Son Scot-

It is sometime since I wrote you as my last one was dated May 28th. The long silence is the result of several careers I have been much occupied in farming operations and in the business of University. For a portion of the time my health has been too poor to write with ease and now I am not in as good health as I could desire in attempting to with you. But your Ma has written frequently and kept you well advised of matters at home.

I may as well sat that I have felt some embarrassment in attempting to write you on account of the sentiment expressed at the close of your letter to Marie of the date of May 25th. You say “As to being the representative of an Abolition family, I must decline the honor. Slavery I believe to be wrong. When negroes free and slave can be taken off the continent I want to see it done. But when they are set free and given equal privileges and with White men I want to leave the country. When the government forgets us – dignity so far that it will arm them and employ them in its service, I will see it fall before I will raise my hand in its defense.” This is an extract from your letter. I do not know when I have felt a keener pang than upon seeing it there. I can but believe that it was hastily and carelessly written, without any appreciation of its meaning. I reproduce it here to give you an opportunity to reconsider it.

I first notice the first sentence in the extract. Are you ashamed of you parentage? The sentence would seem to imply this, in your declining to be regarded as the representative of an Abolition family. Since the year 1848 I have been regarded (whether justly or unjustly it matters not) an abolitionist and were that even now considered a term of reproach I would not expect a son of mine to so speak of it in connection with me. I have not however regarded myself as a political abolitionist. My anti slavery sentiments are well expressed in the Chicago platform and this has been endorsed by the nation and hence cannot be regarded as a reproach but whether of poor or evil report whether popular or unpopular the nationality of freedom, the prohibition of slavery in all the national territories is a sentiment so deep and strong in my moral nature that I cannot yield it without being false to my country my conscience and my God. As such it ought to be held above reproach from any one and especially from a son of mine. Politically I have been opposed to any interference by the national government with the institution of slavery in the States for the reason that I regarded such interference as unconstitutional. I was even willing for the purpose of putting the
question that the Constitution of the United States should be amended by the insertion of a provision irrepealable [sic] but by the consent of all the States prohibiting any such interferance [sic]. As long ago as the year 1850 I suggested such an amendment to Secretary Chase then a Senator of the United States. Such an amendment was adopted by the last Congress but has not been accepted by the Slave States, and therefore is not now a part of the Constitution. My opinion remains the same so far as the loyal States are concerned. But the rebel States have forfeited [sic] all their rights and privileges as States under the Constitution. They have in Law and in fact ceased to be States of the Union. Hence for the present and until they shall return to loyalty they should be regarded and treated as National Territories. I know that even the loyal people of the deended [sic] States may object to this but it is really their only security for life and property against their rebel neighbors and the only way of placing the local government in the hands of loyal men. Regarding the rebel States as Territories if slavery exists [then] it exists in [illegible] of National Law and rinder [sic] the protect[-]

tion of the National Government. I am decidedly in favor of its abolition in all the rebel States. Such abolition I believe to be a moral a political and a military necessity. So far I am now an abolitionist, and whether the term be one of honor or reproach, the sentiment is the result of my lifelong convictions, morally and politically and I may justly claim for it the respect at least of my children. The term abolitionist was once a term of reproach, but it is so no longer. The war is forcing from all loyal and earnest men the arrival of the sentiment. It is true that there are still among us many old line Democrats, secession sympathizers who curse abolitionism and insist that abolitionists should be hung. Your ancestry, your education and your present position would not lead any one to suppose that you sympathised [sic] with that sentiment. By the paternal line you are of the Puritan stock clear, pure and unmixed. My ancestors paternal and maternal were of New England. I glory in such an ancestry. I may accept or reject their religions faith and political opinions but I respect and reverence their memory for the stern [illegible] their self sacrificing spirit and their devotion to principle and to duty. Your maternal ancestry were Scots and you have but to read the history of Scotland to become acquainted with their National Character. You cannot but feel proud of their bravery their love of liberty of even their religious fanaticism, [illegible] a [illegible] they were above and beyond all others [ultra?] abolitionists so much so that even Eld A. Campbell on a visit to Scotland some years since found himself incarcerated in a dungeon on account of his pro slavery utterances there. It is true that your maternal Uncle have departed from the faith of their Father both politically and religiously. It might not be unprofitable to trace the cause and progress of that departure. Your Maternal Great-Grandfather George Lockabie was living in Glasgow Scotland at the time of the French Revolution. He was a radical in polotics [sic] there and by his sympathy with the French Revolutionists was drawn into
sympathy with French Jocabanism [sic] and French infidelity. On coming to America he naturally affiliated with the Democratic party which then really professed the true principles of Democracy. Settling in Kentucky where Slavery presents an aspect less repulsive and perhaps more attractive than at any other point in the Union it was but natural that the native repugnance of the family to Slavery should be much modified during its residence there and yet your Grand Mother says that they left Kentucky on account of the vicious influence of the Institution upon society and especially upon the young. This being the fact it is strange that your Uncles are now the Northern Advocates of Southern Slavery. This can only be accounted for in the fact of their blind unreasoning and prejudiced adhesion to partisan Democracy, a Democracy which is such only in name having rejected every true principle of Democracy and having become the defender of and the sympathiser [sic] with rebellion the advocate and the strength of a slave holding Oligarchy your Ma had kept herself posted in reference to the issues of the day and the tenable necessities of the present conflict and she is at least a radical an abolitionist as I am. I had hoped that our children would contribute something to swell the advancing and increasing tide of Free and liberal sentiments, I know that of they attempt to check and resist that tide they will be overwhelmed by it. I had hoped too that they might do something to atone for the deflection of a portion of their maternal family from the true course of progress and civilization. The sentiments contained in your letter startled me from that cherished dream and created a fear that it might not be realized. I had expected to get in one letter what I had to say in reference to the above extract from yours. I have but noticed the first sentence and I find my letter already too long. I have yet much to say and purpose to resume the subject at another time. This letter is intended to advise you or remind you of your true position, that you may not look upon the moral and political questions of the day from a false stand point. I think I am justified in a somewhat elabrate [sic] treatment of the subject in writing to you, for your letters especially the more recent once contain very satisfactory and to me very gratifying evidence that your mind is improving and maturing and that you are capable of giving to this subject proper consideration, that your life may not be a waif upon the Ocean of human existence but that it may be a blessing to humanity and an honor to yourself in the sincere and fervent prayer of Your affectionate father Ovid Butler

Note: this letter is held in its original in the Ovid Butler Letterbook in Special Collections, Irwin Library.