

**LETTERS OF THE HON. JOSEPH  
HOLT, THE HON. EDWARD  
EVERETT, AND COMMODORE  
CHARLES STEWART, ON THE  
PRESENT CRISIS**

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Letters of the Hon. Joseph Holt, the Hon. Edward Everett, and Commodore Charles Stewart, on the present crisis by Joseph Holt & Edward Everett & Charles Stewart

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COMMODORE CHARLES STEWART,  
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1861.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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MR. HOLT is already well known to the country as the Post-Master General, and subsequently, for a few weeks, the Secretary of War under President Buchanan. The ability and efficiency with which he administered these trusts, commanded the general approval of the country; while the personal and official corruption by which he was surrounded, brought into bolder relief his own spotless integrity. It was quite in keeping with the antecedents of such a man, that he should write the Letter here reprinted. He saw his native State dallying with the demon of secession—as Satan beguiled our first mother.

“Oft he bowed  
His turret-crest, and sleek enamelled neck,  
Fawning; and licked the ground whereon she trod.”

This was not a sight for a true patriot to see unmoved; and he addressed the following Letter to the “People of Kentucky.” The special design of the appeal, is to keep that State from sliding into the abyss before her. But in aiming at this object, he has discussed the whole subject of the pending contest with masterly ability. He traces the secession movement to its true sources; lays bare the sordid motives of the Confederate leaders; and

shows that the treason which is now making war against our just and beneficent Government, has been covertly plotting the overthrow of the Union for many years.

His views on these points are confirmed by the other Letters herewith published. MR. EVERETT states it, as of his personal knowledge, that "leading Southern politicians had for thirty years been resolved to break up the Union," whenever the sceptre departed from their hands. And the venerable COMMODORE STEWART traces the roots of this foul scheme back as far as 1812. These testimonies, in connection with the recent letter of Mr. Russell to the *London Times*, seem to justify the presumption, that the State of South Carolina was never loyal to the Union; that, however it may have been with the mass of her people, she had nursed *ab initio* a nest of traitors, who have persistently cherished the purpose to destroy the Government whenever they could no longer control it.

These developments are of great moment in their bearing upon the present conflict; and they will not be lost sight of in the future adjustment of this quarrel.

The three Letters contained in this pamphlet are of too much value to be consigned merely to the fugitive columns of a newspaper. The Publisher feels that he is doing the country a good service, by presenting them in a form suitable for preservation and reference. Without specifying other topics which are worthy of notice, he may be allowed to direct particular attention to the paragraph of Mr. EVERETT's admirable Letter (pp. 38, 39) on the plausible claim of the South, "simply to be let alone."

PHILADELPHIA, June 25, 1861.

## LETTER OF THE HON. J. HOLT.

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WASHINGTON, Friday, *May 31*, 1861.

J. F. SPEED, Esq.

*My Dear Sir*—The recent overwhelming vote in favour of the Union in Kentucky has afforded unspeakable gratification to all true men throughout the country. That vote indicates that the people of that gallant State have been neither seduced by the arts nor terrified by the menaces of the revolutionists in their midst, and that it is their fixed purpose to remain faithful to a Government which, for nearly seventy years, has remained faithful to them. Still it cannot be denied that there is in the bosom of that State a band of agitators, who, though few in number, are yet powerful from the public confidence they have enjoyed, and who have been, and doubtless will continue to be, unceasing in their endeavour to force Kentucky to unite her fortunes with those of the rebel Confederacy of the South. In view of this and of the well-known fact that several of the seceded States have by fraud and violence been driven to occupy their present false and fatal position, I cannot, even with the encouragement of her late vote before me, look upon the

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political future of our native State without a painful solicitude. Never have the safety and honour of her people required the exercise of so much vigilance and of so much courage on their part. If true to themselves, the Stars and Stripes, which, like angels' wings, have so long guarded their homes from every oppression, will still be theirs; but if, chasing the dreams of men's ambition, they shall prove false, the blackness of darkness can but faintly predict the gloom that awaits them. The Legislature, it seems, has determined by resolution that the State, pending the present, unhappy war, shall occupy neutral ground. *I must say, in all frankness, and without desiring to reflect upon the course or sentiments of any, that, in this struggle for the existence of our Government, I can neither practise nor profess nor feel neutrality. I would as soon think of being neutral in a contest between an officer of justice and an incendiary arrested in an attempt to fire the dwelling over my head; for the Government whose overthrow is sought, is for me the shelter not only of home, kindred and friends, but of every earthly blessing which I can hope to enjoy on this side of the grave.* If, however, from a natural horror of fratricidal strife, or from her intimate social and business relations with the South, Kentucky shall determine to maintain the neutral attitude assumed for her by her Legislature, her position will still be an honourable one, though falling far short of that full measure of loyalty which her history has so constantly illustrated. Her Executive, ignoring, as I am happy to believe, alike the popular and legislative sentiment of the State, has, by proclamation, forbidden the Government of the United States from marching troops across her territory. This is in no sense a neutral step,

but one of aggressive hostility. The troops of the Federal Government have as clear a constitutional right to pass over the soil of Kentucky as they have to march along the streets of Washington; and could this prohibition be effective, it would not only be a violation of the fundamental law, but would, in all its tendencies, be directly in advancement of the revolution, and might, in an emergency easily imagined, compromise the highest national interests. I was rejoiced that the Legislature so promptly refused to endorse this proclamation as expressive of the true policy of the State. But I turn away from even this to the ballot-box, and find an abounding consolation in the conviction it inspires, that the popular heart of Kentucky, in its devotion to the Union, is far in advance alike of legislative resolve and of Executive proclamation.

But as it is well understood that the late popular demonstration has rather scotched than killed rebellion in Kentucky, I propose inquiring, as briefly as practicable, whether, in the recent action or present declared policy of the Administration, or in the history of the pending revolution, or in the objects it seeks to accomplish, or in the results which must follow from it, if successful, there can be discovered any reasons why that State should sever the ties that unite her with a Confederacy in whose councils and upon whose battle-fields she has won so much fame, and under whose protection she has enjoyed so much prosperity.

For more than a month after the inauguration of President LINCOLN, the manifestations seemed unequivocal that his Administration would seek a peaceful solution of our unhappy political troubles, and would look to time and amendments to the Federal Constitution, adopted in

accordance with its provisions, to bring back the revolted States to their allegiance. So marked was the effect of these manifestations in tranquilizing the Border States and in reassuring their loyalty, that the conspirators who had set this revolution on foot took the alarm. *While affecting to despise these States as not sufficiently intensified in their devotion to African servitude, they knew they could never succeed in their treasonable enterprise without their support. Hence it was resolved to precipitate a collision of arms with the Federal authorities, in the hope that under the panic and exasperation incident to the commencement of a civil war, the Border States, following the natural bent of their sympathies, would array themselves against the Government.* Fort Sumter, occupied by a feeble garrison, and girdled by powerful if not impregnable batteries, afforded convenient means for accomplishing their purpose, and for testing also their favorite theory, that blood was needed to cement the new Confederacy. Its provisions were exhausted, and the request made by the President, in the interests of peace and humanity, for the privilege of replenishing its stores, had been refused. The Confederate authorities were aware—for so the gallant commander of the fort had declared to them—that in two days a capitulation from starvation must take place. A peaceful surrender, however, would not have subserved their aims. They sought the clash of arms and the effusion of blood as an instrumentality for impressing the Border States, and they sought the humiliation of the Government and the dishonour of its flag as a means of giving prestige to their own cause. The result is known. Without the slightest provocation, a heavy cannonade was opened upon the