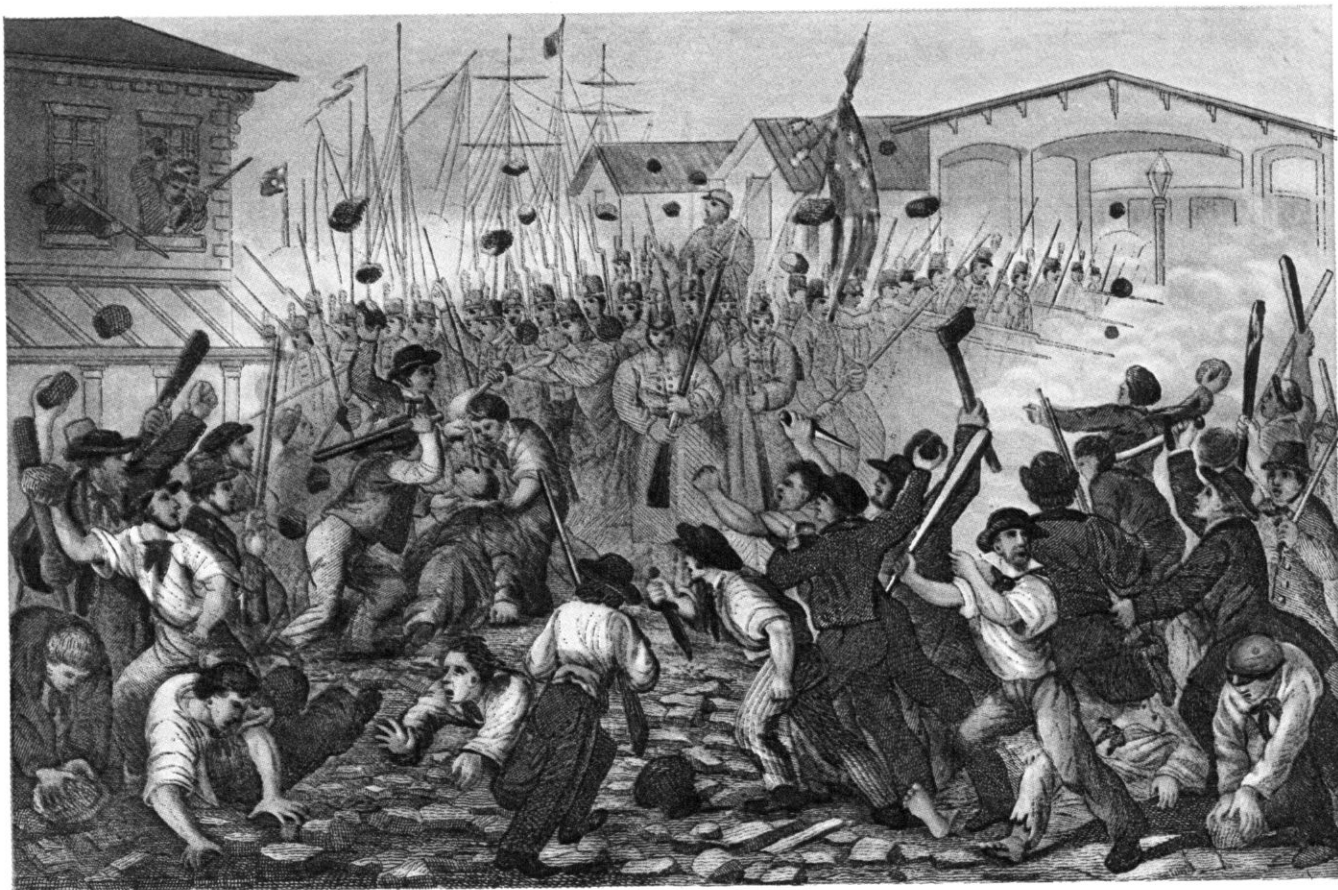


A century ago this month began the war that set

BROTHER *AGAINST*



ATTACK ON THE MASSACHUSETTS 6th AT BALTIMORE
APRIL 19th 1861.

Sometimes the weariest old clichés turn out to be true. The Civil War was, really, a war of brother against brother. Now and again the brothers come under the magnifying glass and can be seen, hot and bitter against one another.

The Civil War began in mid-April, 1861, with the bombardment of Fort Sumter. President Lincoln called for troops. Among the contingents that headed for Washington was the 6th Massachusetts, which marched through Baltimore on April 19, got into a fight with a street crowd, and reached the capital only after a melee in which both soldiers and civilians were killed.

The riot infuriated many people, among them the Massachusetts-born Pratt brothers. John C. Pratt lived

in Boston; his brother, Jabez D. Pratt, lived in Baltimore. Both were sober businessmen, in their forties, and they appraised this fight from opposite angles. When news of it reached Boston, John telegraphed to Jabez, offering him a haven in the Bay State. Jabez replied in anger, blaming all of the trouble on Northern hotheads. Letter followed letter, until at last the brothers were bitter foes, showing—in the words they put on paper—just why the “war between brothers” became a byword. Their letters, furnished us by Mrs. Elizabeth Pratt Holthusen of New York, great-granddaughter of John C. Pratt, are reprinted here as a moving example of the way the war turned good brothers into enraged enemies.—BRUCE CATTON

BROTHER

These unpublished letters show how one family was bitterly split

Baltimore, April 20, 1861

My dear Brother:

I have received your dispatch, and while I thank you for your kindness in the offer, we, both Lucy and myself, are not disposed to run,—much less into the arms of infernal abolitionism. We know there is danger. We have expected for thirty-six hours war to the knife. Possibly all may be slaughtered; but by the God in heaven, we are determined to die in the work, and not a man or woman have I seen or heard of but are so determined.

Let any more Northern troops attempt passage of this city and not one will live to tell the story. It is a yawning gulf as long as a man is left to do the death.

Thirty-six hours ago a majority of our people were for peaceable separation, and I may say for peace at all hazards, but now the man does not exist in these parts who is not for the defense of our city against the inroads or passage of troops from the North. We are not to be subjugated by Lincoln and his hordes.

All this has been brought about by the wicked refusal of Lincoln to hear and be advised by Gen. Scott not to send armaments to the South. Gen. Scott begged Lincoln not to do it but he replied, "What in hell will become of the Republican party."¹

This is the fact and Scott repeated it to Col. Huger of this city who, notwithstanding his being a South Carolina man, has held to the Government till he heard this from Scott and then resigned his commission.

I have just got arms and Joseph and myself intend to do what we can, be it ever so little. If he would not fight I would disown him. But enough.

Your brother
J. D. P.

Boston, Wednesday, April 24, 1861

My dear Brother:

I have just received your letter of the 20th in reply to my dispatch, and I need hardly say that I am pained at its contents. The manner in which you treat my invitation that you would send your wife and little ones to my care where they would be out of danger is cruel and unkind, and I am happy to know several persons who have kindred in your city, and be-

tween whom the kindest personal relations are kept up and who have received no such response to fraternal offers of protection. The time will come, aye it will sooner than you believe, when you will be proud to proclaim yourself a "son of Massachusetts."

What would you have us do? Would you have us surrender the National Capitol into the hands of that band of mercenary thieves and traitors who rule the "Confederated States"? men who have stolen the public property? who have violated their oaths? Shall we not defend the Capitol? Did not Gov. Hicks say in his proclamation on Friday last that he would furnish troops to do that? And was it not this simple mission and nothing more that our troops were engaged in?

You speak of the South being subjugated by "Lincoln and his hordes." In the first place there is no attempt to subjugate the South, but simply to maintain the Government and that not by "Lincoln and his hordes." No, no. As I told you in my last, the commander of the Massachusetts forces was a delegate to the Charleston convention. Caleb Cushing today offers his services to the Government. Franklin Pierce and every Democrat in the North is willing to bear arms in this contest.²

If Baltimore is a "yawning gulf" to bury Northern troops in, the same gulf will bury the last vestige of your beautiful city, for though it cost a hundred thousand lives and "not one stone shall remain upon another" in your city, before this contest ends a *full, safe and unobstructed* passage will be opened for our troops to the Capitol.

We do not undervalue Southern prowess; neither can you sneer at Northern courage without proclaiming yourself to be possessed of "Coward's Blood," and let me assure you that you shall have no reason to be

¹ Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, top officer in the Army, never warned Lincoln "not to send armaments to the South;" and Jabez Pratt's anecdote is clearly apocryphal. The "Col. Huger" referred to in the following paragraph may have been Major Benjamin Huger, a Regular Army officer who resigned in April, 1861, and became a brigadier general in the Confederate service.

² Caleb Cushing was a prominent Boston Democrat who, in the 1860 Democratic convention at Charleston, had stood firmly with the proslavery southern delegates who opposed the nomination of Stephen A. Douglas.

ashamed of Massachusetts troops; as I said at the beginning, you will be proud to say, "I was born in Boston."

J. C. P.

Boston, 27th April, 1861

My dear Brother:

Yours of the 24th with the extract from the Sun is received.

I have read the account of your interview with the President and the result of your mission.³

I have no doubt that "Old Abe," as he is familiarly called, is a man of rough exterior, but he is an honest man, and that is better than to have the government in the hands of *polished refined* knaves such as had possession under the last administration, but if he had possessed all the polish and refinement of a "Chesterfield" and had the most fastidious ideas of the dignity of his position, it must have entirely "broken down" before the spectacle of six full-grown boys on such a ridiculous mission.

We read of "the seven wise men of Gotham who went to sea in a bowl." We shall now have the song of the six wise men of Baltimore who went all the way to Washington to ask the President to make an infernal fool of himself, and if his boorishness was equal to your consummate folly and impudence, he would deserve a place in Barnum's museum.

What an astonishing piece of information it must have been to the President to be told by Dr. Fuller and then to be endorsed by yourself that peace would at once be restored if he would recognize the Independence of the Confederate States, give them up all the property they had stolen, and evacuate Washington.

I wonder he had not called his Cabinet together to consult upon the proposition, seize upon it before it "grew cold." I wonder that instead of smiling with ill-concealed contempt he had not grasped your hands and said, "Gentlemen, you have saved the country," and you should each of you have a monument of brass erected to your memory, that being the only material to perpetuate this great event.

Pardon me, my dear brother, if I treat this matter with levity, but I am surprised that you should be a party to this consummate folly.

You may perhaps like to know that Gen. Wigfall has sent his family to Brookline into the arms of "infernal abolitionism."⁴

We are rejoiced to hear as we do this morning that there is a reaction in sentiment in Baltimore and that there is a prospect that our troops will be allowed to pass without a fight. I hope so, for it would be a terrible alternative to be obliged to apply the torch to your city and widen the streets with artillery, for there

is no question that if Maryland is obstinate in this matter, she will have to be subjugated. Her secession will amount to nothing; she will not be permitted to go; we like your people too well to part company so easy.

The North is just waking up like the "lion from his lair" as there is a force coming down through the South that will crush out, annihilate, and *sweep away* all before it.

Let the South look out for its cherished institution, let this war continue a few months, and the whirlwind now gathering will sweep within its vortex the South and slavery, and all will perish together. I hope not, but as I have before told you, there is danger.

Love to all.

Yours affectionately
John C. Pratt

Baltimore, April 27, 1861

My dear Brother:

I have just received yours of the 24th.

I wish to say that I fully appreciated your offer of protection made in the kindest manner and prompted by the kindest personal feeling, and this I said in my former letter. For this I thank you and I know that *you* could harbor no other feelings towards me.

I wish also to say that under similar circumstances I would have done the same for you, and this you well know.

That letter was written under the most intense excitement in this city, and the most of it, so far as it affected me and my friends and the business community, was caused by the deliberate murder (outside of the city after the cars had left for Washington) of my dear friend, Robt. W. Davis, a merchant and one of nature's noblemen. I saw and conversed with him at his store and in the best of humor and spirits. We were starting together to go and see the soldiers pass, without the least idea of any obstruction being offered. I had to go to the office first and we parted, or I should have been with him. He was standing quietly

³ The reference is to a delegation of Y.M.C.A. leaders from Baltimore, including Jabez Pratt, which called on President Lincoln on April 22 to urge that no more troops be sent through Baltimore; the spokesman for the group, the Reverend Dr. R. Fuller, advised Lincoln to preserve peace by recognizing Confederate independence. Lincoln told the delegates that he had to have troops to defend Washington and that the troops had to cross Maryland to reach Washington, and he added: "Go home and tell your people that if they will not attack us, we will not attack them; but if they do attack us we will return it, and that severely."

⁴ John Pratt may be referring to ex-Senator Louis T. Wigfall of Texas, a leader in the secessionist movement, who later became a Confederate general. In his statement that Wigfall had sent his family to Brookline, Massachusetts, Pratt apparently was passing on a groundless rumor.

laughing and talking with two of his and my friends, totally ignorant of any riot or difficulties in the city, and not in any crowd for they had gone away from the city crowd, when a soldier from the platform of the car in very slow motion deliberately aimed and shot him down.⁵

Then it was that the merchants and all the best citizens (not the rowdies) armed themselves to prevent more troops passing via our city, and the tide of popular feeling was aroused and a united determination of resistance went forth.

The city is calm and quiet and order is restored. All the disorder we now have is from the old clubs of "Tigers, Roughs, and Plugs," who are to a man "Black Republicans," and the only ones that we have in Baltimore.

I send you a slip from the "Sun paper," which by the way is a strong Southern paper, which I want you to read.⁶ You must permit me to add that while in your house as a guest last summer when the *proprieties of hospitality* should have restrained your family even if I had not requested it, I was compelled to listen to sermons on "John Brown raids" which I never can forget, and that is what I called *infernal* abolitionism.

For myself I can hold no other than brotherly affection though we may differ and be separated.

As for being proud of Massachusetts, I long ago lost all such feelings, and if my relations could be moved from the scene I would like nothing better than to see Massachusetts and South Carolina swallow each other up, and I believe it would be a good thing for the world if it could be accomplished.

I understand your eulogies on Massachusetts and do not complain of them, but I do not unite in them. I do not wish to argue the points with you.

We do not want war, much less a war of sections, when neither side can conquer, and when if they could it would be the worst thing which could be done.

We say nothing against the courage of Northern men although it is a notorious fact that the citizens killed were shot by the soldiers while on a run and by turning around and firing to the rear. There are brave men on all sides and it is useless to test the bravery of either.

Now let me say in conclusion that I reciprocate your brotherly feeling towards me, and, if as you intimated in your last letter that if you were called upon you were ready to march, I hope I may not be compelled to meet you in hostility. I would much prefer to meet you as a brother. I don't think you would shoot at the next man to me, and I assure you that such would be my feelings. Of course I mean in my attempt to subjugate the South by the North.

As to defending the Capitol, Lincoln could have got enough men in Washington to have done that, and Virginia would have done it by herself had not the declaration of war been pronounced by him, and this is the same that I told Mr. Lincoln last Monday. But the object is not merely to defend the Capitol.

But enough.

Yours affectionately
J. D. P.

Baltimore, April 29th, 1861

My dear Brother:

I wrote you on Saturday and to relieve anxiety I write again today.

I see the Northern papers filled with inflammable matter and dispatches as to Baltimore which are false. There is no city more peaceable and quiet and not the first particle of "reign of terror." We have in our city Black Republicans and Union men, the latter in large numbers, and who are not fearful in expressing their sentiments, and the B.R. are as safe as in Boston.

There is no muzzling, as in the North. The excitement of our citizens caused by the shooting of our friends has entirely abated. The mob of Friday is deprecated now that reason has its sway. I think the same would have happened in New York or Boston if places and circumstances had been changed to those cities.

Maryland is not going to be hasty and the feeling which before the trouble was prevalent is again shown, that of a peaceable solution of the dispute between North and South.

The whole irritation has been caused by the foolish acts of the administration in declaring war and making enemies of those who were for peace and union for and with the Border States.

We hope for peace and will do all we can for peace.

Yours affectionately
J. D. Pratt

Accept my kind regards and best wishes for yourself

CONTINUED ON PAGE 89

⁵ Robert Davis had no part in the Baltimore riot; he seems to have been one of a group of bystanders that set up a cheer for Jefferson Davis as the train bearing the 6th Massachusetts left Baltimore for Washington. His death was a profound shock to the city and undoubtedly made many of its Unionists feel that the Massachusetts soldiers were responsible for the April 19 bloodshed.

⁶ This reference is obscure. The Baltimore *Sun* for April 22 carried a statement by Mayor Brown of Baltimore announcing that President Lincoln had asked the Mayor and Governor Hicks of Maryland to come to Washington by special train to confer on "the preservation of the peace of Maryland"; on April 23 the *Sun* announced that a delegation of thirty from the Baltimore Y.M.C.A. had gone to Washington to urge President Lincoln not to send any more troops through Maryland. Whether either of these stories is the one Jabez Pratt refers to here, or whether he enclosed still a different clipping, is not clear.

Brother Against Brother

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

and be assured that I hold nothing in my heart of bitterness towards you.
J. D. P.

Baltimore, May 1, 1861

Dear Brother:

You are fast driving me to consider that term inappropriate.

I have received your letter of the 27th, and if you consider me a "fool and a boor" why so be it.

The only answer I have to make is that you are crazy. I will only say further that you entirely misinterpret and misunderstand the mission to Washington and what was asked of Mr. Lincoln. We asked nothing of what you so glibly ridicule.

If such is to be your correspondence it had better be stopped till you get your senses,

Yours,
J. D. Pratt

Baltimore, May 3, 1861

Dear Brother:

I am this morning advised that you have so far forgotten yourself, your personal honor, and your oft-repeated assurances of affection for me and my family under all circumstances, as to violate the confidences of private correspondence, and cause to be published a private letter, with no other intention than to influence and exasperate the public mind still farther

than it then was, and at the same time to invite and urge me to put my family under your protection.

May God forgive you for this act of dishonor and private treason.

I think I have already written you under what circumstances of excitement I wrote that first letter. I had just been overwhelmed by the sad fate of my friend, Mr. Davis, who was murdered by the troops from the North. I had seen those troops fire from the cars towards a crowd at a distance, not a man being within a hundred yards of the train; I knew nothing whatever of any mob at the other end of the city attacking the troops; I had no expectation of violence being attempted or any attempt to obstruct the passage of the troops; I did, however, hear days previous of individual threats but personally I had frowned upon such threats and did not believe that they were of any consequence whatever as I had confidence that they emanated from bad men who were but a small minority in this city: I had seen the day before (on the 18th) a body of the most miserable looking recruits pass through our city on foot under the protection of the police.⁷

⁷ The day before the 6th Massachusetts was mobbed, a poorly trained regiment of Pennsylvania militia passed through Baltimore without difficulty. Its general appearance caused Lincoln's youthful secretary, John Hay, to make caustic remarks about the poor quality of the first Unjonist detachments.

In a word, my heart was for peace and the Union until exasperated by the exhibition at the Washington depot and the killing of Mr. Davis, a quiet citizen, and it was under the influence of that infliction that I received your dispatch, kindly meant by you, to come away from danger and thus show myself to be a coward.

Your dispatch, kindly meant as it was, only served to increase my excitement, and I wrote you in that heated manner.

There was also another cause for my excited letter. During the intense excitement of the 19th and 20th many Northern men had been alarmed by anonymous letters from some of the mob, and I with others was named as suspicious characters.

Now, cannot you see that there was enough to madden almost any man, and cause a bitter letter to be written, which prudence and brotherly affection should have covered up and protected.

What could I think of myself if I had caused to be published your letters to me breathing forth the most fiendish threats worthy of the "dark ages." But no, I did just the contrary. I had the use of the columns of our paper here but I would suffer death before I would violate the confidence of a brother's correspondence.

When the heat of excitement had passed, and I had become acquainted with the real facts of the outbreak and violence, I admit that I was wrong and had acted and written in an improper and unchristian manner. It was some days before the people understood that the outbreak was that of a mob. Their sympathies and interests are with the South, yet they prefer the whole Union if it can be preserved peacefully.

We deplore the present thirst for blood and would if possible arbitrate for peace. This, however, is impossible so long as men and Christian men of the North breathe forth the spirit of fiendish cruelty.

All, or nearly all, in this city admit that the violence of the 19th ult. was wrong, and some days ago I suggested a paper which is now being signed, representing that in our opinion troops or whatever else the Government desire *ought* to pass through Baltimore without hindrance.

The frenzy was soon over in this city and quiet restored, and yet Christian men and women in Boston, and from your letters I suppose you with rest, instead of praying for peace, pray for blood, flames, murder, and the violation of women and children.

(Great God, what hast thou in store for this wretched country that thou shouldst permit thy professed friends to so dishonor thy cause and word!)

Did you stop to think over what the effect of this temper among Christians would be in other lands?

No, I fear not. Will they see the same spirit manifested by the South as in the North? They do not and will not. They have plead for peace: they (the border states and Virginia particularly) have exhausted all resources in their efforts to bring about a peaceable adjustment and save the *whole Union*, but they have been met by the most cruel and inhuman thirst for vengeance and blood from the North, until they were driven to desperation themselves.

For myself, I have my interests here and with the South, and also property in Virginia. I wish peace. I desire the Union, but Union in harmony, and no other is to be desired.

Oceans of blood could not harmonize or settle this question.

Now, my Brother, I close. If I have offended you it was not in my heart to do so, and I ask your forgiveness, and hard as it is to forgive your cruel offence to me and my family by the publishing and violation of private correspondence in the publishing of my letters, that particular vengeance might be brought down upon my head, I will say that I forgive you and will pray for you, but I fear you have broken the chain which should unite brothers forever and that we must part. This is a bitter cup. It cuts me to the quick and I can hardly see through my tears which flow as I write these lines.

May God forgive you.

Your brother
J. D. P.

Boston, May 6, 1861

My dear Brother:

I have just received yours of the 3rd and hasten to reply to it.

Your letter exhibits so much feeling that I begin to feel as if I had done some terrible thing. Why, Jabez, as "Old Abe" said "there is nobody hurt"; don't make yourself unhappy.⁸

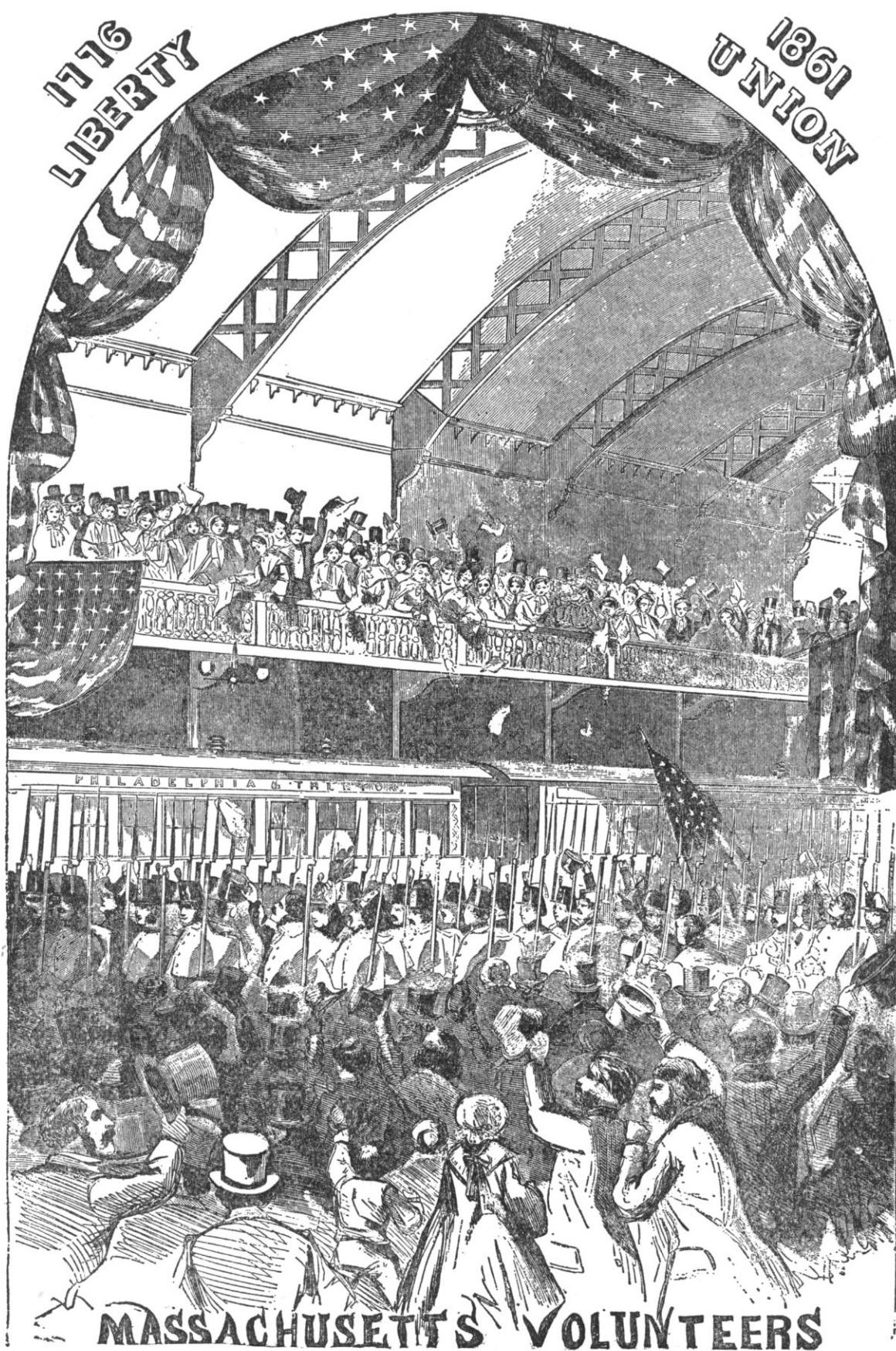
The publication of the extract of your letter was wholly without thought or premeditation. I had no design to injure you and I had no thought till this moment that I had done so.

The facts are these: At the time that I received that letter there had been no mail or telegraphic communication for several days from Baltimore, and there was the utmost anxiety felt to hear from Baltimore. On the way from the office with your letter in my hand I

⁸ In February, 1861, traveling from Illinois to Washington, Lincoln made a series of speeches in which he tried to allay excitement. In one of these he remarked that although several states had announced their secession, nobody had actually been hurt—a remark which both friend and foe often quoted in the weeks ahead.

1776
LIBERTY

1861
UNION



MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEERS

Massachusetts volunteers board a train at Jersey City, bound for Washington. "Among the ladies could be seen several in tears," the New York Herald noted, ". . . and one old gentleman cried like a child."

Harper's Weekly, MAY 4, 1861

stopped at the Journal to buy an "extra"; one of the reporters (a friend) met me and asked, "Have you heard from your brother?" "Yes" I replied, "I have this moment received a letter." "What does he say?" he asked. I replied, "Read it for yourself." He did so and then remarked that he should like to print an extract from it. After a moment's hesitation I assented, the names to be suppressed; and I had not the most remote or distant idea of doing you an injury. On the contrary, I thought you would feel complimented in being considered an exponent of public sentiment in Baltimore.

The letter has done you no harm and if you should come here today the worst that would happen would be a few harmless jokes cracked at your expense. I have heard no hard things said about you; the few who know the author think you are "plucky" and our troops would prefer to meet a *regiment* of Southerners than a *company* of Yankees; all the genuine pluck there is at the South has been transplanted from the North.

I hope, Jabez, you will consider this explanation as satisfactory. I am sorry, very sorry, if I hurt your feelings; if I did it was an error of judgment and not of the heart, and as to your publishing my letters, you are welcome to print every line I have written you in every paper in Baltimore.

I send you the extract from your letter as printed. I might send you mine if I had it at hand. However, I only printed that part having reference to the war; all that of a personal nature was left out.

As to the war, you know my sentiments. Seward's instructions to the French minister is the doctrine of the North and West. The rebellion is *to be put down, crushed out, and it will be done*; there is to be *one Republic* and *one only* and the dictates of true humanity are that the war should be prosecuted with all the vigor and energy possible.

As to the Christianlike spirit of the South—I have no wish to discuss that. The flames of Fort Sumter as they scorched the seventy heroes within its walls instead of appealing to human beings to stay the slaughter, appealed to fiends who revelled in the carnage and the shot of the artillery poured in as the flames rose higher. Read Major Anderson's account of the *mercy* of Southern soldiers. Is privateering a Christianlike occupation? If it is there will be a few good Christians less if our steamers catch them.

Hundreds of letters like yours have been printed in Baltimore, and the reporters of several of the papers have been after me to get letters from you to print, which I have declined. I did think of giving them that which contained the account of your interview with the President but did not do so.

You say a great many harsh things in your letter which I will not reply to, for I have no doubt you were under as great a state of excitement when you wrote this letter as when you wrote your first, and you will regret what you say in the last as you have in the first case—"dishonor," "private treachery," "heart of confidence"—hard words, but they don't apply in the present case. Your letter had reference to what was public in Baltimore. You gave me the *public* sentiment. There was nothing *private* about it and you are needlessly excited in this matter. As to bringing down upon your head "particular vengeance" in heaven's name tell me *who* has any vengeance in store for you? Where? How? I don't understand you. There is no vengeance in Boston for you, I can assure you of that, but as I said before there may be a little *fun* at your expense in the way of a *joke*. It can't be in *Baltimore*, for great as the reaction there I don't suppose the time has come when sentiments such as were contained in your first letter would hurt anybody for uttering them. Where is the "particular vengeance" coming from? It shant come. It won't come, anyhow. I will put on my Ancient and Honorable uniform⁹ and with my musket and sword will defend you against all vengeance, both "particular" and general, here, in Baltimore or anywhere else. The blood of the Pratts is up and woe be to whoever stands in the way.

Now, Jabez, there is no use in getting mad or in keeping mad. Act like a sensible man and don't make such a great fuss over such a small matter. I expect you and I will make our names immortal before this contest ends, and it won't do to stop at such trifles as this.

Give my love to Lucy and all, and "through evil and good report," believe me, I am

Affectionately
J. C. P.

Boston, 6th May, 1861

My dear Brother:

I have just mailed your letter and forgot to enclose the slip from the newspaper therein referred to. I guess you won't feel bad when you see it in print.

As I told you in my letter, you may print every line of every letter I have written on this subject in every paper in Baltimore and put my name to them, and I will meet all the "particular vengeance" it brings with it in Baltimore or anywhere else.

I ought to have said in my letter in reply to your remark that we of the North were "praying for blood,

⁹ The Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Boston was a dress-parade, high-society militia outfit that was prominent in Boston before the war.

flames, murder, and the violation of women and children" that no such prayers are offered this side of "Mason and Dixon" line. Our first prayer is that the misguided people of the South may see their folly and come back to their allegiance to the best government that the sun ever shone upon, a government without whose protection they cannot exist. Our next prayer is that the leaders in this rebellion, your Yan-ceys, Floyds, Davis, etc., may be arrested and hung. The next is that God would give success to our armies in crushing out the most infamous rebellion that the world ever saw.

Your women and children are safe from all except the vile creatures that horde in the South.

Yours affectionately
John C. Pratt

So the story ends. Like so many human stories, it ends in uncertainty. We do not really know whether the two brothers were fully reconciled after the war ended—whether the heated words they exchanged during the early months of the war were later buried in brotherly affection and deeper understanding. The record closes with the letters printed above.

Jabez Pratt, the Baltimore brother, appears to have died in March of 1866. His Boston brother, John C. Pratt, lived until 1888. With both brothers, the hot fires of controversy apparently died before death made the final separation. But whether the two men adjusted their differences and struck hands once more as brothers and fellow citizens . . . this, like so many other questions arising out of the Civil War, goes off into mystery.