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Letter from Senator H. V. Johnston.  
To Several Gentlemen in Middle Georgia,  
Sandy Grove, near Bartow P. O., Ga.,  
September 25, 1864.

GENTLEMEN:—Your letter of the 14th instant was received several days ago. I have taken time to consider the object which it proposes—"the inauguration of a peace movement at the South." I long for peace as ardently as "the hart pants for the cooling water brook." I agree with you that "this unnatural strife cannot be terminated by arms." The pen, not the sword, must at last solve our difficulties, and the sooner the controversy can be transferred from the field of battle to the forum of rational and honorable negotiation, the better it will be for both governments. I agree with you that the peace movement at the North should be duly encouraged at the South. To this end, we should lose no occasion, nor omit any proper means to convince the North that we are still, as we always have been, willing to adjust the difficulties between us upon honorable terms. We have avowed our desire for peace and readiness for negotiation from the very beginning of the war, in every form in which organized communities can give expression to their will. We have avowed it in Executive messages, in Legislative resolves, and Congressional manifestoes.

What more can we do, in view of our situation? Gladly would I do more, if it were possible. But I do not believe that it is. We can inaugurate no movement that would lead to the result so earnestly desired by every friend of humanity, and so urgently demanded by the interests of both sections. Our military situation would seem to forbid even the attempt. The capture of Atlanta and Richmond is regarded by the authorities of the United States as all that is necessary for our ultimate subjugation. They have captured Atlanta, and Gen. Grant says the early capture of Richmond is certain beyond a doubt. What, under the circumstances, would be the probable effect of any peace movement at the South? Would it conciliate the North? Would it inspire the government of the United States with a sense of justice, or forbearance, or magnanimity? So far from this, it would be construed into intimidation on our part, and it would stimulate and intensify the war spirit of the North. It would be regarded as our confession of overthrow, and the premonitory symptom of our readiness to sue for mercy on the bended knees of unconditional surrender.

In view of the avowed object of the war on the part of the Northern Government, it is very certain that there can be no peace, upon any honorable terms, so long as its present rulers are in power. The President of the United States has proclaimed emancipation, and his determination to enforce it by the sword. He has announced, in advance of any formal offer of negotiation on our part, that he will not treat with rebels (as he is pleased to call the people of the Confederate States,) except upon the condition that we lay down our arms, abandon slavery, and return to the Union. He will then grant such terms as may be compatible with his sense of justice, liberality and magnanimity. So long, therefore, as its present rulers are in power, and this policy shall be adhered to, there can be no peace between us and the government of the United States, which will not bring upon us confiscation, social disorganization, poverty, degradation, and intolerable dishonor. What worse would be our doom if subjugated by military power? Subjugation is not worse than submission offered to us as the only condition of peace. It would at least save to us our honor.

If the people of the United States will change their rulers; if they will repudiate the avowed policy of subjugation; if they will return to a practical recognition of the true principles which underlie the whole structure of American governments, organized to secure and maintain constitutional liberty, the door will soon be open to honorable and lasting peace. Peace

upon any other terms involves the loss of liberty, because it will be the result of force—not of choice and compact between co-equal and sovereign States. Peace upon any other terms means despotism, enthroned in empire—not republicanism founded upon "the consent of the governed" and organized "in such form as to them shall be most likely to effect their safety and happiness." This is the kind of peace which the United States propose to enforce upon the people of the Confederate States—the peace of death to constitutional liberty—the stagnant peace of despotism—the peace which chains and prison-bars impose.

I look with anxiety to the approaching Presidential election in the United States. For although the Chicago platform falls below the great occasion, and the nominee still lower, yet the triumph of the Democratic party of the North will certainly secure a temporary suspension of hostilities and an effort to make peace by an appeal to reason. They confess that four years of bloody war, as a means of restoring the Union, has proven a failure. They declare that the true principles of American government have been disregarded and trampled under foot, by the present Executive of the United States. Their success will bring a change of administration, and with that a change of policy. It will do more, and what is of infinitely greater importance, it will bring the two contending parties face to face, in the arena of reason and consultation. Then and there can be discussed the history of all our difficulties, the principles involved in the bloody issue and the respective interests of both governments. Such is my conviction of the omnipotence of truth and right, that I feel an abiding confidence that an honorable peace would ultimately spring from such deliberations.

In their long cherished devotion to the Union of the States—a sentiment which challenges my respect,—the people of the North, it seems to me, have fallen into two grave and capital errors. On the one hand, they attach an undue importance to the mere fact of form of Union, ignoring the principles and objects of the Union, and forgetting that it ceases to be valuable when it fails to secure that object, and maintain those principles. On the other hand, they think that the States of the Confederacy have separated from the United States in contempt of that Union, in a wanton disposition to insult its flag and to destroy the government of which it is the emblem. Both opinions are wrong. The old Union was an organization of States. But it was more; it was such an organization, founded upon great principles, in order to give the most efficient security for the maintenance of those very same principles. These principles are the sovereignty of the States; the right of the people to govern themselves; the right of each State to regulate its own domestic affairs, to establish its own municipal institutions, to organize its own system of labor, and to pursue its own career of enterprise, subject to no restrictions except such as are expressed in the Federal Constitution. On these the Union was based, and constituted the solemn guarantee of all that each State should be protected in their undisturbed enjoyment. When it failed to do this, or what is worse, when its government passed into the administration of those whose avowed policy and measures must lead to the overthrow of those principles, it was virtually at an end, and in their opinion ceased to be valuable to the people of the Confederate States. Hence, secession was not resorted to merely to throw off the Union. Our people loved the Union and honored its once glorious flag, for the rich memories that clustered around it. They left it with a reluctance and regret to which history will scarcely do justice. They were, as they are now, wedded to the principles on which the Union was founded; they separated from it, but to vindicate and maintain them. Whether they acted wisely or unwisely must be left to the impartial arbitrament of time and coming events. But no people

were ever prompted to so momentous a step by loftier devotion to constitutional liberty. For this, we are denounced as rebels against the government of the United States, and threatened with the bloody doom of traitors; our country is invaded, our homes desolated, and our people slain by hostile armies. We are told that we must be conquered or exterminated. The North is fighting us to maintain the mere fact or form of Union, by force. We are defending ourselves to preserve the great principles which lay at the foundation of the Union.

If we be rebels against the one, if disposed to bandy epithets, we might reply that they who advocate and wage this war against us, are traitors to the other. If there is wrong on either or both sides, let impartial history decide who are the greater sinners. This is the naked truth. When thus viewed, how cruel and unnatural is this war! Why should the North fight us? Especially why should the thousands of professed constitutional men of the North lend their countenance and aid to our subjugation? We are struggling for principles which should be as dear to them as they are to us. Do they not see that our overthrow will be the downfall of constitutional liberty—fatal to their freedom as well as ours—the inauguration of an irresponsible and unlimited despotism? Correct ideas are slow in their progress of leavening the mass of mind; truth is ever trampled upon, when passion gains sway. But the ultimate prevalence of the one, and the ascendancy of the other, is only a question of time, and their end peace. The light already begins to break in upon the thinking and better portion of the Northern people. They begin to see that this war is not waged to restore the Union, in good faith—the Union of the Constitution; but, either to secure disunion, by avowing impossible and degrading terms of peace, or to convert it into a despotism by subjugating the South. Hence the Chicago movement. Hence the note of discontent that is being sounded by a portion of the press and statesmen of the North. God opened the light, that the people of the North may understand the position which we occupy, and discern the volcano that threatens to engulf their liberty. Then they will consider negotiation not only politically but absolutely necessary. Then peace will come, predicated upon those principles so essential to both governments, and all our strifes and difficulties solved in conformity to the best interest of the parties.

In view of our position, permit me to repeat, I do not see how we can inaugurate any movement likely to lead to an honorable peace. We are the party assailed. Peace movements must come from the assailing party. I would not be understood, however, as standing on any point of etiquette, as to who should take the initiative—I have no such feeling. All I mean to say is, that in view of the avowed policy of the United States Government, any advance on our part is already rejected, before made, and that we cannot make any upon the conditions announced by its President. I would not hesitate to take the initiative if there was the least hope of a favorable response or an honorable result. But if the Government of the United States should pass into other hands, repudiate the policy of subjugation, and indicate a desire for negotiation, I would, if need be, have our Government propose it—certainly, accept the offer of it, if tendered by the Federal authorities. Such I believe to be the spirit and temper of our people. Such I am satisfied is the sentiment of the President of the Confederate States. He has avowed it on every occasion which required him to allude to the subject. The North can have peace at any moment. All that they need to do is to let us alone—cease to fight us, or if they prefer, agree to negotiate a peace on terms honorable to both parties. We are willing—always have been willing, and shall continue to be willing. But as long as they fight us, the war must continue. For what can we do, but defend? We have no power to stop

their fighting short of unconditional submission to the terms announced by the President of the United States.

Are our people prepared for peace upon those terms? It is an insult to ask the question, unless indeed, we suppose, contrary to the whole history of our struggle, that they did not count the cost in the beginning, and have no just appreciation of the mighty principles involved. The President of the Confederate States never uttered anything more true, than when he said to the unofficial messenger of President Lincoln, that "we are not fighting for slavery, but for the right of self-government."

So long as the people will keep this great truth in view and obey the inspiration which it should kindle in the breasts of freemen, they cannot be conquered. They may have their land desolated, their property destroyed, their towns and cities burned and sacked, but subjugated they never can be. We cannot have peace so long as the present rulers of the United States are in power. We may not, even if the Chicago movement should be successful. But let us wait and hope for the change and for peace. If it come not, then we must rely upon the omnipotence of truth and right, and the judicious economy and use of the means which God has given us. Patience, fortitude, courage, hope and faith are as much elements of heroic patriotism as they are of Christian perfection. It is as indispensable to cherish them with untiring devotion as the only condition on which liberty can be gained or preserved. Her christening from the beginning, was the baptism of blood. She requires her votaries to lock arms and shields around her altar, resolved to die freemen rather than live slaves. If this be the spirit of the people, ultimate success will be the reward for their sufferings and sacrifices. For their encouragement, history is replete with examples, of which none is more striking or more inspiring than that of the revolution of 1776. Then let there be no despondency—no relaxation of effort and energy—no abatement of courage and heroic resolve.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,  
HERSCHEL V. JOHNSTON.

## MR. BOYCE'S LETTER.

Winnabow, S. C., Sept. 29, 1864.

His Excellency, Jefferson Davis:

SIR:—The Democratic party of the United States, in their recent Convention at Chicago, resolved that if they attained power they would agree to an armistice and a Convention of all the States, to consider the subject of peace. I think that action demands a favorable response from our Government. You are the only person who can make that response, because our Congress does not meet until after the time appointed for the Presidential election. If our Congress met in time, I should propose the action I desire taken to that body, and submit to its judgment my argument; but as that opportunity does not occur, I have no alternative but to remain silent, or address myself to you. I cannot consistently with my ideas of duty, remain silent. I therefore address myself to you. We are waging war to obtain a satisfactory peace. By a satisfactory peace, I mean a peace consistent with the preservation of our free institutions. By a satisfactory peace, I do not mean that cessation of hostilities which might, after a protracted contest, result from the exhaustion of the belligerents, whereby the sword would fall from their nerveless hands, their hearts a prey to the furies. Such a peace as that would be but a hollow truce, in which each party would be incessantly preparing for a new, final and decisive struggle. The peace which I mean is a peace which reconciles the interests and the feelings of the belligerents; a peace, in short, which restores harmony. Unless we can obtain such a peace as this, our republican institutions totter to their fall, and we become the subjects of a military despotism. Every Government must exist; that is the law of its being. If it is attacked by great force it must bring a