

John Branch to Andrew Jackson, May 12, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY BRANCH TO JACKSON.

Washington, May 12, 1831.

Sir, Business of a nature which forbids its neglect, or delay, requires me to leave Washington City this evening, and of course I shall not have it in my power to continue my attentions to the Navy Department after the present day.

I deem it my duty *Sir*, to give you this information that you may designate some person to take charge of the Dept, and to prevent any delay in the transactions of its important official concerns¹

¹ In asking for the resignations of Ingham, Branch, and Berrien, Jackson disclaimed dissatisfaction with them personally. He wished them to go without exciting a controversy. At first each of them seemed disposed to accept that attitude; but reflection brought changes of opinion. To go quietly was to promote Van Buren's advantage, and they revolted at the idea, as they realized the design beneath the surface. Branch, himself a pacific man, became hot at the predicament he was placed in and was persuaded to announce himself as a candidate for Congress in North Carolina, his home state, a position to which he was elected by a combination of his own friends and the opponents of Jackson. His ideas of the situation are expressed in the following letter to Maj. A. J. Donelson, written May 8, 1831, on the eve of the former's departure from Washington:

"My Dear Sir, Untill the receipt of your last letter I had confidently expected to have had the pleasure of seeing you in this place before my departure. I have more to say to you than

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I can possibly compress within the compass of a letter. The fatal course pursued by Genl Jackson must overwhelm him and his vile parasites. I had intended to proceed directly from this to Nashville untill a day or two past. I have just determined to go *home* first. My friends in N. Carolina are very anxious that I should become a candidate for Congress. Two of the three candidates have consented to withdraw and it is probable that the other will also. At all events I am convinced from the present excitement in the State that my election will be pretty certain, This too by a large majority. Circumstanced as I am I must acknowledge that the approbation of my immediate neighbours will be gratifying to me. I herewith send you a copy of a letter which I have addressed to several of my friends with authority to publish. It may lead to further developments.

“I have been driven to the wall and must vindicate my humble name from unmerited opprobrium. I deeply regret the inauspicious results which must ensue. The laurels won by the “Hero of N. Orleans” have already withered in the deadly embrace of the arch intriguers. I have nothing to reproach myself for and I am satisfied that you have not. This however is only calculated to mitigate the deep mortification which every sincere friend to the President must feel. I certainly have been his friend and deeply regret the hard fortune which decrees our *eternal* seperation. I have consented to remain in the Department for a short time, from a high sense of duty to the public. I must however be off in three or four days. My opinion is that Genl Jackson does not mean to be a candidate for reelection and that Van Buren and Eaton know it; and hence in a moment of desperation this *public spirited* movement on the part of Cass. He may by what has already been termed a most disinterested disregard for the patronage of office blind the good people, and secure the bewitching prize.

“The *manner* in which the *grand council* achieved the signal reform, would amaze you; while it could not fail to excite strong feelings of indignation and contempt. They were taken in their own nett. They are particularly anxious to make the world believe that our resignations were voluntary; and their plans were laid to produce that impression on the public mind. I was prepared to expect treachery, and yet I was loth to believe that the

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“Hero of two wars” could have participated in it. Alas poor degenerate man. Lewis, Smith, Kendall etc. etc. are triumphant and *will reign*. The general impression here is that the President must and will have E. and Mrs. E. with him and about him. My opinion is that I shall visit Tennessee sometime during the year. Perhaps in August or September. It is folly to dwell on the inconveniences to which I have been subjected, by this arbitrary movement on the part of the President. He struck the blow on the day fixed for the marriage of Rebecca, and was thus *made* to subserve all the little malignant purposes of my bitterest enemies. I would not however exchange “one self approving hour” for all the *spoils* which they may and will secure. I am now a freeman once more and will carry war into the enemy's territory unless they guard well their outposts. Fear not, discretion shall mark my course. I will keep them in the wrong. Berrien has been heard from. He must however go out, unless they become alarmed before his return. His letters are rather equivocal, *his resignation will not be voluntary.*”

I have the honor to be