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Report from the Committee Appointed to Wait upon the President of the United States to Ascertain his Policy toward the Confederated States, and the Response from the Federal Executive.

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[DOC. NO. XVII.]

REPORT

FROM THE

COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO WAIT

UPON THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

TO ASCERTAIN HIS POLICY TOWARD THE

CONFEDERATED STATES,

AND THE RESPONSE FROM

THE FEDERAL EXECUTIVE.

REPORT.

The Committee appointed on the 8th instant, by this Convention, with direction to wait upon the President of the United States, and present to him the preamble and resolution adopted on that day, beg leave to report: That in the fulfilment of our duty we left the City of Richmond on the morning of the 9th inst., for Washington City; we were, however, prevented by injuries sustained by the rail road, from a violent and protracted storm, from reaching Washington, until 11 o'clock on Friday the 12th inst. At 1 o'clock on that day we called on the President and informed him that we had been appointed a Committee by the Convention of Virginia, then in session, to make a communication to him from that body and requested him to designate an hour at which it would be agreeable to him to receive us. He replied that he would be happy to receive us at 9 o'clock the next morning. We accordingly attended him at that hour, presented him the resolution of the Convention and explained to him our mission. He then read to us a paper which he stated he had just prepared, as the answer to the communication from the Convention, declaring that he had seen in the newspapers the proceedings of the Convention and the character of our mission. We herewith communicate the President's reply to the preamble and resolution of the Convention.

WM. BALLARD PRESTON,
ALEX. H. H. STUART,
GEORGE W. RANDOLPH.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPLY TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE VIRGINIA CONVENTION.

HON. MESSRS. PRESTON, STUART AND RANDOLPH:

Gentlemen,—As a Committee of the Virginia Convention, now in session, you present me a preamble and resolution, in these words:

“Whereas, in the opinion of this Convention, the uncertainty which prevails in the public mind as to the policy which the Federal Executive intends to pursue towards the seceded States is extremely injurious to the industrial and commercial interests of the country, tends to keep up an excitement which is unfavorable to the adjustment of pending difficulties, and threatens a disturbance of the public peace: therefore,

“*Resolved*, That a committee of three delegates be appointed to wait on the President of the United States, present to him this preamble and resolution, and respectfully ask him to communicate to this Convention the policy which the Federal Executive intends to pursue in regard to the Confederate States.”

In answer, I have to say, that having at the beginning of my official term expressed my intended policy as plainly as I was able, it is with deep regret and some mortification I now learn that there is great and injurious uncertainty in the public mind as to what that policy is, and what course I intend to pursue.

Not having as yet seen occasion to change, it is now my purpose to pursue the course marked out in the Inaugural Address. I commend a careful consideration of the whole document, as the best expression I can give of my purposes. As I then and therein said, I now repeat:

“The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what is necessary for these objects there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere.”

By the words "property and places belonging to the Government," I chiefly allude to the military posts and property which were in the possession of the Government when it came to my hands.

But if, as now appears to be true, in pursuit of a purpose to drive the United States authority from these places, an unprovoked assault has been made upon Fort Sumter, I shall hold myself at liberty to repossess, if I can, like places which had been seized before the Government was devolved upon me.

And, in any event, I shall, to the extent of my ability, repel force by force.

In case it proves true that Fort Sumter has been assaulted, as reported, I shall, perhaps, cause the United States mails to be withdrawn from all the States which claim to have seceded, believing that the commencement of actual war against the Government justifies and possibly demands it.

I scarcely need to say that I consider the military posts and property situated within the States which claim to have seceded, as yet belonging to the Government of the United States, as much as they did before the supposed secession.

Whatever else I may do for the purpose, I shall not attempt to collect the duties and imposts by any armed invasion of any part of the country—not meaning by this, however, that I may not land a force deemed necessary to relieve a fort upon the border of the country.

From the fact that I have quoted a part of the Inaugural Address, it must not be inferred that I repudiate any other part, the whole of which I re-affirm, except so far as what I now say of the mails may be regarded as a modification.