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of
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SPEECH OF GOV. MARTIN CHITTENDEN – 1813¹.

Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives, – We meet under prospects not the most flattering. Our political horizon is encircled with clouds somewhat portentous. It is a period peculiarly interesting, as it respects our national and state affairs, and most eventful in the history of the world: a crisis demanding the united wisdom, prudence, and firmness of the whole community. Under these views and prospects, and with a due sense of my own inexperience and imperfections, it is with extreme diffidence that I enter upon the duties assigned me by the constituted authorities of a moral and enlightened people. But I do it cheerfully, relying on that candor and indulgence which I have often heretofore experienced.

The national constitution having wisely placed our foreign relations in the hands and under the controul of the general government, our attention will principally be directed to the local concerns of the State. To provide for the protection and promote the greatest possible prosperity and happiness of every class of citizens, being the legitimate object of all wise and free governments, will necessarily claim your attention. The peculiar situation, under which I am called to enter upon the duties of the Chief Magistrate, must afford an apology for not laying before you, at this time, so particular a view of the affairs of the State as might be desirable. But I have the satisfaction of believing that the wisdom and intelligence of the legislature, composed of men elected from every portion of the State, and intimately acquainted with the feelings and necessities of their constituents, will furnish all the information necessary to promote the public interest.

The preservation of all free governments principally depending on the virtue and intelligence of the great body of the people, forcibly recommends the propriety of selecting for office men distinguished for virtuous example; disregarding those local and² party views which stimulate one part of the community to trample on the rights of the other, and to sport with the feelings and happiness of their fellow men. In just retribution, however, for this perversion of reason, this violation of duty, it will generally be found that this spirit is not less destructive to the happiness of the aggressor than of the aggrieved.

The importance of the subject of the militia will not fail to claim your deliberate consideration. I have always considered this force peculiarly adapted and exclusively assigned for the service and protection of the respective States; excepting in cases provided for by the national constitution, *viz. to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrection, and repel invasions*. It never could have been contemplated by the framers of our excellent constitution, who, it appears, in the most cautious manner, guarded the sovereignty of the States, or by the States, who adopted it, that the whole body of the militia were, by any kind of magic at once to be transformed into a regular army for the purpose foreign conquest; and it is to be regretted, that a construction should have been given to the constitution, so peculiarly burdensome and oppressive to that important class of our fellow citizens.

The known spirit and patriotism of the militia forbid the supposition that they will not cheerfully perform their duty, when it shall be clearly defined, and their rights permanently secured; and nothing is now wanting but proper regulations and suitable encouragement to render them an efficient force for all the purposes contemplated by the national and state constitutions. But a recurrence to our present militia system will evince the propriety of many alterations and amendments. The propriety, likewise, of many alterations in our present code of laws may be apparent. But that subject being under the consideration of the Hon. Council of Censors, I would suggest the propriety of waiting the result of their deliberations.

The state of our financial concerns will be derived from the Treasury Department; and the known integrity and ability, with which the duties of that office have been performed, leaves no room to doubt its correctness. And it is to be hoped that no additional burdens will be necessary to meet the current expences of the present year. A consideration of the embarrassed situation of our commerce – the great source of national and individual income in times of prosperity, and the heavy burdens soon to be imposed in the form of direct and internal taxes cannot fail to recommend a strict attention to the principles of economy both public and private.

¹ Ms. *Council Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 19.

² Or in the printed journal

The national constitution very justly enjoins due obedience to all the laws and regulations which are made in conformity to it. But the same charter of our political rights ensures us the freedom of speech; a right never to be resigned while a single vestige of civil liberty remains. It is, therefore, our unquestionable right, and, at periods like the present it may be considered our duty, not only to reflect on the state of our public affairs, but with a manly and temperate frankness, becoming freemen, to express our sentiments respecting them; and in the exercise of all fair and constitutional means, endeavour to produce such a state of things as will promote a just, secure and honourable peace, and avert the evils we feel, and the much greater, which we have reason to expect, from a war with one of the most powerful actions of Europe, and from the toils and intrigues, still more dangerous, of another. The war, in which we are engaged, would require the united wisdom and energy of the nation to sustain. It was declared under circumstances which forcibly induced a great proportion of the people to consider it at least doubtful, as to its necessity, expedience or justice. And its continuance has become still more so, since the removal of the Orders in Council, the principal alleged cause of it. The subject of impressment never having been considered a sufficient cause of war by either of the preceding administrations, and having been adjusted by two of the present cabinet, Messrs. Monroe and Pinckney, ministers on our part, in such a manner as was by them stated to be both safe and honourable to our country, it would seem that it ought not now to be considered an insuperable obstacle to a fair and honourable peace, or an adequate cause for a protracted, expensive and destructive war. The conquest of the Canadas, of which so much has been said, if desirable under any circumstances, must be considered a poor compensation for the sacrifices, which are and must necessarily be made. Notwithstanding the multiplied embarrassments, and afflictive judgments, with which we are visited, yet as a people, our situation is enviable compared with that of many of our fellow men, who are groaning under the iron hand of despotism and oppression; and we have the highest reason to express, with grateful hearts, our dependence on an indulgent Providence for the bounties of the present season, and other unmerited blessings we still enjoy.

Should the documents of the office furnish matter for your consideration, it will be made the subject of a future communication. In the prosecution of the important business of the session, you may be assured, that every measure calculated to promote the security, prosperity, or happiness of our constituents, shall meet with my cordial co-operation and support. I am sensible, that in times of party heat and general commotion, passion too often usurps the place of reason; which seldom fails to lead to an improper result. But, with a firm reliance on the assistance of Divine Providence, I trust we shall never disregard those duties, which are enforced by the national and state constitutions, and which, if steadily pursued, will not fail to result in the promotion of the public good.

MARTIN CHITTENDEN.