

State of S.C.  
Exec. Dept  
Columbia 11 January 1865

General

I have received your letter. It tells me what I feared; yet could not bring myself directly to anticipate. It means I suppose the evacuation of Charleston the abandonment of its population; its loss forever to the State.

I say it, lost, forever; for it cannot be retaken. If the vitality of the Charleston could survive its surrender, the situation of Charleston is such that it can never again be ours. Once lost to the State, it is lost forever.

I might regret that as a loss to the Confederation: but when such a loss is to be suffered by this State, I must do more than regret it: if I can & as far as I can I must interfere. If it were necessary to part with a portion of its territorial possessions because of the fortunes of war, that would be under the best circumstances, matters of deep regret: so far as the inhabitants were concerned who were this [carried?] to a tyranny they had [?] it would be cause of the deepest pain.

But where the loss of such a portion of its territory & of its resources is inconceivable, the State has a right to ask what stern necessity compels it? What imposes on it this great sacrifice?

It is no question of strategy. No principle of war, short of a stern necessity is addressed to a State, when it parts with valuable territory, which loss it can never recover. That stern necessity is not here. If Charleston cannot be defended, what can be defended? To day there are no forces to defend it is to assert that there are no men in the field; or that other places are more important.

There are men in the field; men sufficient to defend & save it & with it to defend and save the Confederation.

If then there are men, & if they can act to defend Charleston, it must be because there are other places now of more consequence to the Confederation.

If there are such places let them be named. I know them not. I know not any place the defense of which is more important to the whole Confederation than Charleston.

I tell you with the fall of Charleston, the cause of the Confederation, now tottering, then falls. That surrender made, you cannot avert the consequences. It follows with inevitable certainty.

You know the paralyzed condition of the country. You know the feeling with which the defense of Charleston has been regarded. You know that it will be received in and out of the Confederation as the proof that the place which has been defended with the obstinately held, and which it will be believed would never be abandoned if it could have been kept; now in its fall must & does foreshadow the fate of the Confederation.

I tell you that belief will be realized. I tell you now that the retreat from Charleston will be the dead march to the Confederation. Your army will be a funeral procession.

If this determination to give up the city is yours (which I hope not & believe not) [because?] I beseech you to consider its consequences. If it comes from another & you are forced to obey, tell me who it is that thus [disperses?] of the people & property; the rights of the State.

In the name of the State & its executive I protest against this surrender of the city. I protest against the power, & by whosoever exercised, wherever it may be which thus sacrifices the State & the cause which the State supports.

If the loss of its seaboard cities was not in fact the loss of the cause, I would suffer in sorrow and in silence. But it is the loss of all for which we have contended. The question to the State is one of life. Of this there is no doubt. To the Confederation it is no less so.

If you will give back to the State even a portion of those who from afar are forced to contemplate the invasion of the State, that State can be saved. Shall the State be sacrificed when the men who could save her & who have been sent to the common cause, are kept idly contemplating, but [unreadable]. Remember this State has held back not a single man; it has given all without question. Shall none of them it has given to others, be given back to it for its own defense?

I cannot believe it. I will not give credit to the apprehension. But if it is to, then in the name of the State & of the Confederation & of the cause itself, I protest against the abandonment of the city of Charleston or an act which may be prevented & should be prevented by the succor which can be given to it, & which not prevented, but persisted in, commences the last act of that Tragedy in which the lives, fortunes, & liberties of this people will have been sacrificed.

Depend upon it, the order which evacuated Charleston destroys the last hope of our success. Whoever he may be, upon him will devolve now & in all time the responsibility for a measure more disastrous than has yet befallen us.

I am

Very respectfully

A.G. Magrath