

# TO THE PEOPLE OF VIRGINIA.

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A large portion of the State is now distracted by a rebellion, that is consuming all your material interests. I ask your candid attention to some facts which I deem worthy of consideration. It is with you to arrest the rebellion, and save, of life and property, what is left, or to continue the strife until all is lost.

Since 1831, South Carolina politicians have been plotting the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States: First, on the pretext of the tariff; next, by the false assumption that the institution of slavery was in danger from some supposed hostile legislation that might be made at some time by Congress. Her leading statesmen, at the head of one of the great political parties of the country, gradually poisoned the public mind, and at length fired the Southern heart, and precipitated the Southern States into rebellion.

Those largely interested in slave property in Virginia never believed the institution was in danger by hostile legislation in Congress. The party which had always been in favor of the Constitution, the Union, and the enforcement of the laws—and opposed to those who claimed to be the peculiar protectors of the institution—had its greatest strength in the large slave holding districts of the State. The three Presidential candidates in 1860, vied with each other in professions of attachment to the Constitution and the Union.

At the election for members of the State Convention in February, 1861, it was claimed that there was a majority of sixty thousand votes cast for the Union candidates. One hundred and ten of the one hundred and fifty members elected to that Convention claimed to be Union men. They had to *claim* to be such, to secure the votes of the people. That was the last untrammelled expression by the people of their attachment to the Constitution and the Union in Virginia.

The people of Virginia were never dissatisfied with the Union and Constitution of the United States. In no decade, in the history of our beloved Commonwealth, had the people made such rapid progress in all material prosperity as in the last ten years. The conspirators, who had planned the destruction of constitutional liberty in the United

States, saw their cause was hopeless, unless they could "drag" the people of Virginia into the rebellion.

On the 13th day in April, 1861, there was peace in all the broad limits of the State. On the 16th, a lawless mob assembled at Richmond, to inaugurate a rebellion, which was consummated on the 17th by the passage of the Ordinance of Secession, at the bidding of the mob on the outside of the Capitol.

On the passage of the Ordinance in Virginia, the conspirators in the Cotton States told the people of those States, "that they could plant their broad acres of corn and cotton in peace—that the war was transferred to the Potomac and the Ohio." In Virginia, the people were told that Secession was peace. They knew it was war. In three days after the Ordinance of Secession was passed, regiments of troops from South Carolina and Georgia were in Virginia. Thus, this devastating war was transferred from the homes of those who inaugurated it, to the peaceful and happy homes of Virginians. It is well known that it was not a Southern Confederacy of Slave States, alone, nor was it the protection of property in slaves, that the conspirators desired to procure. It was empire—not only of the South, but of the North also, to break down the Constitutional barriers, erected by our fathers, which stood between them and perpetual power, and to inaugurate a military despotism on the ruins of the best government ever enjoyed by civilized man. To this end, a reign of terror was inaugurated, all over the State; a mob of soldiers, in part from other States, suppressed the voice of the people east of the Allegheny Mountains. It was tried in the West, but the fearless spirit of liberty in the people could not be intimidated; more than three-fourths of the popular vote of the section was cast, at the Spring election, against Secession.

The loyal men of Western Virginia knew their rights, and they dared to maintain them. It was a time in the history of the State to recur to first principles. The great framework of our freedom and of Constitutional liberty rests on the principle, "that all power is vested in, and consequently derived from the people; that magistrates are their trustees and servants, and at all times amenable to them."

It was notorious that the Executive of the State, who had been elected by the people, and who had taken the oath of fidelity to the Constitution of the United States, had gone into rebellion, with all the other officers, who, under the Constitution of the State, could take his place. They had, as far as their acts could go, annexed the State to

what they called a foreign nation, and had taken an oath of allegiance to that pretended foreign nation, the officers of which, by armed force had seized the Capitol of the State—that the Executive of the State had surrounded himself with an army, which prevented the delegates of the loyal people from meeting at the Capitol—that he had usurped power, by ordering the people to take up arms against the Government of the United States, and was seizing their property to support the rebel army.

The Constitution of the United States guarantees to the people of each State, a republican form of government. And the President of the United States is authorized to use the whole power of the Government to suppress insurrection or rebellion in the States. The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the land. The Constitution and laws of Virginia recognize it as such.

The loyal people of the State are entitled to the protection of their persons and their property by the laws of the State and of the United States. Those in rebellion are not entitled to the protection of either, because they have abandoned their allegiance to both; and are the subjects of the retribution of the laws of both. Finding that they were deserted by the Chief Magistrate of the State, to whom they had a right to look for protection, but who was seeking their destruction, they did that only which it was their right, and which imperative necessity compelled them to do, for the preservation of their persons and property; resumed their sovereign power; elected their delegates to a Convention which met at Wheeling on the 11th day of June, 1861; and, in conventional capacity, declared the offices of Governor, Lieutenant-Governor and Attorney General vacant, by reason of those who had occupied them having joined the rebellion, and proceeded to fill those offices for a term of six months, and to continue until their successors were elected by the people.

It was not the object of the Wheeling Convention to set up any new government in the State or separate, or other government than the one under which they had always lived. They made a single alteration in the Constitution of the State, which prescribes the number of Delegates in the General Assembly, which shall be necessary to constitute a quorum.

The action of the Wheeling Convention was not, as some have supposed, confined in its scope to Western Virginia; it goes to the whole State. It is made the duty of the Executive to restore all offices of

every grade, civil and military, to be administered by loyal men, in every county in the State. As a test of loyalty, each officer is required to take an oath to support the Constitution of the United States, and of the restored Government of Virginia, as vindicated by the Convention at Wheeling, which assembled on the 11th day of June, 1861. On the refusal or the failure of the office holder to take these oaths, it is the duty of the Executive to declare the office vacant, and to order an election to fill the vacancy.

In obedience to the Ordinances of the Convention, nearly forty counties have been re-organized. Those holding office, who took the prescribed oaths retained their position, of those who refused, the offices were declared vacant, and loyal men were elected to fill them. They are acting now harmoniously under the laws of the United States and the laws of Virginia, made before the Ordinance of Secession was passed. In the north western part of the State, in a section embracing a population of one hundred and fifty thousand, where the people heartily approved of the action of the Wheeling Convention, they are prosperous, and have scarcely felt the effects of the rebellion. As fast as the army of the United States puts down the rebellion in the State, I shall proceed to re-organize the government in every county, by having all the offices filled with loyal men, that law and order may again prevail in every county. In this work, I shall expect the active co-operation of all well disposed people in the State. The Legislature has denounced severe penalties against every person who shall do any official acts in the State without first having taken the oaths prescribed by the Convention. All offending will be punished.

Fellow-citizens of Virginia: What has secession or rebellion brought on the State? Whether farms, houses, or internal improvements, all is one common ruin which lies in the track of the rebel army. But this is this not the worst. Fathers and mothers mourn in deep sorrow their sons slain on the battle-field, or who have died in sickly camps—thousands of widows and orphans made by the rebellion, houseless and homeless, are sending their bitter cry up to heaven; while tens of thousands more are reduced to want by their subsistence being taken to feed the rebel army. There is not a casualty which takes place in the field but brings a pang to some loving heart.

A system of guerilla warfare was set on foot by Wise and Floyd, in their raids in the mountains of Western Virginia, last summer, which extend from the Kentucky line to the Blue Ridge. This war is marked

by a bloody cruelty that would disgrace the painted savage. Theft, arson, murder—all the catalogue of crime has been practiced on unoffending citizens. And this conduct is encouraged and applauded by men boasting a superior civilization.

I repeat the question. What have you gained by rebellion? You have been deceived in everything. You were told that the North was divided, and the President could not bring an army into the field to enforce the laws. You were told that England and France would support you. You suffered your minds to be deluded by the idea that one Southerner in the field was equal to five Northern men, and, finally, that all your slaves were going to be liberated by somebody. In all of this you were deluded—worse, you were willfully deceived. Those who inaugurated the rebellion, sent their Commissioners to England and France, and authorized them to declare to those governments, that the object of the Confederate States was not to perpetuate slavery; and if these governments would acknowledge the nationality of the conspirators' pretended government, that they would pledge themselves to liberate all the children born of slaves after such acknowledgement. Thus those who had fired the Southern heart by the cry of "Abolition," themselves, to secure political power, were willing to become the princes of Abolition.

But why Virginians should be willing to form an alliance with a foreign power for the purpose of breaking down the great Government of the United States, is to me, most incomprehensible. A State in all its commercial, geographical and social relations, so intimately connected with the Middle and Western States; to say nothing of its ancient history, and hallowed associations in the early struggles of our fathers in achieving our glorious independence, and why Virginia should have linked her fortune with South Carolina, whose history is tainted with Toryism, Nullification and Secession, is still more incomprehensible. When the Convention was called which passed the Ordinance of Secession, I am confident that not one tenth of the voters of the State were in favor of Secession. A few desperate politicians without office and without fortune, through a mob and the metropolitan press at Richmond jostled the people, for a time, from their propriety, and brought this calamity on the State.

Was it to secure property in slaves? No sane man ever dreamed that Secession would secure this. Its only safety was in the Union. After one year's rebellion, all the material wealth of the State is con-

sumed, except slaves. Now, as the rebel army is being driven out, it is burning and destroying everything in its retreat. The planters have had their meeting to burn their crops—will they take their slaves South with the rebel army and all perish with famine together—or will they leave them behind, without control without food, suddenly released from bondage and restraint, starving for the necessaries of life. Leaders will rise up among them: all their savage nature will be aroused; plunder, murder, and every crime will mark their path; and it is not improbable that a part of the Union forces will have to turn their arms on the slaves thus abandoned to protect helpless innocence. A just God only knows the retribution He has in store for those who plunged our State and country into this terrible calamity.

This miserable guerilla warfare is a disgrace to any civilized age, and is only an illustration of the spirit of Secession. This lawlessness, if not speedily stopped, will ruin the State. I therefore call upon the people, without distinction of party, to form themselves together in home leagues, for county and neighborhood protection, and put down these lawless bands. In each county the persons and property of Secessionists will be held responsible, through the military power, for any outrages that may be committed on Union men. The plea that you cannot prevent these raids of the bandits, will be unavailing. Though you may not have taken arms in the rebellion, you cannot plead neutrality. Now that the rebel army is about driven out of the State, you must be active in restoring peace. A few months of active co-operation with me in re-organizing all the counties in the State, will restore peace and order in each community.

All those who have taken an oath to support the Constitution of the United States and have engaged in the rebellion, in giving aid and comfort to the rebels, by adhering to them while waging war with the Federal Government; or who have participated in the Legislature of the State, at Richmond, since the pretended annexation of the State to a foreign nation; or who have acted as members of the Confederate Congress; or who have engaged in administering the government under the pretended Confederate States or State of Virginia; or who have held military office under the Confederate States or State of Virginia, since the passage of the Ordinance of Secession on the 17th of April, 1861, will be punished according to the laws of the State and of the United States. The majesty of the law which has been insulted, demands its vindication. Constitutional liberty pleads for retributive justice; but

more than all, the tens of thousands who have been bereft of property, friends and life by the rebellion, demand that the leaders should be made to suffer the penalty of their wickedness. The Government of the United States is the hope of the nations. It is great in all the arts of peace; great in offensive and defensive war; great in suppressing the rebellion; and the only guaranty of liberty it can give to future generations, is to teach traitors that the sovereignty of the people can not be offended with impunity.

F. H. PEIRPOINT, Governor.