

PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S FIRST ANNUAL MESSAGE.

To express gratitude to God, in the name of the People, for the preservation of the United States, is my first duty in addressing you. Our thoughts next revert to the great event in our history, the adoption of the Constitution. The grief of the nation is still fresh; it finds some solace in the consideration that he lived to enjoy the high proof of his confidence by entering on the renewed term of the Chief Magistracy, to which he had been elected; that he had been elected; that he had been elected; that he had been elected...

The best security for the perpetual existence of the States is the "supreme authority" of the Constitution of the United States. The perpetuity of the Constitution is the security of the Union; the security of the Union is the security of the States; their mutual relation makes us what we are, and in our political system their connection is indissoluble. The whole cannot exist without the parts, nor the parts without the whole. So long as the Constitution of the United States endures, the destruction of the one is the destruction of the other; the preservation of the one is the preservation of the other.

I have thus explained my views of the mutual relations of the Constitution and the States. Because they unfold the principles on which the Government is founded, and the difficulties that met me at the very commencement of my administration. It has been my steadfast object to escape from the way of momentary passions, and to derive a healing policy from the fundamental and unchanging principles of the Constitution. I found the States suffering from the effects of a civil war. Resistance to the General Government appeared to have exhausted itself. The United States had recovered possession of their forts and territory; and every State which had attempted to secede, whether the territory within the limits of those States should be held as conquered territory, under military authority emanating from the President as the head of the army, was the first question that presented itself for decision.

Now, military government, established for an indefinite period, would have offered the security for the early suppression of discontent; would have divided the people into the vanquished and the vanquisher; and would have envenomed hatred, rather than have restored affection. Once established, no precise limit to their continuance was conceivable. They would have exhausted the patience of the people, and have exhausted the patience of the people. Peaceful emigration to and from that portion of the country is one of the best means that can be thought of for the restoration of harmony; and that emigration would have been prevented; for what emigrant from abroad, what industrious citizen at home, would place himself singly under the military rule? The chief persons who would have followed in the train of the General Government, or men who expect profit from the miseries of their erring fellow citizens. The powers of patronage and rule which would have been exercised under the military rule, would have envenomed the naturally healthy regions of the country, unless under extreme necessity, I should be willing to entrust to any one man; they are such as, for myself, I could never, unless on occasions of great emergency, consent to exercise. The willful use of such powers, would have endangered the liberty of the States which remained loyal.

Does the policy of military rule over a conquered territory would have implied that the States, whose inhabitants may have taken part in the rebellion, by the act of those inhabitants, ceased to exist. But the true theory is, that all pretended acts of secession were, from the beginning, null and void. The Constitution cannot commit treason, nor screen the individual citizens who may have committed treason, any more than they can make valid treaties or engage in lawful commerce with any foreign Power. The States attempting to secede placed themselves in a condition where the vitality was impaired, but not destroyed. If any State neglects or refuses to perform its duties, there is the more need that the General Government should maintain all its authority, and, as soon as practicable, resume the exercise of all its functions. On this principle, the Government has proceeded, and by almost imperceptible steps, sought to restore the rightful energy of the General Government and of the States. To that end, Provisional Governors have been appointed for the States, Conventions called, Governors elected, Legislatures assembled, and Senators and Representatives chosen to the Congress of the United States. At the same time, the Courts of the United States, as far as could be done, have been re-opened, so that the laws of the United States may be enforced through their agency. The blockade has been removed and the custom-houses re-established in ports of entry, so that the revenue of the States may be restored.

The Post Office Department renews its ceaseless activity, and the General Government is thereby enabled to communicate promptly with its officers and agents. The courts bring security to persons and property; the opening of the ports invites the restoration of industry and commerce; the post office restores the ties of social intercourse and of business. And is not this happy result, that the restoration of each one of these functions of the General Government brings with it a blessing to the States over which they are extended? Is it not a sure promise of harmony and renewed attachment to the Union, that, as the laws of the United States are enforced, the General Government is known only as a benefactor?

I know very well that this policy is attended with some risk; that for its success it requires at least the acquiescence of the States which it concerns; that it implicates an invitation to those States by renewing their allegiance to the United States, to resume their functions as States of the Union, to be a high and noble duty. For the choice of difficulties, it is the smallest risk, and to diminish, and, if possible, to remove all danger, I have left it incumbent on me to assert one other power of the General Government—the power of pardon. As no State can throw a defence over the crime of treason, the power of pardon is a necessary and a just prerogative of the Government of the United States. In exercising that power, I have taken every precaution to connect it with the clearest recognition of the building force of the laws of the United States, and an unqualified acknowledgment of the great social change of condition it regards as a high and noble duty. For the choice of difficulties, it is the smallest risk, and to diminish, and, if possible, to remove all danger, I have left it incumbent on me to assert one other power of the General Government—the power of pardon. As no State can throw a defence over the crime of treason, the power of pardon is a necessary and a just prerogative of the Government of the United States. In exercising that power, I have taken every precaution to connect it with the clearest recognition of the building force of the laws of the United States, and an unqualified acknowledgment of the great social change of condition it regards as a high and noble duty.

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