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May 12

PERSONAL LETTER from Alexander Declouet in Montgomery,
Alabama, to his son, Paul Declouet, in Charlottesville, Virginia.
Montgomery, May 12th, 1861

My dear son,

I wrote to you yesterday in answer to your letter of the 6th and I have just received your last of the 7th in reply to which I must say that I am not yet prepared to give you any final advice and positive instructions as to the expediency of your removing to Lexington. This is a step which requires matured reflection. I have consulted with my friend C. M. Conrad on the subject and he thinks that it is the best thing you can do - but when I bring to my mind your dear mother's (Marie Louise Benoit) despair and anguish and my own harrowing anxiety, I cannot but hesitate and take time for serious consideration. It is true that you have been recommended by my colleagues, but I know that the War Department here is overwhelmed and crowded by such a number of applications for commission in Confederate service that I am certain that a large number of applicants will necessarily be disappointed, and I cannot form the least conjecture as to the success of the application made for you. You may or you may not be commissioned. In the first case your place would be an excellent one, and in the second it would be excellent also provided that your admission into the Lexington Military Institute and the instruction received did not impose upon you the obligation of serving in Virginia, thus precluding your return to Louisiana should our state need your services. These and many other matters are to be well considered. What is the nature of the obligation which you contract by receiving at that institute the military instruction and drilling to qualify you as an officer? And then have you friends there? In case of sickness, would you be attended to by any

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who care any thing about you? It is better I think to wait a little more, to gather first all the information necessary so as to be certain of doing what is best to be done. Mr. Hunter of Virginia dined with us yesterday and I will consult him on the subject and he may probably be able to give me some useful advise. I am in great perplexity of mind and you will no doubt appreciate the painful hesitation of a father's judgment in a matter where his heart almost excludes the proper exercise of his reasoning faculties. When I transport myself in thought to our peaceful home, when I think of your loving and beloved mother and sisters and picture to myself their mortal anguish on receiving from me the overpowering intelligence that I have consented to offer our dear Paul to the God of battles and that he will be far away from home, exposed to all the vicissitudes of a ferocious and bloody war, I am almost disheartened and I may well hesitate before pronouncing the final word! No! This may not be right, it is not right in these times to give away to such thoughts, but I could not help it. At all events let us wait awhile. I should like to hear from you again before coming to a conclusive determination. Get all the information you can about that military institute. Consult with your professors - what associates will you have there? In my last I made a suggestion to you about Professor Blidson - being engaged in drilling of. There may be something in that - the idea just strikes me that if it be practicable and proper you could spend a month or two at Lexington preparing yours for military service and then go home to join or aid in forming some company or other. These are more suggestions thrown out for consideration. I have thought also of writing to Gen. Beauregard who could perhaps employ you in his military family. But to recapitulate - Let us first you on your side and I on mine collect the

1861 P. S. You ought to write home by every mail. Inform me as to your
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(con't.) wants. I suppose that you have received a check for \$150 in New York.

Handwritten in English. Original on file in Dupre Library at the University
of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, La.

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information which may enable us to come to a proper conclusion and then having well considered every aspect of the question we may I hope but upon the best plan. I will write to you often and you do the same. If I have expressed myself clearly you will have understood that my principal objection to your going to the Lexington Institute is that you may thereby bind yourself to service in Virginia during the war and I have no where that Louisiana should be deprived of the services of her own sons should she need them. We may both inform ourselves as to that. To save time, should I make up my mind I will as you suggest simply telegraph to you "Go" and you will understand what it means. In the meantime we can correspond often and think over the matter.

13th May - Having been intercepted yesterday I will today surely add a few lines. I have been informed that the President will not commission any young man under 21. I do not remember exactly whether you will be 20 or 21 years old next July? Let me know. Since writing the above I have almost made up my mind to leave for home on or about the 24 or 25th of this month. From and after the 18th it would then be better to address your letters to me at St. Martinville. I should like to get an answer to this here. You will find this a very uncertain and unsatisfactory letter. It is neither yes or no - But you well understand my embarrassment. If I can see Mr. Hunter today I will write to you in the afternoon or tomorrow morning. Farewell, my dear son, be of good heart and let us implore God for our country - and for our families! Your affectionate father and friend,

Alexander Declouet