

Inaugural address
of
Stephen Royce
As it appears in the
Journal
of the
House of Representatives
October Session
1854

Saturday, October 14, 1854.
Inaugural Message

Fellow citizens of the Senate, and House of Representatives:

Elected by the Freemen of my native State, to act as their Chief Magistrate for the ensuing year, I meet the General Assembly to render that co-operation in the business of the present Session, which is enjoined upon me by the Constitution and the Laws.

In this new, and untried position, I feel the assurance, that faithful endeavors to discharge its duties will meet a candid and generous construction, though they should not be exempt from errors in judgment, and mistakes in routine and detail.

It could not be expected that the present communication would embrace many suggestions bearing directly upon the business of the Session. And, as I come to the Executive Office at a time of life when brevity in a paper of this kind is felt to be no less the dictate of taste than of inclination and convenience, I must claim indulgence for a Message, perhaps, unusually short.

I do not advise radical or extensive changes in the Laws of the State. In the main, they have always been eminently just, aiming to secure to the people equal rights, and to dispense equal benefits. And, although there may have been occasional tendencies to an excess of legislation, by which substantial and useful progress has been retarded, yet I consider that our laws, with the gradual ameliorations and improvements of more than seventy years, may, as a system, challenge comparison with those of any other government, in the general wisdom of their provisions, and the facility of their administration.

Of the various objects, within the influence of State Legislation, which now engage the earnest attention of community, the promotion of temperance is confessedly among the most interesting and important. The primary, and great question is between permitting, under due regulations, the traffic in intoxicating liquors for the indiscriminate purpose of drinking, and the prohibition of the traffic for such general purpose.

Believing that the great and manifold evils of intemperance are not to be essentially alleviated by any scheme for licensing the traffic, beyond the purposes specified by our Statute, I repeat what I have already publicly announced, that I think the Prohibitory System ought to be continued. And, if amendments in the present law are attempted, they should be made with no view to weaken the policy of Prohibition. Nor would I counsel hesitation in carrying out that policy, from any fear that the legislative power to enact prohibition, to its present extent, will be judicially denied.

The people of Vermont have always evinced their just appreciation of the great political axiom, "that a general diffusion of knowledge is indispensable to the qualification of a state, or community, for successful self-government." And, hence, you scarcely need to be reminded of the obligations to cherish, sustain and perfect our system for the education of children and youth.

It is thought by some of the most able and enlightened men of the State, that decided benefit to these great interests may be realized through the agency of a Board of Education. And should their plan, or any having a like object, be presented for your adoption, I trust its merits will be canvassed in the spirit of kindness and liberality which is due to a subject so important.

There exists in every government the necessity of an organized physical force, in readiness to protect the State, or its members, from violence. In absolute governments this force is a standing army; in a free state, it should always, except in time of actual war, consist exclusively of militia.

Within a few years past, our uniform militia, as an organized class, has suffered a very marked declension. This is attributable to the indifference with which the Militia system has, of late, been regarded, and to the total suspension of that pecuniary encouragement which had, directly or indirectly, been afforded.

It has appeared to me that our policy upon this subject should be reconsidered; and I think it my duty to recommend that measures be taken, by the requisite enactments, to restore the uniform Militia to a state of efficiency.

From representations recently made to me by the Superintendent and Directors of the State Prison, I am led to believe that an appropriation should be made for building, within the Prison, a Hospital for the sick, and for other minor accommodations. Evidence will doubtless be laid before you, showing the necessity of an appropriation. It is thought that an appropriation of one thousand dollars will be sufficient.

It is believed and urged by some of our most intelligent and experienced citizens, that in place of our laws which authorize the sale of lands for non-payment of taxes assessed thereon, a forfeiture of such lands to the State, as the consequence of neglecting to pay the taxes upon them, might be advantageously substituted. A law in the State of Maine, to this effect, it is said, has been found to operate beneficially. The subject is important, and I deem it worthy of your deliberate consideration.

The duty to observe a rigid economy in the public expenditures is, at all times imperative; and I doubt not that you will study to keep them at the lowest point which will consist with a due administration of the government.

The signal prosperity of the State is thus far continued without serious check or abatement. And we have great cause for devout acknowledgment and thankfulness to the Father of mercies, for the general health which the people have been permitted to enjoy, while pestilence has been busy in its work of death in so many other states.

An Act of Congress, passed at the last Session, annulled that part of the Act of A. D. 1820, commonly called the Missouri Compromise, which restricted the spread of Slavery in a vast region of the country acquired by the Louisiana Purchase of A. D. 1803. That great adjustment has the moral attributes of a solemn and valid compact; and had therefore been recognized and respected for more than thirty years, as a final and unalterable act of government, settling forever a great and dangerous controversy. The act repealing the restriction clause of the Compromise, was supported, and urged forward in its passage, with almost unbroken unanimity, by the delegations from all the Slaveholding States. It has naturally, and very justly, excited a sentiment of intense dislike and stern condemnation throughout the Free States.

Notwithstanding the glosses and palliations put forth in defense of that measure, it appears to furnish palpable evidence of its great purpose; and this would seem to be nothing less than to secure to the slave interest an indefinite extension of Slavery, and a perpetual ascendancy and control in the government of the nation. And hence, it should not be a matter of surprise, that so general a determination exists in the Free States to counteract and resist, in all peaceable and constitutional modes, such a spirit of unscrupulous aggression. This course has become manifestly expedient and necessary, as the only resource for the protection and advancement of the cause of freedom; and, as an omen of its ultimate success, I may allude to the concentration of feeling and effort which is now so extensively witnessed, and which is so auspicious to the harmony and strength of this, and other States.

I conclude by expressing my confident hope that, under the guidance of a wise Providence, your labors may be productive of great and permanent good.

STEPHEN ROYCE.

Executive Chamber,
Montpelier October 14, 1854. }