

Mr. President

The reports of the scouts are still conflicting as to the character of the reinforcements to the army of the Potomac, & the Composition of that at Annapolis under Genl. Burnside. I think it probable that the 8th Corps, which embraces the troops who have heretofore guarded the line of the B. & O. R. R., the entrenchments around Washington and Alexd. & c. have been moved up to the Rappk. & that an equivalent has been sent to Annapolis from General Meade. Lt. Col. Mosby states that the 11th and 12th Corps Consolidated have been also sent to Genl. Burnside. But whatever doubt there may be on these points, I think it certain that the enemy is organizing a large army on the Rappk. & another at Annapolis; & that the former is intended to move directly to Richmond, while the latter is intended to take it in flank or rear. I think we may also reasonably suppose that the federal troops that have so long besieged Charleston will a portion of their iron clad steamers be transferred to the James river. I Consider that the suspension of the attack on that city was virtually declared when Genl. Gilmore transferred his operations to the St. Johns river. It can only be continued during the summer months by the fleet. The expedition of the enemy up Red river, has so diminished his (Pg2)forces about New Orleans & Mobile that I think no attack upon the latter city need be apprehended soon, especially as we have reason to hope that he will return from his expedition in a shattered condition. I have thought therefore that Genl. Johnston might draw something from Mobile during the Summer to strengthen his hands, & that Genl. Beauregard with a portion of his troops might move into N. C. to oppose Genl. Burnside should he resume his old position in that state, or be ready to advance to the James river should that route be taken. I do not know what benefit Genl. Buckner can accomplish in his present position. If he is able to advance into Tennessee, reoccupy Knoxville, or unite with Genl. Johnston great good can be accomplished, but if he can only hold Bristol I think he had better be called for a season to Richmond. We shall have to glean troops from every quarter to oppose the apparent combination of the enemy. If Richmond could be held secure against the attack from the East, I would propose that I draw Longstreet to me & move right against the enemy on the Rappk. Should God give us a crowning victory there, all their plans will be dissipated & their troops now collecting on the waters of the Chesapeake will be recalled to the defense of Washington. But to make this move I must have provisions & forage. I am not yet able to call to me the Cavalry or Arty. If I am obliged to retire from this line, either by a flank movement of the enemy or the want of supplies, great injury will (pg3) befall us. I have ventured to throw out these suggestions to your Excl. in order that surveying the whole field of operations you may consider all the circumstances bearing on the question. Should you

determine it is better to divide this army & fall back towards Richmond I am ready to do so. I, however, see no better plan for the defense of Richmond than that I have proposed.

I am with great respect

Your Obt. Servt.

R. E. Lee

Genl.