

Inaugural address
of

Silas H. Jenison

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Inaugural Address

GENTLEMEN OF THE SENATE,
AND OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

In a community possessing and exercising the powers of self-government, where all power and authority annually emanate from the people, and by the established usages of the country annually return to the fountain from whence they cam, it is of the first importance that the fountain should be kept pure. The safety and permanency of our free institutions depend solely upon the public virtue and general intelligence of the people. Hence the necessity of that guardianship which the laws assume over the one, and the indispensable duty of the government to secure and effectually provide for the other. Genius is an often found under the humblest roof as in the dwellings of the affluent. It is public property; and provision should be made to educate at the public expense, every child in the state, whose parents are unable to do it.

I would earnestly recommend to the consideration of the Legislature, an examination of the acts relating to the support of common schools. It is feared they are radically defective, inasmuch as they do not sufficiently provide for the employment of teachers in the education of our children of suitable attainments and qualifications. The public monies, arising from rents, income of loans, and the three cent school tax, are now divided among the several districts in each town according to the number of children between four and eighteen years of age. I have no doubt, that the great interests of education would be better promoted, by dividing one third, or some certain share fixed by law, of the public money accruing in each town, equally among the several districts in the same, and the residue in proportion to the number of scholars in each district, as now provided by law. Such a provision would seem to equalize the benefits resulting from the public aid afforded to common schools, enabling the smaller districts to procure the services of better qualified teachers and to continue their schools for a longer period, and lessening the tendency to extravagance and waste, which it is feared may exist in some of the larger districts.

In connection with this subject permit me to suggest, that, although our schools are in many places, able to avail themselves of competent teachers from our colleges and academies, still it is believed that in the state there is a want of well qualified teachers, and it is worthy of enquiry whether it would not comport with, and be the legitimate duty of the legislature to provide for and patronize some suitable institutions for the education of teachers. Public opinion seems to call for some measure of this kind. An opportunity is now afforded through the means of the surplus revenue, soon to be placed at the disposition our state, of making, probably, an effectual and permanent provision for the support of our primary schools, and for the encouragement of other institutions of learning, and also to enable the towns to diminish, what is considered by some, the onerous burthen of the three cent school tax.

A revision of the entire code of our militia laws is earnestly called for. Repeated additions and alterations have so obscured their meaning, and diminished their effect, that they are known in many instances to have failed in the accomplishment of the objects for which they were enacted. They are expensive and unequal in their operation, and perfectly inefficient, so far as subordination and discipline are concerned. A well disciplined militia has ever been considered the surest safeguard in a free government, and well deserves all the commendation which has been bestowed upon it. It is earnestly hoped that the legislature will be disposed to give to this subject that consideration which its importance demands.

In the progress of the session your attention may be called to the consideration of the laws relating to imprisonment for debt. Within a few years they have been shorn of much of their severity. Should the legislature, however, deem it expedient to abolish or change our present system, rigorous measures ought to be adopted for the prevention of fraud; and while the rights of the really poor debtor are provided for by the

humane policy of our laws, the rights of the honest, and in many cases, poor creditor, should be secured by the terrors of criminal punishment.

The pursuits of our people are, at present, essentially agricultural, and being such, we must in some measure, remain dependent for many of the necessities and luxuries of life, as well as for a market for the surplus products of our soil. But from the enterprising spirit manifested by many of our citizens for a few years past, it is very apparent, that we are destined at no distant period to become also a manufacturing people. The facilities afforded for propelling machinery in the immense water power every where abounding throughout our territory, the inexhaustible mineral wealth of our mountains, together with the cheapness of living, will unless discouraged by a narrow and illiberal course of legislation, present such inducements to our citizens, and to foreign capitalists as will lead them to increase their investments in manufacturing establishments, and thereby secure to the cultivator of the soil a more certain and uniform reward for his industry. Although adequate protection for our manufacturing interests cannot be afforded by any legislative action of ours, still, we may and perhaps ought, on all suitable occasions to express our convictions and expectations that the general government will lend its aid.

In connection with the interests of agriculture and manufactures, perhaps I may be permitted the enquiry, whether public opinion does not point, too plainly to be misunderstood, to the necessity of commencing, at some period, improvements in our facilities of communication, worthy of the state and of the age in which we live.

Satisfied, as I am, that it is only a question of *time* when the state shall step forward and do something to encourage this great work, I submit to the wisdom of the legislature whether the time has not already arrived, beyond which it would be a dereliction of duty, and disregard to the prosperity and best interests of the people of our state, to postpone the incipient measure of some system of internal improvement: whether this legislature will not cause surveys to be made, at the public expense, of some of the leading routes, with particular and accurate estimates of the expense, and the probable business which may be done upon them. I am not so visionary as to suppose, that with the present resources of our government, this state will undertake, like some of her sister states, any gigantic system of Internal Improvement:--but after a thorough examination of the several projects, with careful estimates of their expense and probable income, is it unreasonable to believe that some of these routes may be found feasible, and afford fair prospects of profit, and that the energies of our own citizens may thus be aroused to attempt and accomplish some one of them. To one, who has attentively marked the march of improvement, among our sister states, who has seen Canals and Rail Roads formed as if by magic, while no attempt has been made to improve the facilities of communication in our own state, the cause of the daily drain on wealth, and what is of incalculably greater importance to any community, the unprecedented emigration of our best and most enterprising citizens, is not problematical.

By the provisions of the act of congress of the last session, entitled "an act regulating the deposits of the public money," it will become the duty of the legislature to provide by law, some means to enable the Treasurer to receive, on deposit, the amount, which by the terms of the act may be received by this state. It is the money of the people, and it is hardly to be supposed that, when once distributed to the several state, the exigencies of the general government will *soon* if *ever* demand its re-payment. The provisions of this act are deemed wise and salutary. The unexpected and rapid accumulation of money in our national treasury, the evil of placing under the control of government too much of the wealth of the nation, combine to render such a distribution necessary. I would not be understood as being desirous or willing, to place the principal of this fund beyond the control of the legislature: It should be kept, so long as it remains at the disposal of this state, as an inviolable fund. The income only, which to all intents is the property of the people, should be annually applied for the support of common schools, as in that application and in that only can the beneficial effects resulting from the distribution be so fully and equally realized by the whole people.

I am not disposed to remark upon the various projects which will probably be presented for your consideration, but would simply suggest a plan which I consider liable to the least objection. The several towns in the state might be made the depositories of such share of the whole amount received, as by their population they would be entitled:--and be made accountable to the state in the same manner that the state is to the general government.—The selectmen of the several towns, a board, already, by the laws, entrusted with the prudential

affairs of the same, might manage such share as such town should receive, and cause the income to be divided among the several school districts in such manner as might be provided by law.

It is believed that the fund might be managed, the income applied and the advantages more impartially distributed in this manner, than in any other.

During the recess of the legislature, communication have been made to me by the executives of the state of Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Mississippi, Virginia, Maine, Connecticut, South Carolina and New York, enclosing resolutions of the legislatures of those states upon various subjects, and containing requests that they be communicated to the legislature of this state, which will be laid before you at an early day.

The vacancy occasioned by the death of the Hon. Timothy Merrill, late Secretary of State, was supplied by the appointment of Ferrand F. Merrill, who had held the office of deputy Secretary under the late incumbent.

The recent adoption of the amendments to our constitution will necessarily call your attention to an alteration, in the several acts relating to the passing of laws, to meet the present organization of the Legislature.

I have, as I deemed it my duty, this frankly submitted to you my views upon the subjects alluded to in this communication, relying upon your wisdom and general knowledge of the wants of our state for such legislative action, as will advance the virtue and happiness of our citizens, and secure, in their purity, our free institutions.

I should do injustice to my own feelings, should I omit, on this occasion, to express by grateful and respectful sense of the confidence reposed in me by an election, by a majority of my fellow citizens, to the responsible office of chief magistrate of the state. Aware that the servants of the people should be judged, not by their professions of zeal for the public good, but by the manner in which they shall discharge the trusts, reposed in them, I will barely remark, that in the performance of my official duties, I shall rely on the cordial co-operation of the several branches of our government, and the generous and liberal support of an intelligent people.

SILAS H. JENISON.

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER, }
Montpelier, Oct. 14, 1836 }