

Address of the Grand Council, U.L.A., to the councils of the Union League in Alabama [January 2, 1867]

ADDRESS OF THE GRAND COUNCIL, U. L. A., TO THE COUNCILS OF THE UNION LEAGUE IN ALABAMA

The Grand Council of the Union League of Ala., to all the members of their loyal charge, greeting:

We thank the God of Nations, who has been to the American people a God in war as well as a God in peace, that the time has arrived when men can assemble in Alabama, violating no law and dreading no tribunal, in declaring for liberty, and for a National Union based on liberty; and that, through the agency of the loyal soldiers of the Union we may again proclaim that truth, uttered by the patriot fathers in 1776, but so long ignored in Alabama, "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

We rejoice that it has pleased the National Grand Council to authorize our meeting and organization, that we may take counsel together for the good of all, and send you such expressions of opinion and advice as will assist you the better to labor in the cause of truth, Justice and Liberty.

The National situation, so dark before the manifestation given by the people in October and November last of their determination that the Government of the United States should not be administered in the interest of the rebels who tried to overthrow it, is now steadily improving. Loyalty maintains the ascendancy in Congress, endorsed by the people of the Nation with marked unanimity. In only two of the *recognized* states does rebellion hold up its head. Maryland has been secured to the rebel interest by the treachery of an Executive elected to serve the cause of loyalty, but which, for the sake of personal aggrandizement, he endeavors, with all the zeal of a betrayer, to destroy. In Delaware, ignorance and a lax moral sentiment have not been sufficiently brought into contact with the church and the school to enable her to abandon her cause of slavery, ever sustained and fostered only where few can read, and fewer still possess any real love of virtue.

But these blots, in connection with the disloyal legislature of a State which once boasted a Clay, are insignificant. When contrasted with the condition of the remainder of the loyal nation, and we should hardly give them a passing notice were it not for the suffering which they carry to thousands of loyal hearths, now under control of the petty tyranny, which the rebels, aided by the National Executive, have been enabled to institute.

No word of cheer, however applies to our very properly *unrecognized* State. Alabama.

But for the loyalty before alluded to, which manifests so much power at a distance, the personal safety of the loyal men of Alabama might well be questioned. The late devotees to treason have far too much power to permit a loyal man to be regarded with respect by the masses in their train. The pains taken in all places of public resort to denounce the Government and its defenders; the manner in which a vicious press alludes to our flag; the continual annoyance of those who wear the National uniform in either service; the misrepresentations of a Bureau instituted to secure the colored man justice, and which has not been allowed to secure him that justice; and the ingratitude towards the Government in view of it's lavish charity dispensed to suffering whites; all indicate that old things have not yet passed away—that treason is still a power in Alabama.

Here we would gladly pause and dismiss a theme contemplated only with regret. But the interests of humanity demand that the disposition to wrong those who have little, if any, influence in the State, should receive a passing notice, even in our present moderate and conservative temper. That freedmen have been defrauded of hard-earned wages justly due—that they have been punished for petty offences as no other class of men has been—that offenders against their persons and property meet with but nominal punishment under a vicious administration of the laws, and are often altogether shielded by a prejudiced public sentiment—and that former owners of minor have used the State Courts to take them from the custody of and protectors—are facts which must be published. We cannot do less than this. Were we inclined to be vindictive we might say much more, and yet speak but the simple truth. How true it is that the power of treason is thus far only weakened—that the old pro-slavery ideas, in which it had its birth, have still controlling power in the State.

And yet we say to you, our loyal brethren, take courage. The power which has made treason stagger, can make it die.

We desire that you keep bright the council fires, and see that the fact that positive loyalty still exists within our borders, is kept before the people, in season, and when the faint hearted would deem out of season. Teach them that in this whole nation loyalty will take no step backwards. Proclaim that the acceptance of the pending. Constitutional amendments, with a rigid adherence to the Test Oath, are the mildest terms that will ever be presented as a basis of peace.—That even these complied with in letter only and not in spirit, will be of no avail. That loyalty, if not met with out-spoken praise, must be respected by the silence of its of its adversaries.

And brethren, while you do thus, look well unto yourselves, and see that you are true to whole spirit of the times. Meet fully the demands of the present hour. Abolish the spirit of hatred and contempt which makes us unwilling to accord to one class of our fellow citizens their rights as citizens. Let us do with all our might whatever lies in our power to make them competent sovereigns, equally with ourselves, of our free, common country.

In all the nations of the earth we see manifested the workings of an All-wise Providence in behalf of liberty and progress. The Russian Czar continues to execute his promise that, in spirit as well as in name, the serfs shall be free. Hungary again makes her despotic rulers tremble at her demands for a free constitution. Turkey is convulsed by popular uprisings, and her long benighted dependency, Egypt, emerges again into the view of the world with the concessions of suffrage and representation to the people, enslaved for many centuries. Staid old England's titled rulers stagger as they read the nu-mistakeable signs of an approaching time in which the people shall rule. But our large slaveholders cling as fondly to the traditions of their favorite institution as the old order of nobles in France did to theirs, and seek to perpetuate their power over the negro by forever retaining him in an object position in our civil and social state. Yet if monarchs are yielding what has been termed a principle, how much easier ought it to be for us to yield a prejudice. It is the cardinal principle of our Government that the people shall rule, and under this principle of our Government that the people shall rule, and under this principle, whether we will it not, the freedman will soon be recognized as a man, with all the powers and all the rights of every other man under our republican system.

It is your duty then, brethren, in view of this fact—if from no higher consideration—to discard the prejudices of the past against race and color. We would that nobler motives than those of policy might influence you, because even-handed justice is more potent and creditable as an incentive than the lower maxims of the mere politician—But if you will not be constrained by these higher impulses, heed the reasoning of sound policy. In the nature of things, the black man is your friend. In the war, the loyal men of the nation found nothing but kindness and respect on his part. He loved the flag which we love, and he suffered privation and death in behalf of the cause to us so dear. *Shall we have him for our ally or the rebel for our master?*

Trifle not with his friendship by denying him the rights to which he is justly entitled. Accept his proffered assistance, and accord to him the ballot that he may have that hold upon the laws which they have who help make them, and by which he may be shielded from the cruelty, wrong and oppression under which he now suffers. Let us seek to do from a sense of justice what the rebels are ready today to do, were they but convinced that he would use his vote to perpetuate their power.



Be strong, then, in the love of truth. Seek not to increase your numbers unless the numbers can be increased and the principles here enunciated be maintained at the same time.

Do this, and we will shortly be able to prove before the nation the falsity of the charge now made by rebels, that the loyal men of Alabama have not the ability to manage the State.

Do this, and we will be able to show before God and man, that we have not been unfaithful to the high trust committed to our care.

Done at the Council Chamber in the City of Montgomery. Alabama, on the 2nd day of January, 1867, and the Sixth year of the League.