

A LETTER ON NEUTRALITY

Hugh L. Oakley, Ed. D.

(Editor's note: This letter, reproduced here both in facsimile and transcription, was graciously loaned by Dr. and Mrs. Hugh Oakley for publication in this *Journal*. It had never before been made public. In his letter of transmittal, Dr. Oakley states:)

Mr. Downing was a member of the Kentucky State Legislature from Barren County, Kentucky. Mr. G. A. M. Ellis was the great-grandfather of my wife (formerly Josephine Ellis of Bowling Green). Mr. G. A. M. Ellis lived near the Tracy Postoffice, Barren County, Kentucky.

You will note that Mr. Downing's letter dwelt largely with the question of Kentucky's position in the Civil War and the pressure on the Kentucky State Legislature regarding this question at that time. It is interesting to note that Mr. Downing felt that Kentucky should maintain a position of neutrality. He also felt that the major issue of the Civil War really was not a question of slavery, but rather a question of government vs. no government.

Frankfort Ky May 16th 1861.

Mr Geo. Ellis

Dear brother I now take my pen to redeem my promise to you. I ought to make some apology for not writing to you last week. I was pressed with other matters that I forgot it till Friday then I knew that you would not get it till next Saturday & would wait till this week. I am in verry good health & hope these lines will find you all well. I have no verry strange news to write. The excitement upon Union & secession still seems to rage with unabated fury there are a great many outsiders here on both sides. Several of the members of the Tennessee legislature are here helping the secession members of this Legislature arrange their secession plans I can see no other business they can have as they are all rabid secessionists. The union feeling in this section of the state seems to be gaining & the people seem to be determined that they will remain in the Union & that the war is not on the slavery question at all but that it is Government or no Government. The secessionists seems to be bent on carrying out their secession purposes. I thought at the beginning of the session that they would not attempt the passage of a law calling for a convention, but it was announced in the house yesterday that they would offer such a measure. I fear that if they do & provide for the submitting it to a vote of the (state — not completely erased) people it will pass as some of the union members have committed themselves to go for such a proposition but if they do we have to double our diligence and beat them at the polls. All sorts of measures I believe would be resorted to if this thing was brought before the people to call a convention which would be certain to declare Ky out of the Union, which I believe would be folly in Ky now if it ever was proper for to do such a thing, it certainly is not the time now. It would bring the war immediately into our Territory which would ruin our people. The position for Ky is to remain neutral & not take sides with either North or South the only objection urged against this is that we can not maintain that position it is understood here that if the position of neutrality is assumed & carried out in good faith that it will be respected by the Federal Government and our sister states on our Northern border. The great question is the arming the state. The secessionists want to appropriate six million of dollars to arm & equip the state & to call ten thousand troops into action service, the Union party are for one million they think it a plenty to arm the state sufficiently to maintain her position of armed neutrality. I think it likely we will adjourn next monday I am anxious to get home give my respects to your father & mother I am as ever yours affectionately.

To Geo. Ellis

D. E. Downing

Frankfort Ky. May 16th 1861,

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