

Inaugural address
of

John McCullough

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Inaugural Address

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representative:

We have come together in obedience to the requirements of the Constitution. This Government is, however, essentially a people Government. In Vermont the Governor is the titular head of the State. He is expected to represent her at public functions. His duties, unless in some great national crisis or convulsion, are neither many nor arduous.

In Vermont, too, we are fortunate that the powers of the Legislature itself, the law making department of every representative government, are only called into exercise in the mildest degree.

The people govern themselves.

A State whose citizens have mastered the problem of self government is best governed when least governed.

From its first settlement, through the stormy period of its Colonial life, during the Revolutionary era, as an independent Republic for thirteen years, as a member of the Federal Union for over a century, Vermont has been educated in a school of self-reliant manhood. That the majority should rule, that the rights of the minority must not be infringed, that liberty regulated by law must prevail, are the lessons that have been so well learned by the citizens; of Vermont as to be, and have become, a part of their very being.

The civilization of this people that had its origin in Lower Germany centuries ago, that crossed the Channel and sprouted and grew slowly with the ages amid and against countless obstacles from within and without on the British Isles, that budded at Hastings and Runnymede, at Lewes and Naseby, that blossomed at Bunker Hill and Bennington and Yorktown, at Gettysburg and Appomattox, needs no guiding hand to instruct its subjects in the matters best suited for their welfare and government.

Your ancestors who founded this little mountain commonwealth struck off your first Constitution in 1777 in the midst of war, and with the enemy upon your borders declared Vermont a "free and independent State." And under its rule and as revised in 1786, for thirteen years maintained an independent existence; and after admission into the Federal Union established the Constitution of 1793, under whose beneficent provisions, and the amendments from time to time adopted, you and your ancestors for over a century have enjoyed the blessings of free government; and, so far as human wisdom can foresee, you and your posterity will continue for other centuries to enjoy the multiplied and multiplying blessing of even a freer government.

The very conservative method, too, providing for its amendment insures against any hasty innovation from popular impulse, and assures that liberty regulated by law shall continue to be the rule of Anglo-Saxon development.

The provision of the National Constitution that requires for its amendment the concurrence of two-thirds of both Houses of Congress, or two-thirds of the States, and then the subsequent ratification of three-fourths of the States, has received the highest encomiums of modern political philosophers as one of the wisest guarantees of good government.

The provision in our Constitution is equally, if not more, conservative and yet in practical working there is little difference.

These provisions insure solidity and security, and, as is well said, these are the most vital attributes of a fundamental law.

Our town system existed before the State. It is the inheritance and the growth of the ages of Anglo-Saxon uplifting. It was simply recognized in our Constitution.

These republics in one form or other have always had their Legislatures. In their annual March meetings, or at other sessions regularly called, they select their rulers for the year and discuss all public questions and decide what is for the best good of the community and the State; and that judgment expressed at the general election is

reflected in the persons of the two hundred and forty-six Representatives standing for these little republics, and in the persons of the thirty Senators representing the counties.

The duty and the responsibility of any needed legislation rests almost wholly on you; the function of the Executive being advisory.

The retiring message of my predecessor, delivered yesterday, is so full and exhaustive and gives such a comprehensive review of the affairs of the State for the past two years, accompanying the same with most valuable suggestions, that it only remains for the present Executive to add his recommendation to the General Assembly to give these suggestions their most careful consideration.

The reports of the various State officers and of the boards of trustees and superintendents of the State institutions furnish you with full information upon which to exercise your intelligent judgment in formulating such wise and prudent legislative action as the requirements of these different institutions and departments demand.

While keeping your appropriations safely within your revenues, I bespeak for all the State institutions, for your whole educational system, your common schools, your normal schools, your colleges and universities, your libraries, for your Home, your Boards of Agriculture and Health, for your Insane Asylum, your Industrial School, your House of Correction, your State Prison, just and liberal treatment.

Wisely and generously administered, such institutions, are the best evidence of an advance and advancing civilization.

TEMPERANCE LEGISLATION.

The verdict of the freemen of the State on September 2d last was in favor of the General Assembly framing a local option and high license law and submitting the same to the people for their adoption or rejection.

This duty will require the very best efforts and the most intelligent consideration of the members of the Assembly.

For fifty years prohibition has been the policy of the State. The mandate comes up now from the people to their legislators commanding them to formulate and to submit to them for their decision some other system.

This the Anglo-Saxon, the American method. It is the rule, of the majority.

And primarily, on this subject, it must be borne in mind that all sumptuary legislation must be supported by public sentiment to be effectual.

In framing a statute the General Assembly will have the benefit of the legislation on the subject of eight or ten of the other States. Experience is the very best guide.

In every State the difficulties arising from the United States internal revenue laws, from the freedom or interstate commerce guaranteed by the National Constitution, and from the medicinal and industrial demand for alcohol will always embarrass the enforcement of any law.

Different States and different parts of the same State may require different treatment, Unlike most of the States, Vermont has few manufacturing centres or large municipalities; the great majority of her towns are rural and agricultural.

Massachusetts is more nearly similar to Vermont than any other State and from her legislation probably more valuable suggestions will be derived than from any other source.

But in the legislation of no one State, only, should we look for the best and wisest provision and those most suitable to the circumstances of our people.

In any local option or license system, it is worthy of consideration whether the vote on License or No License should be taken in any town or municipality oftener than once in three or five years; whether it should not be taken at elections specially called for that purpose and not at any regular election. State or local; whether if License be voted, it would not be wise to require the petition of a majority of the property holders in any

block or square of a municipality before issuing a license whether a majority of the legal voters of any town or sub-division of a city should not be allowed to remonstrate against licensing or continuing the license of a specified person whether any license should be granted for more than a year; whether the number of licenses where authorized should not be limited to one for every 1,000 inhabitants, and prohibited within a limited distance of any church, school house, theater, opera house, public building, park or other public place; whether all licensees should not be required to give am bonds, and every applicant for a license furnish evidence of citizenship and good character.

As to the licensing body or authorities, it has been well said that judicial purity and reputation for purity are far more important than discreet licensing.

It is of the utmost importance that courts and judges should be kept as far removed from politics as possible.

This matter of licensing, therefore, should be entrusted to some other department or to boards specially raised up for that purpose, and which boards should have stability and independence.

There should be several grades of license fees depending on the size and population of the towns or cities; and the traffic should be made to raise large revenues for both the State and the towns or municipalities.

Every licensee should be restricted from selling to minors or intoxicated persons, or on Sundays, election day or any legal holidays, nor should he be allowed to furnish musical entertainment of any kind or billiards or cards or any game whatever; and the place should be wide open to inspection from the street or highway and the hours should be strictly limited, and the shorter the better, provided public sentiment supports these restrictions.

If druggists' licenses are to be granted at all, they should be entrusted only to registered pharmacists who should be authorized to sell only in small quantities and only on the written prescription of a physician not interested in the store.

These suggestions, gathered from many sources, may be of some value in formulating a proper statute to be submitted to the people for their adoption or rejection.

PRIMARY ELECTION LAW.

Many of the other States have such laws, and the enactment of a similar statute by Vermont would tend to secure purity in nominations.

The caucus should be surrounded by the same safe-guards as the election. The primary election should be held on the same day and hour throughout the State; check lists should be provided; the choice should be by ballot; and all the precautions of the general election law should be extended to the primary election.

GOOD ROADS.

In view of the agitation on this subject for the past ten years or more in this country, and of the advanced action taken in many of the States, and of what has already been done in this State, it cannot be necessary for me at any length to urge consideration on your part.

Nothing can add more to the prosperity of the State, nothing can serve to lift farm values so materially, nothing can bring summer tourists and residents to settle and beautify and enrich our valleys so much as permanent road building.

I would not only urge the continuance of the present State tax, but I would advise an increase of the same, and even more liberal treatment.

And in this connection, and as a corollary, I would recommend that the State begin a system of elimination of grade crossings of both steam and electric roads and the highways.

The laws of Massachusetts and New York furnish desirable methods. Proceed slowly, but make a beginning.

REVENUE.

It seems to me, without unjustly or improperly burdening any interest, that all the expenses of the state government can be raised by indirect taxation, and relieve real estate entirely, and I commend this subject to the intelligent consideration of the Legislature.

In conclusion, permit me to express the hope and the expectation, that you will prosecute your legislative labors with all diligence, and that the results may be the passage of a few wise and well considered measures redounding to the welfare and prosperity of the state whose best interests we are all anxious to promote.

JOHN G. McCULLOUGH

October 3, 1902.