
Charles Pettit Mcllvaine Letters

1-25-1863

Letter to Charles Petit Mcllvaine

S. P. Chase

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~~Private~~

Mr Chase
Washing Jan 25, 1863

My dear Bishop

Your letter I have been crowded
at once; but I need not apologize for
the delay; for you know my hindrance. Ever
since writing this initial sentence I have
been interrupted half a dozen times by half
a dozen callers on various business.

It is impossible for me to express
my anxiety concerning the State of the
country; but my ignorance of the real
condition except so far as my own defect-
ness is concerned is almost as great as
my anxiety. Our Administration, under
the President's system, if system it be, is
defunct. There are some important matters
which the President reserves substantially
to himself - then relating to slavery for the
most part. He also not infrequently determines

important & some times unimportant questions
concerning the War; and decides a many
appointments. Whatever he then does, he does
generally, though not always, without consultation
so far as I am advised. If there is consultation
his except in a few cases, I do not know it.
With these exceptions, I repeat, the Adminis-
tration is Departmental: that is to say I
administer the Treasury, Mr. Blair the Post Office
Mr. Wells the Navy &c. &c. The President
sustains me kindly and cordially when I
ask him; but in general, does not interfere
at all or even ^{can be} informed ~~himself~~ as to the
line of action I adopt. What is true of the
President is true of other Heads of the Departments
as a general statement. And what is true of
my Department is true of all, except that
the President naturally takes more actively in
the progress of the War & of course in the action

of the War Department and also, though not
so much, in ^{naval} the Navy Department. The Heads
of Departments are not intended to check each other,
if any, influence, or the action of any other
Department other than one: of course, they do
not expect to be consulted, except by necessity,
in relation to any important matter involved
in such action. Not being consulted, they are
not informed. I can get more or less informa-
tion touching the war by going to the War &
Navy Departments seeking particular inquiries.
I receive what it is though fit to impart
and am left in ignorance of what it is though
fit to withhold. How much is imparted - how
much withheld I can only judge by developments.
Such information under such circumstances is
not pleasant, nor very profitable. So I content
myself generally with what I learn from the
public prints.

I am it for example announced this morning
that Gen. Barre - is relieved from command &

Gen. Horner appointed to his stead. I had heard
nothing for any word in the Administrative indi-
cating that such a move was likely to take
place.

Of course, I can give you no information.
I try to administer my department as well as
I can; but feel that I am ^{at} little an outside
of it; and that to be considered as a responsible
member of an administration is as unjust as
it is natural. If my service here is useful,
I shall thank God - who enables me to be useful;
but it is far from ^{agreeable} pleasant, or, in my judgment, ~~ad-~~
visable to be the Head of a Department under existing circumstances.

My notion of an administration is, a President
superior under the Constitution & Laws; Head of
Departments, capable & faithful in their several
administrations, and fit to be counsellors of the
Chief Magistrate; measures grandly & fully considered
before & determined on after such consideration
by the Head & then vigorously executed by concert of
all - high & heart-focalizing. I may be all wrong, in this.
But I must stop. I send this report & some
other pamphlets. Affly & faithfully yours
Wm. C. C. McKim