

propriation for the prevention of fraud.

#### INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS.

I advise appropriations for such internal improvements as in the wisdom of Congress it may deem to be of public importance. The necessity of improving the navigation of the Mississippi river justifies a special allusion to that subject. I suggest the adoption of some measure for the removal of the obstructions which now impede the navigation of that great channel of commerce.

#### CIVIL SERVICE.

In my letter accepting the nomination for vice-president, I stated that in my judgment no man should be the incumbent of office the duties of which he is for any cause unfit to perform, who is lacking in the ability, fidelity or integrity, which a proper administration of such office demands. The sentiment would doubtless meet with general acquiescence, but opinion has been widely divided upon the wisdom and practicability of the various reformatory schemes which have been suggested, and certain proposed regulations governing appointments to public office. The efficiency of such regulations has been mistrusted mainly because they have seemed to exalt mere educational and abstract tests above general business capacity, and even special fitness for the particular work in hand. It seems to me that the result that should be applied to the management of the public service may properly conform in the main to such as regulate the condition of successful private business. Original appointments should be based upon ascertained fitness. The tenure of office should be stable. Positions of responsibility should, so far as practicable, be filled by the presence of worthy, efficient officers. The investigation of all complaints and the punishment of all official misconduct should be prompt and thorough. The views expressed in the foregoing letter are those which will govern me in the administration of the executive office. These are doubtless shared by all intelligent and patriotic citizens, however divergent in their opinions as to the best methods of putting them into practical operation. For example, the assertion that original appointments should be based upon ascertained fitness is not open to dispute, but the question of how in practice such fitness can be most effectually ascertained, is one which has for years excited interest and discussion. The measure which with slight variations in its details has lately been urged upon the attention of Congress and the executive, has as its principal feature, the scheme of competitive examination. With certain exceptions, which need not here be specified, he plan would admit to the service only to the lowest grade, and would accordingly demand that vacancies in the higher positions should be filled by promotion alone. In these particulars it is in conformity with the existing civil service of Great Britain, and indeed the success which has attended that system in the country of its birth, is the strongest argument which has been urged for its adoption here. The fact should not, however, be overlooked that there are certain features of the English system which have not generally been received with favor in this country, even among the foremost advocates of civil service reform. Among them are, first, a tenure of office which is substantially a life tenure; 2d, a limitation of the maximum age at which an applicant can enter the service, whereby all men in middle life or under, with some exceptions, are rigidly excluded; 3d, a retiring allowance upon going out of office. These three elements are as important factors of the problem as any of the others. To eliminate these from the English system would effect a most radical change in its theory and practice. The avowed purpose of that system is to induce educated young men of the country to devote their lives to public employment by an assurance that having once entered upon it they need never leave it, and that after voluntary retirement they shall be recipients of an annual pension. That this system as an entirety has proved very successful in Great Britain seems to be generally conceded there by those who once opposed its adoption. To a statute which should incorporate all its essential features I should feel bound to give my approval, but whether it would be for the best interests of the public to fix upon an expedient for the immediate extensive application, which embraces certain features of the English sys-

tem, but excludes or ignores others of equal importance, may be seriously doubted, even by those impressed as I am myself with the grave importance of correcting the evils which exist in the present methods of appointment. If, for example, the English rule which shuts out persons above the age of 25 years from a large number of public employments is not to be made an essential part of our system. It is questionable whether the attainment of the highest number of marks at a competitive examination should be the criterion by which all applications for appointment should be put to the test, and under similar conditions it may also be questioned whether admission to the service should be strictly limited to its lowest ranks. There are very many characteristics which go to make a model civil service officer. Among them are probably industry, good sense, good habits, good temper, patience, toil, courtesy, tact, self-reliance, many deference to superior officers, and manly consideration for inferiors. The absence of these traits is not supplied by wide knowledge of books or by promptitude in answering questions, or any other quality likely to be brought to light by competitive examination. To make success on such a contest therefore, an indispensable condition of public employment would very likely result in the practical exclusion of the older applicants, even though they might possess qualifications far superior to their younger and more brilliant competitors. These suggestions must not be regarded as evincing any spirit of opposition to the competitive plan which has been to some extent successfully employed already, and which may hereafter vindicate the claims of its ardent supporters; but it ought to be seriously considered whether the application of the same educational standard to persons of mature years, to young men fresh from school and college, would not be likely to exalt more intellectual proficiency above other qualities of equal or greater importance. Another feature of the proposed system is the selection by promotion of all officers of the government above the lowest grade, except such as would fairly be regarded as exponents of the policy of the Executive and the principles of the dominant party. To afford encouragement to faithful public servants by exciting in their minds the hope of promotion if they are found to merit it, is much to be desired; but would it be wise to adopt a rule so rigid as to permit no other mode of supplying the intermediate wants of the service? There are many persons who fill subordinate positions with great credit, but lack those qualities which are requisite for the higher posts of duty, and besides the modest thought and action of one whose service in a governmental bureau has been long continued are often so cramped by routine procedure as almost to disqualify him from instituting changes required by the public interests and the infusion of new blood from time to time into the middle ranks of the service might be very beneficial in its results. The subject under discussion is one of grave importance. The evils which are complained of cannot be eradicated at once. The work must be gradual. The present English system is a growth of years, and was not created by a single stroke of executive or legislative action. Its beginnings are found in an order in council promulgated in 1855, and it was after patient and courteous scrutiny of its workings that fifteen years later it took its present shape. Five years after the issuance of the order in council and at a time when resort had been made to competitive examination as an experiment, much more extensively than has yet been the case in this country a select committee of the House of Commons made a report to that House, which declaring its approval of the competitive method, deprecated nevertheless any precipitancy in its general adoption, as likely to endanger its ultimate success. During this tentative period the results of the two methods of pass examination and competitive examination were closely watched and compared. It may be that before we confine ourselves on this important question within the stringent bounds of secular enactment, we may profitably await the result of further inquiry and experiment. The submission of a portion of nominations to a central board of examiners selected solely for testing the qualifications of applicants may perhaps, without resort to the

competitive test, put an end to the mischief which attends the present system of appointment, and it may be desirable to vest in such board a wide discretion to ascertain the characteristics and attainments of candidates in these particulars which I have already referred to as being no less important than mere intellectual acquirements. If Congress should deem it advisable at the present session to establish competitive examinations for admission to the service, no doubt such as have been suggested shall deter me from giving the measure my earnest support, and I urgently recommend that should there be a failure to pass any act upon this subject, then an appropriation of \$25,000 a year be made for the enforcement of section 1753 of the Revised Statutes. With the aid thus afforded me I shall strive to execute the provisions of that law according to its letter and spirit. I am unwilling in justice to the present civil servants of the government to dismiss this subject without declaring my dissent from the severe and almost indiscriminate censure with which they have been assailed. That they are as a class indolent and inefficient and corrupt, is a statement which has been often made and widely credited, but when the extent, variety, delicacy and importance of their duties are considered the majority of the government employees are, in my judgment, deserving of high commendation.

#### MERCHANT MARINE.

The continuing decline of the merchant marine of the United States is to be greatly deplored. In view of the fact that we furnish so large a proportion of the freight of the commercial world, and that our shipments are steadily and rapidly increasing, it is a cause of surprise only is our navigation interest diminishing, but it is less than when our exports and imports were not half so large as now either in bulk or value. There must be peculiar hindrance to the development of this interest, or the enterprise and energy of American merchants and capitalists would have kept this country at least abreast of our rivals in the friendly contest for ocean supremacy. The substitution of iron for wood and of steam for sail have brought a great revolution in the trade of the world, but these changes could not have been adverse to America if we had given to the navigation interests a portion of the aid in protection which has been so wisely bestowed upon our manufacturers. I commend the whole subject to the wisdom of Congress, with the suggestion that no question of greater magnitude or further reaching importance can engage their attention.

#### THE IMMIGRANT TAX.

In 1875 the supreme court of the United States declared unconstitutional the statutes of certain states which imposed upon ship owners, or consignees, a tax of \$1.50 for each passenger arriving from a foreign country, or in lieu thereof required a board to indemnify the state and local authorities against the expense for the future relief or support of such passengers. Since the decision the expense attending the care and supervision of immigrants has fallen on the states at whose ports they have been landed. As a large majority of such immigrants immediately upon their arrival proceed to the inland states and territories to seek permanent homes it is manifestly unjust to impose upon the state whose shores they first reach, the burden which is now borne. For this reason, and because of the national importance of the subject I recommend legislation regarding the supervision and transitory care of immigrants at ports of debarkation.

#### ALASKA.

I regret to state that the people of Alaska have reason to complain that they are still unprovided with any form of government by which life or property can be protected. While the extent of its population does not justify the application of the costly machinery of territorial administration, there is immediate necessity for the constitution of such a form of government as will promote the education of the people and secure the administration of justice.

#### CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

The Senate, at the last session, passed a bill providing for the construction of a building for the library of Congress, but it failed to become a law. The provision of such able protection for this great collec-

tion of books, and for the department connected with it, has become a subject of national importance and should receive prompt attention.

#### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

The report of the commissioners of the District of Columbia, herewith transmitted, will inform you fully of the condition of affairs of the district. The vital importance of legislation for the reclamation and improvement of the marshes and the establishment of the harbor lines along the Potomac River front is presented. In the present condition these marshes seriously affect the health of the residents of the adjacent parts of the city, and they greatly mar the general aspect of the park in which stands the Washington monument. This improvement would add to that park and the park south of the Executive Mansion, a large area of valuable land and would transform what is now believed to be a dangerous nuisance into an attractive landscape extending to the river front. They recommend the removal of the steam railway lines from the surface of the streets of the city, and the location of the necessary depots in such places as may be convenient for the public accommodation. They call attention to the deficiency of the water supply, which seriously affects the material prosperity of the city, and the health and comfort of the inhabitants. I commend these subjects to your favorable consideration.

#### NATIONAL ELECTIONS.

The importance of timely legislation with respect to the ascertainment and declarations of the vote for Presidential electors was sharply called to the attention of the people more than four years ago. It is to be hoped that some well defined measure may be devised before another national election which will render unnecessary a resort to any expedient of a temporary character for the determination of questions upon contested returns.

#### PRESIDENTIAL INABILITY.

Questions which concern the very existence of the government and the liberties of the people were suggested by the prolonged illness of the late President and his consequent incapacity to perform the functions of his office. It is provided by the second article of the Constitution, in the fourth clause of its first section, that in case of the removal of the President from office, or of his death or inability to discharge the powers and duties of said office, the same shall devolve on the vice-president. What is the intention of the Constitution in the specification of inability to discharge the powers and duties of said office, as one of the contingents which calls the vice-president to the exercise of Presidential functions? Is the inability to be long continued intellectual incapacity, or is it of broader import? What must be its extent and duration? How must its existence be established? Has the President, whose inability is the subject of inquiry, any voice in determining whether or not it exists? Or is the decision of this momentous and delicate question confided to the Vice-President? Or is it contemplated by the Constitution that Congress should provide by law precisely what should constitute inability and how and by what tribunal or authority it should be ascertained? If the inability proves to be temporary in its nature, and during its continuance the vice-president lawfully exercises the functions of the executive, by what tenure does he hold his office? Does he continue as President the remainder of the four years' term, or would the elected President, if his inability should cease in the interval, be empowered to resume his office? And if having such lawful authority, he should exercise it, would the vice-president be thereupon empowered to resume his powers and duties as such? I cannot doubt that these important questions will receive your early and thoughtful consideration.

#### CONCLUSION.

Deeply impressed with the gravity of the responsibilities which have so unexpectedly devolved upon me, it will be my constant purpose to co-operate with you in such measures as will promote the glory of the country and the prosperity of its people.

(Signed)

CHESTER A. ARTHUR.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 6, 1881.

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