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Letter to William Seward

Charles Francis Adams

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Dec 11. 1861.

No 95.

Legation of the United States,
London, 27 December, 1861. ✓

Sir:

Although many of the leading presses zealously continue their efforts to keep up the war feeling here against the United States, I think the signs are clear of a considerable degree of reaction, and of a growing hope that the friendly relations between the two countries may be preserved. Of course everybody is waiting to hear of the issue of the demands transmitted by the Europa. Much gratification has been expressed at the publication of the Despatch addressed by M. Thouvenel to the Government through M. Mercier, as also at the treatment of the question of the Trent by M. Hautefeuille. Indeed the harmony of sentiment on this subject is

To the Honorable
William A. Seward.

so general throughout Europe as to have very much increased the confidence of the British Ministry in their position. They are even disposed to put up with unusual patience with the severe reflections made on the past policy of Great Britain in consideration of the substantial advantage they gain in the immediate dispute. Unquestionably the view of all other countries is that the opportunity is most fortunate for obtaining new and large modifications of international law which will hereafter materially restrain the proverbial tendency of this country on the ocean. My own opinions to the same effect have been already so freely expressed that it is needless, if it were not also superfluous to repeat them, especially now that the decision is probably complete.

But even if it should be possible to escape the immediate danger from the present difficulty, my confidence in the tendency of things towards peace in this country has been so much shaken as to make the prospects for the future quite doubtful. Parliament will probably assemble somewhat earlier than

than has been anticipated, perhaps by the 16th of January. It will then be impossible to avoid a general expression of opinion upon American affairs. Of what a character that will be, some idea may be formed from the various addresses made during the recess by members to their respective constituencies. As usual in all deliberative assemblies having freedom of speech the popular tendency will be towards the most positive doctrines. The war party will in this particular enjoy the advantage, which they will not fail to use with effect against the Ministry of Lord Palmerston, especially if there be the smallest opportunity of reproaching it for any concession on a point of honor. Even if in this particular they should find it difficult to make an issue, they will not fail to go on and urge the application of a limit to the law of blockade, as well as to the refusal to recognise a *de facto* government. In both these cases the ground has been already broken by the public press and by particular members. So that although Lord Russell in a portion of his latest conversation with me affirmed that we should have full opportunity

given

given to us of trying our experiment of overcoming the rebellion before action on their part, it is not quite clear to my mind that he will very long retain the power to make his words good. I have felt it my duty at this time to enter into such speculations solely because I think I ought to prepare your mind for the possibilities that may follow a settlement of the immediate difficulty. Neither do I wish to undervalue the amount of sympathy and good will that may be brought into play to avert the threatened danger. It is from the friends of our Government that I gather most of my conclusions. And one of them is that nothing but very marked evidences of progress towards success will restrain for any length of time the hostile tendencies developed by the case of the Trent.

I am happy to say that I have seen and conferred repeatedly both with Bishop McVane and Mr. Weed. I think their services have already been of material use, and that they will be of still more hereafter, if peaceful relations should be preserved. The industry of the Confederate emissaries in poisoning the sources of opinion

(5)

opinion, as well as in disseminating wholly erroneous notions of the nature of the struggle) in America has been unvaried. And where the seed has fallen on favorable ground it has germinated strongly and fructified well. But the effort to conceal the true issue and to substitute a false one has failed. The progress of affairs in America is daily more and more exposing its real character. Much as the commercial and manufacturing interests may be disposed to view the tariff as the source of all our ills, and much as the aristocratic classes may endeavor to make democracy responsible for them, the inevitable logic of events is contradicting each and every assertion based on these notions, and proving that the American struggle is after all the ever recurring one in human affairs between right and wrong, between labor and capital, between liberty and absolutism. When such an issue comes to be presented to the people of Great Britain, stripped of all the disguises which have been thrown over it, it is not difficult to predict at least which side it will not consent to take.

I ought before closing this letter to make one remark in regard to the manner in which the telegraphic intelligence from America is made up here. Finding what its tendency is I thought it expedient to seize the occasion of a voluntary transmission of the favorable news from Port Royal to me by the agent, Mr. Reuter, to have some conversation with him on the general subject. I concluded to go so far as to offer to subscribe for the American portion of his labors for the time I might remain here, or else not exceeding one year. In consequence, he offered to let me have the advantage of sending me pages to the Government, if I wanted to do so at any time. I know not precisely what the cost of this will be, nor whether the Department will authorize my charging it on the contingent fund of the Legation, or not. But ^{with} for its political and personal advantages in my present situation I regard the step as having been so wise that I shall continue it in any event during the present season. The telegrams are not yet what they should be, though not

So bad as they were. I learn from another
source that they are transmitted through
Liverpool where they suffer gentle modifi-
cations from the hands of some directors of
the Company not well affected to our cause.

I have the honor to be Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Charles Francis Adams