

Inaugural address
of
Horace Eaton
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Saturday, October 16, 1847
Inaugural Address

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

The annual assembling of our State Legislature ever presents an appropriate season for a passing survey of those prominent incidents pertaining to our common welfare, which have marked the previous year. And, upon such a survey on the present occasion, we find ourselves surrounded with abundant causes for gratitude to that Benificent Being from whom we receive every good. The year has been characterized by a cheering state of activity and prosperity in our business operations; and although our rejoicing in this respect should perhaps be somewhat tempered by the reflection which forces itself upon us that this favorable condition is to no small extent a result of the destitution and distress which have prevailed in other lands, yet such a remembrance may serve to impress upon us the more deeply a sense of obligation that we, too, have not been suffering the want of bread. So far from this, we have been enjoying an unstinted supply of the fruits of the earth during the year past, and another rich harvest has been freshly gathered in. Our people, too, have been preserved from any wide spread and desolating sickness; civil order has been maintained; and our distinguishing social and religious privileges, unimpaired, have been yielding, for our enjoyment, their rich and countless blessings.

As we enter upon the discharge of our legislative duties, let us not only bear in mind our obligations to those who have committed their interests to our care, but also recognize our responsibility to a Higher Power. Under the generally received and substantially correct doctrine, that laws are but the expression of the public mind and an index of public morals, there is danger of our overlooking a truth of great practical importance that lies beyond. Laws themselves, in turn, exert an influence in forming the character of a people. The estimate which those, who are assumed to be among the wisest and most virtuous of the State, impliedly place upon certain acts by their legislation, goes far to mould the public sentiment in regard to those acts. And, in view of the educational influence which the legislator in this way exerts, he should not regard it as his paramount and exclusive purpose to register the public will, but he should also aim to be guided in every act of legislation by the elevated principles of a sound Christian morality.

In attempting to comply with that provision of the constitution, which requires the Executive annually to lay before the legislature such business as he may think necessary, I do not deem it requisite for me to present every subject, even of public interest, which may properly claim your attention. I regard it as sufficient for me simply to advert to such matters of public concern as would more appropriately claim the notice of the Executive, from the fact, that information pertaining to them might be presumed to fall more especially into his possession. Members of the legislature, coming as they do from different quarters of the State, and acquainted as they are with the operation of existing laws upon the well being and prosperity of the several sections which they respectively represent, will, in regard to most matters relating to the public welfare, arrive for themselves at more just and correct conclusions than any to which the Executive could guide them.

Among those subjects to which I regard it as proper for me to call your attention, I would suggest an apparent defect existing in the statute relating to public accounts. There is no provision by which the Auditor is required to give bonds for the faithful discharge of his official duties. In an office which holds so great control over the treasury, without any effective and immediate check beyond the integrity of the officer, I cannot but regard the defect as one that ought to be remedied; and it is believed that no one holding the office would regard the requirement, that he should give bonds, as oppressive or unreasonable. The present Auditor of Accounts, it is proper for me to state, concurs in these views.

I would respectfully suggest to the Legislature the propriety of altering our laws respecting the rights of married women, so as to secure to them the sole control and benefit of all property which they may have at coverture, or receive during it, in their own right. The effect of such a provision would be to guard married women more effectually from the danger, which ever increases with the growth of a state and the consequent increase of business and its hazards, of being reduced to destitution and suffering by acts in which they have had no part, and in whose disastrous consequences, so far as it can be avoided, they should not share. Other States have turned their attention to this subject, and it would seem that our State should not be less ready to

give salutary and equitable protection to the wife – at least when it can be done without wrong to the husband or his creditors.

I deem it my duty to call your attention to an act passed at the last session of the Legislature, entitled “An act to prevent inposition and accidents in the sale of medicines.” The provision contained in the act, that it should not go into effect until the first day of November, 1847, would seem to imply that doubts were entertained as to the utility or expediency of the law by the legislature that passed it; as the provision appears to have been inserted for the purpose of affording an opportunity for a repeal of the act previous to its taking effect. Such doubts were certainly entertained by myself, and time but served to confirm them. It is strongly believed that an attempt to carry out the provisions of the law would not only be attended with great embarrassment and inconvenience, but would altogether fail of effecting the purposes sought to be accomplished. I would, therefore, respectfully recommend a repeal of the act in question – and should the legislature concur with me in the main opinion, there are obviously reasons why the subject should receive immediate attention.

It is a source of much gratification to me to be able to express my firm and decided convictions, that, under the regulations recently adopted for the supervision of our common schools, and the efforts made in connection with that supervision to improve these institutions and extend their influence, a palpable advancement has been made in many particulars, although much remains to be desired. But as the condition of this great interest of the State, and its present demands upon us, will be considered in the Report of the State Superintendent, which in due time will be laid before you, it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon this subject here.

I have received the third Annual Report of the State Geologist, and it is now in process of publication. It appears from the Report, that the survey has been progressing during the past year with a good degree of activity and success, and that the field labor has been mainly completed, only a small portion of the State remaining unexplored. The sum originally appropriated for the purposes of the survey will be exhausted on the first day of March next; and from the estimates of the Geologist, appended to the Report, it appears, that an additional appropriation of sixteen hundred dollars a year for two years will be required to complete the remaining systematic field labor; to make such re-examinations of certain localities as may be found necessary in making out the final Report; and to prepare the Report for publication.

I have heretofore so strongly expressed my convictions of the utility and importance of this great work, and of its credit to the State, that it is needless for me to say that I trust the appropriations will be readily made, so that no obstacle shall be presented to its successful and honorable completion.

In accordance with a resolution passed at the last session of the legislature, directing me to appoint some one to examine the documents collected by Henry Stevens, Esq., relative to the claims of this State upon the government of the United States, for expenses incurred during the revolutionary war, I appointed the Hon. Charles K. Williams, whose report I have reason to believe will be submitted to the legislature at its present session.

To carry into effect the resolution of the last session, directing me to appoint some suitable person or persons to correspond with the sculptor Powers, respecting proposed statues in marble of Ethan Allen and Thomas Chittenden for the vacant niches in the lobby of the Capitol, I appointed the Hon. Charles Paine and the Hon. George P. Marsh. Their report has not yet been received, nor am I apprised what progress has been made in the work assigned to them; but believe it will be faithfully accomplished at the earliest period practicable.

Under the resolution requesting me to examine or cause to be examined the Historical Collection of Henry Stevens, Esq., I appointed the Hon. Samuel C. Crafts, and A.G. Chadwick, Esq., to examine the collection, and report to me the number, character, and value of the books and documents which it embraced, and the price at which they could be obtained. Their report has been made to me; but not feeling myself authorized to make the purchase on the terms proposed, the subject is open for such action as the legislature may see fit to take in regard to it. The report of the Committee will be laid before you.

Under the series of resolutions, providing for the collection of the Surveyor General's papers, and other documents pertaining to the history of the State, some progress has been made towards accomplishing the purposes contemplated by the Legislature, but the business is not yet fully completed.

During the year, communications on sundry topics have been received from several of the States, which will at an early day be laid before you; as also will a communication from one of the Directors of the New York Institute for the Blind, suggesting the propriety of a provision being made by this State, by which a part of its unfortunate blind, who are educated at the expense of the State, may be placed in that institution. I deem it proper also to state that the resolutions passed at the last session of the Legislature, relating to Slavery, and the Mexican War, transmitted by me to the executive of Virginia, were reconveyed to me in accordance with an order of the Legislature of that State, directing the Executive to "return them forthwith." This is not announced to you because any action in regard to it is supposed to be necessary, but as Vermont can have no fears that her honor will be dimmed by the contrast in the respective positions of the two States, it is deemed due to her that a record of the transaction should be in her own safe keeping.

I believe that the position of Vermont is distinctly understood in regard to all those great questions of national policy, which are from time to time agitating our national councils, and in which Vermont in common with the other States of the Union has so deep an interest. It affords occasion for the most profound regret that the unhappy war with a neighboring Republic has not yet been terminated, but, on the contrary, is making still greater and greater demands upon the blood and treasure of the nation. It is believed that Vermont has seen nothing in the progress of the contests, to change her sentiment, either in regard to the insufficiency of the grounds on which the war was commenced, or the unworthiness of the purposes for which it has been waged. She cannot recognize the general government as committed to any career of conquest, nor will she regard any unaccomplished schemes of territorial aggrandizement as presenting an obstacle to the speedy adjustment of existing difficulties. Peace she unequivocally and earnestly desires, and asks for no territory, whether slave or free, as a condition of its establishment and security.

It remains for me to pledge you my cordial co-operation in all your efforts to promote the public welfare. And impressed with a grateful sense of our obligations to those who have generously committed their interests to our care – guided by firm convictions of truth and right, and aided by that Divine Favor which alone can insure success to the best devised plans, we may hope that our labors for the session will advance the substantial prosperity and happiness of the people of the State.

HORACE EATON.

Executive Chamber, }
October 16, 1847.