

Executive Speech
of
William A. Palmer
As it appears in the
RECORDS
OF THE
GOVERNOR AND COUNCIL
OF THE
STATE OF VERMONT.

Volume VIII.

1832

OCTOBER 19, 1832.

SPEECH OF GOV. PALMER— 1832.

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

The freemen having a second time failed to elect a Chief Magistrate of the state, I have again been called to the discharge of the duties of that office by your suffrages. I accept the important trust with that gratitude which is due to such distinguished confidence, with that diffidence which is fearful to do wrong, and with that solicitude which is inseparable from a sincere desire to do right.

At this enlightened age of the world, the criteria for judging of rulers are their *measures*,—not their *professions*. A candid, upright and honorable course, then, is the only way to ensure the approbation and support of their constituents.

Government is instituted for the common benefit of all; and is in its nature a concentration of the public opinion to a certain form of public rule. This may be supported in a government of force, by terror; but in a republic, by patriotism, knowledge and public virtue. To sustain this attachment, the powers of the government must be so exerted as to secure to all, as far as is practicable, by general laws well executed, the enjoyment of the various gifts which God has bestowed upon them. Where the laws secure to every man the right to acquire and hold property, the desire to accumulate wealth, by fair and honest means, is compatible with, and inseparable from patriotism. Enterprise and industry are in the class of public virtues, because they are the unfailing sources of wealth and power to a nation.

Knowledge and virtue, then, are the main pillars of a republican government, and the only permanent basis upon which they can rest is education. The venerable founders of our government were well aware of this great truth, and therefore declared in our constitution that “a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town for the convenient instruction of youth, and one or more grammar schools be incorporated and properly supported in each county in this state.” It becomes your duty, as guardians of the public welfare, to inquire whether the good intentions and wise policy of our forefathers have been carried into effect in the various parts of the state from whence you come, and to provide that the means of education should be widely extended, and cheaply and easily afforded to every class of our citizens.

As commander in chief of the militia when not in the actual service of the United States, it will not be considered improper to make a few suggestions on that subject. As a frontier State we are more interested in an efficient organization of the militia than those States more remote from immediate attacks. From our infancy we have all been taught the danger to be apprehended in a republic from a standing army. History is full of instruction on this subject, and warns us, in language too glowing to be unfelt and too plain to be misunderstood, to beware of the danger.

To preserve the forms of war and the principles and feelings of military discipline, some regular troops are necessary; but our main defense must rest with the militia. They are our safeguard against internal commotion and a shield against sudden invasion from external enemies. The soil must be protected by its owners, and this must include all, because all have a right to acquire estates in fee simple.

For the acquisition of military knowledge schools have been established in different parts of the country, where the theory may be acquired, and much useful information obtained; but these are not the only measures necessary in a country like ours to keep up a proper spirit in the militia against the time of difficulty and danger, from which no country can expect to be exempt in the present state of the world. On the militia must we depend to meet the first advances of an enemy; yet little benefit will be realized unless they are well armed, equipped and trained; which must be attended with no inconsiderable expense of time and money. It is just to require the services of so large a portion of our citizens and subject them to the expense of equipment and training without some equivalent? Is it just that they should bear a burden not borne by the other citizens of the State, and at the same time be compelled to contribute an equal proportion with others to the general expense?

Each State in the union has the same interest in the discipline of the militia of the other States as in its own; there can be no impropriety, therefore, in considering this as a subject of national concernment, interesting to

all. I submit then to your consideration whether you will attempt to prevail on Congress to adopt some general system, by classification or otherwise, to improve the state of the militia generally, or whether you will give your attention to your own state alone. To neglect this subject seems to be alike incompatible with the public safety, and inconsistent with the wisdom of the Legislature.

We have every reason for gratitude to a kind Providence for the unusual measure of health enjoyed by the citizens of this state during the past year. A fearful and deadly malady has been raging in the neighboring Canadian provinces and in some of the adjoining states, which has carried death and desolation in its train. Much alarm has been felt by our own citizens lest this scourge of the human race should reach us; but with very few exceptions our people have been exempt from this terrible disease. During the past summer, I have been applied to by various respectable individuals in different parts of the State, and by some public bodies, to establish and enforce such regulations on the frontiers of this State as would tend to secure our citizens for contagion from abroad. I did not feel myself authorized to adopt such regulations as the applicants desired, no law of this State empowering me to do so. Should the Legislature think proper to adopt quarantine regulations, they will pass the necessary laws to carry them into effect.

Since the last session, the President has refused his assent to a bill passed by Congress, rechartering the Bank of the United States. Those who remember the deranged state of the currency at the close of the last war, may anticipate a like derangement should a recharter be finally refused and the bank be obliged to close its concerns. Much embarrassment, it is apprehended, will be produced in the mercantile community by calling in so large a portion of the capital engaged in commerce as is due to the bank. Though comparatively little of this sum is due from the citizens of this state, and therefore little trouble is to be apprehended here on that account, yet it is believed that a great majority of the people of this state are in favor of a recharter, from the consideration that the Bank has exercised a salutary influence in equalizing the currency of the country, and in preventing many of the state banks from suspending specie payments. It is submitted whether any action of the Legislature, on this subject, would be productive of beneficial consequences.

Nothing has occurred to disturb the peaceful relations of our country with foreign powers, and we may be permitted to indulge the hope, that no aggression on their part or injustice on ours will intervene to change these relations.

Our relations at home have not been equally fortunate. Disturbances have occurred on our western border resulting in war with a band of the Indians, which has been attended with the usual accompaniments of savage warfare, and has produced scenes afflictive to community. The active operations of the war have terminated in the capture or destruction of most of the enemy, yet consequences deeply injurious to our frontier settlers may ensue and continue for years to come. Our relations with these unfortunate tribes, the remnant of a once powerful people, it is feared, have not always been so conducted as to leave favorable impressions on their minds with regard either to our justice or humanity.

At the last session of Congress, the law regulating the Tariff of duties received such a modification as was thought by its friends would soothe the jealousies of the South, and disarm the opposition which has been exhibited in that section of the Union; but from recent manifestations of public feeling in that quarter, we have much reason to fear that the party claiming the extraordinary right to nullify any law of Congress, which, in *their opinion*, has not been passed in strict conformity to the provisions of the constitution of the United States, will result either in immediate civil commotion, or a separation from the other members of the confederacy. Whatever may be the points of difference between parties of this government, in this they will all undoubtedly agree, that in union alone is there any adequate security for our liberty. It is indeed not less essential to the existence of our confederated government, than is the principle of gravitation to the harmony of the material universe. From time immemorial the successful maxim of ambition has been to "divide and conquer"; but cemented as our union now is by excellent federal and state constitutions, yet if the invisible hand of foreign influence, or deep-rooted domestic prejudices and animosities, or the more fatal projects of unprincipled and vaulting ambition should obtain an ascendancy, we should too late discover that the loss of union is the irretrievable loss of our liberties.

I feel it is my duty to present again for your consideration a subject to which I briefly alluded at the last session. It is that relic of a dark age and a barbarous code, imprisonment for debt. I cannot permit the occasion to pass without manifesting my decided disapprobation of this discordant feature in our statutes, and expressing the opinion that it is inconsistent both with the spirit of our laws and the constitution of the state.

I cannot, moreover, let the occasion pass, without again calling your attention to the imposition and multiplication of oaths, and would renew the recommendation on that subject contained in my communication of last year.

In selecting such officers as are necessary to be appointed by the General Assembly, you will not fail to keep constantly in view that article of our constitution, which recommends a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, and a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry and frugality, as absolutely necessary to keep government free.

In pursuance of a resolution of the last session, authorizing the Governor to appoint a suitable person to investigate the question whether the lands in the town of Wheelock, granted by this State to Moor's Charity School, are not forfeited, I appointed the Hon. Asa Aikens of Windsor, to make the investigation. His report, as soon as received, will be laid before you.

It will be the duty of the General Assembly to appoint, at the present session, a Senator to serve this state in the Congress of the United States, for six years from and after the fourth of March next.

Any communications which have been, or may be, received by me, and which are proper to be laid before you, shall be communicated in due season for the action of the Legislature.

In conclusion, permit me to express the hope that the different branches of the government may act together in harmony—that a spirit of mutual forbearance and good will may characterize our proceedings, and that we may all strive to merit, in the discharge of our several functions, the confidence and approbation of our constituents, and the smiles of a gracious Providence, without whose aid all our efforts to advance the public good, however well intended, will prove fruitless.

WM. A PALMER