

Tell me what you really think!

The correspondence of General Isaac Brock

Colonel Brock to Lieut.-Colonel J.W. Gordon:

QUEBEC, Sept. 6, 1807.

It is impossible to view the late hostile measures of the American government towards England, without considering a rupture between the two countries as probable to happen. I have in consequence been anxious that such precautionary measures might be taken as the case seemed to justify; but his honor the president has not judged it proper to adopt any other step, than merely to order one-fifth of the militia, which amounts to about 10,000 men, to hold itself in readiness to march on the shortest notice.

The men thus selected for service being scattered along an extensive line of four or five hundred miles, unarmed and totally unacquainted with every thing military, without officers capable of giving them instruction, considerable time would naturally be required before the necessary degree of order and discipline could be introduced among them. I therefore very much doubt whether, in the event of actual war, this force could assemble in time, and become useful.

Without considerable assistance from the militia, the few regulars which might be spared from this garrison could avail nothing against the force the Americans would suddenly introduce by various roads into this province.

The Canadians have unquestionably shewn a great willingness upon this occasion to be trained, and, I make not the least doubt, would oppose with vigour any invasion of the Americans--but how far the same sentiments would actuate them were a French force to join, I will not undertake to say; at any rate, I feel that every consideration of prudence and policy ought to determine me to keep in Quebec a sufficient force to secure its safety; the number of troops that could therefore be safely detached would be small, notwithstanding a great deal might be done, in conjunction with the militia, in a country intersected in every direction by rivers, deep ravines, and lined, at intervals on both sides the road, by thick woods.

From every information I can receive, the Americans are busily employed in drilling and forming their militia, and openly declare their intention of entering this province the instant war is determined upon; they will be encouraged to adopt this step from the very defenceless state of our frontiers; the means at my disposal are too limited to oppose them with effect in the open field, and I shall be constrained, unless his honor the president make exertions, which I do not think him at this moment disposed to do, to confine myself to the defence of Quebec.



Brigadier Brock to his sister-in-law, Mrs. W. Brock

QUEBEC, June 8, 1810.

It was my decided intention to ask for leave to go to England this fall, but I have now relinquished the thought. Several untoward circumstances combine to oppose my wishes. The spirit of insubordination lately manifested by the French Canadian population of this colony, naturally called for precautionary measures, and our worthy chief is induced, in consequence, to retain in this country those on whom he can best confide. I am highly flattered in being reckoned among the number, whatever inward disappointment I may feel. Some unpleasant events have likewise happened in the upper country, which have occasioned my receiving intimation to proceed thither, whether as a permanent station, or merely as a temporary visit, Sir James Craig has not determined. Should, however, a senior brigadier to myself come out in the course of the summer, I shall certainly be fixed in the upper province, and there is every probability of such an addition very soon. Since all my efforts to get more actively employed have failed; since fate decrees that the best portion of my life is to be wasted in inaction in the Canadas, I am rather pleased with the prospect of removing upwards.

There is a lady living at Barnet for whom I feel much interested. If you should by chance drive that way, and do not object to form a new acquaintance, I wish you to call upon her. She is the wife of Captain Manners, of the 49th, and the daughter of the celebrated Dr. Rush, of Philadelphia. She has a most amiable disposition and genteel manners. Her sister, Mrs. Ross Cuthbert, a charming little creature, makes her husband--my most intimate friend, and with whom I pass a great part of my leisure hours--a most happy man.

Brigadier Brock to his brother Irving

QUEBEC, July 9, 1810.

I have a thousand thanks to offer you for the very great attention you have shewn in executing my commissions: the different articles arrived in the very best order, with the exception of the cocked hat, which has not been received—a most distressing circumstance, as, from the enormity of my head, I find the utmost difficulty in getting a substitute in this country.

I proposed writing to you early to-morrow, but Sir James having this instant intimated his intention of sending me upwards immediately, I avail myself of an hour's leisure to do that hastily which I would gladly have done quietly, and, consequently, more fully. If I am to remain in this country, I care little where I am placed; but going up, as I do now, without knowing whether I am to stay or return, is particularly awkward, and interferes materially in all my future arrangements: perhaps I shall be able to get the point settled before I commence my journey.

Every thing here remains in a state of perfect quietness. It is but too evident that the Canadians generally are becoming daily more anxious to get rid of the English. This they cannot effect unless a French force come to their aid, and I do not think that Bonaparte would risk the loss of a fleet and army for the chance of getting possession of the country. What infatuation! No people had ever more cause to rejoice at their fate; but they are not singular, as all mankind seems prone to change, however disadvantageous or productive of confusion.

Savery forwarded your pamphlet to me. You have taken a very proper view of the political dissensions which at this moment disgrace England. Those to whom I have allowed a perusal, and who are infinitely better judges than I can pretend to be, speak of the purity of the language in terms of high approbation. You have happily suited the style to the matter. . . .

I do not see the smallest prospect of my getting away from here, as the disposition manifested by the Canadians will occasion a large military force to be kept in the country, and it will serve as a plea to retain all at their posts. I wish that I could boast of a little more patience than I feel I now possess.

Major-General Brock to Sir George Prevost.

YORK, February-- , 1812.

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I had every reason to expect the almost unanimous support of the two houses of the legislature to every measure the government thought it necessary to recommend; but after a short trial, I found myself egregiously mistaken in my calculations.

The many doubtful characters in the militia made me anxious to introduce the oath of abjuration into the bill: there were twenty members in the house, when this highly important measure was lost by the casting voice of the chairman.

The great influence which the numerous settlers from the United States possess over the decisions of the lower house is truly alarming, and ought immediately, by every practical means, to be diminished. To give encouragement to real subjects to settle in this province, can alone remove the evil. The consideration of the fees should not stand in the way of such a politic arrangement; and should your excellency ultimately determine to promise some of the waste lands of the crown to such Scotch emigrants as enlist in the Glengary Fencibles, I have no hesitation in recommending, in the strongest manner, the raising of a Canadian corps upon similar offers, to be hereafter disbanded and distributed among their countrymen in the vicinity of Amherstburg. Colonel M'Donnell being in full possession of my sentiments on this subject, I beg leave to refer your excellency to him for further information.

The bill for the suspension of the habeas corpus, I regret to say, was likewise lost by a very trifling majority. A strong sentiment now prevails that war is not likely to occur with the United States, which, I believe, tended to influence the votes of the members; I mean of such who, though honest, are by their ignorance easily betrayed into error.

The low ebb of their finances appears to stagger the most desperate democrats in the States, and may possibly delay the commencement of direct hostilities; but should France and England continue the contest much longer, it appears to me absolutely impossible for the United States to avoid making their election; and the unfriendly disposition they have for some years past evinced towards England, leaves little doubt as to their choice. Your excellency, I am sensible, will excuse the freedom with which I deliver my sentiments.



Every day hostilities are retarded, the greater the difficulties we shall have to encounter. The Americans are at this moment busily employed in raising six companies of Rangers, for the express purpose of overawing the Indians; and are besides collecting a regular force at Vincennes, probably with a view of reinforcing Detroit. Indeed, report states the arrival of a large force at Fort Wayne, intended for the former garrison. Their intrigues among the different tribes are carried on openly and with the utmost activity, and as no expense is spared, it may reasonably be supposed that they do not fail of success. Divisions are thus uninterruptedly sowed among our Indian friends, and the minds of many altogether estranged from our interests. Such must inevitably be the consequence of our present inert and neutral proceedings in regard to them. It ill becomes me to determine how long true policy requires that the restrictions now imposed upon the Indian department ought to continue; but this I will venture to assert, that each day the officers are restrained from interfering in the concerns of the Indians, each time they advise peace and withhold the accustomed supply of ammunition, their influence will diminish, till at length they lose it altogether . . .

Poster distributed by Americans throughout Upper Canada prior to the invasion:

A PROCLAMATION

Inhabitants of Canada!--After thirty years of peace and prosperity, the United States have been driven to arms. The injuries and aggressions, the insults and indignities of Great Britain, have once more left them no alternative but manly resistance or unconditional submission.

The army under my command has invaded your country, and the standard of union now waves over the territory of Canada. To the peaceable, unoffending inhabitant, it brings neither danger nor difficulty. I come to find enemies, not to make them. I come to protect, not to injure you.

Separated by an immense ocean, and an extensive wilderness from Great Britain, you have no participation in her councils, no interest in her conduct. You have felt her tyranny, you have seen her injustice--but I do not ask you to avenge the one or redress the other. The United States are sufficiently powerful to afford you every security, consistent with their rights and your expectations. I tender you the invaluable blessings of civil, political, and religious liberty, and their necessary result, individual and general prosperity--that liberty which gave decision to our councils and energy to our conduct in our struggle for independence, and which conducted us safely and triumphantly through the stormy period of the revolution--that liberty which has raised us to an elevated rank among the nations of the world, and which has afforded us a greater measure of peace and security, of wealth and improvement, than ever yet fell to the lot of any people.

In the name of my country, and by the authority of my government, I promise protection to your persons, property and rights. Remain at your homes--pursue your peaceful and customary avocations--raise not your hands against your brethren. Many of your fathers fought for the freedom and independence we now enjoy. Being children, therefore, of the same family with us, and heirs to the same heritage, the arrival of an army of friends must be hailed by you with a cordial welcome. You will be emancipated from tyranny and oppression, and restored to the dignified station of freemen.

Had I any doubt of eventual success, I might ask your assistance; but I do not. I come prepared for every contingency. I have a force which will look down all opposition, and that force is but the vanguard of a much greater. If, contrary to your own interests and the just expectation of my country, you should take part in the approaching contest, you will be considered and treated as enemies, and the horrors and calamities of war will stalk before you. If the barbarous and savage policy of Great Britain be pursued, and the savages be let loose to murder our citizens, and butcher our women and children, this war will be a war of extermination. The first stroke of the tomahawk, the first attempt with the scalping knife, will be the signal of one indiscriminate scene of desolation. No white man, found fighting by the side of an Indian, will be taken prisoner--instant destruction will be his lot. If the dictates of reason, duty, justice, and humanity, cannot prevent the employment of a force which respects no rights and knows no wrong, it will be prevented by a severe and relentless system of retaliation.

I doubt not your courage and firmness--I will not doubt your attachment to liberty. If you tender your services voluntarily, they will be accepted readily. The United States offer you peace, liberty, and security. Your choice lies between these and war, slavery and destruction. Choose, then, but choose wisely; and may He who knows the justice of our cause, and who holds in his hand the fate of nations, guide you to a result the most compatible with your rights and interests, your peace and prosperity.

W. HULL.

By the General, A.F. HULL.

Capt. 13th Regt. U.S. Infantry, and

Aide-de-Camp.

Head Quarters,

Sandwich, July 12, 1812.