

Executive Speech  
of  
William A. Palmer  
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SPEECH OF GOV. PALMER— 1831.

*Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:*

No choice of Chief Magistrate having been made by the people. I have been called to the discharge of the important duties connected with that office, by a majority of your suffrages. Deeply sensible of the honor conferred on me, and the responsibilities attendant upon its acceptance, it is proper for me as well to give the assurance, that all my abilities shall be brought to a prompt and efficient exercise of the functions of my office, as to express the wish, that they may be so performed as to merit and receive the approbation of those, whose servants we are.

The circumstances, under which I have been called to my present station, have afforded me but little time for the collection of such information, and the suggestion of such recommendations as are proper, at the present time, to be presented for your consideration.

The general condition of our common country is that of peace, prosperity and happiness. Compared with any other people, we have the most abundant cause for grateful acknowledgments as to the Author of all good, that our lot has been cast here. The evils to which we are subject are light and transient in their character. The conflicts of opinion incident to a free government produce sometimes, indeed, contentions and divisions which are for the time alarming and portentous in their aspect; but they are generally of short duration, and when they have passed away, like the commotion of the elements, leave a clearer sky and a purer atmosphere. They present no serious obstructions in our march to national happiness and glory. Other nations have witnessed this, and are profiting by the example. It is indeed a source of just and honest pride to every American, that the old world is already experiencing the progress of republican principles, as taught in the school of our revolution, and is gradually yielding to the dominion of public opinion.

In guarding against evils which threaten our free institutions, a special regard should be paid to that great principle incorporated in our Bill of Rights, which declares “that government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection and security of the people, nation or community, and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single man, family or set of men, who are a part only of that community.” This principle constitutes the basis of every free government, and whatever tends to impair this “common benefit, protection and security,” and to destroy this equality, tends to its subversion.

The approbation uniformly expressed by the people of this State of the policy of a protecting Tariff, and the encouragement given to works of Internal Improvement by the general government, cannot fail to produce in us a hearty co-operation in suitable measures for the promotion of those great objects.

In attending to the various and important duties assigned us by the constitution, it behooves us to examine with great care the measures which may be presented for our consideration. It is proper, especially, to compare those which are new, with the provisions of the constitution and existing laws, carefully guarding against encroachments on the rights of any portion of the people; and while we protect those rights, entrusted more particularly to our guardianship, not to infringe those of a more general and important character, pertaining both to other members of the confederacy, and to the confederacy itself.

The subjects which more immediately require our attention, on the present occasion, are, such improvements and alterations in the existing laws, and the passage of such new ones, as experience has proved to be important and necessary, and called for by the changes in the condition of society—a vigilant superintendence of the fiscal concerns of the State, as it respects both the just levy and prudent expenditure of the public taxes—the improvement of the various channels of communication between the different parts of the State and with other States—the promotion of trade, agriculture and manufactures—the appointment to office of men who are discreet, honest, capable, and unshackled by any earthly allegiance except to the constitution and laws—a due regard to the state of the Militia, and a watchful care over the condition of our common schools and literary institutions. There are several topics, however, to which I wish more specifically to direct your attention.

The power which, under existing laws, the creditor claims and exercises over the body of his debtor, has always appeared to me to be inconsistent with the mild policy of our laws and the free and liberal spirit of our institutions, and especially at variance with that clause of our constitution which provides that “the person of the debtor, where there is not strong presumption of fraud, shall not be continued in prison after delivering up all his estate for the use of his creditors.” It is true that difficulties exist in regulating the details of a system calculated to secure to all the just rights belonging to each; but it is believed that the wisdom of the legislature can devise some plan which shall give relief to a class of community, whose claims to our attention are founded in the first principles of benevolence and justice.

The administration of oaths is a subject of the deepest importance to every government, and cannot fail, consequently, to command your especial attention. The influence which they exercise over the human mind, renders it of the utmost importance that they should be resorted to, only for the attainment of proper objects; and I submit to your consideration whether their administration should not be prohibited by law, except when necessary to secure the faithful discharge of official trusts, and to elicit truth in the administration of justice. I submit also to your consideration whether the cause of morality, and the general good, do not demand your interposition to diminish the frequency of their imposition even for the above purposes.

The condition of the state prison will also engage your attention. By a law of this state, passed in 1829, commissioners were appointed and authorized to expend a sum not exceeding nine thousand dollars, in erecting an additional building for the accommodation of the prisoners, and to make alterations in the buildings already erected. It was expected that the expenditures incurred to carry the object of the law into effect, would be taken out of the prison funds belonging to the State. I have the pleasure to inform you that the buildings and alterations contemplated by said act have been completed without incurring any additional expense to the State. The rules and regulations established for the government of the convicts have been so altered, that solitary confinement as been introduced in all cases except when the convicts are engaged in labor. I have long entertained the opinion that this mode of conducting the prison is the only one calculated to attain the benevolent objects of the penitentiary system; and that, without it, the system would fail to produce the effect on this unfortunate and degraded class of community so ardently desired by its friends.

Should anything of sufficient moment to demand your attention, not already referred to, suggest itself to my mind hereafter, it will be made the subject of a special communication.

With feelings of gratitude for the measure of prosperity and happiness vouchsafed to us by a kind Providence, who has watched over our concerns for good, let us all strive to improve the blessings bestowed upon us, both as a people and as individuals, as the best means of securing them to ourselves and our posterity.

WM. A. PALMER.