

Washington, D.C. September 16th 1862

Darwin:

Your letter of the 6th and 7th came duly to hand and I am still digesting it. Sunday, I sat down and answered it but some how my letter did not reach the mails. Part of your letter gave rise to renewed and closer study of the events of the past 8 months and the acts and demeanor of the men who in great part made American history during that time. You and I differ very little in opinion as to results perhaps but differ very widely as to the acts and motives of some of our leading men. Indeed my opinions have changed very much since I came to Washington. I came here half inclined to hold Gen. McClellan responsible for the failure of the peninsula campaign believing it in great measure a part of his planning. The inexorable logic of facts as I see them have induced the conclusion that the charge of misconduct or incompetence must rest elsewhere. History, I think will bear me out on this. Upon the assurances of the theory that it could command the James River for a base of operations for the Army, McClellan last winter postponed to leave to save one half his army on the line of the Potomac to paralyze the enemy, then in our front and with the other half proceed by water directly to Richmond then comparatively defensibles. The Gov. hesitated and then overruled. In the meantime the rebels became alarmed and commenced falling back from our front. With his whole force through the snow and mud of early spring McClellan was ordered to follow in direct opposition to the advice and under protest of every General officer of experience in the army. After a two week trial sheer starvation, the evil McClellan predicted, made our progrefs so slow and

painful that the gov't was forced to either wait until roads were settled or already on the move adopt a new plan of campaign. It determines to fall back on McClellan's original proposition. The Army retraces its steps and finally arrives at Fortress Monroe in all the confusion and disorder incident to extreme haste and want of preparation and in the meantime the rebels had reached the new scene of operations. Then too the navy became aware for the first time that it could not promise control of the James River and the route was too hazardous to be adopted unless the naval cooperation was certain and complete, for the line of march in a country so defensible in every respect should be under cover of the gunboats. With the promise of 50,000 men cooperating from the direction of Fredericksburg, the Army goes up York river ordered into the marshes of that region by a higher authority than its commanding generals. Building its roads as it went, through a country half the time under water and itself half the time on half rations, and soldiers in the field only understands the full significance of that fact in the face of an enemy disputing every rod the army dragged itself to near Richmond. By a conscription including every able bodied man within a hundred miles and almost superhuman efforts the rebels had massed a force outnumbering our own and strongly fortified. Relying upon the promises of the gov't but too weak to assail by storm McClellan adopts the only remaining course save retreat – attacks by regular siege. An inferior besieges a superior force. The lines are drawn and rod by rod ground is gained. And day by day the swamps decimate the army. Where is the Gov't and where are the thousands promised at the change of base forced upon the Army- Day by Day our forces decrease and the rebels by means of conscription increase in nos. The disposition is becoming terribly dangerous- Anxious to hear the guns of McDowell, McClellan stretches out his army to meet his

advance. The situation demanded the anticipation of McDowell's arrival by hours and moments.

Not until just before the retreat did the gov't inform McClellan that not one man of that 50,000 could be spared for him. Members of his staff say that the information appalled him. That for 24 hours he hardly left his tent but was deep in study. Relying upon the promise of the gov't he had advanced so far that the support must be had or his whole army was threatened with destruction. In the meanwhile, the navy had gained possession of the James River. How McClellan concentrated his army (scattered of necessity to protect its supplies and extended by warrant of gov't professions) and extricated himself from his situation the world knows. The masterly execution of the movement will not be forgotten or unknown while American history is read.

I claim for McClellan this—that the plan for the peninsula campaign as he was ordered to execute it was none of his making, that the gov't acted in bad faith. That the “strategy” of the spade in place of the bayonet (McClellan's favorite weapon) was of a consequence of circumstances entirely outside of his control.

The country is today paying the penalty of a civilian of eminent incompetence for public duties having interfered to upset and overrule every plan of the generals in the field. And McClellan wants no greater vindication than these three facts. A people indignant at results have held him responsible for all the mismanagement of a gov't whose orders he was simply obeying and heaped merciless obliquy and insult upon him. Yet he recollects he is a soldier and as a soldier his duty is to obey without question or explanation. Not one word of defense or reproach has he uttered, relying upon his acts to justify him when they shall become known. During the whole time of extraordinary labor

and disaster he retained the love and confidence of the men who were the immediate sufferers. No General of America ever stood firmer in the confidence and affection of his men than did McClellan during those trials and sufferings.

And During its hour of peril and calamity he was the only one of its tried commanders dared to lean.

You fear his conservatism. I did once – but this very conservative man, this proslavery general has begged of a Republican President to be permitted to make use of every measure that could weaken the rebellion.

But I must notice one other man in this letter, a man who events have made almost a Dictator over a great people. When he is strong and firm and wise the country prospers. Well he calls men to his advice and despises their counsel. He brings desolation upon a land and talks glibly of being alone responsible. A nation groans in its death agony and he sits and laughs. The representatives of a great people approach him with their interests and he turns them off with a story. A committee from the religious association of the country lay the burden of their fears before him and he descends almost to obscenity. The homes of the land are in mourning and he illustrates agony in anecdote. A people who are pouring out their blood and treasure to sustain him as the exponent of their principles entreat him to enforce the laws of the land and are scorned. Never did man in high position comprehend its duties and responsibilities more feebly. Stern inquiry will show that most of our calamities throughout this whole war were the direct results of his intermeddling with affairs of which he had neither practiced or theoretical knowledge. In only one thing has he been firm- A nation is divided against itself. The principles of liberty and humanity are at issue with those of tyranny and injustice, the

latter in rebellion against the former. 16 states are unconditionally loyal. Four are wavering their influence being against the government. The supposed wishes, interests and fears of the four have invariably outweighed those of the sixteen. The four fill his comprehension. He looks at them with a telescope and fears. He inverts the glafs and the wants and needs of his loyal friends are in the distance.

What need of more confiscatory and or emancipatory acts of Congress. What law affecting rebel property and interests is enforced. Who is to blame. Why have not our generals carried out the confiscation act. Why sir. Any act of Congress any law of the land affecting military action is a dead letter to the army until it is announced in an order from the Commander in Chief. And the Commander in Chief is the President. In time of war his will is law. It knows no other. He alone is responsible to the country, to the people. This is the danger of large Armies in a Republic. The nature and conditions of war is so entirely at variance with those of peace that our army cannot be effective otherwise. It must be the blind agent of brute force directed by a single mind. Its action is wholly executive and its strength must be in the executive of the nation.

What general has attempted to exercise even the authority belonging to his situation that has not met with rebuke. Every act of McClellan's or Halleck's, every order affecting property of the rebels was in consonance with implicit instructions from the president contrary often to their own judgment. Andy Johnson begged of him in tears as a women would intercede for a husband or son or brother to be permitted to carry out the provisions of the last confiscation act in Tennessee and was refused. Thank God the pressure from both army and people is becoming so great that he is becoming aroused to the fact that he must regard their wishes. Every prominent commander is and long has

been eager to make use of slavery against the rebels and all concur in the fact that tis the strength of the rebellion. It is the power of the throne that protects it.

How long will the power behind the throne submit. How long ere it will ask itself whether simple honesty alone compensates the nation for want of ability to comprehend the times.

Sunday I read a letter from father and yesterday the box to Mfs. Thompson arrived. They are very much pleased with the presents. The bead work exceeds anything they thought possible. The news as it comes in now is very favorable but you get it as soon as we do here. I may be mistaken but the movements of supplies, munitions etc. indicate that a large force has started or is starting towards Leesburg and beyond. I think a movement in that direction commenced yesterday. Of course no mention is made of the matter in the papers, nor is it known on the street. I judge only from the signs of the times. A concerted movement is being made by the different relief associations to correct the awful abuses in the conduct of some of the government

(Letter incomplete)