

Executive Speech
of
William A. Palmer
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SPEECH OF GOV. PALMER— 1833.

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

Having been elected by the suffrages of the independent freemen of this State, to the office of Chief Magistrate, I accept the trust confided to me, with a grateful sense of the honor which such an expression of public confidence confers, and a deep conviction of the responsibility which it imposes.

The occasion of our assembling cannot fail to remind us of the source of our authority. The government we are called to administer is the government of the people, and the power it confers upon us as their constituted agents, involves the high responsibility of expressing their will, and laboring to promote their welfare. The just extent of those powers, and the best means of their beneficent exercise should become, therefore, the subjects of our deep and anxious deliberation.

Coming, as we do, from the midst of the people, we have the best means of knowing their wants—of understanding their interests, and of perceiving the operation of existing laws, and the necessity which experience many have suggested for their modification. In discharging our duties as Legislators, we shall find it necessary to guard against a spirit of innovation on the one hand, and a blind adherence to precedent on the other.

The judiciary department of the Government will always claim the first regard of the Legislature. Upon the wisdom and purity of that department, all the most valuable possessions in civil society depend. In all countries, the principles and feelings of the magistrate ought to accord with the principles of the government; this is necessary, to give it energy. In a State, where an inquiry by grand juries and trials by petit juries are fixed by the constitution as the strong barriers of the people's rights, the modes of punishing crimes and enforcing private claims are always expensive and sometimes attended with inconvenient delay. A cheap, ready, and plain manner of obtaining remedies for wrongs and compelling the execution of contracts by fixed and established rules, and without unnecessary delay, forms the distinguishing feature of a good government. There is no doubt but that improvements may be made in the jurisprudence of the State, and therefore, the attention of the Legislature will be directed to it.—But in all alterations of the laws, a sacred regard to the constitution, and such a degree of perfection and permanence as will render them respectable, ought to be kept steadily in view.

The great improvements in Agriculture—the increase of Commerce, and the progress and encouragement of the Arts, in our country, furnish the most satisfactory proof of the excellence of our political institutions; but the path of public as well as private prosperity ought to be trodden with care. Governments which depend in so great a measure for their due execution on the will of the governed, so frequently expressed by their suffrages, demand for their preservation, great intelligence in the body of the people. To maintain this, our institution of Common Schools, is admirably adapted; those, with our Academies and Colleges, are rendered indispensable by the nature of our government, and will claim the constant attention of the Legislature for their support and encouragement.

The views which I have heretofore expressed to the Legislature on the subjects of the Militia, of the multiplication of Oaths, and of Imprisonment for Debt, remain unchanged: and I refer to those important objects, as deserving your particular attention.

On the subject of the Militia, if nothing more should be done at the present session, I would suggest the propriety, and even the necessity, of revising the laws on that subject, making such alteration and amendments as will do away those difficulties in their execution, which have been found to exist, and that each field officer and captain of a company in the State be furnished with a copy at the public expense, to be distributed in the same manner as the public laws and journals are distributed.

By an act of the General Assembly, passed at their last session, it was made my duty to appoint three suitable persons as a committee, to fix on a place, in Montpelier, for the erection of a State House. In obedience to the provision of this act, I appointed Samuel C. Crafts of Craftsbury, Allen Wardner, of Windsor, and George

T. Hodges, of Rutland, to fix the place for a new State House, and to prepare a plan for the same. Their report on the subject is herewith laid before you. By the persons as a committee to superintend the erection of the State House, agreeably to the plan adopted by the locating committee. To this service I appointed Lebbeus Egerton, of Randolph, whose report of the progress of the work thus far will be laid before you.

In pursuance of a resolution of the General Assembly adopted at their last session, requesting me to open a correspondence with the Governor of Lower Canada on the subject of removing the obstructions at the outlet of Lake Champlain, near St. Johns, in Lower Canada, I addressed a letter to that officer on the subject, enclosing sundry affidavits tending to establish the existence of the evils complained of. I have received the answer of the Governor, with a number of affidavits and documents, relating to the same subject. This correspondence, with the papers relating to it, will be laid before you.

In pursuance of another resolution of the General Assembly, adopted at their last session, requesting me to enter into such negotiations with the Governor of Lower Canada as would conduce to the removal or lowering of a dam erected at the outlet of Lake Memphremagog, in the province of Lower Canada, so that the waters of the Lake may recede to their original level, or take such other measures as would remove the nuisance complained of, I addressed a letter to the Governor of Canada, on the subject, to which I have received an answer, assuring me that prompt measures would be taken to inquire into and remove the obstructions referred to, and I have no doubt, the difficulty will be satisfactorily adjusted.

When we reflect that the United States are in possession of numerous blessings—political, civil and religious—many of which are not enjoyed by other nations—that we are remote from the troubles which frequently agitate the old world—that we enjoy the uncontrolled right, on the true principles of liberty, to form, alter, and carry into effect, our federal and state constitutions—that founded on them and on law, there exists a spirit of toleration, securing to every one, the undisturbed rights of conscience and the free exercise of religion—that the people, at fixed periods, have the choice of their rulers and can remove them when they do wrong—that the means of education in all branches are liberal, general, and successful—that there is no place where the road to comfort, to wealth, or honest fame is so open—that the national resources and powers by proper management and arrangement, may render our country invincible—that by our husbandry, commerce, manufactures, and mechanic arts, the resources and wealth of the nation almost surpass belief—let us not be prompted by imprudent zealots of any description to hazard the loss of all or any of these inestimable blessings, but let us secure them forever, with the aid of Divine Providence, by rallying around the standard of the Constitution, and encouraging a true national spirit, on the solid foundation of peace, order and concord.

That we may in some measure be instrumental in promoting ourselves and our constituents the benefits of a good government, let us encourage that watchfulness over the conduct of our rulers which is calculated to teach them a just responsibility in their several stations, exercising all that indulgence towards honest differences of opinion, which the full and complete enjoyment of all the blessings of a free government render necessary; may we all for the present session, and for the period for which we are elected, be directed to the adoption of such wise and beneficial measures as will promote the public happiness.

WILLIAM A. PALMER.