? Is this great work to be abandoned?

What about the American flag? Is it to be given up, dishonored and disgraced, its stars obscured and its stripes erased?

What about the other thousand charming and delightful associations connected with our country's brief history, which cluster around every patriotic heart, and which will be mainly valuable to us and to our children, as incentives to nobler efforts in the cause of our country, and of liberty and humanity? Are the people ready to run all these risks—to suppress all these emotions—to sacrifice all that is dear to them on the altar of prejudice and of passion, without a full trial, exhausting every argument which reason and honor and patriotism may furnish towards the settlement of all surrounding difficulties? I think I may answer for the people of the State of Missouri, *No!* And whenever the question is put to them, asking when they will favor a dissolution of the Union, if they do not respond in the language of the great patriot of Ashland, "*never, never, never,*" they will at least say, not until every effort at compromise which the wisest heads and hearts of her most patriotic statesmen can devise is finally given up. They will answer, that for the sake of peace they will yield much; but if questions come which extort the arbitration of the sword, we will fight it out in that Union which our fathers gave us—this priceless jewel we will never willingly give up, and if sink we must, we shall be proud to go down with a cause which embraces all the hopes of progress, of civilization and human liberty.

At the same time I speak so warmly for the Union and its preservation, allow me to say, now that the "fight is up," the people should be content with nothing less than such a settlement of all pending questions of difficulty between the North and the South as will hush forever this eternal sectional strife, and sectional wrangling. For if this be not done it will be but a short time before we shall hear again of secession, revolution, disunion! The Crittenden proposition—the border State Compromise—the plan proposed in the report of the committee of thirty-three—any of these will do as a basis of settlement; and if all these are likely to fail, let us urge the course suggested by the Legislature of "Old Kentucky," the birth place of many of us, to call a Convention of all the States, and endeavor to have the Federal Constitution satisfactorily amended, and in the mode provided for in the instrument itself. But let us not in Missouri stake our all upon any

ultimatum of our own, before first consulting with other States similarly situated.

I have great hope of the action of the Convention suggested by Virginia, and which assembles on the 4th inst. Above all let the border States stick together until all hope of adjustment has failed, for their interests are identical or nearly so, and they must share a common destiny.

In the meantime the States which have passed ordinances of secession, will have time for serious reflection, and they will have experienced too, in some small degree, some of the evils of separation; and I have every hope that they will return and embrace any compromise that may be agreed upon by the border slave States. The occasion calls for deliberation—it is not a season for fiery invective and denunciation—let us pursue the one and avoid the other. For more than thirty years a citizen of Missouri—identified as thoroughly as any man can be with her in feeling and in interest—and believing that they will adhere to the Union, it is my purpose to follow the fortunes of my State, “whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!”

I hear the question frequently asked are you in favor of coercion? I answer promptly that I am not at present, for the very attempt at coercion destroys at once all hope of a peaceful settlement of the questions. I would oppose the sending of armed men into any of the seceding States *now* for the purpose of forcing them back into the Union, or of compelling subjection. And whilst I do not favor coercion on the part of the General Government, now, I am just as far from favoring the coercion of the General Government by South Carolina! We all know that too much of this thing has been practiced already by that State, and if persisted in, it may become in self-defence the duty of the General Government to protect its property, its soldiery and its flag, without regard to consequences. I am nevertheless, in favor of the “Union, the Constitution and the enforcement of the laws.” I have been too recent and too earnest an advocate of this excellent platform to abandon now either of its planks. I stand upon them all, and whilst compromise fair and honorable; preservation, and not “ruin first and reconstruction afterwards,” should be the watchwords, as they were with the fathers of the Republic, in framing the Government, and have been time and again since, and whilst in times like these, when there is such a

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conflict of passion and of interest and opinion, it is the duty of patriotic men to yield their opinions on questions of mere public policy, and their abstract ideas of right for the good of our common country; there are some matters in my view which no man can yield, *the integrity of the Government itself—its existence—its permanency*. These are questions that can only be yielded at the close of peaceful separation or a successful revolution! Until one of these things occur, the Constitution must be obeyed, and the laws passed in pursuance of it, must be enforced north and south! not at the point of the bayonet, or with the sword, but by those civil processes to which we are all accustomed, in the execution of those laws, to which we all appeal to enforce our rights and remedy our wrongs. To act upon any other theory would be at once destructive of all Government, and turn us over to the wild fury of a lawless mob. Anarchy would usurp the throne where the law should reign, and there would be no security for life, liberty or property, save in the strongest arm!

If civil officers cannot be found to execute the laws as they are, in some of the states, then the laws must remain, of necessity, a "dead letter," until repealed, or until reason assumes its wonted sway over the public mind.

But with you, I pray for a return of peace—for the restoration of kind feeling—for the salvation of the Union—and when the storm which now rages with so much fury shall have passed by, I trust we may all gaze upon a brighter sun and clearer sky—and that we shall see the "old ship" with her priceless cargo and her happy crew gliding over a smooth and tranquil sea—with every sail unfurled, and floating from her mast head that same bright and beautiful banner, incised with the motto as it kisses each passing breeze *The United States of America— one Union---one Constitution---one Destiny!*

Most faithfully,

Your friend,

JAS. S. ROLLINS.

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