

RECONSTRUCTION
IN
MISSISSIPPI

BY

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and killed by a member of the governor's staff. He fled from the state, and was never caught.¹ Such occurrences made the Democratic victory easy in many counties.

Four days after the election, ex-United States Senator Revels wrote a long letter to the President, in which he gave his views on the course of Governor Ames, and the reasons for the defeat of the Republican party. The letter was widely published at the time, and was the subject of not a little comment throughout the Union.²

HOLLY SPRINGS, MISS., November 6, 1875.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY, U. S. GRANT, *President of the United States* :

. . . Since reconstruction, the masses of my people have been, as it were, enslaved in mind by unprincipled adventurers, who, caring nothing for country, were willing to stoop to anything no matter how infamous, to secure power to themselves, and perpetuate it. My people are naturally Republicans, and always will be, but as they grow older in freedom so do they in wisdom. A great portion of them have learned that they were being used as mere tools, and, as in the late election, not being able to correct existing evils among themselves, they determined by casting their ballots against these unprincipled adventurers, to overthrow them. . . . My people have been told by these schemers, when men have been placed on the ticket who were notoriously corrupt and dishonest, that they must vote for them; that the salvation of the party depended upon it; that the man who scratched a ticket was not a Republican. This is only one of the many means these unprincipled demagogues have devised to perpetuate the intellectual bondage of my people. To defeat this policy, at the late election men, irrespective of race, color, or party affiliation, united, and voted together against men known to be incompetent and dishonest. I cannot recognize, nor do the mass of my people who read, recognize the majority of the officials who have been in power for the past two years as Republicans. . . .

The great mass of the white people have abandoned their hostility to the general government and Republican principles,

¹ Testimony of Judge W. B. Cunningham, Boutwell Report, p. 844.

² The letter was first published in the *Jackson Daily Times* in November, 1875. In June, 1876, Mr. Revels testified before the Boutwell committee, and declared that he still stood by that letter. He said: "I believed then, as I do now, that certain imprudent men who called themselves Republicans had broken our party down, and after the defeat they rushed to Washington and were trying to mislead the President and throw the blame on the pure Republican party and the innocent old white Republicans, both of whom I felt it my duty as a Christian man to defend." In this connection it is but fair to state that Mr. Revels was likely prompted in some degree by personal prejudice, the governor having removed him from the presidency of Alcorn University.

and to-day accept as a fact that all men are born free and equal, and I believe are ready to guarantee to my people every right and privilege guaranteed to an American citizen. The bitterness and hate created by the late civil strife has, in my opinion, been obliterated in this state, except perhaps in some localities, and would have long since been entirely obliterated, were it not for some unprincipled men who would keep alive the bitterness of the past, and inculcate a hatred between the races, in order that they may aggrandize themselves by office, and its emoluments, to control my people, the effect of which is to degrade them. As an evidence that party lines in this state have been obliterated, men were supported without regard to their party affiliations, their birth, or their color, by those who heretofore have acted with the Democratic party, by this course giving an evidence of their sincerity that they have abandoned the political issues of the past, and were only desirous of inaugurating an honest state government, and restoring a mutual confidence between the races. I give you my opinion, that had our state adhered to Republican principles, and stood by the platform upon which it was elected, the state to-day would have been upon the highway of prosperity. Peace would have prevailed within her borders, and the Republican party would have embraced within her folds thousands of the best and purest citizens of which Mississippi can boast, and the election just passed would have been a Republican victory of not less than eighty to a hundred thousand majority; but the dishonest course which has been pursued has forced into silence and retirement nearly all of the leading Republicans who organized, and have heretofore led the party to victory. A few who have been bold enough to stand by Republican principle, and condemn dishonesty, corruption, and incompetency have been supported and elected by overwhelming majorities. If the state administration had adhered to Republican principles, advanced patriotic measures, appointed only honest and competent men to office, and sought to restore confidence between the races, bloodshed would have been unknown, peace would have prevailed, Federal interference been unthought of; harmony, friendship, and mutual confidence would have taken the place of the bayonet. . . .

H. R. REVELS.

Other notable letters written to the President by prominent Republicans shortly after the election, and which, like that of Senator Revels's, received much attention at the time, were those of Attorney General Harris and Ham Carter. In each of these letters, the responsibility for the Republican defeat was placed upon Governor Ames. No Democrat ever arraigned his administration with such severity as did these three Republicans, two of whom were colored men. Ex-Attorney