

Inaugural address  
of  
Charles Paine  
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## Friday, October 14, 1842

### Inaugural Address

*Fellow – Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:*

It affords me much pleasure again to meet you in these halls of legislation, to deliberate upon the welfare of the people of this state, and to make such provisions for their improvement as your wisdom may devise. Since we were last assembled here, our whole country has been in the enjoyment of all the blessings which a bountiful Providence could bestow, and the year has been distinguished by several events which can hardly fail to add to the general prosperity and happiness.

In a spirit of mutual concession and forbearance, the Governments of the United States and Great Britain have, by treaty, succeeded in removing those causes of discord and animosity between the two countries, which had become so alarming, and in laying the foundation for a wise and, I trust, a lasting peace. The negotiation of this treaty, conducted, as it has been, with a view to the good of man rather than for the gratification of his passions, is an honor to the age and to the nations engaged in it.

The greatest interests of our beloved country have also been rescued from the destruction which seemed impending over them, by the wise and magnanimous efforts of Congress to secure a Tariff of duties adequate to protect them. When we look back upon the strife of elements, from which have proceeded the blessings of peace and protection to domestic industry, the two greatest interests, perhaps, which it is the duty of the national government to guard, we find abundant cause for gratitude towards the Disposer of the hearts of men.

We have now every reason to hope that the prosperity of the country will begin again to revive; nor can we be in immediate danger of repeating those experiments upon it, the fruits of which have already been so bitter. Experience, so dearly purchased, cannot have failed to teach us wisdom and prudence for the future. The trials of adversity, and especially those which are self-inflicted, have their uses for nations not less than for individuals. We have only to look back upon what we have suffered, and upon what we might have enjoyed, to learn the extent of our blindness and folly.

But we should greatly err, in our review of the past, were we to impute all the blame to our rulers. It was ourselves, individually, who were first at fault. We had become too insensible of the inestimable advantages of self government, and of the unceasing watchfulness and activity which such government always demands of those who would enjoy it. We have perhaps yet to learn how eminently, above all other nations, we are blessed in our form of government; but we certainly ought to have discovered, by this time, that, whether we are well or ill governed, must depend wholly on ourselves. If we have intelligence, activity, and energy enough to place and keep in power honest and able rulers, political self-government is undoubtedly the best form of which we have any knowledge; but if we have not these qualities, it is probably the worst. Self-government arms us, for our protection, with the right of suffrage and with the power of enlightening and improving our fellow-men. These have been given us, not to be thrown aside, or neglected at our pleasure, but to be preserved and cherished, as the choicest rights of freemen, and to be diligently and perseveringly used on all occasions. The destinies of our beloved country are, in some degree, in the hands of each one of us, and not only the destinies of our own country, but those of the human race. On our shores liberty has unfurled her standard. If she find sons here worthy to bear it, it will not only continue to wave over our own heads, but it will stand as a signal to other nations. Let us not then be unmindful of our high responsibilities: but let us place our duties to our country and her institutions next after those to religion and our Maker.

In looking back upon the events of the past year, we find reason to be grateful not only that we have escaped the dangers of a foreign, but the horrors of a civil war. Incredible as it may appear, in an age and country like ours, but a few months have elapsed, since, almost in our own neighborhood, sons have been armed against fathers, and brothers against brothers, and trains of artillery have been pointed with deadly intent, while accident alone has prevented the lighting of the match which might have deluged our whole country in blood. I shudder to think that the spirit of party has, so soon, and with so little cause, involved us in a scene like this. The danger we have but just escaped is the greatest and most appalling with which we have been threatened since we became a nation. It was neither imaginary, nor uncertain in magnitude. It attempted to conceal the odious features of rebellion, and assume the more attractive form of justifiable revolution. In this disguise it

appeared to, and enlisted the sympathies of those, who had originally no concern with it, and it was then, and not before, that it became the cause of general and well grounded alarm. However we may be divided by state lines, when internal or external wars are threatened, we are but one people. Whatever may be the cause of rebellion or revolution, in a single state, its consequences can never be confined within its own limits. They will extend throughout the land, and involve, eventually, every member of the Confederacy. The flames of civil war are not likely to be lighted up by rebellion against the general government. That has been armed with powers which are abundantly sufficient to quell domestic insurrection. But our peaceful state sovereignties, although authorized to inflict the penalties for treason, are not sufficiently provided against the exigencies of rebellion. Unless, therefore, the general government promptly interferes, under its constitutional power, to suppress it, rebellion against our state governments is the most probable cause which exists of a general civil war.

After escaping from danger, it is natural to look back, that we may see how it occurred, and how it can be avoided for the future. When the colonies, which now form the oldest thirteen states of the Union, separated from the mother country, they generally adopted written constitutions of government, with the right of suffrage more or less restricted, but in none of them universal, and in several, colonial inequalities of representation were preserved. When written constitutions were adopted, they, in most instances, provided modes for their own amendment.

Rhode Island, however, satisfied with the existing form of government, did not adopt a written constitution. On our separation from Great Britain, therefore, the laws of the legislature of that state became the supreme law, and the power of government could not be changed without an act of the legislature, or by revolution. Any change which should be made, however peaceably, unless by law, would, of course, be a revolution, as it would be putting down the existing government, without its own consent, and substituting another in its place.

In all the old states, inequalities in the right of suffrage and representation continued to exist unaltered, till within about twenty years past unattended by serious complaint, and certainly without the thought of revolution. About that time, in some few of the states, public opinion demanded a change and a change was accordingly made, without difficulty or violence. In other states, where peaceable modes of altering the constitution are provided, inequalities, nearly or quite as great as those complained of in Rhode Island, have been allowed to exist to this day. In our own state even unshackled by colonial restraints, we voluntarily formed and have continued a government, whose inequalities of representations are probably equal to those, which, in Rhode Island, were thought to justify a revolution, and that, too, by the sword. But such a revolution can only be justified when the evils of government have become oppressive and intolerable, and when all hope of milder remedies is lost. Such was not the state of things in our sister state, at the time a portion of her citizens thought proper to raise the standard of civil war. We heard no complaints of misgovernment, nor of the suffering of any portion of her people. They were in full possession of the same free government they had always enjoyed, and of the civil rights which are universal in the country. It is true their political privileges were not equal. Some towns had a greater proportion of representation than others, and there were property qualifications for voters. These were the evils, and all the evils complained of.

If it is to be granted, that for reasons like those, government may, at any time, be overturned by violence, we shall never, in this country, be without fruitful causes of civil war. There are inequalities in the right of suffrage and representation in every state; and in none, can greater inequality of representation be found, than at present exists, under our national government, in the Senate of the United States. There, two millions and a half of the citizens of New York are no more numerously represented than a hundred thousand citizens of Rhode Island.

Considerations like these should satisfy us, that mere theories about government and political rights, unaccompanied by oppression and a privation of civil rights, can never, in this country, justify a resort to the sword. Public opinion is the safe, proper, and certain corrective of all evils of this description. Its operation is gradual, but it is surely better to wait long and patiently for its ultimate effects, than rashly to engage in a savage warfare with each other. Indeed, in Rhode Island, public opinion had already produced its effect, and left those, whose feet were so swift to shed blood, without the slightest excuse. Before they raised the standard of rebellion, the legislature had caused a constitution to be submitted to the people, which it was fully in their power to adopt. It will hardly be deemed a sufficient answer to this, to say, that it was not such in all respects as a portion of the people required. It went almost the whole extent of their demands. It is not desirable that

changes in government should be abrupt, in matters about which there is nearly an equal division of opinion. In all well regulated communities, such changes are always gradual, and there cannot be the slightest doubt but that, in Rhode Island, surrounded by free republics, and herself one of their elder sisters, every thing, which could be justly demanded, would, in due time, have been obtained. And, under all the circumstances, the attempt, which was made by a portion of her people, to plunge the state in civil war, deserves, in my judgment, the severest reprehension of every humane citizen, and every lover of his country. And I cannot find words to express my sense of the conduct of those, who, unconcerned in the affairs of that state and remote from the dangers and horrors of the scene, urged on and stimulated her deluded citizens to the enactment of the tragedy which they were so eager to witness.

I have thought it my duty to express these views, because it is a subject of immediate interest to us all, and because a suitable expression of opinion, as to the character of such events, is, perhaps, one of the best means of preventing their recurrence. It is due also to the state of Rhode Island, after having passed through so severe and unexampled a trial, and after the noble exhibition she has made of firmness, wisdom, and forbearance, under circumstances of such extreme difficulty and peril.

There is nothing which so much promotes the love of order in a community as the diffusion of knowledge, and especially of that knowledge which is early instilled into the mind. Those who are prepared, with sound principles and a good education, for the active scenes of life, can hardly fail to make useful, peaceable, and moral members of society. And those who are not thus prepared, though naturally well inclined, may easily be made instruments of disorder and mischief. Society has, therefore, no security, except in the early education of its members. Self-interest is thus made the means of compelling us to discharge the highest of all duties towards our fellow men. That portion of our lives, which is employed most profitable for ourselves and our children, is probably the time we devote to educating the children of others – as the greatest of all benefits is that of living in a peaceable, moral, and well governed community.

Knowing that you fully united with me in these sentiments, I do not hesitate again to press upon your attentive consideration the subject of our schools and seminaries of learning. In pursuance of a resolution passed at you last session, I appointed a committee, charged with the duty of inquiring into their condition and the best means of improving them. Their report, which has not yet been received, will probably be made during the present session, and I entertain the hope that it may greatly benefit the cause of education. There is reason to fear that the individual interest, in our common schools, which was formerly so observable among our citizens, has lately been declining. It would be natural, perhaps, that this should be the case, as, at an early period, these schools depended principally for their support upon the separate arrangements and voluntary contributions of each school district. And, as our schools have become, every year, more and more at the public charge, the necessity of such voluntary support would be less and less felt, and, possibly, the introduction and progress of a new system has been allowed to supplant the old one more rapidly than it should have done. If private interest in the subject has thus been withdrawn, only in proportion to the increase of the public fund even, the effect may have, and probably has, been unfavorable. Individual exertion, which springs from a sense of necessity, is active and zealous; and to render a system of support, in schools at the public expense, an adequate substitute for the voluntary system, it is indispensable that it should be accompanied by some general plan of public superintendance and management. Such a plan should embrace all that is essential to secure a perfect knowledge of the whole subject of education, as it exists throughout the state, a careful application of the school fund, and an adequate support of the necessary schools.

Several states have adopted systems similar to the one I recommend, and I would refer you particularly to that which exists in the state of Massachusetts, and to the reports which are annually made, under it, by an officer charged with the duty of their superintendance. I have been forcibly impressed with the utility of these reports, and indeed, I am unable to perceive how they can be dispensed with, if our schools are to become objects of public care and support. Without them, it is difficult to understand how the public can ever be possessed of the knowledge necessary to their proper management.

The expense attending such reports, and the examination and inquiries of which they are the result, would not be considerable, and even if it were, it ought to constitute no objection to the plan, if I am correct in my view of its importance. But it seems to me, that, if a wise and efficient system were adopted, and our school

fund and schools placed under the immediate care of faithful officer, a sufficient saving might be made to defray all additional expenses.

Without attempting to present new reasons for a liberal provision for our colleges and higher schools, I would again urge the subject upon your consideration. It is for you to decide how liberal a provision the state of our finances will admit of. But I must be permitted to say, that, in a community like ours, education, in any of its branches, ought not to be suffered to languish, from any motives of economy.

The business prosperity of the people of the state, and the means of improving it, deserves your continued and consistent care. While every one is left perfectly free in his own pursuits, it is in the power of government to accomplish many things to which individual efforts would be entirely unequal. Government may in various ways afford salutary aid to the enterprise and industry of its citizens, and it seems to me to be one of its first duties to inquire what it can do to improve them. Our citizens have become so dependent upon the growing of wool, that this article may be said to be the staple of the state, and I regret to say that the extreme depression in its price is not only the cause of present inconvenience, but of uneasiness as to the future. The rich and almost boundless plains of the great West are becoming covered with flocks of sheep, which will soon furnish supplies of wool in such abundance, as, I fear, may seriously affect the sale of our own. But as the West can also produce every thing else cheaper than the Atlantic states, It would be in vain to attempt to compete with them in any other product destined for the general market. Our constant study should therefore be directed to creating and building up a market among ourselves, and to establishing the means of such rapid communication with the markets on the sea-board as would enable us to dispose of our products, without fear of competition from the distant west.

The most obvious means of accomplishing these objects are the introduction of the railroads, and the encouragement of manufactures and the mechanic arts. Capitalists, confiding in the stability and justice of our legislation, would readily occupy the valuable sites for water power with which our state abounds, were it not for the difficulty of reaching them. This difficulty would be entirely removed by the construction of railroads, and they will be constructed when individuals become fully satisfied of their vast importance to our prosperity. Almost unattainable as this object seems, at present, to be, I do not at all despair of its ultimate accomplishment. Obstacles, which at first appear almost insurmountable, will yield, in the end, to public spirit and enlightened self-interest, kept constantly alive.

The establishment of manufactures may be encouraged by a liberal granting of charters, with such provisions as shall secure vested rights against violation or encroachment. I greatly mistake the character of the people of this state, if there should ever be a disposition to disturb them. But it would, nevertheless, be the part of wisdom to offer this, as well as every other possible inducement, to those who have the means and inclination to embark in such undertakings. In the neighborhood of manufactories, population would naturally increase, and the mechanic arts spring up and thrive. A home consumption would thus be created for agricultural products, upon which the farmer could always depend. Certainly no community could secure to itself greater prosperity than ours, by adopting and steadily pursuing this course of policy. No people have been more highly favored than ourselves, by natural advantages, and it will be our own fault if we do not improve them.

The tariff of duties lately passed by Congress will, I have no doubt, greatly increase our prosperity. Yet we must not expect from it miraculous effects. Protection had been so long, so unwisely and unjustly withheld, that the whole country was inundated with foreign manufactures, and our means almost exhausted to pay for them. The consequence has been a universal prostration of all the great interests of the country, from which we cannot expect they will suddenly recover. But let us at least derive some benefit from these self-inflicted evils. They should teach us the necessity of guarding against their recurrence. Already do we see the same spirit of mischief, which produced them, again at work in demanding and threatening a repeal of the Tariff. If we watch and oppose it, as we should, we can have little to fear from it. But its success would be our ruin.

In connection with our internal prosperity, I would again call your attention to the subject of a geological survey of the state. The discovery of mineral wealth would more certainly hasten the establishment of railroads than any other cause. To this cause, indeed, they owe their invention. But it is principally on account of the direct benefit which agriculture would derive from such a survey, that I am solicitous to see it undertaken.

While the agriculturalists of other countries are availing themselves, to so much advantage, of the lights of science, let it not be said that the farmers of Vermont are falling behind the age in agricultural improvements. Similar surveys have already been made, or are now in progress, in most of the sister states, and in no instance have they failed to be attended by results of high importance and value. They have not only determined the locality of suspected ores and other minerals, but have often laid open rich mines of metallic and mineral deposits, in regions where their existence had never before been imagined. The narrow territorial extent of our state, and the ready accessibility of its whole surface, render its thorough examination a task which may be accomplished within moderate limits both of time and expense; and I have no doubt our people would cheerfully bear the light addition to their burdens, arising from the adoption of a measure, which promises not only substantial pecuniary and social benefits, by a development of our internal resources, but an important contribution to natural science and to those great agricultural and manufacturing interests, which it is among the chief duties of an enlightened community to foster. I would suggest, in this connection, that a sum more than sufficient to meet the expense of such a survey, is now due to the state from the General Government, arising from the sales of the public lands, under the act of September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841.

It will be your duty, during your present session, again to divide the state into districts, for the election of members of Congress. For a long series of years this state has been distinguished, I think I am warranted in saying above any other, for the moderation and justice with which the prevailing political party has treated the rights and claims of the minority. It is a circumstance in our history of which we may justly be proud and upon which we shall always look back with satisfaction. An equitable division of the state into congressional districts will furnish us no new matter to boast of; it will be merely an adherence to our established customs.

The militia of the state, the brave successors of these, who, in our revolutionary struggle, acquired such unfading honor, will, I am sure, receive from your hands all the consideration which so important a part of our system deserves. The duty of appointing a committee to revise the militia laws, which you devolved upon me at your last session, has been discharged, and their report will, at an early day, be communicated to you.

In discharge of my official duties, I have had an opportunity of learning the mode in which the accounts of the state, with many of its officers, have hitherto been kept, and I feel bound to call your particular attention to the subject. There is an urgent and pressing necessity here, for a thorough reform. I have been surprised to find that, from the manner of keeping these accounts, opportunities have so long existed for fraudulent practices. A revision of the laws on this subject is imperatively required, and a system should be adopted which will secure a rigorous and exact accountability of every public officer. Great improvements have recently been made in the systems of other states and it may be well to avail ourselves of the benefit of their experience. I fear we shall gain little, however, by any attempts at change, unless they are made with a determination to effect a thorough and well matured reform, and to extend it to every officer, immediately or remotely connected with the Treasury. I am relieved from the necessity of entering into greater detail, by the able report of the Auditor, appointed at the last session of the Legislature, which I herewith transmit to you.

In my annual communication last year, I called your attention to several subjects connected with the administration of the General Government, and certain proposed amendments in our Federal Constitution. I allude to the Veto power, the re-eligibility of the President, and the power of removal from office. Subsequent occurrences have strengthened my confidence in the soundness of the views I then expressed; but whether these questions – or that of the distribution of the proceeds of the Public Lands among the several states, to which they have, in my opinion, the clearest right – call for any immediate legislative action, I submit to your judgment and discretion.

CHARLES PAINE.

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER,  
Montpelier, 14<sup>th</sup> Oct., A.D. 1842 }  
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