

Inaugural address

of

Silas H. Jenison

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

Under the peculiarly embarrassing circumstances which have been operating upon the currency and business of the country for a few months past, it may have been expected and by some has been deemed my duty to have convened the Legislature in special session. My attention has been directed to the subject with anxious solicitude, and could I have come to the conclusion, that any act of the legislature would have afforded relief to our citizens, from the evils consequent upon the deranged state of the currency, equivalent to the trouble and expense of an extra session, I should have cheerfully assumed the responsibility of adopting that measure. But believing the unwise and unauthorized measures of the late executive of the General Government to have been the primary cause of producing the disastrous state of our monetary affairs, I could not flatter myself that any state legislation would cure the evil, or restore to us that safe, sound and convenient currency we had before enjoyed. To the General Government we must look for a remedy commensurate with the evil.

The citizens of our own state have suffered, as yet, perhaps less, than those of our sister states, still the business and credit of the country have received a shock, whose effects, if not averted by some measures of the General Government calculated to restore confidence in community, must result in consequences most destructive to the industry, enterprise and prosperity of our fellow-citizens. Our habits and commercial intercourse are such, that any attempt to transact the business of the country through the agency of the precious metals alone, would tend to unsettle and destroy the present relative value of property, and paralyze many of the great interests of the nation.

The several banks in this state, have, it is believed, rendered themselves liable to a forfeiture of their charters, by their suspension of specie payments. That measure, under the then existing circumstances was, perhaps, the only alternative which a prudent regard to the interest of community could dictate. It was approved by the wise and considerate of all parties.

The question of legalizing this act of the banks, is one of intense interest to our whole people, and I will trust it will be met, discussed and disposed of with all the wisdom, prudence and moderation to which, from its importance, it is entitled. The motive of the legislature in chartering these institutions was the promotion of the public good, and if any legislation upon the subject should be deemed expedient at this time, the interests and safety of community should be kept steadily in view.

A rigid enforcement of the penalties provided in the "act regulating the chartering of banks," would, doubtless, increase the difficulties of an already suffering people. It would destroy of all general and beneficial purposes, a circulating medium, to which an uniform value is attached, and although this medium may be somewhat depreciated below the precious metals, still it is one with which, by common consent, the indebtedness of individuals is discharged and the business of the country transacted.

Although the banks may have been led by the circumstances which preceded the suspension of specie payments throughout our country, to depart from what is considered by the undersigned, the proper and legitimate business of banks, and to make loans for purposes which ought always to be accomplished with real capital, and thereby lessened their ability to afford relief in time of pressure; yet, since the suspension, it is hoped they have been steadily engaged, so far as a due regard to the wants and exigencies of community would permit, in placing themselves in a situation to resume specie payments simultaneously with the banks in adjoining states. In this crisis great reliance has been placed upon the forbearance of our patriotic fellow-citizens, and it is a source of peculiar gratification, to say, that thus far my expectations have been fully realized.

The past season has been marked as one not only of a peculiarly disastrous character, as it relates to the derangement of the currency, and the effects of that derangement upon all the great interests of the country, but it has presented the novel spectacle of a people whose pursuits are mainly agricultural, depending upon foreign nations not only for the products of manufacture, and the mechanic arts, but for bread. This state of things ought not to be. The lesson will be duly appreciated by a discerning people. It admonishes to economy in our public, and industry and frugality in our private affairs.

No community, *exclusively* of an agricultural character, can maintain that independence and high standing, which are essential to the enjoyment of happiness. A dependence upon foreign nations for the *necessaries* of life, is derogatory to a free and intelligent people; and withal has, in times of national difficulties, a demoralizing tendency which, by the wise and provident legislator will be foreseen and guarded against. Considerations of this character fully justify the policy heretofore pursued by our national government in promoting and encouraging, while in its infancy, the mechanical and manufacturing skill of our country, and continue to demand it fostering care. Efficient protection and encouragement, it is true, belong to the general government; still as freemen, as members of the great national family, it is our right, our duty, to express our convictions on the subject.

It will be recollected that a revision of our militia laws was earnestly urged upon the consideration of the last legislature. Another year's experience must have served to convince, if any thing were wanting, all whose attention has been drawn to the subject, of their utter inefficiency to secure the objects they were designed to accomplish. Although I am gratified in being able to say that there are some honorable exceptions; yet, upon the whole, it is believed, subordination and discipline have been upon the retrograde for several years past. Are not our militia laws wrong in principle? If those patriots and benefactors who laid the foundations for our free institutions were not mistaken when they said, "A well regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state," no good reason can be urged why the burthens and expense of the system should not reach every individual, by whom the benefits of the systems are enjoyed.

The exemption of the polls of those enrolled in the militia from a portion of the annual taxes, is scarcely an equivalent for keeping in their possession and in repair, the arms and equipments required by law; consequently all the time spent in obtaining that instruction and organization necessary to render the militia efficient, is an unjust tax levied upon those individuals who cannot, through favoritism or some other means, obtain a discharge from enrollment. The effect of this manifest injustice in the operation of our laws, has been greatly to increase the number of exempts, and to render those who could not obtain discharges, impatient and dissatisfied under the restraint and burthens to which they were subjected.

Another evil which is deemed subversive of discipline and good order among our militia, is the manner now provided by law for the enforcement of the rules and regulations governing the same, and the collection of fines for delinquencies. Should all questions of this nature be referred to a board composed of commissioned officers, detailed for that service from each regiment or brigade, to whom all delinquencies should be reported by the several commandants of companies, it would secure an uniformity in decisions, which is very desirable.

The law of the last session authorizing the executive to procure the mounting of several pieces of ordnance, for distribution to newly organized companies of artillery, has not been complied with. It was ascertained that two companies, to whom cannon and apparatus were distributed under the law of 1827, had some time since been disbanded, and consequently, the pieces and apparatus were liable to go to decay, not being in the care or custody of any person feeling an interest in their preservation. Orders have been given to the companies recently raised in Stow and Morristown, to take possession of those pieces.

Information has been received from the officer in command at the United States Arsenal at Vergennes, that the arms belonging to this state, deposited there, are in a bad condition, beginning to corrode. That being the case, economy would dictate a small appropriation to enable the Quarter-Master-General to have them examined, cleaned, and put in a good state for preservation.

In compliance with a resolution of the Senate, passed at its last session, requesting me to procure an estimate of the probable expense of a geological and topographical survey of the State, I have addressed several scientific gentlemen upon the subject, the result of which correspondence will be laid before you at a proper time.

Accident and the unaided enterprise of individuals, have developed many sources of wealth, in the mineral treasures of our mountains.

From what has been already brought to light by these means, we are fully warranted in presuming, that, if the aids of science should be brought to bear upon the subject, under the patronage of the State, and a thorough examination were had, with a view to its practical utility, important discoveries would be made, highly

beneficial to the State. A spirit of scientific research would take the place of pretended knowledge in the art of searching for valuable mineral substances, and our citizens saved from the fruitless expenditure of much time and money. Surveys of a similar character have been prosecuted in several of the neighboring states, and are believed to have produced the most satisfactory results.

This is an object intimately connected with the prosperity and best interests of this State, and it is recommended that measures be taken for its early accomplishment. If its consequences should be such as are anticipated, it could not fail of affording profitable employment to many of our worthy citizens, who would otherwise leave the soil of their birth, to people the more fertile regions of the west.

The advantages of a Topographical survey of the State, may not, to a superficial observer, be very apparent, but still the time is not distant when the importance of the measure will be duly appreciated. The state of science calls for it, and its importance for practical purposes cannot be too highly valued. It would afford useful data in the location and survey of rail roads and canals, and if entered upon and prosecuted in the only manner in which a work of this kind should be done, would be productive of great public utility.

In accordance with "an act appropriating the sum therein mentioned for making certain surveys," I appointed, early in January last, John C. Holbrook, Esq. of Brattleboro', and Erastus Fairbanks, Esq. of St. Johnsbury, commissioners. Subsequently, the Hon. David M. Camp was appointed to supply the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Fairbanks. The survey is understood to have been completed, and a report of the proceedings of the commissioners under the act will probably be transmitted for the information of the General Assembly during the present session.

Under the joint resolution requesting the executive to exchange copies of the reports of the judicial decisions of this for those of each of the other States, I have caused to be transmitted to the executive authorities of the several state a part of the volumes of the Vermont Reports, and solicited an exchange. The favor will doubtless be reciprocated whenever their legislatures shall be in session.

During the recess of the legislature, I have received communications from several of our sister states, which will be laid before you at an early day.

It became my duty, by an act of the last session of the General Assembly to appoint some suitable person, to superintend the completion of the State House. In compliance therewith, I appointed A.B. Young, Esq., who had been employed s architect from the commencement of the building, whose report, when received, will be communicated to the General Assembly. It may be thought necessary to retain Mr. Young, the whole, or a part of the next season, to complete the building and its enclosures, and to carry out and perfect the original design. The building when thus completed, will prove a source of lasting credit to the taste and skill of the architect, and be highly creditable to our state.

I would respectfully refer you to my annual message to the last legislature, for some suggestions which are deemed highly important to the prosperity and usefulness of our common schools; they are the medium through which we reach the minds, and form the morals of the rising generation. Vermont has been liberal in providing the pecuniary means for the advancement of the interests of education; and it is due to ourselves and to posterity, that a wise and efficient application of these means should be made.

Other subjects may be presented for our consideration, demanding legislative action.

Confiding in your wisdom and prudence, I can promise a cordial co-operation, in whatever may tend to promote the prosperity of our state, or add to the security and happiness of its citizens. Convinced, as I am, that in a government, depending upon the moral power of the people, the best claim to support, is insured by a faithful performance of duty, I take this occasion to express to my fellow-citizens, through you, the deep sense entertained, of the importance of the trust committed to me, and to tender to them my grateful and respectful acknowledgments, for their repeated kindness and partiality.

SILAS H. JENISON.

Montpelier, Oct. 13, 1837