

Executive Speech
of
William A. Palmer
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SPEECH OF GOV. PALMER— 1834.

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

Being again called to the office of Chief Magistrate of the State, by a majority of the suffrages of the General Assembly, I accept the trust confided to me, and will use my best endeavors to discharge the duties incumbent on me, for the good of the State, and the interests of the people.

The Constitution enjoins upon the Governor and Council to take care that the laws be faithfully administered, and to carry into execution such measures as may be resolved upon by the General Assembly. Very few of the Executive powers of our Government are entrusted, solely, to the Chief Magistrate; but, on the contrary, are entrusted to certain officers, who, from their appointment, and the nature of their duties, appear to be exempted from executive direction or censure.

In the financial department, a vigilance in the executive over subordinate officers, who may be in any way employed in receiving and paying over public monies, seems more important. The necessity of any particular attention to this, by the Executive, is however superceded by the laws already in force, by which it is made the duty of all subordinate officers, connected in any way with the collection of revenue, to make annual settlements with the head of the treasury department. An annual settlement is also to be made with the Treasury Department, with a full and fair statement of the accounts, together with the balances due, to be laid before the General Assembly at their October session. By the foregoing provision in the law, any call of the Executive on the Treasury department, for the information of the General Assembly, is rendered unnecessary. Some attention to this subject by the legislature may be attended with beneficial results.

Our duty as legislators is to provide wholesome laws for the promotion of virtue, happiness and prosperity among the people, upon whom the laws are to operate. One of the important ends of all government is, to teach each individual of the community the necessity of self-government.

When we reflect on the vast influence of the laws in molding and forming the manners, habits and virtues of a people, and that this influence, in our own case, is to exert itself of little less than three hundred thousand individuals, the business entrusted to us assumes an importance demanding our highest efforts to render such influence salutary in its operation. That such has not been the case in all countries, has arisen from the irresponsibility with which the powers of government have been exercised by their rulers—an irresponsibility growing out of the mistaken and anti-republican doctrine that those powers were exercised by men in their own right, and not in the right and for the good of the people. Under such circumstances is it to be wondered at that the laws, instead of being calculated to promote the general welfare, should be wrested to the purposes of individual aggrandizement?

Our government is happily so organized that the duty and interests of the lawgiver are necessarily identified with the rights and interests of the community, and under such circumstances of responsibility as to compel him to feel less sympathy for the ruler than the ruled. From these considerations it would seem that nothing but a great degree of ignorance or depravity could induce those who are employed in making and executing the laws, to be forgetful of the rights and interests of their constituents; and it behooves us, the prosecution of our important duties, to keep these great principles of republican freedom constantly in view, and not to flatter ourselves that the people have become either so ignorant or disregarding of their just rights as to sanction or submit to any attempt to impose upon their ignorance or credulity.

The sentiments, in regard to public worship, religion, and morality, interwoven with our constitution, as far as our limited knowledge can extend, have had great influence on the people. These circumstances, under our established form of government, excluding as it does all persecution and intolerance in matters of religion and modes of worship, give to our state and honorable station in the view of the enlightened part of the world.

The principles and precepts of the gospel, if improved for religious and moral purposes only, will always make good men, and by consequence, good citizens. Upon the religious and literary institutions of the state, our happiness as a people essentially depends. While, therefore, that freedom of opinion, and those rights of

conscience, which are recognized in our constitution, are sacredly maintained, the legislature will not fail to give every suitable encouragement to their support.

Permit me again to call your attention to the subject of the Militia. Unprepared to enter into details, my observations must be general. However, some may esteem it, the militia is the great depository of our liberty and independence—it is the first and last hope of our country. Let the militia become and remain inefficient, and our transition to despotism will be gradual, perhaps, but inevitable.

Previous to the revolution, the greatest care was taken to keep the militia in an unorganized and inefficient state. In most of the then British provinces patriotic exertions were made, but with little effect, to counteract this slavish policy; the provincial governors, generally opposed to the interest of the people, appointed the militia officers subservient to their own views. When, however, war with the mother country became inevitable, one of the first and most important measures adopted was the reorganization of the whole body of the militia; and since that period most of the states have paid a marked and laudable attention to the subject. The result has in many instances done honor to the government; the measures adopted have excited a martial spirit, which merits every attention and encouragement.

The materials composing the militia are independent and aspiring citizens, whose fearless spirit never was, and with confidence it may be said, never *will* be, subdued by foreign domination. They will sooner, by far, nobly perish on the field of battle, than surrender their beloved country—the birthright of themselves and those most dear to them, to an inexorable and haughty invader. Such materials for soldiers are not exceeded in any other country; and is it proper or expedient to let them remain unimproved, when they are so vitally important to our existence as a free people? And is it sound policy to continue to neglect the discipline of the militia—suffer the military ardor heretofore existing among the yeomanry, which has given us a name among the nations, to languish and expire? Or shall an effort be made to secure a proper organization of the militia, and foster a military spirit among the people? I therefore earnestly recommend the subject of your careful consideration and control, but hope that the present occasion will not pass without the adoption of some measure calculated to promote the object in view.

During the past year there has been much agitation on the subject of the United States bank, and the measures of the national executive in relation to it. The questions of principle involved in the controversy are of vast importance to the interest of the nation, and require to be discussed and decided with reference both to the present convenience and necessities of the people, and also to their influence upon the future destinies of the country. An institution, like that of the bank of the United States, necessarily possesses powers which, if exercised for good, as they ever should be, are most beneficial in their operations, and if exerted for evil, are of a nature the most pernicious. If such an institution, therefore, be demanded to meet the wants of the community, the utmost caution should be observed in framing the provisions of its charter—the most effectual checks placed upon its power—and the most watchful vigilance exercised with regard to its conduct. That a national bank, with proper powers and restrictions, is both necessary and constitutional, I do not doubt. I deem, however, the charter of the present bank exceptional in several of its provisions, and am opposed to its renewal in its present form. Its conduct in some respects I consider justly liable to censure; yet I cannot regard that as furnishing any justification of the executive proceedings in relation to it, some of which I deem pernicious in their consequences and altogether unwarrantable.

The public mind has been much agitated in relation to certain abuses and assumptions of power on the part of the national executive. It will be sufficient for me to say, in connection with this subject, that too much vigilance cannot be exercised, either on the part of the people or the state legislatures, with respect to his patronage and power. A manifestation by him of the least disposition either to overstep the bounds of the constitution and laws or to exercise those powers which he legitimately and constitutionally possesses, for purposes not within the scope of his duties, should be met and resisted, on the threshold, as the beginning of tyranny.

At the last session of the General Assembly, a resolution was passed, requesting me to renew the correspondence with the Governor-General of the British Provinces upon the subject of obstructions at the outlet of the waters of Lake Champlain, and to solicit that a commissioner or commissioners be appointed to act

in conjunction with commissioners appointed on the part of this state, to ascertain, if practicable, the true cause or causes, of the overflowing of the lands in this state, on the margin of Lake Champlain and its tributary streams, and the extent of the evils complained of. In pursuance of the request expressed in that resolution, in February last I addressed a letter to the Governor-General of the British Provinces in North America, on that subject, requesting the appointment of commissioners on the part of the government of Lower Canada, to meet such as were appointed on the part of this state, for the purpose of carrying the object referred to into effect, but have received no answer from the Governor, or any of the authorities of that government.

At a period of uncommon agitation and embarrassment, it is among the important duties required of us, to soar above local and partial views—to cherish and inculcate a disinterested spirit, and to secure, by every possible means, the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

It only remains with me to assure you that I shall, in all things, heartily co-operate with you, in the necessary measures to promote and ensure the general welfare.

WM. A. PALMER.