

Executive Speech
of
Richard Skinner
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SPEECH OF GOV. SKINNER— 1822¹.

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

The evidence given by my fellow citizens, of their continued respect, in electing me again to the office of Chief Magistrate of the State, excites in my breast the sense of gratitude and while it encourages the belief, that hitherto, the discharge of the important duties of the trust has merited approbation, it reminds me, that, repeated tokens of confidence, demand increased exertions of faithfulness and diligence.

The opportunity with which I have been favored, of becoming acquainted with the sentiments of gentlemen who compose this assembly having been frequently associated with most of you, in some of the different departments of the government; enables me to rely with confidence, upon your countenance and support, in every proposition, made by the Executive, which has for its end, the advancement of the public interest at the same time affording satisfactory evidence, that the independent and enlightened opinions of the representatives of the freemen, are duly appreciated.

In assembling together upon an occasion like the present, we are naturally led to a recollection of the events of the past year and although in the dispensation of Providence, there are none, distinguishingly marked with prosperity, or adversity, in which we are immediately interested much to the sober, considerate mind, is presented, which demands sincere acknowledgments to the Supreme Being; and that through his gracious influence, our present labors may have a prosperous result, it becomes us to cherish a grateful remembrance of past favors, and in sincerity, humbly implore Divine assistance.

The short period for which representatives hold their offices, and the plenary powers with which they are invested, was designed by the venerable framers of our Constitution to secure to the people, the power of speedily abrogating such laws as were inexpedient, or unjust; and while we possess this peculiar advantage, that we may practically avoid the evil of frequent and injudicious changes of the public laws, against which other governments have provided, by creating a co-ordinate and more permanent branch of legislative authority we ought to cultivate a habitual regard for existing laws, and carefully to resist a natural, yet dangerous, propensity, of magnifying partial imperfections, to which all human institutions are unavoidably subject, into unnecessary and radical defects.

The present period of public tranquility, is highly favorable to the adoption of measures, calculated to promote the permanent interests of the State. To improve the means of transporting the various commodities with which the State abounds and to facilitate access to the most favourable markets, are objects of the first importance. We have witnessed with pleasure the interest which this subject has excited in our sister states; and it cannot be doubted, that the time is not distant, when it will claim the attention of our own. Whether the period has arrived, in which it would be practicable to attempt anything beyond the improvement of our roads, will be decided by the discretion of the legislature. That striking disparity which exists in the state of the roads in different towns, possessing equal means, and subjected to equal obstacles and difficulties, is evidence of a defect in the law, or its administration. I apprehend it will be found upon examination, that the statute of 1820, applying a penalty imposed upon a town, for neglect in making and repairing roads, to that object, has produced no salutary effects but has rather induced the very neglect against which the law was designed to provide. Instead of stimulating to diligence and attention, from the fear of punishment, it invites delay until the tardy process of the law shall compel them to do that, and that only, which was their duty to have performed. It is in effect saying, "if you neglect to impose this necessary tax upon yourselves, it may, at some future period, be imposed upon you by others."

The fiscal concerns of a State, however limited and inconsiderable, require the constant care and watchfulness of its guardians. They ought not only to require, but to obtain, annually, information in relation to every source of revenue, as well as the state and condition of all the demands under the charge of the various public officers through government. Although retrenchment cannot be deemed necessary in reference to the

¹ From Ms. *Council Journal*, Vol. 9.

present compensation allowed for specific service which is probably below that of any other State of equal rank: that the claims upon the Treasury may not be unnecessarily augmented, every branch of public expenditure demands frequent examination. The expenses incurred by public prosecutions constitute a principal source the disbursements made by that department and it is to be noticed, that for many years, they have much increased. In a government like ours, established upon the avowed principle of securing equal privileges, and affording equal protection to all, justice demands of those to whom its administration is entrusted, so to provide as that the unsuspecting and unfortunate may be secured against the unjust exactions of the more artful and fortunate. The distinction, which exist in other governments, arising from affluence and indigence, and may *there* be necessary, to support the deformed fabrics, are alike opposed to the safety of *our* civil institutions, and the well being society. The acquisition of wealth by laudable industry, economy and prudence, merits approbation and encouragement but laws providing facilities for a few calculating greedy citizens to monopolize that property, the product of the toil and industry of the more useful and deserving, can never be sanctioned by the faithful and intelligent representatives of the people. These suggestions are made from a conviction, that the practice of exacting exorbitant interest – a subject alluded to in addressing the legislature last year, and for which I hope to be excused in again inviting its attention – is becoming extensively injurious to the interests of the great body of the citizens. The amount of the exaction is overlooked in the covert poison of long credit, and illusive hope, of good fortune, and better times or submitted to from necessity. In most governments, where the amount of interest is at all restricted by law the contract, or security, in which is reserved the usury, is rendered void. Should any law on the subject be considered useful, I submit to the General Assembly, whether a provision to that effect would not necessarily check, the evil, So long as the security is not jeopardized, the usurer will not hesitate to make the reservation; suspending on the happening of events, the ultimate determination of receiving. It is believed that the existing penalty is inadequate to the object. Private prosecutions by the aggrieved, or others, are discouraged by the consideration, that in most cases the cost and expense incurred in, and the uncertainty of the final issue of the prosecution, will counterbalance the offered and unprecedented low reward. Public prosecutions are rare inasmuch as where no private advantage is expected, there are few who will at the expense of the displeasure of a powerful class of citizens, voluntarily exercise the reputedly invidious office of informer.

The natural effect produced by the success, which of late has attended the petitions for the establishment of banks, is to encourage others in the pursuit; and the difficulty of resisting applications, supported by arguments which have heretofore been urged, with so much, skill and efficacy, is probably not diminished, the commercial concerns of the State cannot require extensive banking institutions. The resources of husbandmen, and their course of business, are illy calculated to meet the demand, and comply with the necessary regulations. An opportunity will be afforded for investing that money, which would otherwise remain in the hands of many wealthy honorable citizens, accessible to those who, will then become the prey of such as are thereby enabled to increase the means of usurious depredations. The advantage ordinarily derived to the State at large, from the augmentation of a circulating medium, which is not the representative of real wealth, is not discerned. The ruinous effect of multiplying banks in the interior of our country, has indeed been felt, and is, I believe, generally acknowledged; and I can but hope that the legislature will concur in the opinion, that enough has already been done to satisfy every requisition, emanating from an ingenuous desire for the public good.

The doubts which have been entertained by many whose opinions, merit respect, together with the decision lately made by the Circuit Court of the United States, will suggest to the General Assembly the propriety of cautiously providing for the relief of the unfortunate, who are induced to ask for acts of suspension and insolvency that the intended favor may not prove delusive to the debtor, or prejudicial to those who have humanely furnished the requisite aid, for extending the limits of their confinement beyond the walls of a comfortless prison.

In obedience to the direction of the General Assembly at their last session, a correspondence has been opened with the Governor of Canada, on the subject of the obstructions supposed to have been erected on the waters issuing from lake Memphremagog and it is due to that distinguished public officer, to state, that a prompt attention was given to the complaint, and satisfaction afforded to the citizens who felt aggrieved.

The sincere attachment of this State to the government of the Union, cannot fail to excite a deep, interest in the success attending its administration and it is with pleasure that I am enabled to congratulate you as the present prosperous state of our national concerns. The general anxiety produced by the depressed state of the revenue, has measurably subsided, by the favorable reports of its augmentation.

The success which has attended the exertions of that meritorious class of citizens, engaged in manufactures, notwithstanding the obstacles and difficulties they have encountered, is noticed with much satisfaction; and it is to be hoped by that encouragement which may reasonably be expected, our supplies and our revenue, which heretofore have rested upon a precarious foreign commerce, may be drawn from a source, profitable to the citizen, and safe to the government. An enlightened and enterprising people cannot long be satisfied with a system of regulations, in which a favorable market for the varied and principal productions of every part of the country, and the different interests of every class of citizens, is not duly regarded. The good sense of community will discover, that the nominal price of the wares in market, is not so important as is the possession of the requisite means, to defray the expence of the purchase. This subject is one which has not heretofore been passed unnoticed; and is now only referred to, in the hope that some salutary effects may issue from a frequent recurrence to the claims of the great portion of the useful and industrious citizens of this section of our country.

The unanimity which has hitherto apparently prevailed amongst the freemen of this State, in placing me in the responsible station I now occupy; and which I hope will ever be remembered with gratitude and delight has induced the belief that it is probable, without a manifestation of my desires, I may again be honored with the suffrages of some portion of my fellow citizens, I have therefore deemed it my duty to request that I may not again be considered a candidate for the office.

RICHARD SKINNER.