

TO THE PEOPLE OF MARYLAND.

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER,
ANNAPOLIS, JAN'Y 3, 1861.

The exciting character of the events now transpiring in our country, naturally agitates and fills with care the minds of the citizens of this State. There naturally exists among the people an anxious desire to learn what course will be pursued by those whom they have placed in positions of trust, and I know that my own course is watched by them with deep interest. They have a right to be informed on the subject, and although I have in several published letters indicated my views, I yield now to the requests of many of my fellow-citizens, and address you this frank statement, calmly and truthfully, in my plain way representing the actual condition of the question as I believe it to be, and giving my own convictions of what is required of me in this crisis.

From the location of the National Capital within our limits, and our peculiar geographical position, Maryland would inevitably become the chosen battle ground of the sections in the event of civil war. Her long line of exposed frontier would be open to attack from every quarter, and her peaceful waters would soon become the theatre of this horrid contest. It needs no argument to convince a reflecting mind that such a war would bring upon us more than the usual accompaniments of war—loss of life, destruction of all domestic peace, oppressive taxation—ruinous depreciation of property, and almost universal bankruptcy. As a border slaveholding State she would especially suffer in the utter destruction of a cherished domestic institution with which all our sympathies are firmly united. A brave people, forced into a necessary war, would partially estimate even these great evils, and Maryland never has been, and never will be, found backward in such a contest. But no man, who has a real stake in the community, would consent to embark in such a future if it could be avoided with honor.

I firmly believe that the division of this Government would inevitably produce civil war. The secession leaders in South Carolina, and fanatical demagogues of the North, have alike proclaimed that such would be the result, and no man of sense, in my opinion, can question it.

Is it not then the bounden duty of all of us, and especially of those placed in authority, to endeavor to prevent the occurrence of such a catastrophe, by opposing any thing even tending to produce it?

I fervently hope, and I firmly believe, that the Union may be preserved. Our forefathers would not have admitted that the Government was utterly dissolved if the Hartford Convention had resolved the New England States out of the Union—nor can we agree that similar resolves, passed by the Conventions of one, or two, or half a dozen, of the Cotton States, should be considered as working its dissolution at this time. It is yet, thank God, in full existence, recognized by every Government on the globe, and prepared and willing to redress, with the whole power of the Nation, any indignity or injury, inflicted by the proudest Power on earth upon the humblest citizen of South Carolina, or any other State.

How shall we preserve this Union, founded by the labors and prayers of our ancestors and cemented with their precious blood?

Each one of us has his part to perform in this labor of love, and each of you has responsibilities connected with it, as I, myself, have. Upon each private citizen devolves that duty, so earnestly pointed out by the Father of his country, of cherishing, by every word and deed, an unchangeable devotion to it, and frowning indignantly upon every attempt to destroy it. Upon those in official position is imposed the responsible task of so exercising the power committed to them, that those who would drive us headlong into war and misery, shall derive no assistance in their mistaken and criminal course from those who ought to oppose them.

It is unnecessary for me to make extravagant professions of devotion to the South. Such protestations may be necessary from imported Northern politicians, who, by indirect abuse of their own Northern brethren, and truckling flattery of the Southern people, have worked themselves, and are hoping still further to work themselves, into power at the South. I am a Marylander by birth, and descent, and by a residence of more than sixty years. Every dollar of property I own is invested in this State. I am a slaveholder, not by accident, but by purchase, out of the hard earnings of a long life of toil. I have not a conviction or prejudice which is not in favor of my native State—I have never lived and should be sorry to be obliged to live, in a State where slavery does not exist, and I never will do so if I can avoid it. Whatever would impair the rights of slaveholders in Maryland, would equally injure me, and the instinct of self-interest, if no higher motive, would impel me to stand by the South while life shall last.

With these feelings and under a conscientious sense of my obligations, before God and man, I have calmly considered my duty in this emergency. Two courses were before me. The one was to suffer myself to be hurriedly borne along into the turmoil of the political movements of the day, without any effort to subdue its violence, and joining in the cry of

disunion, to allow Maryland to slide into the ranks of the seceding States. This course would have been by far the easier, the most certain to find favor with the floating mass of noisy politicians, who can only breathe with comfort in an atmosphere heavy with discord and excitement. It would have secured me the ephemeral outward popularity of the day, and might have spared my humble name many an execration and slander, which the advocates of this policy have heaped upon it. But I most solemnly believe that it would have brought ruin upon my country; and I would rather die a thousand deaths than be instrumental in accomplishing such a result. I therefore adopted the other course—to await with calmness the progress of events—to remember my joint obligations to the Constitution of the United States, and of Maryland; both of which I have repeatedly sworn to support; and I must try to allay that fearful excitement, which was threatening to undermine and destroy that sacred palladium of our liberties, committed to us by the Great Father of the Republic, who has raised us to be a Power among the Nations, and which is so ardently cherished by the people of Maryland. I knew that the adoption of this course would bring upon me violent abuse, subject me to slanderous reports from those whose particular schemes it might frustrate; and, what I most of all regretted, would subject me to the censure of good men whose convictions on the subject might be different from my own.

Believing that the interests of Maryland were bound up with those of the border slaveholding States, I have been engaged, for months past, in a full interchange of views with the Governors of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, with a view to concerted action upon our part. These consultations, which are still in progress, I feel justified in saying, have resulted in good; so that when the proper time for action arrives, these sister States, bound up in a common destiny, will, I trust, be prepared to act together.

I have been urged by a considerable number of citizens to convene the Legislature in special Session, as the proper measure to be adopted at this time. After a most anxious and conscientious examination of the question, I have failed to be convinced of the necessity or propriety of such a course. The Constitution, in entrusting a discretionary power to the Governor of calling such Session, never designed that he should act in so serious a matter, upon the judgment or convictions of other men; and in opposition to the clear and unbiased dictates of his own conscience. He was not intended to be a mere machine to act in this matter, when others should deem it necessary, although he himself might feel morally certain that it would be unwise and dangerous. I have, therefore, felt obliged to decide this question for myself, subject to the real responsibilities which attach to those who corruptly, or against their judgments, violate an official oath.

I have been forcibly impressed with the fact, in considering this question, that every Disunionist in Maryland, (and to our shame be it spoken, there are some such among us,) is an earnest advocate for the immediate call of the Legislature. One of the papers of to-day contains a report of the proceedings at a meeting which adopted a resolution in favor of immediate secession, which was warmly advocated by the present Speaker of the House of Delegates, and the last of the series of resolutions, directs the appointment of a committee to urge upon me to convene that House of Delegates forthwith. It seems to me that a measure thus earnestly advocated by those who are bent upon the destruction, at once, of the Union, and the happiness of our State, can hardly be the proper means of preserving both.

I have hitherto forbore to dwell particularly upon an objection to this measure which deserves to be maturely weighed in a crisis like this, when the people are ill prepared to bear increased burdens. It is nevertheless proper that you should be informed that on the first of October, there was a deficit in the State Treasury of at least fifty thousand dollars, and that the Treasury officers have repeatedly been without the means of paying drafts upon it, in consequence of the appropriations made by the last Legislature. Nothing but the most rigid economy and careful management can enable the Treasury to pay the April interest upon the State debt. Maryland knows something of heavy taxation, for she has borne it heroically, until she is just beginning to relieve herself from its crushing weight. That her people would bear it again without a murmur, if they were convinced of its necessity, I well know; but should not our past experience warn us against incurring further burdens, unless they are positively required by our honor. Especially, should we not avoid it, if it be probable that the consequence of this renewed taxation should be to secure woes and sufferings for the people of the State?

What could the Legislature do in this crisis, if convened, to remove the present troubles which beset the Union? We are told by the leading spirits in the South Carolina Convention, that neither the election of Mr. Lincoln or the non-execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, nor both combined, constitute their grievance. They declare that the real cause of their discontent dates as far back as eighteen hundred and thirty-three.

Maryland, and every other State in the Union, with united voice then declared that cause insufficient to justify the course of South Carolina. Can it be expected that this people, who then unanimously supported the course of General Jackson, will now yield their opinions at the bidding of modern secessionists?

I have been told that the position of Maryland should be defined, so that both sections can understand it. Do any really misunderstand her position? Who that wishes to understand it can fail to do so? If the action of the Legislature would be simply to declare that Maryland is with the South in sympathy and feeling—that she demands from the North a repeal of offensive and unconstitutional statutes; and appeals to it for new guarantees—that she will wait a reasonable time for the North to purge her statute-books, and do justice to her Southern brethren, and, if her appeals are vain, will make common cause with her sister Border States in resistance to tyranny, if need be—they would be only saying what the whole country well knows, and what may be said much more effectually by HER PEOPLE themselves in their meetings, than by a Legislature chosen eighteen months since, when none of these questions were raised before them. That Maryland is a conservative Southern State all know who know any thing of her people or her history.

But, my fellow citizens, it is my duty to tell you that the re-assembling of the Legislature is wished for by many, who urge it with a view to no such specification. I have been repeatedly warned, by persons having the opportunity to know, and who are entitled to the highest confidence, that the secession leaders in Washington have resolved that the Border States, and especially Maryland, shall be precipitated into secession with the Cotton States, before the Fourth of March.

They have resolved to seize the Federal Capital, and the Public Archives, so that they may be in a position to be acknowledged by Foreign Governments as the "United States," and the assent of Maryland is necessary, as the District of Columbia would revert to her in case of a dissolution of the Union. It is only contemplated to retain it for a few years, as the wants of the Southern Military Confederacy will cause its removal further South. The plan contemplates forcible opposition to Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, and consequently civil war, upon Maryland soil, and a transfer of its horrors from the States which are to provoke it.

The voices of those who favor this scheme are unanimously for a special Session, and every effort has been made, and will be made, henceforth, to manufacture public opinion in this State, to force me to convene that body.

Injurious reports have been disseminated among you by these men, to try to destroy whatever influence I may be supposed to possess. It has been falsely reported that I would be an applicant for office under Mr. Lincoln, and this rumor had been long in circulation before it reached my ears, and I thus had the opportunity to denounce it as an infamous, unfounded slander. It has been publicly reported that I had written a very objectionable letter, to Mr. Crittenden, upon the present condition of affairs. As soon as I heard it I read a copy of the letter to the gentleman who repeated the rumor, and he at once signified his approval of its contents; but I have since directed it to be published, and you can read it for yourselves. This spirit of defamation has gone so far that anonymous letters have been circulated in Anne Arundel County, stating that I had invited the slaves to a public dinner, on Christmas day, near this City. You will doubtless hear many similar falsehoods, circulated with this same design of weakening your confidence in the Executive of the State by attempting to work upon your fears.

For myself, I have lived long enough to know how to despise false reports. A man need only fear unfavorable reports when they are true.

The men who have embarked in this scheme will spare no pains to carry their point. The whole plan of operations in the event of the assembling of the Legislature, is, as I have been informed, already marked out—the list of ambassadors who are to visit other States, agreed on—and the Resolutions, which they hope will be passed by the Legislature, fully committing this State to secession, are said to be already prepared.

Is it your will, my countrymen, that the State should be exposed to the peril of adopting such a course? Are you—who are to bear the brunt of this fearful contest—who are to be forced to abandon your ploughs and forges and looms, to fight the battles of the Cotton States—who must leave behind your families, unprovided with the daily support which is only afforded them by your daily labors—are you desirous to be engulfed in this whirlpool of strife, before you have had time to breathe, and before every honorable plan has been tried to avert the necessity of war? If the people of the North were a foreign nation, we would first resort to negotiation, and, in the failure of that, to reprisals, before openly declaring war against them. Shall we be less forbearing to our brethren? If men alone were to be the sufferers in such contests, the consequences would be less deplorable,—but

think of the helpless, timid women and children, who are to be the chief sufferers. To you, the workingmen of Maryland, who must carry the musket and endure the real hardships of the war, they look for protection.

The people of Maryland, if left to themselves, would decide, with scarcely an exception, that there is nothing in the present causes of complaint, to justify immediate secession; and yet, against our judgments and solemn convictions of duty, we are to be precipitated into this Revolution because South Carolina thinks differently. Are we not equals? Or shall her opinions control our actions? After we have solemnly decided for ourselves, as every man of you must do, are we to be forced to yield our opinions to those of another State; and thus, in effect, obey her mandates? She refused to wait for our counsel, are we bound to obey her commands?

My countrymen, if you are the true descendants of those who have rendered glorious the annals of our early history, is it not an insult to you, to intimate that you cannot be trusted with time for deliberation? or that your courage would ooze out and be exhausted, unless you are forced to act in this matter without time for reflection? Are you to be alarmed with the argument that unless you join in this secession, at once, you may be discarded by your Southern Sisters? They would always be glad enough to have with them our noble State, with its commercial, agricultural and mineral wealth, with its hardy, brave people. The language of menace and threats is no argument to prevail with these.

I firmly believe that the salvation of the Union depends upon the border slave States. Without their aid, the cotton States could never command the influence and credit and men essential to their existence as a nation. Without them the Northern half of the Republic would be shorn of its power and influence. Within the Union, I firmly believe we can secure guarantees for our protection, which will remove these distressing causes of irritation.

If we find hereafter that the North shall, after due deliberation, refuse to give them, we will, in a united body, demand and receive a fair division of the national domain. We claim an equal share in the territories, let us not abandon the whole of them by seceding—we claim the full execution of the fugitive slave law; let us not annul that law entirely, by leaving the Union, and thus virtually bringing Canada down to our borders. We claim the protection of our institutions, as guaranteed by the Constitution, let us not render this protection impossible by tearing the Constitution to fragments.

I have extensive means of information as to the wishes of the people, not possessed by those who urge this measure upon me; and I am fully convinced that an immense majority of these, throughout the whole State, are firmly opposed to such action.

The business and agricultural classes, the planters, merchants, mechanics and laboring men—those who have a real stake in the community, who would be forced to pay the taxes and do the fighting—are the persons who should be heard, in preference to excited politicians, many of whom, having nothing to lose from the destruction of the Government, may hope to derive some gain from the ruin of the State. Such men will naturally urge you to "pull down the pillars of this accursed Union," which their allies at the North have termed "a covenant with Hell."

These extremists, North and South, agree in their hatred of the Constitution, which condemns the fanaticism of both. And leaders in South Carolina and Massachusetts agree in denouncing the fugitive slave law as unconstitutional, in the face of repeated decisions of the courts of the country.

I know that the masses of the people are opposed to the assembling of the Legislature at this time, and approve of my course: and it is a source of gratification to me to know that many of the most distinguished citizens of Maryland, and other border slave States, without distinction of party have endorsed it.

I have, throughout this matter, conscientiously and honestly endeavored to perform my duty, and I solemnly protest that all other considerations, but those of duty, have been banished from my mind. The men who have ascribed lower motives to me, have done me great injustice, and have shown that they cannot rise to the comprehension that an honest man feels compelled to discard all party ties when he is placed in a position where he must account, at each moment, to his conscience, for any departure from duty. I, your fellow-citizen, necessarily injure myself by every act or omission which can injure you, and without a single motive of personal ambition to lead me aside from the plain path of my duty. In the course of nature, I cannot have long to live, and I fervently trust to be allowed to end my days a citizen of this glorious Union. But should I be compelled to witness the downfall of that government, inherited from our fathers, established, as it were, by the special favour of God, I will, at least, have the consolation, at my dying hour, that I never, by word or deed, assisted in hastening its disruption.

THOMAS H. HICKS.