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LIBERIA HERALD.

GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE.

TO THE HONORABLE,
THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGESLATURE.

GENTLEMEN:—Another year has come around; and it is with peculiar satisfaction that I meet the 9th, Session of the Legislature of Liberia. Coming from all parts of the Commonwealth, at this critical and interesting period, it is presumed Gentlemen, that you are fully possessed of the sentiments and wishes of your constituents; and are prepared to act promptly in all questions which may be submitted to your consideration; and, no doubt, will be enabled to give such a direction to public affairs, as the wisdom and patriotism of your constituents will approve and support.

On our present meeting, it is my first duty to invite your attention to the individual favors which these Colonies have experienced during the past year—to the unusual degree of health dispensed to their inhabitants—to the overabundance with which the earth has rewarded the labors of the husbandman—and to the success which has attended the efforts of our merchants and traders.

In the successful cultivation of other branches of industry—and in the progress of general improvement—every where manifest—favorable to the national prosperity—there is just occasion also for our mutual congratulations and thankfulness.

I have the satisfaction of informing you that the Market House in this Town has been completed: and in conformity with the 6th Section of an Act entitled: "An Act providing money for building a Market House in the Town of Monrovia"—which provides, "that when said Market House shall have been completed it shall be leased to the Corporation of Monrovia, for an annual rent, to be agreed upon by persons appointed by the Governor, and the corporation, for that purpose"—Messrs James Brown, and H. Teage, were appointed on the part of the Commonwealth, and Messrs D. B. Brown and James B. Mc. Gill on the part of the corporation. I lay before you the award of those Gentlemen, and the agreement of the corporation authorities. By the latter you will perceive that the corporation authorities bind themselves to pay into the Treasury of the Commonwealth annually, certain sums, until the amount so paid in shall equal the amount expended in erecting the building.

The report of the Canal Commissioners has not yet been received. I understand however it is in a forward state of preparation, and will be laid before you at an early day.

Accounts of the receipts and expenditures of the last year, will, as usual, be laid before you. I am happy to be able to inform you that the state of our finances continues to fulfil our expectations. Full returns of officers in the counties of Grand Bassa, and Sinoe, have not yet been received. It is ascertained, however, that the Revenue received during the last year, exceeds—by a small amount—that of the preceding: and it may reasonably be expected that the receipts of the ensuing year—with the sum now in the Treasury will be sufficient to defray the current demands of the year, and meet any expense which may be incured—should the Legislature adopt measures to that effect—in carrying out the wishes of the people in regard to the framing of a new government.

With respect to the subject of independence, I have the honor to inform you, that in compliance with the desire of the Legislature as expressed in their resolution of the 15th of July last—requesting the Executive to call the attention of the people of these colonies to certain recommendations expressed in a set of resolutions adopted by the Board of Directors of the American Colonization Society, at their annual meeting in January last, touching the independence of Liberia—I issued a proclamation, expressive of the desire of the Legislature, and calling on the people of the Commonwealth to determine—through the means of the ballot box—what disposition should be made of the resolutions, or whether the recommendations therein submitted should be adopted or not. I lay before you the result of the vote taken on the question, in all the towns and villages of the Commonwealth, on the 7th day of November last.

You will perceive that the people, by a small majority however,—have decided in favor of adopting the suggestions of the Board of Directors, in regard to a change of our relations with the Society; and have expressed a desire that a convention be called to draft a constitution for the new government; and that measures be adopted to carry the same into effect as soon as practicable.

I regret exceedingly, to find by official returns that not more than two thirds of the legal voters of the Commonwealth attended the poles to record their opinion respecting this highly important question.

Why so many of our fellow citizens absented themselves, and declined giving a public expression of their sentiments respecting the question submitted to their consideration, is unknown to me. It is nevertheless, a question of vital importance to the people of Liberia. One that should interest—deeply interest—every citizen of the Commonwealth.

Since this question was first mooted, I have been watching with much concern the progress of public opinion in regard to it; and have frequently been astonished at the instability of the public mind, and the manifest inconsistency of some of the leading men of our community.

In tracing out the causes of this fickleness, I have been pained to find, that many of our less informed fellow citizens have been egregiously deceived in regard to the purport of a communication addressed to the Board of Directors of the American Colonization Society, by a committee of the Legislature of 1845—respecting the light in which the sovereignty of these colonies is held by the government of Great Britain.

It is asserted, I understand, that the Legislature of 1845—not having the authority of the people for that purpose, of course—communicated with the Board of Directors of the American Colonization Society, informing them "that it was the wish of the people of these colonies, that their political relations with the Society should be immediately changed; and that Liberia be declared an independent state. And that the Legislature contemplated forming a new government without asking the consent of the people"

As preposterous and foolish, to say the least of them—as these accusations are; they have nevertheless, had a baneful effect upon the minds of some of our people, and, I have no doubt, in a great degree prevented that unanimity of action so desirable on the adoption of any great and important measure.

I believe it was not the intention of the members of that Legislature to convey the idea, by their communication to the Board of Directors, that a vote of the people had been taken on the question of independence, and that they were recommending the measure on their authority. And how any rational man could entertain the idea that the Legislature contemplated changing the relations of these colonies, and forming a new government—without the authority of the people, I cannot conceive. I venture to assert that not a single member of that Legislature would tolerate the doctrine, that the inhabitants at large should not exercise that right—a right which God has given them in common with all men, to judge whether it be consistent with their interest or no change their political relations, or to accept reject a constitution framed for the state which they are members.

This is the birthright of every citizen to whatever state he may belong. There he is or ought to be, by indefeasible right, a Co-Legislator with all the other members that community: and while it is acknowledged every individual in a community is not qualified for assisting in the framing of a constitution it is equally evident that, that share of common sense which the Almighty has so bountifully tributed among mankind in general, is sufficient to quicken every one's feelings and enable him to judge rightly what degree of safety, and what advantages he is likely to enjoy, or be deprived of under any constitution proposed to him.

The diversity opinions and judgments which always takes place on a new measure—the unaccountable progress of some men to censure every thing not their own, and the fretfulness of others at not being consulted on all public matters, are every day occurrences in long established, intelligent, and well regulated communities, therefore are not wonderful in Liberia.

I presume, Gentlemen, that you will dispose of this question of independence according to the wishes of the people as expressed by their vote of the 27th of November last. If so, you will, of course, determine upon the number of which the convention for framing a new constitution shall be composed, the manner in which they shall be elected, the time of their meeting &c. &c. &c.

I am aware that objections are urged against this course. It is insisted, on the grounds that not more than two thirds of the male inhabitants attended the polls to signify their wishes with respect to the question, and that the majority in favor of the measure being so small, that the Legislature should decline calling a convention, or adopting further measures in the premises.

For my own part, I can see but one course for your consideration to pursue. With respect to those of our fellow Citizens who declined attending the polls, I have only to remind you: that no person was excluded from voting but those who chose to exclude themselves; and in that case, I hold, that they either show themselves unworthy of the privileges of a citizen, or confiding in the judgment of others signified their consent to the measures proposed. And while it is deeply to be regretted that greater unanimity does not exist with respect to this important question, we can but remember the indisputable maxim, "that the will of the people is the law of the land;" and that government is, or ought to be, instituted for their benefit; and of all the various modes and forms of Government, that is best which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety: and that when any government shall be found inadequate or contrary to these purposes, the majority of the community, however small that majority may be, has an undubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter, or abolish it, in such a manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal. Such changes, however, are always dangerous, and should never be made except under the firm conviction that they are necessary for the benefit, protection, and security of the people in general.

Now, Gentlemen, this perplexing question is in your hands; and, as the representatives and guardians of the rights and interests of the people of these colonies, *I* beg to remind you of the great responsibility which rests upon you. It is your duty to watch cautiously over every occurrence that can possibly tend to obstruct the fair channel of our happiness. *And*, I am fully persuaded that the prosperity and happiness of the people of these colonies depend, under God, on the firm union of their inhabitants. Generations yet to come may owe their freedom and happiness to the result of your deliberation on the important subject now submitted to your consideration. A single false step at this critical crises, may ruin—irreparably ruin, our hopes of future success. Upon you then depends the political happiness or wretchedness of the people of Liberia: may I therefore entreat you to weigh and consider well the part you are called to act in this important matter; and that you will not suffer yourselves to be betrayed into any feelings unbecoming the dignity of your station, and the present critical situation of our affairs. Let us substitute calmness for passion, confidence for suspicions, and, no doubt, we shall soon agree as to the course proper to be pursued on this occasion of your meeting.

In assuming the whole responsibility of conducting the affairs of this government it is impossible to conceal from ourselves or the world the many disadvantages and embarrassments, we must necessarily labor under for some years. The numerical strength of the colony is comparatively small, nor can we boast of great intelligence, experience or wealth. Indeed, when these are considered, it is not matter of surprise that so many of our fellow citizens are exceedingly fearful as to the result of this new organization. The question: "Has the time arrived for this important change?" naturally forces itself on the mind of every reflecting citizen.

A majority of the people, however, has decided in the affirmative; which opinion is sustained by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors of the American Colonization Society. In their opinion it is the only course that will, or can, relieve us from the embarrassments we labor under with respect to the encroachments of foreigners; and the objections urged by Great Britain in regard to our sovereignty.

I sincerely hope, and believe Gentlemen that you will be sustained by your fellow citizens in whatever measures you may adopt respecting this question, and that the reputation of the people of Liberia, for order and good government, will not be diminished by our future conduct—that there will be no discord among us—that all differences of small moment will be entirely laid aside, and that the only strife among citizens will be who shall do most to serve and to save an oppressed and injured race.

I feel particular satisfaction in being able to announce to you that nothing has occured during the past year to disturb the friendly relations subsisting between this government and the surrounding native tribes. Indeed our amity with them appears to have become more firmly established. I am also happy to state that the continued efforts to introduce among them the christian religion, and habits of civilization, have not been without success. They are unquestionably becoming, every year, more and more sensible of the superiority of civilized life, over the barbarous customs of their fathers; and many of them are beginning to engage pretty extensively in the pursuits of agriculture, and household manufacture. They are becoming convinced of the precarious resources of the slave trade and of the sufferings to which many of them are frequently reduced by the wars and wants of savage life: and find it their interest to dispose of their territories to this government—ceding to it the political control and jurisdiction over all persons and property therein; incorporating themselves with us, forming an integral part of this Commonwealth.

Since the last annual meeting of the Legislature another important acquisition of territory has been made. In February last the natives occupying the lands lying between Blue Barra and Grand Cess—the territory of Settra Kroe, comprising about six miles of sea coast, excepted—ceeded to this government—including the right of sovereignty—their entire territories:—also two tribes further north, occupying the territories known as Tassoo, and Baffoo Bay:—reserving for their members only what is sufficient to maintain them in an agricultural way. A few days ago, General Lewis, commissioned on the part of this Government, succeeded in purchasing about fifteen miles of sea coast, comprising portions of the territories of Manna, Curreo, and Timboo.

It is understood, in each case, that we shall extend to them our patronage and protection, that we will establish trading factories among them, furnishing them necessaries, at moderate prices, in exchange for their commodities, and protect them against the incursions of their marauding neighbors.

Other tribes occupying intermediate points have agreed to transfer their territories to this Government; and we are only awaiting the arrival of funds—daily expected—to perfect our negotiations. If not interrupted by foreigners, and means are placed at our command, I have but little doubt, that during the present year we shall succeed in extinguishing the native title to all the lands lying between the extreme points of colonial jurisdiction.

Gentlemen, I lay before you a communication, dated December 8th 1846, addressed to me by Captain Murray of Her Majesty's Sloop "Favorite," in which he asks permission "to construct a chart of the line of coast occupied by the Liberians, in which to mark the territories now in their possession,"—and that I would attach my signature to the same: and allow him to examine the title deeds by which are held the territories in question.

He has, also, been pleased to say "that England recognizes our right to these territories, if legally purchased from the rightful owners of the soil,"—regarding the Liberians however," only in the light

Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

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B. Liberia Herald

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