

Abbot Archives - Journal

April 19th

MacElrath came in. Poor fellow he told us he is going tomorrow at 8. He got leave of absence from the Pres. today and is off for the South. He feels sadly about going, and it was as much as he could do to keep from bursting into tears several times. We talked about the war, not in argument, but as sheer regret led us to speak, and sad enough we felt! Mac and I have been good friends, many a pleasant evening I have passed with him, many a game of chess have I played with him, and many a time I have thought I liked him as well as any in the class.

Well, we have parted never to meet again, or perhaps to meet in battle. Who can tell where this frightful quarrel will lead us? I may be drafted, and he is sure to join the Confederate Army, and who can say we may not meet hereafter as mortal foes who in the old times held each other so fondly? Poor fellow, he wished to see Edwinⁱ ever so much, for he fitted Mac for college, and always treated him right kindly, and Mac says he will be round to see Edwin in the morning before prayers. He nearly cried when he said he could never be back here again, "for if you whip us," said he, "as you will, for you are the biggest, no Southern man will ever plant his foot on Northern soil." He tried hard to conceal his feelings but he could not, and as he stood in the doorway, grasping my hand so cordially and strongly his voice shook, and I saw the tears falling down his cheeks when he said "write to me, old fellow, and I will answer you, honour bright, secession or no secession, and there's my hand upon it" giving me an honest grip, and then he walked sadly away in the darkness, and I shall see him no more this side of the grave! My God! What a frightful thing this horrible war is! Oh we do not see it when the blood within us boils high, and blind sectional enthusiasm makes fratricides of us all in heart! But sometimes there must be pauses in the tragedy between the acts, and then its appalling bitterness sweeps down and crushes us. Oh how America will weep in tears of bitter agony, and oceans of blood the blindness that has fallen upon us like a curse from the Almighty! It will be a war of opinion and principle, for both sides honestly believe they are doing God good service. Who shall tell the end? What an end to the gorgeous drama of the American Republic, civil war, anarchy, and looming darkly in the dim and gloomy future, military despotism! 86 years ago today was

fought the first good fight of the Revolution, and this day has seen the opening act of the tragedy in the streets of Baltimore the first blood has been drawn in a land conflict. The union is crumbling ere yet is has survived the paltry century its opponents ever granted for its life! The ways of the God of hosts are inscrutable, and in his hand are the destinies of this ruined land.

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Cambridge, April 19th, 1861

Dear Mother,

The clock has just struck 12 and so I cannot stop to write a very long letter, but Ed is going home tomorrow and I cannot resist the opportunity of sending a line.

MacElrath, a Southerner, has just left the room. He came to bid me goodbye for he is going to the South and doubtless he will join the Confederate army. He is as good a fellow as ever breathed and he cried like a baby when he bade me goodbye. He and I have been right good friends and I cannot well tell what a pang I felt to see him walk off into the darkness and hear him sob as he walked; I will never see him again this side of the grave. He told me, poor fellow, "Abbot, you will thrash us to pieces, you have all the power, but God knows it shall not be without a struggle! No one loved the union more than I and you cannot know what it will cost me to raise my arm against the stars and stripes, but God has willed it and Gods will be done! Write to me before the mails are closed and I will write back secession or no secession!" Tis a horrible war that is upon us! And everyone seems so blind. The streets are full of enthusiastic crowds and they cheer as though God had given us a blessing.

I cannot think of anything but this terrible business, everything is in a turmoil of excitement and men only breathe when they are listening to the news.

Of course you know about the first blood being spilt at Baltimore. The border states are out in a body and we are on the verge of the bloodiest war of modern times. 86 years ago today was fought the first battle of the revolution and today has seen the downfall of everything that has been reared on the glory of the past. Even its enemies prophesied for the Union an existence of a century and it has failed of that! Glorious end of the "great republic" is it not?

Goodbye. I have been sick for three days, with a sick headache, but am well now and I shall go into recitation tomorrow.

Love to all, yr. loving son Stanley.

Beverly, April 21, 1861

Dear Stanley,

I thank you for your letter, it went to your Mother's heart, and I should have felt just as you did at your young friend's departure. God knows I never before had the kind of heartache I have had today, though I did think I had tried several varieties. I know not but last Sunday Henryⁱⁱ wrote his last letter to me from his Washington home. It was a sad one truly, but today he may be fighting for his life (*the first Bull Run battle), if one can credit telegraphic signs. At any rate they seem to be near a struggle there, and it is all the more sad because too many on both sides feel like poor McElrath....

Mother

ⁱ Edwin Hale Abbot was a brother of Stanley. He was a tutor at Harvard at this time and probably tutored McElrath.

ⁱⁱ Henry Larcom Abbot was Stanley's brother. Her graduated from West Point and was in the Regular Army stationed in Washington.

From Quincy S. Abbot, the author of the book "From Schoolboy to Soldier: The Correspondence and Journals of Edward Stanley Abbot: 1853-1863" which contains extracts from Stanley's letters and Journal about his parting from John Edgar MacElrath.

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