

Princess Anne April 30th 1865

Dear Sir:

The appointment of persons to make Registry of Voters, which you will soon be called upon to make, is one of the most delicate and important duties of your position; and I hope I shall not be considered improperly intrusive, if I venture a few words on the subject.

The duties of these officers require them to deal with the primary element of Government, and with the personal rights of each individual. Mistakes committed by them are to be deplored and may be fatal. The harmony of Society, and even the safety of the Government itself will depend upon the justice and correctness of their judgement. Unless great care and circumspection shall control their conduct, every man proscribed by them will henceforth become a disturbing element, more or less active and dangerous, as he may feel his proscription is more or less just; Think for one moment of the effect of disfranchising large numbers, a third, or a half, and even more in some parts of the State, which will be done, if violent and indiscreet partisans, burning with passion, and swift to recall the hasty utterances of a period of violent agitation, should be entrusted with this delicate duty. People so proscribed will have no motive to sustain the Commonwealth; they must become its enemies and from their numbers formidable for evil. Cherishing the revengeful feeling inspired by supposed wrong, which will become more fierce and implacable as they brood over their humiliation, they will plot and combine, and seize every occasion to disturb and overthrow the Government. The ordinary Civil Tribunals will not be sufficient to restrain them. On the other hand these men will be harmless, if not denied the right of Citizenship. In that case, they will be absorbed by Society and their influence neutralized or overruled by their more numerous, wiser, and more loyal fellow Citizens.

I am not for allowing those to vote who are laboring to destroy the Government, State or National. The Constitution must be obeyed. He who aims at these bad ends has forfeited his right to a voice in shaping the policy of either. In this respect he is an outlaw, and to this extent deserves to be treated as such. There is no injustice and no peril in excluding this class from the ballot box. The danger to be apprehended is from the exclusion of another class, whose fault consists in an intemperate condemnation of the War and the policy of the Administration, which will undoubtedly be done, if the counsels of extreme men are followed. I should deem this unwise and dangerous.

Loyalty in some Countries is personal to the Prince and means fidelity and support of him. Here we have no Princes whose fortunes we are obliged to follow, and Loyalty means no more than fidelity to the law. He who in good faith has obeyed the law has forfeited none of his rights as a Citizen. If he has performed the duty of a Citizen, justice will accord to him the rights of a Citizen. He may have entertained very absurd ideas, and uttered opinions you and I may think very erroneous and very improper, yet if he has done no act of hostility what law has he violated? Human agency cannot fetter the mind, and our Laws have not