Letter to Charles Petit McIlvaine

Jacob D. Cox

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General Jacob D. Cox, later Secretary of the Interior, to Bishop C. P. McIlvaine

Head Quarters, Dist. of Western Virginia
Marietta, 6 January 1863

My dear Sir:

Yours of 3rd enclosing Dr. Dubois' letter in regard to Mr. Clement Smith is received today. I have heard nothing of any arrest of Mr. Smith, and no report has reached me of any complaints against him. What I have heard of him in the Kanawha Valley has been in his favor & I should be surprised to learn that at this late day any steps are being taken to disturb him.

I shall immediately refer the matter, with your & Dr. Dubois' statements in his favor to Brig. Gen. Crook, now commanding at Charleston, & direct him to see that no vexations & baseless charges are entertained.

The regiments raised in Western Virginia have frequently given trouble by making personal quarrels the basis of military persecution, and this results in an almost necessary evil whilst troops continue to serve in the neighborhood where they were raised. Not only personal enmities, but even more, jealousy of superior wealth or social position is sometimes made the motion for charges of disloyalty, and wrong is thus done under the guise of public duty. The temptation to such evil is so great that I have long been of the opinion that troops might not be permitted to serve in the region where raised, and fully believe that the West Virginia regiments are not worth half what they might be, for this reason. Unfortunately the War Department received some of these regiments with an agreement that they should be thus employed as home guards. You may, however, be assured that I will spare no pains to see that no injustice is done Mr. Smith.

I should be very happy to gratify Dr. Dubois in regard to his son the Captain, but as my allowance of aides is now filled, with no prospect of immediate change, I am unable to offer him a position which would enable him to retain his pay etc. Should a vacancy occur, I shall be most happy to bear the matter in mind.

The removal of McCollan was as great a surprise to me as it could be to anyone. I was full of hope when I left the Potomac that so cordial an understanding existed between him & the administration that everything would move smoothly, I had strongly urged the issuing of his order in regard to the duties of the army relative to the civil power, (which you will remember), strongly hoping that would put at rest all fears of his decision to thwart the administration in its policy. When it was expected that his removal was in consequence of disobedience of orders, I feared that matters had taken a shape which left the administration no other alternative, but subsequent developments have all been in his favor, and most unexpectedly justified the confidence of his friends in his patriotism as well as his military capacity.

Burnside's position was a most trying one, and his manly course in the whole affair has increased the cordial admiration & friendship I conceived for him whilst serving in his command.

Recent events have deepened the conviction in my mind, that we need to adopt such modifications of our military organization as may carry the army to a higher degree of efficiency than it has yet reached. I believe we must abandon the system of reenforcing the army by new additions of raw regiments, and adopt that of increasing it solely by the introduction of new levies within existing battalions.
We are constantly fighting with a large proportion of raw troops & the army as a whole is not growing in efficiency. Our volunteer army of nearly a million has no educated staff, and in trying to make shift by borrowing a part of that of the little band of regulars. I am convinced that we ought to reorganize, scattering all the scientific military ability we have, throughout the whole army, making of it a unit, and putting all the theoretic knowledge in such relations to the practical energy & enterprise of the volunteers as to elevate the standard of excellance throughout the whole. Then by a universal & systematic scouting & rejection of all incompetents we might soon hope to have an army reliable in all its parts. As it is, while portions of it are excellent, other parts are sadly unreliable giving us an iron & clay mixture. I have recently written at some length to Mr. Chase on this subject which I think demands serious attention. Pardon my troubling you with a digression of such length, & believe me,

most sincerely Yours,

J. D. Cox

Rt. Rev. C. P. McIlvaine

Cincinnati -