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Vermont's Flirtation with Canada

Ethan Allen to Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester Quebec, 16 July 1788

My Lord.

I have the honor of addressing your Lordship, on the subject of American politics, as it may respect the reciprocal interest of Great Britain, and the little rising State of Vermont. Your Lordship is undoubtedly sensible of the Jealousy of the United States over Vermont, since it is not and will not be confederated with them. They proceed so far as to threaten its subjugation, as soon as they have established their new proposed constitution and made their government sufficiently energetic. Their arguments for so doing, (in case of their ability,) appear to be too well founded to be disputed in a political view. For, say they, Vermont is locally situated to the waters of lake Champlain which communicate with those of St. Laurence, and lies contiguous to the province of Quebec, where they must be dependent for trade, business, and intercourse, which naturally incline them to the British interest. They likewise frequently mention, that in the latter part of the late war there was no fighting between the Kings Troops and those of Vermont. Besides these arguments of the United States, which are truly natural, the people of Vermont, further argue, that a confederation with those States, would not only expose them to the displeasure of Great Britain and ruin their Commerce, but involve them in debt, if not in Insolvency, and in the broils of those States relative to their federal government, concerning which they are probably as much divided and subdivided, as can well be conceived. The vast extent of this territory is the source of much of their confusion. They are spread over different climates, have different religions, prejudices, and interests. Furthermore, the licentious notions of liberty, taught and imbibed in the course of the late revolution, operates strenuously against their uniting in any confederate government. Nevertheless there are considerations in favour of their new proposed constitution's taking place, for some government or other will be found to be necessary, and after much strife and confusion, possibly with amendments their foederal system may be adopted. Should this be the final event, yet there would be a large minority opposed to it, including many leading and influential men in the several States, as well whigs as tories, which cannot fail to render their foederal government weak, if not able to prevent its taking place, and consequently make it difficult, precarious, and probably impossible, for the United States to subjugate Vermont, which will undoubtedly be attempted by them, at such time as they may conclude that is within the limit of their power, without indangering their premised foederal government. Vermont could on an emmergency bring fifteen thousand able effective men into the field, who in point of prowess, would probably more than equal a like number of the troops of the United States, especially in defending themselves against the usurpation of those

States: on their own ground, where they are acquainted with every natural advantage. Besides, the people of Vermont having originated from the contiguous united States, and part of Family, friends, relations, and connections both from consanguinity and interest residing partly in both territories, would render it quite imposible, to bring the troops of these States into Vermont. The probability is, that they would join together with the antifoederalists throughout the States, and crush the premised foederal government. Vermont small as at first she may appear to be, has a heavy influence in the American politicks, and may turn the scale, and is well worth the attention of Great Britain. For besides her own natural population she has a constant immigration from the united States, and whether whig or tory it makes no odds, as they come to Vermont to rid themselves of exorbitant taxation, they very cordially unite with the policy of the State, in rejecting every Idea of a confederation with the united States, since property in the lue of liberty is their main object. Should an appeal to arms be the Dernier [i.e., Last], resort, it would be in the power of the united States to prevent Vermont from obtaining military Stores from their territory, in which case this province would be our only resourse, and it is expected that the British government, on an emmergency, would not prohibit the people of Vermont, from procuring of the merchants in this province, any stores which the exegancy of these affairs may require. Finally should Vermont obtain favour of the British government, it would be a delicate part of the policy, to point out the mode of it. Probably General Haldimand's policy would still be the best. Matters were so contrived with the General, and certain men of influence in Vermont that hostilities ceased between Great Britain and Vermont the last three years of the late war, which answered all the purposes of an allyance of nutralty, and at the same time prevented the United States from taking any advantage of it. A formal publick allyance between them, or that at present Vermont should become a british province, might occasion a war between France and the United States on the one part, and Great Britain including Vermont on the other, when on the Haldermand policy, it may be prevented, and a friendly intercourse and commerce without any cost of protection to the Crown, be continued, and at any future day, such alteration of the policy be made, as to suite futer emergencies. In the time of General Haldimand's command, could Great Britain have afforded Vermont protection, they would readily have yielded up their independency, and have become a province of Great Britain.

And should the United States attempt a conquest of them, they would, I presume, do the same, should the British policy harmonize with it. For the leading men in Vermont are not sentimentally attached to a republican form of government, yet from political principles are determined to maintain their present mode of government, till they can have a better, and hope that they will be able to do it, as long as the united States will be able to maintain their, or till they can on principles of mutual Interest and advantage, return to the British government without war or annoyance from the united States. These appear to me to be the outlines of the policy, which if adopted, would be for the common interest of great Britain, and the people of Vermont, which is humbly submitted to your Lordships Consideration.

I should not have had the assurance to have wrote to one of the first Generals, and Statesmen of Europe on these important matters, had not a clear sense of the danger with which Vermont is threatened, and in which my interest, and preservation, and that of my friends is involved, urged me to do it.

I am my Lord with the greatest respect and am Your Lordship devoted, most Obedient
Ser[van]t

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