EASTERN-SHORE WHIGAND PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE

"THE PRICE OF LIBERTY IS PERPETUAL VIGILANCE."

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MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE U. S.

To the Two Houses of Congress,

at the commencement of the Second Session of the Twenty-fifth Congress.

Fellow-Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

[illegible] to renew the expression of [illegible] to the Giver of all good [illegible] tion. Our country presents [illegible] evidences of that continued [illegible] auspices it has gradually [illegible] dependant Colonies [illegible] powerful Confederacy. [illegible] domestic tranquillity, and [illegible] national prosperity. The [illegible] for a time, some [illegible] of the Union, interrupted [illegible] of unusual health, has [illegible] in extent, and arrested in [illegible] industry and prudence of [illegible] ually relieving them from [illegible] embarrassments under which [illegible] have labored; judicious legis[illegible] and the natural and boundless resources [illegible] the country, have afforded wise and timely [illegible] to private enterprise; and the activity al[illegible] characteristic of our people has already, [illegible] great degree resumed its usual & profi[illegible] channels.

The condition of our [illegible] since the last annual [illegible] of my predecessor. We remain at [illegible] with all nations, and no effort on my [illegible] part, consistent with the preservation of our [illegible] and the honor of the country, shall be [illegible] to maintain a position so consonant to [illegible] institutions. We have [illegible]

[illegible] of their president, to [illegible] in friendly relations—that [illegible] regulating their intercourse with other powers [illegible] the approved principles of private life; ask[illegible] and according equal rights and exact[illegible] leges; rendering their own, and discharging [illegible] duties; advancing others, with candor, direct[illegible] the promotion of [illegible] ness, and sincerity; appealing at all times to [illegible] reason, but never yielding to force, nor seeking to acquire any thing for themselves by its [illegible] exercise.

A rigid adherence to this policy has left this Government with scarcely a claim upon its justice, or injuries arising from acts committed by its authority.—The most imposing and perplexing of those of the United States upon foreign Governments, for aggressions upon our citizens, were disposed of by my predecessor. Independently of the benefits conferred upon citizens by restoring to the mercantile community so many millions of which they had been wrongfully divested, a great service was rendered to his country by the satisfactory settlement of so many ancient and irritating subjects of contention; and it reflects no ordinary credit on his successful administration of foreign affairs, that this great object was accomplished, without compromising, on any occasion, either the honor, or the peace of the country.

With European powers no new subjects of difficulty have arisen; and those which were under discussion, although not terminated, do not present a more favorable aspect for the future preservation of that good understanding, which has ever been our desire to cultivate.

Of pending questions, the most important is that which exists with the Government of Great Britain, in respect to our northeastern boundary. It is with unfeigned regret, that the people of the United States must look back upon the abortive efforts made by the Executive, for a period of more than half a century, to determine what no nation should suffer long to remain in dispute, the true line which divides its possessors from those of other powers.

The nature of the settlements on the borders of the United States, and of the neighboring territory, was for a season such, that this perhaps was not indispensible to a faithful performance of the duties of the Federal Government. Time has, however, changed this state of things; and has brought about a condition of affairs, in which the true interests of both countries imperatively required that this question should be put at rest. It is not to be disguised, that with full confidence, often expressed, in the desire of the British Government to terminate it, we are apparently as far from its adjustment as we ever were at the time of signing the treaty of peace in 1783.

The sole result of long pending negotiations, and a perplexing arbitration, appears to be a conviction, on its part, that a conventional line must be adopted, from the impossibility of ascertaining the true one according to the description contained in that treaty. Without coinciding in this opinion, which is not thought to be well founded, my predecessor gave the strongest proof of the earnest desire of the United States to terminate satisfactorily this dispute, by proposing the substitution of a conventional line, if the consent of the States interested in the question could be obtained. To this proposition, no answer has as yet been received. The attention of the British Government has, however, been urgently invited to the subject, and its reply cannot, I am confident, be much longer delayed. The general relations between Great Britain and the United States are of the most friendly character, and I am well satisfied of the sincere disposition of that Government to maintain them upon their present footing.

[illegible] I am persuaded, [illegible] and than at any previous period. It is scarcely necessary to say to you, how cordial it is reciprocated by the Government and the people of the United States. The conviction which is thus common to all of the injurious consequences that result from keeping open the irritating question and the certainty that its final settlement cannot be much longer deferred, will, I trust, lead to an early and satisfactory adjustment. At your last session, I laid before you the communications between the two Governments and that of the State of Maine, in whose solicitude, concerning a subject in which she has so deep an interest, every portion of the Union participates.

The feelings produced by a temporary interruption of those harmonious relations between France and the United States, which are due as well to the recollections of former times as to a correct appreciation of existing interests, have been happily succeeded by a cordial disposition on both sides to cultivate an active friendship in their future intercourse. The opinion, undoubtedly correct, and steadily entertained by us, that the commercial relations at present existing between the two countries, are susceptable of great and reciprocally beneficial improvements, is obviously gaining ground in France; and I am assured of the disposition of that government to favor the accomplishment of such an object. This disposition shall be met in a proper spirit on our part. The few and comparatively unimportant questions that remain to be adjusted between us, can, I have no doubt be settled with entire satisfaction and without difficulty.

Between Russia and the United States, sentiments of good will continue to be mutually cherished. Our Minister recently accredited to that Court, has been received with a frankness and cordiality, and with evidences of respect for his country, which leave us no room to doubt the preservation in future of those amicable and liberal relations which have so long and so uninterruptedly existed between the two countries. On the few subjects under discussion between us, an early and just decision is confidently anticipated.

A correspondence has been opened between the Government of Austria, for the establishment of diplomatic relations, in conformity with the wishes of Congress, as indicated by an appropriation act of the session of 1837, and arrangements made for the purpose, which will be duly carried into effect.

[illegible] Austria and Prussia, and with [illegible] States of the Germanic [illegible] Commercial League, our [illegible] and our commercial [illegible] extending [illegible]

[illegible] yet rages in Spain, producing in[illegible] to its own people, and to other [illegible] inevitable consequences of long [illegible] exhausting interest on years. The [illegible] of the interest of the debt due under the convention with the Queen of Spain has not been paid; and similar failures may be expected to happen, until a portion of the resources of her kingdom can be devoted to the extinguishment of its foreign debt.

Having received satisfactory evidence that discriminating tonnage duties were charged upon the vessels of the United States in the ports of Portugal, a proclamation was issued on the 11th day of October last, in compliance with the act of May 25, 1832, declaring that fact, and the duties on foreign tonnage, which were levied upon Portuguese vessels in the U. States, previously to the passage of that act, are accordingly revived.

The act of July 4, 1836, suspending the discriminating duties upon the produce of Portugal imported into this country in Portuguese vessels, was passed upon the application of that government, through its representative here, under the belief that no similar discrimination existed in Portugal to the prejudice of the U. States. I regret to state that such duties are now exacted in that country, upon the cargoes of American vessels; and as the act referred to vests no discretion in the Executive, it is for Congress to determine upon the expediency of further legislation on the subject. Against these discriminations, affecting the vessels of this country, and their cargoes, seasonable remonstrance was made, and notice was given to the Portuguese Government, that unless they should be discontinued, the adoption of countervailing measures on the part of the U. States would become necessary; but the reply of that government, received at the Department of State through our Charge d'Affaires at Lisbon in the month of September last, afforded no ground to hope for the abandonment of a system, so little in harmony with the treatment shown to the vessels of Portugal & their cargoes in the ports of this country, and so contrary to the expectations we had a right to entertain.

With Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Naples, and Belgium, friendly intercourse has been uninterruptedly maintained.

With the Government of the Ottoman Porte and its dependencies on the coast of the Mediterranean, peace and good will are carefully cultivated & have been fostered by such good offices as the relative distance and the condition of those countries would permit.

Our commerce with Greece is carried on under the laws of the two Governments, reciprocally beneficial to the navigating interests of both; and I have reason to look forward to the adoption of other measures which will be extensively and permanently advantageous.

Copies of the treaties concluded with the governments of Siam and Muscat are transmitted for the information of Congress, the ratifications having been received, and the treaties made public, since the close of the last annual session. Already have we reason to congratulate ourselves on the prospect of considerable commercial benefit; and we have, besides, received from the Sultan of Muscat prompt evidence of his desire to cultivate the most friendly feelings, by liberal acts toward one of our vessels, bestowed in a manner so striking as to require on our part a grateful acknowledgement.

Our commerce with the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico still labors under heavy restrictions, the continuance of which is a subject of regret. The only effect of an adherence to them will be to benefit the navigation of other countries, at the expense both of the United States and Spain.

The independent nations of this continent have, ever since they emerged from the colonial state, experienced severe trials in their [illegible] to the permanent establishment of liberal political institutions. Their unsettled condition not only interrupts their own advances to prosperity, but has given seriously injured the other powers of the world. The claims of our citizens upon Peru, Chili, Brazil, the Argentine Republics of Colombia and Mexico, are still pending, although many of them have been presented for examination more than twenty years. New Granada, Venezuela, & Ecuador, have recently formed a convention for the purpose of ascertaining and adjusting claims upon the Republic of full compensation for the injuries originally inflicted upon them, and for the delay in affording it.

An advantageous treaty of commerce has been concluded by the United States with the Peru-Bolivian Confederation, which wants only the ratification of government. The progress of a subsequent negotiation for the settlement of Claims upon Peru, has been unfavorably affected by the war between that Power and Chili; and the Argentine Republic; and the same event is also likely to produce delays in the settlement of our demands on those powers.

The aggravating circumstances connected with our claims upon Mexico, and a variety of events touching the honor and integrity of our Government, led my predecessor to make, at the second session of the last Congress, a special recommendation of the course to be pursued to obtain a speedy and final satisfaction of the injuries complained of by this Government and our citizens. He recommended a final demand of redress, with a contingent authority to the Executive to make reprisals, if that demand should be made in vain. From the proceedings of Congress on that recommendation, it appeared that the opinion of both branches of the Legislature coincided with that of the Executive, that any mode of redress known to the law of nations might justifiably be used.

It was obvious, too, that Congress believed, with the President, that another demand should be made, in order to give undeniable and satisfactory proof of our desire to avoid extremities with a neighboring power; but that there was an indisposition to vest a discretionary authority in the Executive to take redress, should it unfortunately be either denied or unreasonably delayed by the Mexican Government.—So soon as the necessary documents were prepared, after entering upon the duties of my office, a special messenger was sent to Mexico to make a final demand of redress, with the documents required by the provisions of our treaties. The demand was made on the 20th of July last. The reply which bears date on the 29th of the same month, contains assurance of redress, on the part of that Government, to be [illegible] and explicit answer respecting [illegible] complaints, but that the examination of them would necessarily be deliberate; [illegible] that in this examination, it would be guided by that might lead to the most speedy and equitable adjustment of our demands; and that its determination, in respect to each case, should be communicated through the Mexican Minister here.

Since that time, an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary has been accredited to this Government by that of the Mexican Republic. He brought with him assurances of a sincere desire that the pending differences between the two Governments should be terminated in a manner satisfactory to both. He was received with reciprocal assurances; and a hope was entertained that his mission would lead to a speedy, satisfactory and final adjustment of all existing subjects of complaint. A sincere believer in the wisdom of the pacific policy by which the U. States have always been governed in their intercourse with foreign nations, it was my particular desire from the proximity of the Mexican Republic, and well known occurrences on our frontier, to be instrumental in obviating all existing difficulties with that government, and in restoring to the intercourse between the two Republics, that liberal and friendly character by which they should always be distinguished. I regret therefore, the more deeply to have found in the recent communications of that government so little reason to hope that any future efforts of mine for the accomplishment of those desirable objects would be successful.

Although the larger number and many of them aggravated cases of personal wrongs have been now for years before the Mexican Government, and some of the causes of national complaint, and those of the most offensive character, admitted of immediate, simple and satisfactory replies it is only within a few days past that any specific communication in answer to our last demand, made five months ago, has been received from the Mexican Minister. By the report of the secretary of State, herewith presented and the accompanying documents, it will be seen, that for not one of our public complaints has satisfaction been given or offered; that but one of the cases of personal wrong has been favorably considered; and that but four cases of both descriptions, out of all those formally presented, and earnestly pressed, have as yet been decided upon by the Mexican Government.

Not perceiving in what manner any of the powers given to the Executive, alone could be farther usefully employed in bringing this unfortunate controversy to a satisfactory termination, the subject was by my predecessor referred to Congress, as one calling for its interposition. In accordance with the clearly understood wishes of the Legislature, another and formal demand for satisfaction has made upon the Mexican Government, with what success the documents now communicated will show. On a careful and deliberate examination of their contents, and considering the spirit manifested by the Mexican Government, it has become my painful duty to return the subject, as it now stands, to Congress, to whom it belongs, to decide upon the time, the mode, and the measures of redress.—Whatever may be your decision, it shall be faithfully executed, confident that it will be characterised by that moderation and justice which will, I trust under all circumstances, govern the councils of our country.

The balance in the Treasury on the first day of January 1837, was forty-five millions nine hundred and sixty eight thousand five hundred and twenty three dollars. The receipts during the present year from all sources, including the amount of Treasury notes issued are estimated at twenty three millions four hundred and ninety nine thousand nine hundred and eighty one dollars, constituting an aggregate of sixty nine millions four hundred and sixty eight thousand five hundred and four dollars.

Of this amount, about thirty-five millions two hundred and eighty-one thousand three hundred and sixty one dollars will have been expended at the end of the year on appropriations made by Congress; and the residue, amounting to thirty-four millions one hundred and eighty seven thousand one hundred and forty three dollars, will be the nominal balance in the treasury on the first of January next. But of that sum, only one million eighty five thousand four hundred and ninety eight dollars is considered as immediately available for, and applicable to, public purchases. Those portions of it which will be for some time unavailable, consist chiefly of sums deposited with the States, and due from the former deposite banks. The details upon this subject will be found in the annual report of the Secretary of the Treasury. The amount of Treasury notes, which it will be necessary to issue during the year on account of those funds being unavailable, will it is supposed, not exceed four and a half millions.

It seemed proper, in the condition of the country, to have the estimates on all subjects made as low as practicable without prejudice to any great public measures. The Departments were, therefore, desired to prepare their estimates accordingly, and I am happy to find that they have been able to graduate them on so economical a scale. In the great and often unexpected fluctuations to which the revenue is subjected it is not possible to compute the receipts before hand with great certainty; but should they not differ essentially from present anticipations, and should the appropriations not much exceed the estimates, no difficulty seems likely to happen in defraying the current expenses with promptitude and fidelity.

Notwithstanding the great embarrassments which have recently occurred in commercial affairs, and the liberal indulgence which, in consequence of these embarrassments, has been extended to both the merchants and the banks it is gratifying to be able to anticipate that the Treasury notes, which have been issued during the present year will be redeemed, and that the resources of the Treasury, without any resort to loans or increased taxes, will prove ample for defraying all charges imposed on it during 1838.

The Report of the Secretary of the Treasury will afford you a more minute exposition of all matters connected with the administration of the finances during the current year; a period which, for the amount of public moneys disbursed and deposited with the States, as well as the financial difficulties encountered and overcome, has few parallels in our history.

Your attention was, at the last session, invited to the necessity of additional legislative provisions in respect to the collection, safe keeping, and transfer of the public money. No law having been then matured, and not understanding the proceedings of Congress as intended to be final, it becomes my duty to bring this branch of the public service, which were presented for consideration. These were, the creation of a National Bank, the revival, with modifications, of the deposite system established by the act of the 23d of June, 1836, permitting the use of the public moneys by the banks; and the discontinuance of the use of such institutions for the purposes referred to, with suitable provisions for their accomplishment through the agency of public officers.

Considering the opinions of both Houses of Congress on the two first propositions as expressed in the negative in which I entirely concur, it is unnecessary for me again to recur to them. In respect to the last, you have had an opportunity since your adjournment not only to test still further the expediency of the measure, by the continued practical operation of such parts of it as are now in force, but also to discover, what should ever be sought for, and regarded with the utmost deference, the opinions and wishes of the people. The national will is the supreme law of the Republic and on all subjects within the limits of his constitutional powers, should be faithfully obeyed by the public servant.

Since the measures in question was submitted to your consideration, most of you have enjoyed the advantage of personal communication with your constituents.—For one state only has an election been held for the Federal Government; but the early day at which it took place, deprives the measure under consideration of much of the support it might otherwise have derived from the result. Local elections for state officers have, however, been held in several of the states, at which the expediency of the plan proposed by the executive has been more or less discussed.

You will, I am confident, yield to their results the respect due to every expression of the public voice. Desiring, however to arrive at truth and a just view of the subject in all its bearings, you will at the same time remember, that questions of far deeper and more immediate local interest, than the fiscal plans of the National Treasury, were involved in those elections. Above all, we cannot overlook the striking fact, that there were at the time in those States more than one hundred and sixty millions of bank capital, of which large portions were subject to actual forfeiture other large portions upheld only by special and limited legislative indulgences—and most of it if not all, to a greater or less extent, dependent for a continuance of its corporate existence upon the will of the State Legislatures to be then chosen.

Apprised of this circumstance, you will judge whether it is not most probable that the peculiar condition of that vast interest in these respects, the extent to which it has been spread through all the ramifications of society, its direct connection with the then pending elections, and the feelings it was calculated to infuse into the canvass, have exercised a far greater influence over the result, than any which could possibly have been produced by a conflict of opinion in respect to a question in the administration of the General Government more remote and far less important in its bearings upon that interest.

I have found no reason to change my own opinion as to the expediency of adopting the system proposed, being perfectly satisfied that there will be neither stability nor safety either in the fiscal affairs of the Government, or in the pecuniary transactions of individuals and corporations, so long as a connection, exists between them, which, like the past, offers such strong inducements to make them the subjects of political agitation. Indeed, I am more than ever convinced of the dangers to which the free and unbiassed exercise of political opinion the only sure foundation and safeguard of republican government—would be exposed by any further increase of the already overgrown influence of corporate authorities. I cannot, therefore, consistently with my views of duty advise a renewal of a connection which circumstances have dissolved.

The discontinuance of the use of State banks for fiscal purposes ought not to be regarded as a measure of hostility toward those institutions. Banks, properly established and conducted, are highly useful to the business of the country, and will doubtless continue to exist in the States so long as they conform to their laws, and are found to be safe and beneficial.—How they should be created, what privileges they should enjoy, under what responsibilities they should act, and to what restrictions they should be subject, are questions which, as I observed on a previous occasion, belong to the States to decide.

Upon their rights, or the exercise of them, the General Government can have no motive to encroach. Its duty toward them is well performed, when it refrains from legislating for their special benefit, because such legislation would violate the spirit of the Constitution, and be unjust to other interests; when it takes no steps to impair their usefulness, but so manages its own affairs as to make it the interest of those institutions to strengthen and improve their condition for the security and welfare of the community at large. They have no right to insist on a connection with the Federal Government, nor on the use of the public money for their own benefit.

The object of the measure under consideration is, to avoid for the future a compulsory connection of this kind. It proposes to place the General Government, in regard to the essential points of the collection, safe-keeping and transfer of the public money, in a situation which shall relieve it from all dependence on the will of irresponsible individuals or corporations; to withdraw those moneys from the uses of private trade, and confide them to agents constitutionally selected and controlled by law; to abstain from improper interference with the industry of the people, and withhold inducements to improvident dealings on the part of individuals; to give stability to the concerns of the Treasury, to preserve the measures of the Government from the unavoidable reproaches that flow from such a connection, and the banks themselves from the injurious effects of a supposed participation in the political conflicts of the day from which they will otherwise find it difficult to escape.

These are my views upon this important subject: formed after careful reflection, and with no desire but to arrive at what is most likely to promote the public interest. They are now as they were before, submitted with unfeigned deference for the opinions of others. It was hardly to be hoped that changes so important, on a subject so interesting, could be made without producing a serious diversity of opinion; but so long as those conflicting views are kept above the [illegible] individual or [illegible] and are discussed with moderation and candor, such diversity is a benefit, not an injury.

If a majority of Congress see the public welfare in a different light; and more especially if they should be satisfied that the measure proposed would not be acceptable to the people; I shall look to their wisdom to substitute such as may be more conducive to the one, and more satisfactory to the other. In any event, they may confidently rely on my hearty cooperation to the fullest extent, which my views of the Constitution and my sense of duty will permit.

It is obviously important to this branch of the public service, and to the business and quiet of the country, that the whole subject should in some way be settled and regulated by law; and, if possible, at your present session. Besides the plans above referred to, I am not aware that any one has been suggested, except that of keeping the public money in the State banks on special deposite. This plan is, to some extent, in accordance with the practice of the Government, and with the present arrangement of the Treasury Department; which except, perhaps, during the operation of the late deposite act, has always been allowed, even during the existence of a National Bank to make a temporary use of the State banks, in particular places, for the safe-keeping of portions of the revenue.

This discretionary power might be continued, if congress deem it desirable, whatever general system may be adopted. So long as the connection is voluntary, we need perhaps anticipate few of those difficulties and little of that dependence, on the banks, which must attend every such connection when compulsory in its nature, and when so arranged as to make the banks a fixed part of the machinery of Government. It is undoubtedly in the power of Congress so to regulate and guard it as to prevent the publick money from being applied to the use, or intermingled with the affairs, of individuals. Thus arranged, although it would not give to the government that entire control over its own funds which I desire to secure to it by the plan I have proposed, it would, it must be admitted, in a great degree, accomplish one of the objects which has recommended that plan to my judgment—the separation of the fiscal concerns of the government from those of individuals or corporations.

With these observations, I recommend the whole matter to your dispassionate reflection; confidently hoping that some conclusion may be reached by your deliberations which, on the one hand, shall give safety and stability to the fiscal operations of the Government, and be consistent, on the other, with the genius of our institutions, and with the interests and wishes of the great mass of our constituents.

It was my hope that nothing would occur to make necessary, on this occasion, any allusion to the late National Bank. There are circumstances, however, connected with the present state of its affairs that bear so directly on the character of the Government and the welfare of the citizens, that I should not feel myself excused in neglecting to notice them.

The charter which terminated its banking privileges on the fourth of March, 1836, continued its corporation powers two years more, for the sole purpose of closing its affairs, with authority "to use the corporate name, style and capacity, for the purpose of suits for a final settlement and liquidation of the affairs and acts of the corporation, and for the sale and disposition of their estate, real, personal, and mixed, but for no other purpose or in any other manner whatever." Just before the banking privileges ceased, its effects were transferred by the bank to a new State institution then recently incorporated, in trust, for the discharge of its debts and the settlement of its affairs. With this trustee, by authority of Congress, an adjustment was subsequently made of the large interest which the Government had in the stock of the institution.

The manner in which a trust unexpectedly created upon the act granting the charter, and involving such great public interests, has been executed, would, under any circumstances, be a fit subject of inquiry; but much more does it deserve your attention, when it embraces the redemption of obligations to which the authority and credit of the United States have given value. The two years allowed are now nearly at an end. It is well understood that the trustee has not redeemed and cancelled the outstanding notes of the bank, but has reissued, and is actually re-issuing, since the 3d of March, 1836, the notes which have been received by it to a vast amount.

According to its own official statement, so late as the first of October last, nine teen months after the banking privileges given by the charter had expired, it had under its control uncancelled notes of the late bank of the United States to the amount of twentyseven millions five hundred and sixty one thousand eight hundred and sixty six dollars, of which six millions one hundred and seventy five thousand eight hundred and sixty one dollars were in actual circulation; one million four hundred and sixty eight thousand six hundred and twenty seven dollars at State bank agencies, and three millions two thousand three hundred and ninety dollars in transitu; thus showing that upwards of ten millions and a half of the notes of the old bank were then still kept outstanding.

The impropriety of this procedure is obvious, it being the duty of the trustee to cancel and not to put forth the notes of an institution whose concerns it had undertaken to wind up. If the trustee has a right to re-issue these notes now, I can see no reason why it may not continue to do so after the expiration of the two years. As no one could have anticipated a course so extraordinary, the prohibitory clause of the charter above quoted was not accompanied by any penalty or other special provision for enforcing it; nor have we any general law for the prevention of similar acts in future.

But it is not in this view of the subject alone that your interposition is required. The United States, in settling with the trustee for their stock have withdrawn their funds from their former direct liability to the creditors of the old bank, yet notes of the institution continue to be sent fourth in its name, and apparently upon the authority of the United States. The transactions connected with the employment of the bills of the old bank are of vast extent and should they result unfortunately the interests of individuals may be compromised. Without undertaking to decide how far, or in what way, if any, the trustee could be made liable for notes which contain no obligation on its part or the [illegible] and without its [illegible] ment for indemnity, in case of loss, [illegible] still presses itself upon your consideration, whether it is consistent with duty and good faith on the part of the Government, to witness this proceeding without a single effort to arrest it.

The report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, which will be laid before you by the Secretary of the Treasury, will show how the affairs of that office have been conducted for the past year. The disposition of the public lands is one of the most important trusts confided to Congress. The practicability of retaining the title and control of such extensive domains in the General Government, and at the time admitting the Territories embracing them into the Federal Union as co-equals with the original States, was seriously doubted by many of our wisest statesmen. All feared that they would become a source of discord, and many carried their apprehensions so far as to see in them the seeds of a future dissolution of the Confederacy. But happily our experience has already been sufficent to quiet, in a great degree, all such apprehensions. The position, at one time assumed—that the admission of new States into the Union on the same footing with the original States was not compatible with a right of soil in the United States, and operated as a surrender thereof, notwithstanding the terms of the compact by which their admission was designed to be regulated—has been wisely abandoned. Whether in the new or in the old States, all now agree that the right of soil to the public lands remains in the Federal Government, and that these lands constitute a common property, to be disposed of for the common benefit of all the States, old and new. Acquiescence in this just principle by the people of the new States has naturally promoted a disposition to adopt the most liberal policy in the sale of public lands.

A policy which should be limited to the mere object of selling the lands for the greatest possible sum of money, without regard to higher considerations, finds but few advocates. On the contrary, it is generally conceded, that whilst the mode of disposition adopted by the Government, should always be a prudent one, yet its leading object ought to be the early settlement and cultivation of the lands sold, and that it should discountenance, if it cannot prevent, the accumulation of large tracts in the same hands, which must necessarily retard the growth of the new States, or entail upon them a dependent tenantry, and its attendant evils.

A question embracing such important interests, and so well calculated to enlist the feelings of the people in every quarter of the Union, has very naturally given rise to numerous plans for the improvement of the existing system. The distinctive features of the policy that has hitherto prevailed, are, to dispose of the public lands at moderate prices, thus enabling a greater number to enter into competition for their purchase, and accomplishing a double object of promoting their rapid settlement by the purchasers and at the same time increasing the receipts of the Treasury; to sell for cash, thereby preventing the disturbing influence of a large mass of private citizens indebted to the Government, which they have a voice in controlling; to bring them into market no faster than good lands are supposed to be wanted for improvements, thereby preventing the accumulation of large tracts in few hands; and to apply the proceeds of the sales to the general purposes of the Government; thus diminishing the amount to be raised from the people of the States by taxation, and giving each State its portion of the benefits to be derived from this common fund in a manner the most quiet, and at the same time, perhaps, the most equitable, that can be devised.

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