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or MUC

LETTER

FROM

J. S. MORRIS, ESQ.,

*Attorney-General of Mississippi,*

ON THE

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1872.

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JACKSON, MISS., May 17, 1872.

MY DEAR SIR: Official and professional engagements have delayed till now my answer to your esteemed favor of the 4th inst.

I am flattered by your suggestion that any views or purposes of mine, in respect to the approaching presidential contest, are regarded as of any importance by any number of that large and intelligent portion of the people of Mississippi, who, including yourself, have heretofore sometimes followed a political leadership which I could not. It encourages and renews in me the hope



which is at all times and under all circumstances uppermost in my ambition, that our people shall yet be politically united as Mississippians, white and colored, differing only in details, but harmonious in objects, seeking first the peace and happiness of our own devoted State, and then the glory and prosperity of the whole nation. I know this consummation is destined to come. I shall not despair of it, but shall struggle for it in whatever party I may be, and with whatever skill and determination I may possess, so long as I shall have any connection with public affairs.

My opinion is that if we would consult our own best interests and act wisely for our children and for our State, we had better give more attention to the development of our agricultural and other resources; to the adornment of our homes; to the operations of our boards of supervisors and of our county finances; to our roads, bridges, and public works; to our free public schools; to the preservation of the public peace, and the prompt and impartial administration of the laws for the punishment and suppression of disorders; to the encouragement of general industry, and to making honest labor as popular as it is honorable; and that we had better give ourselves less concern, and very moderate concern, about national matters of any kind, except to obtain for Mississippi a good national reputation.

I think that not only the best interests of the State—her reputation for peace, for industry, for financial

credit—but also the self-respect of all her people, would be more fully subserved and better vindicated by this course.

“How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
The part, which kings or laws can cause or cure?”

We all know that Northern politicians—not to say the Northern people generally, looking at us from a distance and through an inverted telescope, and with various causes to cloud their vision, regard us, or affect to regard us, in the main, as one-half negroes and the other half rebel Ku-Klux—with a few sainted and immaculate carpet-bag and scallawag martyrs, whose merits and whose sufferings for opinion's sake are magnified by distance for party effect. And looking at us thus, they have no political respect, or any other kind of respect, for us, except in the material fact that we have a certain very small number of *electoral votes* which may be of some importance to *their* candidates (*we* shall have none), on one side or the other, in case the race should be close.

Nor is it any use for us, in such a case, to grow contemptuous of them or of their opinions. They are in a condition to reciprocate all of our contempt a thousand-fold, and then by one word prove to us so plainly that we shall admit the facts, that we are a subjugated, dependent, and powerless people, while they are the conquerors, ruling and irresistible. And even if they should



fail to prove this to *our* satisfaction, they prove it to their own satisfaction, and then vote us down and compel us to submit.

For these reasons, I should think that, in taking position in the approaching canvass, and in determining which of two or three presidential tickets they will support, gentlemen like yourself, who have not yet made any final decision as to their course of action, would consider it well worth while to wait and see the contest fully developed, and not organize themselves so much in advance of the election. The nomination of Mr. Greeley, though it has not, so far, created a spark of enthusiasm anywhere, and though, in my judgment, it has not one ray of hope for success, is nevertheless likely to produce, accidentally it may be, some valuable results to the country. Like a certain gubernatorial nomination in this State in 1869, it will serve as an admonition to the genuine convention soon to follow, and exert a salutary influence in the choice, by that convention, of a successful ticket, and the adoption by it of a successful platform of principles. It will cause the real rulers of Republicanism in the United States, and who are to be, for years to come, the rulers of the nation, to pause and direct their steps aright, to avoid extremes, to do justice, and, politically, to "lure to better worlds, and lead the way." If it shall not have this effect, then it will have no effect at all, except to add one more to the multitude of "straggling squads" of unorganized, wrangling,

selfish, and sore-headed opposers of the great Republican party of the nation.

A certain circle of Democratic politicians in this State, three years ago, issued their dispensation to a betrayed, but still trusting and confiding PEOPLE, directing them to cast their votes for *Dent* and his "lay out." The only recommendation they had to offer was that *Dent* was Grant's brother-in-law, and that they twain loved each other. If the lessons of that campaign have not made the authors of that shallow trick afraid to try it again, we may shortly expect another like dispensation to vote for Greeley and *his* "lay out" on the ground that he is *not* Grant's brother-in-law, and that he and Grant hate each other.

But the people of Mississippi are not quite as trusting, confiding, and obedient to the politicians now as formerly. They rebelled against the ring-masters of 1869 for the first time in my recollection. They will rebel, if need be, in 1872.

And well may they do so. Although Mr. Greeley did not fight or urge others to fight against us in the recent war, it would have been far more reputable in him to have done so. Because he did more to *make* that war, to foment sectional prejudices, North and South, to assert the supremacy of a "higher law," and to precipitate the "irrepressible conflict," than any other ten men in either section. True he belonged to that class of politicians who denounced slavery, and who had kept



together and made a living by denouncing it for forty years. But it was *our* slavery that they denounced and not their own. Their epidemic of the "universal human brotherhood" did not break out till after they had *sold* all their slaves, or afforded full legal opportunity to do so, to the planters in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, etc., and got the money for them. It was *then* that the New York TRIBUNE deluged the land with those "moral ideas" which led to the counter assertion of the "Divine origin of slavery," and thence onward to the melancholy epoch of 1861. Then it was that Mr. Greeley began to quake in his boots, and to say "let the wayward sisters depart in peace." A little later, he flooded the North with the insane cry of "On to Richmond," printed in glaring capitals and exclamation points. (Why did he not *go himself*?) A little later, he was begging Mr. Lincoln to recognize the Confederacy. A little later, he was in Richmond to go on Mr. Davis' bond. (By the way, where was *Helmholtz*, the buchú genius of the Democracy then! One blast upon *his* bugle horn were worth a thousand Greeleys.) A little later, he was favoring Sumner's Civil Rights amendment. Later, he was rusticated among our ruined cities and desolated homes, electioneering among the played-out politicians of the South for the presidential nomination, which he now enjoys.

The oldest and most influential of the Northern protectionists, he is associated on the same ticket with Mr.

Brown, a furious Free Trader of the West—the most ardent and influential advocate, and, in a large degree, the inventor of all the constitutional amendments and test oaths; of the Freedmen's Bureau bill and the Civil Rights bills; and of all the Reconstruction Acts, including the trial and punishment of civilians by military commissions; the earliest and most earnest advocate for Grant's first nomination and election; the most constant and persistent indorser and supporter of all Grant's acts up to the time when visions of the Presidency dawned upon his own bewildered imagination. He is now the most furious of Grant's assailants and traducers. The most unscrupulous and effective of all the enemies of the Southern social system during all his early manhood and throughout the prime of his mature years, he is now, having reached the mental decrepitude of his old age, a pensioner on the slaveholding, slave-driving, seceding, Ku-Klux Democracy of the South, and absolutely *dependent on their votes*, for any faint hope that he may entertain of escaping being distanced at the polls.

Such a candidate, I submit, is eminently fitted for the confidence of that "partisan band" of old leaders in this State, who are just now beginning to discover that they do not any longer carry the destinies of the State in their pantaloons pockets.

If Democracy, on the one hand, or extreme Radicalism on the other, were in power in Mississippi to-day, the laws would henceforth be made and the government



henceforth administered in the interests of only one class of people to the injury and disregard of the interests and feelings of all others. As respects Democracy, they were tried, and the fact in their case proved by the legislation of that party in this State in the years 1865, 1866, and 1867. And did they give peace to the State, to the freedmen! to the mercantile, mechanical, or common laboring classes among our white population? Let the unequal laws they enacted and enforced, and the unequal taxes they assessed and collected, answer! Had their reign and the policy they inaugurated been allowed to prevail and become permanent, we should have had the peace which Tacitus describes:

"Ye make one vast solitude and call it peace."

They did not even recognize the existence of the colored race, except to discriminate against and persecute all who belonged to it; nor of the laboring and mercantile classes of the white race, except to compel them to pay, from the results of their industry, *ten times their proportion of the taxes*.

Extreme radicalism, on the other hand, would try to prostitute the government to subserve the exclusive interests of a very small and utterly worthless class, and that class composed of the most evil-disposed men in all the land. I allude to those homeless and unknown vagrants who have floated into the State on the waves of public calamity—men who are not wanted anywhere,

except, perhaps, in the prisons of distant lands, and who have come here to remain only for a season, and while they remain to rob the colored people or the white people, or the State or county treasuries, or anybody or anything else that they may find exposed. I know there are good citizens among the men who have settled here from other States, as good in all respects as any we have. But to them my remarks do not apply. And I know that there are some first-class rascals born in the State. But these have at least the merit of being *our own* rascals, and are not of the itinerant missionary breed, whose *animo furandi* is disguised under the flimsy pretense of "teaching the natives" a more exalted civilization.

But each of the factions I have named is only a different variety of radicalism, whatever may be the materials of which it is composed, and whatever may be the party in which it is to be found. The one is as much like the other, as small-pox is like the yellow-fever, or as lice are like the itch; and both equally dangerous to the public tranquillity. Either of them would, if put in power, plunge our people into civil war on the question of color in two years.

Nor would any compromise, or pretended compromise, *between them* improve the prospects of their purposes or their practices. Any pretense of such a compromise is necessarily a cheat, and an underhanded and unprincipled combination between jealous and opposing wrong-doers,



solely for the purpose of a *division of plunder*. Of this character was "the Dent movement in 1869," and of this character, though on a larger scale, and perhaps with a little more of personal dignity, is the Cincinnati coalition.

I would not deny or underrate any valid objection to General Grant. But I think it equally unwise to exaggerate facts.

It is fashionable with a certain portion of the Southern press to accuse the President of all manner of infirmities of head and heart, and of all manner of vices and crimes in life and character. I leave out of view the slight and unsatisfactory evidence on which these charges are made, and leave out of view all questions of decency, reflection, and personal propriety, in thus attempting to distract the minds of our ardent and impulsive people. And I put it on the grounds of *self-interest* alone. Why should we strive thus to make Grant, and this immense nation of his friends, our personal foes? Why not try to make them our personal and political friends? You may say that, *perhaps*, they will not much longer be in power. I reply, perhaps they will; and, at all events, unjust personal abuse of them in the South gives them increased political power and influence in the North.

General Grant represents specially the fighting element of the Northern people's devotion to the Union; and, more than that, he represents a war out of the Union

for the sake of peace in the Union. Bearing this in mind, it is expedient and proper that reconciled and returning disloyalists should yield to him whatever support the organized loyal public sentiment of the nation shall, by nominating him, deliberately require. We should do this, not upon his personal merits, whatever they may be, but upon his representative character, just as a particular piece on a chess-board is moved—not on account of its handsome shape or superior material, but because of the effect that the move shall have in the progress of the game; or, take another illustration. I look upon General *Robert E. Lee* as the most dignified character in history. And yet, were he now living, and were he the nominee of the Cincinnati Convention, would it be wise in the good men of the South to support and urge him for President?

But it is said that there is very bitter and wide-spread opposition to Grant, and that grave charges have been made, based upon admitted facts, and upon the profound convictions of wise and conscientious statesmen, of corruptions and abuses in his administration. Admit all this, and make no allowance for a morbid public sentiment, or for partisan exaggeration. And yet, the opposition is not stronger or more bitter, nor the conviction of guilt more profound as to Grant, than were the opposition and convictions of guilt against General Jackson. But the old hero of New Orleans outlived all this, and



his name passed into immortal renown. That Grant will do the same, is a proposition enthusiastically believed in by a very large majority of the people of the United States.

Besides, General Grant has been liberal and magnanimous to Southern soldiers, and to the Southern people in many instances, which it has not been to the interests of violent Democratic newspapers to make public. Did he not prevent the imprisonment of Lee and Johnston? Has he ever shown the malignity of Andy Johnson in making rash and foul charges against Southern men? Has he, like Johnson, signed any death-warrants at the biddings of military commissions? Let the capital of Mississippi speak! Has he not thrown the entire weight and influence of his administration in favor of universal amnesty to rebels? Read his messages, and then answer! Look, also, at his financial policy and his foreign policy. These are the pulses of the nation, that indicate with unerring certainty the condition of its vital power. But I leave these matters to be discussed after the Philadelphia Convention, in case Grant shall be nominated.

Suffice it to say that the motto, "Anything to beat Grant," does not meet my approbation. Let it rather be, "Anything to help Mississippi!" We are not in a condition to beat "anybody or anything." Let us get into the prevailing sentiment of this great nation, make ourselves a part of it, secure its confidence and friend-

ship, obtain a voice in its councils, and assist in guiding it. Then, and not till then, we may talk about "beating" somebody for President.

The Republican party *proper*, whether headed by Grant or by some other recognized leader, whatever may be its faults, is at least genuine and orthodox, loyal to its principles whatever they are, and scornful of all unprincipled combinations with its enemies for the sake of the spoils of office.

Such a party, though it may not command all my entire approval, commands my highest respect. I commenced with this party in the spring of 1867, very reluctantly, it is true; but not as a sham or a cheat toward colored or white. I was opposed with bitterness, and sometimes with persecution. I may have deserved something of this, but not all of it. Whatever may have been the other faults of the Southern whites, they were never false, and I have always believed that they will at last do me justice. But the colored people *en masse*, and a few honest white men, have stood by me, and I by them, through many a dark and weary day. We have promised each other, and promised the colored people, to stand by the Republican party, by its principles and its regular organization. I think Governor Alcorn and many other later members of the party, and thousands of other native sons of Mississippi, who are not yet



known as Republicans, will stand with us for Grant, or whoever else the party at Philadelphia shall nominate.

The Republican party is sufficiently comprehensive to include all men of *both* races and of all nationalities, and whatever else may be the case, you may depend on it that it is *strong enough to win*. Like Noah's ark, it can carry and save the seeds of empire, and the seeds of a new political creation. But, unlike that ancient water-craft, it intends that none shall be excluded or lost. No storm-driven man of any race, or bird of any hue, or beast of any tribe, if worth saving, shall come to its windows in vain. It is an ark of safety for the young white men of Mississippi, and they are invited to come into it—to come not as pensioners or dependents, but as counselors and leaders, and heirs of the glorious heritage of republican liberty. With us there are no privileged classes except such as merit makes. The days of carpet-baggery and scallawaggery are rapidly passing and the time rapidly coming when the State shall be ruled by CITIZENS, native and adopted.

Do the young white men desire a full share in the management of the public affairs of the State? Do they aspire to the high places in her government? Would they win honors for themselves, and bind imperishable laurels upon the brow of Mississippi? Let them shiver into a thousand atoms the worthless idols of the past; trample down the sanctified prejudices and the unprinci-

pled trickery of the Democracy and the assistant Democracy, North and South; send the old party leaders and their silly experiments for deceiving the colored people all to the rear, and then come with me to the main branch and trunk line of the Republican party. Come in "by the door," and do not climb over some other way. This route leads straight to the citadel of power without a change of cars! Get right aboard, and speed with us all to that fruitful mountain which is spanned from vale to vale by the fadeless rainbow of perpetual peace between the two great races which compose our vast population.

Excuse the great length at which I have complied with your request for a statement of my views of the situation, and believe me,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

J. S. MORRIS.

COL. W. E. GIBBS,

Columbus, Miss.

P. S. Since writing the above, I have seen Mr. Greeley's letter accepting the Cincinnati nomination. The abstract sentiments which it contains are, of course, patriotic and conciliatory. They affirm what nobody has ever denied, deny what nobody has ever affirmed, and thus flatter the fancies and soothe the combativeness of



all men with innocent and glittering platitudes. It would be strange, indeed, if a man of Mr. Greeley's long observation had failed, in three weeks, to get up a graceful letter of acceptance. *Dent's* letter, accepting the *bogus* nomination for governor of this State, was a good advertisement for that individual's "wants" at the next ensuing election. Ditto GREELEY.

J. S. M.