

Inaugural address
of
Horace Eaton
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Inaugural Address

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

On assuming, as we now do, the guardianship of those civil interests of the State which have, for a short period, been entrusted to our care, it is proper that we should call distinctly to mind the nature and extent of the obligations and responsibilities which rest upon us. We are but "trustees and servants of the people." And, therefore, while we accept the trusts which they have conferred, with that unfeigned gratitude which the confidence thus reposed in us so justly demands, let us not be seduced to imagine that we are free, in the discharge of these trusts, to consult our own personal benefit, or to be guided altogether by our own personal views and predilections. On the contrary, we should keep it clearly and constantly in view, that the offices we hold are bestowed to be executed for the benefit of those who conferred them.

It is not, however, sufficient for us merely to recognize our responsibility to the people. We should also remember that the civil privileges which we enjoy, and of which the guardianship is temporarily committed to our hands, are the gifts of a gracious and beneficent Providence: and consequently, if we are unfaithful to our trusts, we are not only treacherous to those who have confided their interests to our care, but we incur the yet deeper guilt of ingratitude to Heaven.

Let us then habitually regard the offices with which we have been entrusted, not only as obligating us to those who have clothed us with a brief authority, but as involving a still higher responsibility to Him who gives the privileges and blessings which we are called to guard.

During the past year we have, as a State and people, received from the Great Author of all good, renewed tokens of his beneficence, in not only preserving to us our civil privileges, but in granting to us even more than the common blessings of His Providence, in the means of personal and social enjoyment. The earth has yielded her increase in more than ordinary abundance: and our citizens have generally prospered in their various pursuits, so that industry has every where received a large reward for her toils. No wasting sickness has visited us, but on the contrary, even more than wonted health has generally prevailed. And although the sound of war has been heard in the distance, yet it has not excited apprehensions for our own personal security; its desolations have not been felt within our own borders, nor have its sorrows, except in a few instances, entered our dwellings.

Perhaps no State in the confederacy has been characterized by greater simplicity in its legislation and government, than has the State of Vermont. The line of policy, which the State seems to have marked out, has been to govern as little as might be consistent with the proper protection of her citizens, and the advancement of their substantial interests. Never turning coldly away from the claim of the humblest to be protected in the enjoyment of "life, liberty and happiness," she has yet shunned the opposite error of legislating for the benefit of individuals to the injury of multitudes, and avoided all complicated and entangling connections with private or local interest. And while she has extended her favoring smiles and fostering care to all useful enterprises calculated to promote the general good, whenever their successful prosecution required it, she has yet never sought to assume the special and exclusive guardianship even of public and common interests, when they could be adequately sustained and promoted in any other way. And this general course is one which sound economy and a regard for the best interests of the people at large, would, for reasons sufficiently obvious, ever dictate. Let it be our purpose, then, to conform to so wise and prudent a system of policy, and aid in perpetuating it.

Aside from making the ordinary annual appointments, your duties for the session will probably be few. In the proper field of legislation, there is not, to my knowledge, any great and prominent measure of public interest, which will demand your attention. Modifications of existing laws may, in some cases, be required, to meet new features in our condition, or to remedy original defects in past enactments. Our habits of rapid legislation of course expose to the danger of passing laws not perfectly matured. Yet this expedition in the transaction of business can scarcely be regarded as a fault, unless carried to the extreme; and this ought doubtless to be guarded against. But imperfections and errors, whether the result of haste or of changing circumstances should of course be remedied as experience and practice bring them to light. And in the mean

time, the recognized principle that laws should be as stable as the changing condition and wants of society will permit, will doubtless be kept in view, and exercise its due influence in determining the extent of our legislation.

Among the subjects which may claim your attention will perhaps be that of our system of public accounting. A confidence does not seem to be universally felt that sufficient guards have as yet been thrown around it. If an apology could be found any where for any looseness of practice in the management of public funds, there surely can be none for it in Vermont. And it may be an appropriate subject for your inquiry, whether any further provisions are necessary for securing that punctuality and fidelity in this branch of the public service, which the interest of the State requires.

By existing laws, however, it is made the duty of the Auditor of Accounts to report annually “any modifications which experience shall prove to be necessary or expedient in order to procure a faithful accounting for all public funds;” and the report of this officer, which will in due time be laid before you, will give your inquiries, if in his opinion there should be occasion for any modifications, a more definite direction than is here attempted or deemed necessary.

The practice of taking excessive interest is a wrong against which no adequate remedy has been provided, although the attention of the legislature has been repeatedly invited and given to the subject. Measures have been proposed for remedying the evil, but none so satisfactory as to have received the legislative sanction. But I deem the subject one of sufficient importance renewedly to claim your attention, although I can suggest no better mode of guarding against the wrong or of obtaining redress under it, than that of a chancery process. In case, however, this remedy or any other should be fixed upon I would respectfully suggest the propriety of making it prospective only in its operation. It is true that a provision for a new and more effectual mode of recovering back usurious interest, inasmuch as law was violated in taking it, could not strictly be regarded as attaching any new penalty to an offence after it had been committed. But it is ever desirable to avoid disturbing past transactions entered into with due regard to the estimate which the law, either expressly or impliedly, has placed upon them. And as in this case the statute seems almost to sanction the taking of usurious interest by the utter inadequacy of its provisions for preventing the practice, contracts, made under the law as it is, might be regarded as having received a guarantee almost equivalent to a pledge of public faith, that they should never be called in question. Whether this view of the subject, however, be tenable or not, it is believed that a remedy looking only to the future would be more likely to be received with favor, because awakening no apprehension that transactions supposed to be completed were to be brought into controversy. If the wrongs of the past are not redressed under this plan, it will still be no small attainment to guard against like wrongs for the future.

It is a matter of just gratification to be able to say that the Geological Survey of the State has been progressing during the past season with a good degree of rapidity, and that it appears to be accomplishing all those useful results which were anticipated from it by the most ardent friends of the measure.

The ends proposed to be attained by this survey may justly be regarded as of no insignificant importance. The great object contemplated was to present to the people of the State as much practical and available information as possible, in regard to our rocks, soils, and mineral products, with a view to the immediate benefits which would flow to the great interests of agriculture and manufactures – more especially the former – by way of diverting labor from projects and enterprises that would end in disappointment and loss, and directing it into proper and profitable channels. The correction, too, of injudicious modes of cultivation, tending to gradual deterioration and ultimate exhaustion of the soil, and the substitution for them of practices and methods of management calculated steadily to fertilize and improve it, while it should, at the same time, be yielding to the laborer a present reward – was one of the modes in which it was believed the benefits of the survey would be realized. And these benefits will continue to diffuse themselves, and reach far beyond the period when the expenditure which secured them shall cease to be needed, because they rest upon the only sure foundation of all solid and permanent improvement – that of increased knowledge. They operate not merely by urging industry to more vigorous efforts, but by guiding it in such a direction as to make its efforts most availing, with the least expenditure of sweat and toil.

That agriculture is intrinsically an important interest and worthy of legislative encouragement, so far as this may be necessary to sustain it, can scarcely be questioned. It is the first step in the progress of society to civilizations, and as an employment, it must lie at the foundation of all others that go to form the fabric of national greatness and prosperity. Vitally important then as the employment in question is to the welfare of humanity, and intimately blended as its interests are with all the great interests of an elevated and advanced civilization, we might hope that under the conjoined aid of theory and practice, it would in due time be enabled to partake of the certainty of the exact science, as well as be ranked among the most elevated and honorable of human pursuits.

And while this interest is confessedly one of such vast general importance, it certainly cannot be doubted that it is essential to the prosperity of Vermont. And perhaps in no State in the Union is it more pre-eminently important that the cultivation of the soil should be conducted in accordance with sound principles in agricultural science. The prairie and other alluvial soils which abound in many of the States, being richly charged with all those various mineral elements which enter into different vegetable products, may, even if no correct principles of science are applied in their cultivation, continue to yield abundant harvests for a long series of years – although doubtless liable to the ultimately exhausted. But the soils of Vermont, chiefly primitive in their character, less deep and less abounding in those ingredients essential to prolonged spontaneous fertility, require that correct practical principles be brought to bear upon their cultivation, if we would secure their increased productiveness or even save them from deterioration. What nature, however, has not done for our State, science can do. Let its light then be diffused, and its guidance be followed, and, under an adequate system of protection to this interest in connection with others, Vermont has nothing to fear for her continued and increasing prosperity. Her valleys and plains will teem with unsurpassed fertility, and sheep and cattle graze, in countless thousands, on her hillsides, while the busy hum of prosperous industry shall be heard from all her thriving villages. And if the survey, whose bearings and influence have, in view of their importance, been thus considered at length, shall aid, as it is confidently believed it will, in securing such results, no citizen can feel that it has been undertaken and prosecuted in vain.

The contributions made by the survey to the now rapidly unfolding science of geology, and the aid afforded by it in solving problems of deep interest to the scientific world, although ranking as secondary considerations, are yet in no danger of being overrated in our estimate of their importance.

I am not apprised that any further appropriation will be required in order to complete satisfactorily the field-labor of the survey, unless perchance, on making up the final report it should be found that some facts were wanting to complete the chain of evidence in regard to certain conclusions, so that some flying excursions should be deemed necessary to supply the deficiency. If so, a small sum might be needed for the purpose.

On the publication of the final report, such a form can be given it, and such provisions made for its distribution, as may at the time be deemed desirable and expedient.

The report of the State Superintendent of Common Schools will immediately be laid before you. In regard to that great interest of the State which forms the subject of this report, it is sufficient for me here to say, that all the beneficial purposes and results which it could reasonably have been expected should be accomplished at so early a stage of the common school enterprize, as connected with our recently adopted system of supervision, it is believed have been fully realized. A very laudable degree of interest for the improvement of their schools has been awakened among the people in many parts of the State; a deeper anxiety exists among teachers to secure a proper qualification for their work; and the general impulse has extended its quickening influence to the schools themselves, imparting to their pursuits a life and animation unknown and unfelt before. And I cannot forbear earnestly to express my deep and firm conviction, that the highest and best interest of the State demands the continued maintenance of measures calculated to elevate the character of our common schools, in view of the vast influence which these institutions must exert upon our unfolding and advancing destinies.

The reports of the Trustees and Superintendent of the Vermont Asylum for the Insane, which have been forwarded to me, exhibit a prosperous and flattering condition of that institution. Its buildings recently erected are now completed, so that ample accommodations are provided for three hundred patients, and it is giving, in

the results of its operations ample evidence that the benefactions of the State to it have not been unworthily bestowed.

During the year it appears that 197 have been admitted into the Asylum, and 169 have been discharged. Of those discharged, 94 had recovered and 34 were improved. There are now in the institution 291, of whom 123 are beneficiaries, sharing in the continued munificence of the State.

It cannot but be gratifying to the friends of humanity that the institution, free from debt, and with accommodations so complete as it now possesses, has entered upon a full and unembarrassed career of usefulness, and is now, from week to week, giving back to society, to usefulness and to happiness, those who had entered within its walls under the darkening of mind and soul, the propensity to mischief, and perchance the ferocity, which characterize the unhappy maniac. Or where the cloud of darkness has settled permanently down upon the soul of the unfortunate inmate, so that in the utterness of his mental ruin no such favorable result, as we have supposed, can be realized, our humanity may yet be consoled by the reflection that a refuge is afforded him the best adapted to his condition, and the best calculated to contribute to his comfort and happiness, that benevolence could provide or devise.

But Vermont, aside from the interests which her domestic policy can reach and guard, has others, growing out of her relations to the general government, of high importance. And these interests have been deeply affected by the prominent measures which, during the past year, have been consummated in the Congress of the United States.

Among those measures, and first in the train, is that by which the institution of Slavery has been so distinctly recognized as one of the elements of national policy, and adopted as one of the objects of the nation's care. By thus prostituting the nation's power, and applying its energies to the unconstitutional and unhallowed purpose of extending the limits and increasing the political influence of this institution, the government has encroached upon our own just rights, as well as committed an outrage upon the moral feelings of our citizens.

Against slavery itself, as a system wrong in practice and wrong in principle, Vermont has taken the ground of irreconcilable hostility; and she must and will continue to maintain it. Educated under a State constitution which breathes the spirit of freedom in every line, her people have deeply imbibed that spirit. In defending and maintaining her position, she would infringe on no constitutional rights; she would dissuade from all lawless violence. Her abhorrence of slavery will manifest itself neither in words of insolence, nor acts of outrage. It is embodied in a calm, though stern and settled purpose, earnestly to advocate the cause of human rights, and firmly and fearlessly to resist any encroachment upon her own. And this it is her fixed determination to do by what ever means she can rightfully and lawfully command.

It is true that the unjust measure alluded to has been consummated, and as one of its disastrous consequences already realized, we have been involved in an unhappy war with a neighboring Republic. But if the past is beyond retrieve, we still have duties to perform for the future.

We have yet to engage in fresh conflicts. The measure already consummated, we are reluctantly compelled to believe, is but one of a series of measures yet impending, designed to give to the slave system still greater influence in the general government, and to secure the perpetuity of its power. Encouraged by past success, slavery appears to be projecting schemes for the extension of her domains over yet wider space, and for an increase of the already disproportionate amount of political power conceded to the territory which has been recently acquired.

I submit then the inquiry whether the occasion does not demand some action on the part of the Legislature, at this time, by way of resisting the further progress of this dangerous and growing evil, which now threatens to absorb every other interest of the government, and to bind the nation's energies to the unworthy and odious task of ministering to its own unholy purposes and demands.

Should not the State proclaim to the country that she persists in the determination "to oppose the admission into the Union of any State whose constitution tolerates domestic slavery?" And should not such a declaration go forth accompanied with the intimation that Vermont begins to feel, in relation to this subject, that "there is a point beyond which forbearance ceases to be a virtue?" That this ground of unyielding opposition is the ground

which right and justice and the honor of the State require us to maintain, there can be no question. And we scarcely need stop to make the inquiry whether a public avowal of our position, or any other action on our part, will avail to resist the insatiable demands of slavery, and stay the part, will avail to resist the insatiable demands of slavery, and stay the present flood-tide of her power. It would stand recorded more to the honor of the descendants of patriotic and worthy sires, that they earnestly and unwaveringly struggled, though in vain, for the right, than that they aided, or even tamely submitted to, the wrong. And while we are reaping, as we have begun to do, the bitter fruits of the measure which has already been consummated in defiance of the wishes of Vermont, and in opposition to her earnest appeals to national justice and national magnanimity, it is to her no source of regret, but rather one of just and honest pride, that she remonstrated against the measure in advance, and exerted her best energies to prevent its consummation. And her regrets under the calamities which have followed the deed of wrong, may be alleviated by the reflection that they are not of her own procuring.

There is, however, no occasion to despair for future efforts. In the lessons of wisdom which the past may have impressed, and in the gradual progress of enlightened views and just sentiments in regard to the intrinsic wrong of slavery and its unworthiness of a rank among the interests of the nation, we may see fair presages, for the future, of more auspicious results.

Among the recent measures of the general government, Vermont cannot but deeply feel that of the overthrow of that system of protective policy under which she had been enjoying such unwonted prosperity. This must be regarded as one of the bitter results of that addition, already spoken of, which has been made to a political power in the government which we must expect will ever be hostile to the interests of free labor. But Vermont cannot see her interests crushed and her prosperity stayed without uttering her clear and deep-toned condemnation of the ruinous policy under which her prospects are thus blighted. She *has* insisted, and will *still* insist, upon protection, as a true and correct system of national policy. Her convictions both in regard to its utility, and the obligations of the government to yield to her its benefits, have been too clear to allow her to be shaken in her belief, or frightened into quiet submission by a distinct and open repudiation of the protective principle.

In regard to the advantages of the system, no proposition, it would seem, could be more clear and palpable than that the nation which protects the labor of its own population, which fosters and encourages its own industry in all its various pursuits, and aims in its whole policy to secure so far as practicable the production, within its own limits, of every article requisite for the supply of its own wants, will be likely to increase in wealth and its attendant means of enjoyment more rapidly than one which coldly turns away from its own industrial pursuits, withholding its fostering care, and pursuing a course of policy rather calculated to stimulate the industry of other countries, by opening to them a market in which all restrictions against a ruinous competition have been removed. No doubt could well be entertained in regard to the result. And in consideration of the large proportionate amount of the products of a nation's labor which is required for immediate consumption, the effect of adding, by such encouragement, but a fraction to the ordinary amount of that labor, is to add to its surplus products, and to increase a nation's wealth in the shape of permanent improvements and accumulated means of ministering to the higher wants, in a much greater proportion than, at a hasty glance, would be apparent.

But no argument or theory could be needed when we have such ample evidence upon the point in our experience under the protective tariff of 1842. A general prosperity, before unknown, here exhibits itself, and asserts, in unequivocal language, the wisdom and beneficence of the policy embodied in that measure. Under it, industry has been reaping, in every department of labor, a competent and sure reward for her toils; and an increase of the comforts of life among all classes has been so palpably and so universally apparent that the least observant could not fail to perceive it, nor could the hardest dare to deny its reality. And why has a blight been wantonly thrown over this cheerful and gratifying prospect?

To deny to the Congress of the United States the right, in levying duties upon imports, to discriminate, in the adjustment of those duties, for the specific and distinct purpose of protecting such useful branches of industry as may require this protection in order to ensure their prosperity, is not only to deny to it a right inherent in every government, but to repudiate one of the leading purposes and ends for which the confederacy was formed, and to discharge it from one of its highest and most sacred obligations. Vermont will denounce the doctrine

whenever she meets it, that any government in which she is concerned was instituted to provide for its own wants, while the interests of the people were to be regarded as beyond the scope of its purposes. Indeed, the heretical proposition bears upon its face the stamp of its own absurdity. Yet this regard for the industrial interests of the country, which we ask of the government, is in no practical shape incompatible with a provision for its own distinct wants. We are content that Congress should impose such an amount of duties, and such only, as will raise a sufficient revenue to meet the expenditures of the general government, while we insist that discriminations be made for the distinct and prominent purpose of granting protection wherever it is needed. Let the relative scale of duties be fixed in accordance with this principle, and the absolute rate we cheerfully leave to be determined by the necessities of the case.

The rejoicing in foreign lands, which has been elicited under the assumption that “henceforth the principle of duties for protection must be considered as abandoned in the United States,” is not without sufficient occasion, if this abandonment is, in truth, destined to be perpetual. Under it, we surrender to be shared with other nations, no small portion of the benefits justly accruing to us from the industrious and enterprising habits of our population – dividing the fruits of a toil which in the other wise favorable circumstances under which it is bestowed, ought to raise us above the common lot of humanity in the enjoyment of the comforts and blessings of life.

It cannot however be supposed, that those who advocate and sustain the free trade policy, contemplate this result as a primary and direct object of pursuit. But the important consideration that this policy benefits other lands at the expense of our own, is overlooked by the supporters of the system in their earnest desire to accomplish coincident purposes of their own, or purposes at best of local and limited utility, to the attainment of which they are ready to sacrifice the welfare of the country.

But whatever be the motive which prompts to this cold desertion of the interests of the country, or rather to the unnatural warfare which is waged against them, Vermont will raise her voice and exert her energies against such an unjust and heartless policy as has now gained the ascendancy, until she sees the restoration of that system of protection to American industry which the “Fathers of the Republic” adopted without misgivings, and pursued without wavering. Her confidence that success will finally crown her efforts is founded upon her strong conviction that the policy of which she demands the adoption, is not merely a *local* but *national* policy, and that hence she cannot want for aid in the re-establishment of a system so benign in its operations, and so vitally essential to her own and the general welfare.

Whether any specific action is requisite in regard to this important subject, or to others not adverted to, in which our interests are involved by our connection with the general government, is cheerfully confided to your decision, to be determined by your own judgment in regard to what the interest of the State may demand.

Permit me to assure you that I shall cordially cooperate in all your measures designed to promote the welfare and prosperity of our people. And in the discharge of all our official duties, may we be guided by such motives, and be enlightened with such wisdom, that, with the divine blessing to crown our efforts, none of the great interests of the State – her industry, education, morals, or religion – shall suffer at our hands.

HORACE EATON

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER,
Montpelier, October 10th, 1846

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