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Letter to C. P. McIlvaine

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Memphis, Feb. 16, 1861

My very dear Bro:

A thousand thanks for your kind letter. It is so like yourself who are always striving to be like Christ!

I left home, within an hour, after the opening of the public mass meeting of the Union-loving people, to which you make reference, and returned just one week ago. In the interim of my absence, I visited all middle & E. Tennessee quite up to the Va. line, & a little over it, at Bristol; I had good opportunities to learn the sentiments of the people through those sections, and to gather up many scraps of information, from intelligent passengers, on the R. Roads, coming from different states. I was well satisfied, long before I reached home last week, that Tennessee’s voice would be heard unmistakably in favor of the Federal Union. I have not been disappointed. The trumpet in this case has given no uncertain sound on my arrival at home last week, and reading your letter of Jan. 5, my first impulse was to write to you at once and assure you that Tenn: would be found in the right place & on the right side - in favor of liberty & union, not only one & inseparable, but cemented by law and order, now & forever! I waited to deposit my vote for all these and having done so, I was taken very sick - the consequence no doubt of 6 weeks continued exposure by night or by day during my visitations. I have been confined to my room ever since, & most of the time to bed, by a painful swelling of the face, very much like erisypelas ((sic)). Yesterday I was able to get up & dress and today I have done the same: and thus find myself venturing to answer your letter: when I shall finish, time will show. In all your observations I concur most heartily. The reflecting and traveled portion of our southern people know that the Abolitionists properly so called constitute but a small party among the northern voters. But here is the difficulty: small as they are in numbers, they always manage to control the elections. It is hard to make the masses in the South comprehend this. But it is a thing comprehensible by one who is acquainted with northern society and some peculiarities in their social organizations. It appears stranger that a rebellion so unnatural as that excited by & his friends against David, should have found so many adherents. And yet it is easily explicable upon the principles which we know ordinarily govern and control the majority of mankind. The greater number do not stop to reach to consequences. They leave the thinking and clamor to others. The first is burdensome, the latter distasteful. Now I am well satisfied that a majority of the people in the seceding states, if their voice could be fairly heard, would speak loudly in favor of Union. They are for their rights in the Union. But the secessionists few at first in numbers, made up by noise what was deficient in argument & in force & so drew numbers to their support by the ten thousand appliances which the demagogue knows too well how to use; Fanciful pictures of the riches & glory of a Southern Confederacy, exaggerated representations of northern insult & aggression etc. And how has it been with you? The same (?) game plagued, but with different hands - the arrogance, pride, oppression, & cruelty of southern slave holders, - the contempt in which they hold Yankees & all that. Thus the appeal is constantly made to the lower passions of our nature, and mutual hate & exasperation fostered & formented to the very verge of war and devastation. But, my dear Bishop, no one has yet so far as I know, looked to the remote & primary causes of the evils which have now come to a head. I do not assume to see further than other men. God forbid! But if this "law makes one wiser than his teachers," to God be the glory and not to man! More than 25 years ago I delivered my first
charge ((?)) to the clergy of my diocese. It was upon "the duty of Christians considered in their civil relations"—nearly every address & pastoral letter of mine since, down to my sermon before the last Gen'l Convention, has called attention to the necessity of "bringing up children in the nature & admonition of the Lord"—a necessity forced upon us by the peculiarity of our civil institutions, as well as made imperative by the law of God! Not a single institution founded by Legislative patronage can permit any teaching upon the subject of man's moral accountability & duty, as taught by Christ, that would not suit a Jew, Turk or infidel as well as a Christian child. To make the matter short without statement or argument: The government knows nothing distinctive in religious teaching; and the jealousy of the sects excludes from all public seminaries, with the efficiency of a wall of fire, every thing but the merest generalities on the matter of Christianity. What sort of a population has grown up under this system in the last 30 or 40 years. You can describe it better than I can. I will only say that east, west, north & south it is found combining all the fierce fanaticism of the Puritan—the heartless spirit of Democracy, impelled by the ambition, pride & wickedness of the Devil! You will, perhaps, think this extravagant language. Before God! I think I am speaking the words of truth & soberness! Have the records of any nation, in its criminal prosecutions, ever brought to light such revelations of crime, of bestial & abominable iniquity of daring, brutal & remorseless murder—of foul & rotting impurity as the annals of our country exhibit? Who thinks it an offense against God or man to send a false telegram, if by so doing the decision of an election is influenced? Who expects members of Congress to speak the truth? Who looks for aught but false statements and misrepresentations in our newspapers? Whence springs this viperous statement that is preying upon the vitals of our country & has for years past been gradually undermining the great social edifice of our civil & religious liberty? Its parent is the avowed principle, that the development of the intellect without the cultivation of the heart is all that is needful in the new aspect in which a Republican government regards man. Democracy has seized hold of this idea. I was going to say that Mr. Jefferson was its author: but this would deprive Satan of his paternity. Jefferson in his last efforts for the good ((sic)) of man, founded an Institution from which all religious worship was to be excluded—or in which rather none was to be recognized by law, statute or bye-law. The party of which Mr. J. was the leader have had in their possession the government of the Country for the last 60 years, excepting an interval of about 4 years, under Mr. Fillmore. About 12 or 15 years since, the principle previously acted on by this party, was shamelessly avowed by the then leader—namely "to the victor belong the spoils." What an avowal in a government controlled by free men! Acting on this principle the government became so corrupt in the distribution of its patronage & the use of its friends, as actually to prostitute both for purely party purpose, & is well known, to influence the operations of exchange in the great commercial metropolis of the nation. Upon the announcement of this fact, the decree went forth, the doom of the Democratic party is sealed! Everything must be sacrificed to put down so wreakless & corrupt an administration Union with abolitionists—with South-Americans—hards & softs with all & any, to rescue the government from such abuse and frustration. But the Democrats cannot live without office. They saw that the "ultima dies et ineluctabile tempus" was come. They split up, in their efforts to unite on a candidate, into two divisions—Douglas & Breckenridge men, and the last in their dying struggles placed themselves on the topmost wave of secession—carrying out another of their maxims into practice, "rule or ruin"—determined in their desperate frenzy, to "rule in Hell—rather than serve in Heaven." And now where are all these magnates of the Democratic party? Actually in the ranks of the secessionists, or working for them at the Federal City! Don't you remember that Mr. Buchanan made a speech in favor of Breckenridge before the election? His dallying with So. C. since Nov. just shows where his _______ of party carried him, and into what they betrayed him!
Would a faithful chief Ex. Magistrate watchful of his public duty, have allowed millions of the public puberty to be put into jeopardy, by the want of an efficient protecting guard, when repeatedly warned of what was in contemplation? Well! Well! Well!! into what a maze of thought & words have I entered? Forgive me, my dear Bro! I will not offend further, in the same direction. I wish to say here that we Tennessians desire this question, between the north & south, to be settled once & forever. But this cannot be done, now or ever, as long as your Governor tells our Governor, that "the laws of Ohio do not recognize negro-stealing as a crime!" Now I humbly conceive, that is not the question. It matters not whether the laws of Ohio recognize such act as criminal or not! Do the laws of the U.S. make it the duty of the Gov. of Ohio to surrender the fugitive to the demand of the Gov. of Tenn.? If yea, and he refuse, then he nullifies the law and deserves the rope or stripes as much as any other criminal, in his proper measure & degree. This is the position of Tenn: Such was the position of the entire South as I understood - to seek her rights under the constitution in the Union! Until this new fangled notion of was broached called secession. Tennessee will have no convention for the present. Her voice for union has rung out clearly & distinctly. Some of her best & ablest men are now in the Peace Conference at Washington. May God in his mercy grant them wisdom to devise & propose some plan of settlement acceptable to all parties!

But how is this movement called secession, if perfected, to affect our beloved Church - the dear Church of the Saviour, for which He shed his blood? This is by far the most interesting question of all to me. Have you seen what your son in the Gospel - Dear Bp. Polk - has written in his Pastoral letter. He says - "The state of Louisiana having, by a formal ordinance, through her Delagates in Convention assembled, withdrawn herself from all further connection with the United States of America, & constituted herself a separate sovereignty, has by that, removed our Diocese from within the pale of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. We have, therefore, an independent Diocesan existence!" There! Does not that clap the climax of all that you ever fancied as of likely occurrence in the future of our Church? By a like course of reasoning, if La: were reduced to the condition of a conquered province by Gt. Britian or France, the Prot. Ep. Ch. in here territory, would pass with the soil! Oh, Oh, Oh!! "Is not rebellion as the sin of witch-craft?" My dear Bro! What are we to make of all these things? To think of such men as Polk & Elliott, & Green & Rutledge avowing the doctrines of secession! Am I indeed so blinded, that I can see no wisdom, nor good sense, no practical utility - none of the spirit of the Gospel, neither its charity, nor humility, nor patience, nor kindness, nor gentleness, nor brotherly love in a thing, in which it is claimed that they all exist! Do write to me freely and frankly and show where I am in error, where I suppose & hold that the Church is above all arrangements & changes of human government: submissive to them only under the law of Christ - thankful for protection & claiming that as a right under all circumstances.

Monday, Feb. 18. I stopped here last Sat. evening. I will now try and get to the end of my letter - a letter which will perhaps claim one distinction of Paul's Epistle to the Gal: "Ye see how large etc. -"

Under the influence of the practical working of the system - or principle to which I have adverted, namely Education of the mind & neglect of the spiritual man or soul - we can easily perceive now to what point we have been drifting. It is impossible to contemplate the picture of our civil, social & religious condition now presented to observation, under the operation of the causes referred to without amazement. It is clothed in the future with almost stygian darkness. No country on Earth presents such a phase of mind, as the U.S. We have come to regard all
sciences, institutions etc. as without any fixed principles. At the bar, the lawyer attacks the very foundations of Judicial administration, and in the presence of the Judge, assails the first principles of law. In medicine all is made to yield before the boldness of new theories & the boastings of new discoveries. In religion nearly all the old land-marks established by Creeds embodying the gathered wisdom of the Church in her early councils are decried and torn away by the wide hand of presuming wisdom. In government the whole frame work has been practically changed - the people cannot be heard except through the organ of self-constituted & irresponsible conventions. Young America rules. No respect is paid to grey-hairs - to wisdom - or position. The catechism of the Church has so fallen in repute, that scarcely any boy in the land recognizes any one as his "betters", & refuses to "order himself lowly or reverently" to anybody! Progress, progress is the universal cry! It is heard in the church, as loudly as in the State, and now we find the principle of secession as boldly avowed by Bishops in their official stations, as by the supreme authority of sovereign states. When comes all this? From the neglect of parents & Ministers to "bring up children in the nuture & admonition of the Lord!" You may look over the history of all nations, as far as history speaks, and you will find without exception, that wherever power has been conceded to the masses, it has never been willingly returned. In our country the Democratic principle has been pushed to the extreme verge of endurance. In our primary civil organization a property qualification was made necessary to the exercise of the elective franchise. Gradually free suffrage has been introduced into all the states: and now, our elections are controlled by poverty - stricken foreigners, by unprincipled men, who have nothing to lose & everything to gain, by anarchy & misrule. Even, here in the south, those, who are loudest in their denunciation of northern aggression upon the rights of slaveholders, do not own a negro to their name. But enough & more than enough of all this. That which I fear most of all is that God is about to visit us & deservedly for our national sins & ingratitude. The only foundation of my hope is that "the Lord reigneth"! O there is comfort in that declaration, precious, full and abiding! Let what changes in government & overthrow of institutions come that may we shall be safe. under the shadow of His wings, who ruleth in the armies of Heaven, & doeth all his pleasure amongst the inhabitants of the Earth! We shall not be long here, to witness these earthly vicissitudes or be affected by them. The wild ebullition of human passions may lash into storm & tempest the troubled sea of life. We shall not be here to see the gathering clouds, nor hear the awful roll of their thunder. We shall be where the voice of the oppressor cannot be heard, and where the hand of violence cannot come!

My dear Brol most devoutly do I wish I could be with you every day, and hear your voice in prayer! I feel in my heart of hearts, that it would do me good, and confer a pleasure which nothing earthly can impart. Let us then be united in heart & mind, if we cannot see each others face! I have never failed, I think, to remember you, according to the agreement now of 22 years standing, every Sunday morning - that we may be always in the spirit on the Lord's day. But now let us make a covenant until this tyranny be over - to call on the Lord every day in the morning Prayer at family worship (except Sunday), to have compassion upon our country - to give not his heritage to confusion - to inspire our rulers with wisdom to govern - to heal all our decisions - to spread abroad the spirit of love & forgiveness among all the people, that this nation may be godly & quietly governed. I suppose you have heard of dear Bp. Cobbs' departure to the better land. I may mention to you what I heard not long since. Dear Bp. Cobbs expressed an earnest wish if he did not pray "in totidem ((?)) verbis," that he might not live to witness the secession of Ala. from the Union. About 15 minutes after his departure, the booming of the first discharge of artillery announced to the
inhabitants of Montgomery that the ordinance which severed the ties that bound Ala. to the Union had passed!

It seems to me that in the present state of affairs, as likely to affect our Ch. Organization, our Gen.1 Convention or a Council of our Bishops should be called by the Presiding Bp. I am ready to join in such a request with any member who think such a movement expedient. We could at least give words of fraternal counsel to our Brethren in the seceding states, and we might in some measure anticipate contingencies which may occur in the position of the border states.

Pray let me hear from you speedily & especially as soon as possible in relation to this last matter. You & Smith are my seniors & you are near to Kemper, McCoskry, Upfold, Hawks & Bedell.

Very faithfully & affectionately,

Jas. H. Otey