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## MESSAGE

Of the President of the United States, Vetoing the Bill Supplementary to the Military Bill. To the House of Representatives.

I have considered the bill entitled "An act supplementary to an act entitled 'An act to provide for the more efficient government of the rebel States,' passed March 2, 1867, and to facilitate restoration," and now return it to the House of Representatives, with my objections.

This bill provides for elections in the ten States brought under the operation of the original act to which it is supplementary. Its details are principally directed to the elections for the formation of the State constitutions, but by the sixth section of the bill "all elections" in these States, occurring while the original act remains in force, are brought within its purview.

Referring to the details, it will be found that, first of all, there is to be a registration of the voters. No one whose name has not been admitted on the list is to be allowed to vote at any of these elections. To ascertain who is entitled to registration, reference is made necessary, by the express language of the supplement, to the original act and to the pending bill. The fifth section of the original act provides, as to voters, that they shall be "male citizens of the State, twenty one years old and upward, of whatever race, color, or previous condition, who have been resident of said State for one year." This is the general qualification, followed, however, by many exceptions. No one can be registered, according to the original act, "who may be disfranchised for participation in the rebellion," a provision which left undetermined the question as to what amounted to disfranchisement, and whether, without a judicial sentence, the act itself produced that effect.

This supplemental bill superadds an oath, to be taken by every person before his name can be admitted upon the registration, that he has "not been disfranchised for participation in any rebellion or civil war against the United States." It thus imposes upon every person the necessity and responsibility of deciding for himself, under the peril of punishment by a military commission, if he makes a mistake, what works disfranchisement by participation in rebellion, and what amounts to such participation. Almost every man—the negro as well as the white—above twenty-one years of age, who was resident in these ten States during the rebellion, voluntarily or involuntarily, at some time and in some way did participate in resistance to the lawful authority of the General Government.

The question with the citizen to whom this oath is to be proposed must be a fearful one; for, while the bill does not declare that perjury may be assigned for such false swearing, nor fix any penalty for the offence, we must not forget that martial law prevails, that every person is answerable to a military commission, without previous presentment by a grand jury, for any charge that may be made against him; and that the supreme authority of the military commander determines the question as to what is an offence, and what is to be the measure of punishment.

The fourth section of the bill provides "that the commanding general of each district shall appoint as many boards of registration as may be necessary, consisting of three loyal officers or persons." The only qualification stated for these officers is that they must be "loyal." They may be persons in the military service, or civilians, residents of the State or strangers. Yet these persons are to exercise most important duties, and are vested with unlimited discretion. They are to decide what names shall be placed upon the register, and from their decision there is to be no appeal. They are to superintend the elections, and to decide all questions which may arise. They are to have the custody of the ballots, and to make return of the persons elected. Whatever frauds or errors they may commit must pass without redress. All that is left for the commanding general is to receive the returns of the elections, open the

same, and ascertain who are chosen "according to the returns of the officers who conducted said elections." By such means, and with this sort of agency, are the conventions to be constituted.

As the delegates are to speak for the people, common justice would seem to require that they should have authority from the people themselves. No convention so constituted will in any sense represent the wishes of the inhabitants of these States; for, under the all embracing exceptions of these laws, by a construction which the uncertainty of the clause as to disfranchisement leaves open to the board of officers, the great body of the people may be excluded from the polls, and from all opportunity of expressing their own wishes, or voting for delegates who will faithfully reflect their sentiments.

I do not deem it necessary further to investigate the details of this bill. No consideration could induce me to give my approval to such an election law for any purpose, and especially for the great purpose of framing the Constitution of a State. If ever the American citizen should be left to the free exercise of his own judgment, it is when he is engaged in the work of forming the fundamental law under which he is to live. That work is his work, and it cannot properly be taken out of his hands. All this legislation proceeds upon the contrary assumption that the people of each of these States shall have no constitution, except such as may be arbitrarily dictated by Congress, and formed under the restraint of military rule. A plain statement of facts makes this evident.

In all these States there are existing constitutions, formed in the accustomed way by the people. Congress, however, declares that these constitutions are not "loyal and republican," and requires the people to form them anew. What, then, in the opinion of Congress, is necessary to make the Constitution "loyal and republican?" The original act answers the question: It is universal negro suffrage—a question which the Federal Constitution leaves to the States themselves. All this legislative machinery of martial law, military coercion, and political disfranchisement, is avowedly for that purpose, and none other. The existing Constitution of these ten States conform to the acknowledged standards of loyalty and republicanism. Indeed, if there are degrees in republican forms of government, their constitutions are more republican now than when these States—four of which were members of the original thirteen—first became members of the Union.

Congress does not now demand that a single provision of their constitution be changed, except such as confine suffrage to the white population. It is apparent, therefore, that these provisions do not conform to the standard of republicanism which Congress seeks to establish. That there may be no mistake, it is only necessary that reference should be made to the original act, which declares "such constitution shall provide that the elective franchise shall be enjoyed by all such persons as have the qualifications herein stated for electors or delegates." What class of persons is here meant clearly appears in the same section. That is to say: "the male citizens of said State twenty-one years old and upwards, of whatever race, color, or previous condition, who have been resident in said State for one year previous to the day of such election."

Without these provisions no Constitution which can be framed in any one of the ten States will be of any avail with Congress. This, then, is the test of what the Constitution of a State of this Union must contain to make it republican. Measured by such a standard, how few of the States now composing the Union have republican constitutions! It, in the exercise of the constitutional guaranty that Congress shall secure to every State a republican form of government, universal suffrage for blacks as well as whites is a *sine qua non*, the work of reconstruction may as well begin in Ohio as in Virginia, in Pennsylvania as in North Carolina.

When I contemplate the millions of our fellow-citizens of the South, with no alternative left but to impose upon themselves this fearful and untried experiment of complete negro enfranchisement and white disfranchisement, it may be almost as complete, or submit indefinitely to the rigor of martial law, without a single attribute of freemen, deprived of all the sacred guaranties of our Federal Constitution, and threatened with even worse wrongs, if any worse are possible, it seems to me their condition is the most deplorable to which any people can be reduced. It is true that they have been engaged in rebellion, and that their object being a separation of the States and a dissolution of the Union, there was an obligation resting upon every loyal citizen to treat them as enemies, and to wage war against their cause.

Inflexibly opposed to any movement imperiling the integrity of the Government, I did not hesitate to urge the adoption of all measures necessary for the suppression of the insurrection. After a long and terrible struggle the efforts of the Governments were triumphantly successful, and the people of the South, submitting to the stern arbitrament, yielded forever the issues of the contest. Hostilities terminated soon after it became my duty to assume the responsibilities of the Chief Executive Officer of the Republic, and I at once endeavored to repress and control the passions which our civil strife had engendered, and, no longer regarding these erring millions as enemies, again acknowledged them as our friends and our countrymen. The war had accomplished its objects. The nation was saved, and that seminal principle of mischief which, from the birth of the Government, had gradually but inevitably brought on the rebellion, was totally eradicated. Then, it seemed to me, was the auspicious time to commence the work of reconciliation; then, when the people sought once more our friendship and protection, I considered it our duty generously to meet them in the spirit of charity and forgiveness, and to conquer them even more effectually by the magnanimity of the nation than by the force of its arms. I yet believe that if the policy of reconciliation then inaugurated, and which contemplated an early restoration of these people to all their political rights, had received the support of Congress, every one of these ten States, and all their people, would at this moment be fast anchored in the Union, and the great work which gave the war all its sanction, and made it just and holy, would have been accomplished. Then, over all the vast and fruitful regions of the South peace and its blessings would have prevailed, while now millions are deprived of rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every citizen, and after nearly two years of legislation, find themselves placed under an absolute military despotism. "A military Republic—a Government formed on mock elections and supported only by the sword," was nearly a quarter of a century since pronounced by Daniel Webster, when speaking of the South American States, as "a movement indeed, but a retrograde and disastrous movement, from the regular and old-fashioned monarchical system," and he added:

"If men should enjoy the blessings of republican government, they must govern themselves by reason, by mutual counsel and consultation, by a sense and feeling of general interest, and by the acquiescence of the minority in the will of the majority, properly expressed: and above all, the military must be kept, according to the bill of rights, in strict subordination to the civil authority. Wherever this lesson is not both learned and practiced, there can be no political freedom. Absurd, preposterous is it, a scoff and a satire on free forms of constitutional liberty, for forms of government to be prescribed by military leaders, and the right of suffrage to be exercised at the point of the sword."

I confidently believe that a time will come when these States will again occupy their true positions in the Union. The barriers which now seem so obstinate must yield to the force of an enlightened and

just public opinion, and sooner or later unconstitutional and oppressive legislation will be effaced from our statute-books. When this shall have been consummated, I pray God that the errors of the past may be forgotten, and that once more we shall be a happy, united, and prosperous people, and that at last, after the bitter and eventful experience through which the nation has passed, we shall all come to know that our only safety is in the preservation of our Federal Constitution, and in according to every American citizen and to every State the rights which that Constitution secures.

ANDREW JOHNSON.

Washington, March 25, 1867.

## A PRAYER FOR LANDLORDS.

While seeking for random pearls, recently, in an old English volume, we found a prayer for landlords, which originally appeared in a book of private devotions in use until the accession of Queen Mary, of England, to the throne. We reproduce it, at this moment, because the lapse of time has not shorn it of its appositeness. Covetousness is, perhaps, the great sin of this age, and while we know that too much generosity and forbearance is often expected of the rich, it is true that, even in meritorious cases, the possessors of houses and lands evince not a particle of sympathy with their tenants. We suggest that the latter classes in Raleigh use the annexed form of prayer during the year, or until conscience is restored to their fortunate landlords:

"The earth is thine, O Lord, and all that is contained therein; notwithstanding Thou hast given possession thereof to the children of men to pass over the time of their short pilgrimage in this vale of tears. We heartily pray Thee to send the Holy Spirit into the hearts of those that possess the grounds, pastures and dwelling places on the earth, that they, remembering themselves to be Thy tenants, may not rack and stretch out their houses and lands, nor yet take unreasonable fines and incomes after the manner of covetous worldlings; but so let them out to others that the inhabitants thereof may be able both to pay the rents, and also honestly live to nourish their families and to relieve the poor. Give them grace to consider that they are but strangers and pilgrims in this world, having here no permanent dwelling place, but seeing one to come; that they, remembering the short continuance of life, may be content with that which is sufficient, and not join house to house, nor couple land to land to the impoverishment of others, but so behave themselves in letting out their tenements, lands and pastures, that after this life they may be received into everlasting dwelling places, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

A POSTSCRIPT.—"I love to look upon a young man. There is a hidden potency concealed within his breast which charms and pains me."

The daughter of a clergyman happening to find the above sentence at the close of her father's manuscript as he had left it in his study, sat down and added:

"Them's my sentiments, exactly, papa, excepting the 'pains.'"

The New York Sun says: From a record kept by a philanthropic old gentleman, we learn that since the year 1860 over six hundred lives have been lost and six millions of dollars worth of property destroyed by accidents happening to persons using the burning fluids made from petroleum.

An American missionary says: "I never heard a heathen complaining of the amount he pays for the support of idolatry." O that we might also add, Christians prize their heavenly religion so highly that they never complain of what they are asked to give for the support and spread of Christianity. But, alas, every minister has heard the cry, "Pew rents too high; too much begging in the church."

Iowa publishes one newspaper for each 6,000 of her population. Twelve to these are dailies.