INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

ROBERT M. PATTON,

GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA,

Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, December 13th, 1865.

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Gentlemen of the Senate and
House of Representatives:

Having been elected Governor of the State of Alabama, I appear before you to-day, for the purpose of taking the oath prescribed by the constitution, and entering formally upon the duties of the office. Profoundly grateful for the distinguished honor which has been conferred upon me, I am by no means insensible of the heavy weight of the responsibilities which rest upon the Chief Executive of the State, particularly at the present time. I assume the duties of this high position under circumstances which are peculiarly embarrassing. Our country is beset on every side with difficulties which seem almost insurmountable. But relying upon the support and assistance of the co-ordinate departments of the State government, and trusting that a generous people will look with kind forbearance upon whatever errors I may commit, and that an All-wise and good Providence will direct me in all my thoughts and conclusions, I willingly enter upon the difficult task before me. By a firm and earnest application of my best energy and abilities to the high service to which I have been called by the popular will, I hope to justify, in some measure, at least, that great trust which has been reposed in me by my confiding countrymen.

By an act of Congress, approved March 2, 1819, the State of Alabama became one of the members of the Federal Union. The relation then established between our State and the general government, remained uninterrupted for a period of nearly half a century. During that time, the people never felt the slightest pressure of real political troubles. In 1819, the State was comparatively a wilderness. In 1860 it literally bloomed and blossomed as the rose. From the feebleness of tender infancy, it had grown to gigantic manhood. The few settlements of hardy and adventurous pioneers, situated at remote distances from each other throughout its vast area, expanded to a dense and wealthy population.

At the beginning of the year 1861, Alabama contained nearly one million of inhabitants, and all branches of industry and trade were prosperous. Villages, towns and cities were flourishing, and internal improvements were rapidly and satisfactorily progressing. We had everything in the most bounteous measure which was essential to make life happy. Our high state of agricultural prosperity may be readily appreciated by reference to the single article of cotton, the annual product of which had reached nearly 1,000,000 bales. Official reports show that the number of bales produced in 1860 was 997,978. This amount of cotton, by fair computation, was worth in the markets of the world, not less than $50,000,000. Alabama had become the largest cotton growing State in the Union, producing about one-fifth of the entire American crop.

Nor was it in agriculture alone that our State was

prospering. Our commercial, manufacturing, and mechanical interests, and internal improvements were all advancing in a highly satisfactory degree.

Thus we see that, as a peaceful and quiet member of the Federal Union, we had grown from an infant State, to one of greatness, wealth and power. Our growth was gradual, healthful, vigorous and substantial. No people can attain to such a high state of prosperity without the protecting hand of a government to maintain political tranquility, and enforce civil order in the land. That quiet and order Alabama enjoyed without the slightest molestation from the time she entered the Union, in 1819, until the unfortunate events of the spring of 1861. Then we were brought to a sudden and violent halt in our proud and rapid march on the high road of prosperity and happiness.

On the 11th day of January, 1861, a Convention of the State passed an ordinance declaring, in effect, that the people of Alabama were thenceforth absolved from all allegiance to the government of the United States. Those who took this step maintained the theory that a State had the constitutional right to dissolve its connection with the Federal Union, and decided that the time had come when it was expedient and proper to sever the relations which bound us to the general government.

I trust that it will not be considered inconsistent with the proprieties of the occasion to state that I did not concur in this reasoning. My judgment did not approve of either the doctrine or act of secession. I thought that the position assumed by Alabama, and

the other Southern States, would precipitate the Northern and Southern States into an unnatural and a protracted war. But while firmly entertaining this opinion, I deemed it a duty, as a citizen of Alabama, to yield a peaceful obedience to what had been done. Painfully apprehending that the step which had been taken would bring ruin upon us; I nevertheless held myself bound by the authoritative decree which was deliberately pronounced by the people through a Convention of their own choice. I can point to this action, on my part, as at least, attesting my devotion to all the regular forms of authority in the State, and as some proof of my readiness to share the fate of my fellow-citizens, under any and all circumstances, whatever that fate may be.

I should have rejoiced if the events which flowed from the Ordinance of Secession had been different from what I apprehended. I would have been most happy if the great problem presented by the action of the Southern States had found some solution which would have saved us from the direful calamities of civil war. But, unfortunately, such was not the case. The United States government disputed the claim of secession, and resolved to maintain its authority over the entire Union, at every hazard.

The Southern States with equal firmness resolved to stand by the position they had taken, and a conflict of arms ensued. War becoming then inevitable, the Southern people rushed to the field with great unanimity; and this gave some ground for the hope that the struggle would at least be of short duration. But even those who cherished this fond

hope were doomed to disappointment. When the issue of arms was joined, the martial spirit of the whole country was aroused. The war at once assumed such gigantic proportions as to render it palpable that the conflict was to be stubborn, protracted, sanguinary, and destructive beyond all parallel in the history of civil wars. All efforts to check or mitigate its ruinous course were fruitless. For four years it swept over our land like a sulphurous sirocco, and scarcely a locality in the South escaped its devastating blast.

The ability and skill with which our prominent Generals conducted their respective campaigns, and the energy and bravery with which our patriotic soldiers fought, excited the admiration of the civilized world. But with all the ability of our Generals, and all the bravery of our soldiers, the war resulted adversely to the South. When our eminent commanders were forced to capitulate they bore themselves with a chivalry and manliness which secured from their triumphant adversaries such terms as were eminently magnanimous and honorable. When the arms of the United States became supreme, the Confederate forces were subjected to no humiliating submission. Their honorable pride was not offended. They were accorded every privilege which modern civilization concedes to a brave and patriotic, though vanquished foe.

Of the wide waste and ruin which the war has wrought upon our once happy country, Alabama has suffered a full share. Of her brave sons who entered the army it may be safely stated that from thirty-

five to forty thousand perished in the service. In material wealth, her loss in one species of property alone—that of slaves—is not less than two hundred and fifty millions of dollars; and the aggregate amount of losses in the various other descriptions of property must be equally as much. Hence we find that, in this State alone, we have sustained a loss, in actual and substantial wealth, of at least five hundred millions of dollars.

In this brief reference to the events of the last four years, I do not wish to be understood as seeking to vindicate the correctness of opinions which I entertained and expressed at the incipiency of our late troubles. It is true, that disaster and ruin were predicted; but Heaven knows I take no pleasure in pointing to the fulfilment. Those events are now historic, and we should only recur to them in that calm and philosophic spirit with which we may appeal to any other history for profitable lessons to guide us in our actions while dealing with the momentous present, and preparing for the dubious, and even threatening future. For this purpose I think we may all profit much by contrasting the prosperity and happiness which our country enjoyed at the beginning of the recent war, with its present crippled and almost ruined condition. In doing this we should forget the contentions, bickerings, passions, excitements and dissensions through which we have passed; or if we cannot forget, let us at least rise above them. Let us be as one man; and if we are unable to recover that which has been lost, it becomes us to bend our united energies in saving and improving that which remains to us.

The war closed with Andrew Johnson as President of the United States. The South lay prostrate and helpless, at the feet of Federal power. During the war, the legislation of Congress was necessarily tinged with the passions of the times, and upon the return of peace there were found upon the National statute book some of the most stringent and proscriptive laws for the punishment of persons and confiscation of property. There was but one way by which we could escape the severe penalties of these rigorous enactments, and that was through the pardoning power of the President.

Soon after the surrender of the Southern armies the President, by Proclamation and the appointment of Provisional Governors, announced his terms of amnesty, and the policy by which he proposed to restore harmonious relations to the recently discordant States. Under all the circumstances, associated with the new condition of things, it must be confessed that the terms of amnesty were as liberal as could have been reasonably expected. To the great mass of our countrymen a pardon was tendered upon the simple condition of taking an oath to support the Constitution and laws of the United States, and the Union of the States thereunder, including a pledge of obedience to the Presidential Proclamations relative to slavery. This condition was readily and cheerfully complied with. The various classes who were excepted from this liberal condition, and who could only obtain amnesty by special action on the part of the Executive, have presented their applications in large numbers; and the anxiety with which they seek for favorable action on their re-

spective cases, gives evidence of the sincerity with which our whole people are endeavoring to conform to the full requirements of the times.

The reconstruction or restoration policy of the President was duly submitted to the people of Alabama, and has been unhesitatingly accepted by them. It may be safely asserted that, as far as the work of reconstruction has progressed in this State, it has been in strict conformity with what was understood to be the policy of the General Government. Without undue murmuring, and in perfect good faith, our people have patriotically conformed to all the exigencies of the situation. They fully and fairly accept the results of the war, with all their legitimate consequences.

Candor and sincerity are prominent traits of Southern character. Our people never dissemble; they always mean what they say and do. Their high character in this regard is so well established, that all reasonable men, in every part of the country, must award full credit for their every action since the termination of the war. Our soldiers bore themselves with manliness when they laid down their arms, and have observed their paroles with scrupulous good faith. Returning home, they sunk the soldier into the citizen; and cordially uniting with other citizens they have given the whole weight of their potent influence in forwarding the great work of restoration. Patiently, and uncomplainingly obedient to all the requirements of the Constitution, laws, and even military orders of the United States since the war closed, the people of Alabama have given every possible evidence which human action

can furnish, of unfeigned integrity of purpose, and devoted loyalty to the General Government. We may rightfully claim, therefore, that our State is fully entitled to be placed in that position in the Union where she will stand as the political equal of any other State under the Federal Constitution. In this faithful acquiescence in results, and this sincere desire for the restoration to amicable and harmonious relations with the other States of the Union, there are no party divisions among us. Those who favored, and those who opposed secession now stand firmly and heartily together.

Having thus, as I maintain, given ample evidence of our purpose to perform our whole duty towards the General Government, let us now address ourselves to more local State affairs.

The depression which the war has wrought upon the country, bears directly, and with heavy weight, upon our State finances. Our treasury is depleted, and the resources from which we have heretofore drawn our revenue are greatly diminished. Slaves formerly constituted a large portion of the property upon which taxes were assessed. But that species of property is now gone, and as a matter of course, we will have to modify our tax laws in reference to the remaining taxable resources of the State.

In the year 1845, the bonded liabilities of Alabama amounted to over $10,000,000. This heavy indebtedness was created, in part, at least, by a system of banking, the general operations of which proved deliterious to the public interest. But by a wise and judicious policy, this large debt has been so far reduced, that our liabilities on account of State

bonds, at the present time, amount to but $3,445,000. These bonds are payable as follows: $2,109,000, payable in the city of New York, and bearing only five per cent. interest; $648,000 payable in London, and bearing also five per cent. interest; and the remainder, $688,000, payable likewise in London, bearing an interest of six per cent. per annum. This is comparatively a small debt, which comes completely within the financial control and management of the State.

It may, perhaps, be proper to state here, that all that is absolutely necessary to be paid in connection with this bonded debt, is the annual interest. It is stipulated upon the face of the bonds that the period for which they are to run may be extended indefinitely, as they fall due, if need be, at the pleasure of the State. But of course, in order to maintain the credit of those bonds, the interest thereon must be faithfully and promptly paid. Up to the period of the commencement of the war, the State's credit had been so jealously guarded that her bonds, though drawing a low rate of interest, commanded a premium in the leading markets of the world. We should by all means be careful to maintain our good reputation in this regard.

In addition to this bonded debt, the State has obligations as Trustee for the Common School and University Funds. The Common School Fund consists of the proceeds of the sales of the 16th section in each township of the public lands, given to the State by the General Government for educational purposes. This fund, amounting to $1,807,099 65, is held in trust by the State, and the interest arising thereon is to be applied to the support of common schools. Then there is the University Fund, amounting to $300,000 00, the interest upon which belongs to that highly valuable institution, the University of Alabama. These trust funds should be held sacred,

and the proceeds faithfully applied to the great purposes of education for which they were created. The cause of popular education I have always regarded as of the highest interest and importance; and it has peculiar claims upon us at the present time. One of the results of the war has been to leave a large number of orphans who are chiefly if not wholly dependent upon our public schools for their education. We have, therefore, additional reasons for continuing, even with increased efficiency, if possible, that system of popular schools which has always conferred so many benefits upon the youth of the State.

The question of raising the amount of revenue which will be necessary for the various purposes of the State Government, is one of great importance. The property in slaves being destroyed, we know that the existing tax laws will not be sufficient for the purpose; and in the modification of those laws, we cannot be indifferent to the depression under which the industrial and business interests of the State are suffering. So far as we can, consistently with sound policy and the necessities of the State, we should refrain from imposing additional burdens upon the people at the present time.

In providing for the wants of the State for the present fiscal year, we will doubtless have to resort to a loan. This I think we may do without any serious detriment to our State finances. We have the assurance of Northern capitalists that as soon as Alabama resumes her proper place in the Federal Union, the requisite loan can be negotiated on advantageous terms.

We may reasonably hope that by the next fiscal year the various interests of the people will have reached that point of prosperity which will enable us to realize from taxation a sufficient amount of revenue for all the purposes of the State. Our people are energetic, industrious and enterprising,

and we may confidently anticipate a speedy revival of agricultural, manufacturing, commercial and mechanical prosperity which will enable us to raise not only what is essential to defray the current expenses of the State—including the interest on our indebtedness—but even a surplus, for a sinking fund, to be applied to the redemption of our funded debt.

There is much suffering in Alabama, which calls for relief at the hands of the State Government. Many appeals will reach us to which we cannot turn a deaf ear. That portion of our indebtedness which was incurred for carrying on the war, has been annulled and set aside. It has been decided that this course, in regard to that debt, is one of the logical results of the war. But we cannot disregard the debt of gratitude which we owe to those heroic men who went to the battle-field in obedience to the authority which was wielded over them, in part, at least, by our State Government. Many of them fell upon the field of carnage; many returned to desolate and ruined homes; while many survived the war, maimed or disabled for life, and are now helpless. The destitute widows and orphans of those who sacrificed their lives, should not be allowed to suffer; the dependent and helpless living should be provided for. The General Government has magnanimously remitted the legal penalty incurred by the Confederate soldier, but upon its bounteous coffers he has no claim for reward or assistance. It is true that generous provisions are being made for present assistance to all classes of our suffering population by Gen. Swayne, an able, just and highly efficient agent of the United States government. But to Alabama alone can the suffering Alabama soldier make his appeal for permanent relief.

A sudden and radical change has been wrought in our labor system. The extinction of slavery is one of the inevitable results of the war. The relation heretofore subsisting between the whites and blacks

has been totally changed. The negroes are now free, and this stubborn fact is fully and unequivocally recognized. How far governmental action may be able to promote the common interest of the two races in their suddenly changed condition is a great problem which time alone can solve.

The normal vocation of the negro is that of a cultivator of the soil. The soil and climate of Alabama are peculiarly adapted to the growth of cotton—that great staple which wields a most potent influence in the commercial world. Land owners are dependent upon the negroes for the labor which is necessary to produce cotton. Hence the negroes have but to avail themselves of the advantages which they possess as cultivators of cotton lands, to make for themselves an independent living. In their new condition their future happiness or misery depends entirely upon themselves. They will find no disposition on the part of the whites to oppress them, withhold from them any of those rights to which they are entitled as freedmen.

The recent Convention of the State adopted an ordinance, imperatively requiring the Legislature, at its present session, to provide full protection for the persons and property of the colored population. Of course it is assumed that the Legislature will take the required action in this regard. In all this we see the evidence of a firm purpose to deal fairly and justly with the freedman in his new condition. We will not only extend to him all his legitimate rights, but will throw around him such effective safeguards, as will secure him in their full and complete enjoyment. More than this, I am persuaded, our Northern brethren cannot and will not ask of us. At the same time it must be understood that, politically and socially, ours is a white man's government. In the future, as has been the case in the past, the State affairs of Alabama must be guided and controlled by the superior intelligence of the white man. The negro must also

be made to realize that freedom does not mean idleness or vagrancy. Emancipation has not left him where he can live without work.

Let us hope that, by a judicious policy on the part of the State, and prudence on the part of planters and others employing negroes, we may not experience that interruption in the development of our industrial resources which might, at first view, have been apprehended from the sudden and radical change to which our labor system has been subjected. It may be, indeed, that, by additional energy, and bolder enterprises, we may find ourselves, at no distant day, on a higher road to prosperity and greatness than we were likely to attain under the old system. At any rate, let us hope for the best. We have vast resources, which capital, science and labor will develop in due time. All these will find inviting fields in Alabama.

I have necessarily touched but briefly upon topics pertaining to State policy. I shall perhaps have occasion to refer to them more fully in formal communications to the Legislature.

Allow me to say, gentlemen, in conclusion, that since the close of the war, it has been evidently the studied purpose of our people to move in full harmony with the avowed policy of the National administration. This attests the high confidence which is reposed in the ability, integrity and patriotism of President Johnson. I have no hesitation in expressing the belief that the President is doing everything in his power to advance the best interests of the whole country, both North and South. In his high and responsible position, he has given the most indubitable evidence of his purpose to administer the affairs of the government in a spirit of fairness, justice, and conservative nationality. I consider it clearly our duty to give him our cordial and earnest support in the patriotic course which he is pursuing.