

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

Albert B. Cummins

GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF IOWA

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GOVERNOR CUMMINS' INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

*Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Senators and Representatives of the
Thirty-second General Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,—*

For the third time I have taken the oath just administered in your presence. I have done my best to keep it in the years that have gone. I will do my best to keep it in the years that are to come. I have tried faithfully to understand the sacred obligations it creates, with the consciousness that my vow to preserve it, inviolate, is registered, not alone upon the records of an earthly government, but is written also upon the eternal tablets of a Divine Master, whose infinite vision sees not alone the act, but the motive which inspires the deed. Remember, however, that this oath binds me to perform my duty as I see the right. It does not bind me to perform my duty as anybody else may see the right. I may not do the thing or say the word that you believe I ought to do or say, but if I do the thing and say the word that I believe I ought to do or say, I will have kept the faith. Judge me, therefore, with that breadth of view, that righteous toleration which recognizes that men may honestly reach varying conclusions upon many of the subjects involved in the administration of public affairs and I will be content.

A few days ago I had the honor to deliver to the members of the General Assembly a message which contained my specific recommendations touching the legislation of the State, and upon this occasion I may be permitted to deal with some phases of our public problems from a more general standpoint.

But first I must congratulate you upon the character of the people you represent. A kind Providence has bestowed upon them unequaled opportunities for the truest happiness and most enduring prosperity that mortals can enjoy. Our sources of wealth, while prolific and inexhaustible will not create fortunes so vast as to excite

discontent, or become a menace to the public good. Our civilization is of the highest type known to the world, for it blends, in perfect proportion, the best qualities of the mind and the noblest virtues of the heart. If our people can not reach the summit of true greatness, it may well be concluded that the top of the mountain is to be forever inaccessible. There is not another community of two millions of human beings upon the face of the earth so well fitted to accomplish the mighty purposes of the Ruler of all things as is the community which we call the State of Iowa. It is a distinguished honor to represent these people. As the chief executive, I acknowledge the honor, and I extend to you the heartiest felicitations upon the admirable constituency in whose service you are engaged.

This is an age of discussion—of calm, riotous, philosophical, foolish, sincere, hypocritical discussion. It is an age of fine eulogy and slashing criticism. It is an age of serene confidence and deep despair. There are persons who deplore rest, and some who deplore unrest; but I think the crashing discord is the salvation of our civilization and our institutions. Nearly everybody wants a change in some thing, and to most of us the agitator or demagogue is the man who wants to make a change that we think ought not to be made. We are all for some reform; and the hypocrite or pretender is the man who wants to reform something that we think ought not to be reformed. Undoubtedly there are agitators, demagogues, hypocrites and pretenders, but when we attempt to point them out, we are usurping the exclusive privileges of the Almighty. The sheep will be separated from the goats some time, but the man who tries to do it in this world will make a great many mistakes. I say, let the discussion—wise or unwise, honest or dishonest—go on. Let the lightnings of criticism strike. Let the thunders of condemnation roll. Let the sharp scream of anger and discontent be heard. Let the songs of praise swell out. In these things lies the real hope of finding our way through the tangled labyrinth through which we must pass. The truth is, and we may as well confess it, that we are a somewhat bewildered people. Our forefathers made for us a government, national and state, putting into it a genius that dwarfs every other effort of its kind; but the country to be governed has escaped from the government established to manage it, and is running wild. These thousands of voices that fill the air are only endeavoring to tell in a variety of tongue that there has been an escape and should be a recapture; but just how to put the harness

of justice upon these new and mighty forces that we call our country—Ah! “There’s the rub.”

The conditions under which we live are utterly unlike the conditions that gave form to our institutions and which prescribed the scope of ancient laws. Forces have come into existence which were unknown to the men who made our constitutions. Not only are the conditions new and the forces unfamiliar, but they have developed so rapidly that we have not yet had time to do much but talk about them. With a wealth that in a very few years has whirled us out of obscurity to the very pinnacle of financial greatness; with this wealth organized in the hands of powerful men, multiplying itself with amazing rapidity, establishing monopolies, crushing and grinding its way without any instinct of fairness or any emotion of sympathy, toward the complete extinction of competition and independence; with forests in its grasp; with ore beds occupied; with its reach and strength drawing together the manufactories of the country; with the packing houses and live stock markets joining into one vast combination; with 220,000 miles of main track railway gradually taken from the ownership of a thousand companies and concentrated into a half-dozen systems all dominated by a few men, and oftentimes by the same men, serving with might and main these masters of finance, bent on paying interest and dividends upon stocks and bonds that aggregate twice the original capital invested, as well as laying aside immense sums for extensions and additions that ought to be constructed from independent capital; with labor unions that are trying to mass the power of the workingman against the associated strength of employers—these things present a situation never before presented to organized society. The farmers and the retail merchants are about the only people remaining to exhibit the force of competition, and the latter are shivering lest the mail order house shall soon make way with them.

When we add the riotous extravagances and the shameful inefficiency of municipal administration, both arising largely from the prodigality of prosperity, we have the picture upon which the American people are now looking. No wonder we are bewildered, and that we are a little nervous, as well as very proud. No wonder that magazines and newspapers are filled with discussion, suggestion, criticism and denunciation. No wonder that the patriot and demagogue, the wise man and the fool, the philosopher and the agitator, the radical and the conservative, are abroad in the land. Understand me. I am not complaining of the conditions I have

described. All of them are natural, and many of them are unavoidable. I am not even prepared to say that, essentially, they can be changed. I am, however, sure that they require of government something that has never been done before, and that if we cling too closely to the wisdom of the forefathers and fail to exercise a little wisdom of our own, the history of our forefathers will be the only part of the history of this country worth preserving.

Herein lies the application of my former statement. No man knows just what to do, although all men know that something ought to be done. It is impossible to set forth an orderly plan that will embrace remedies for all the defects in our customs and laws, but this much is certain: that out of all the babel of argument and assertion, denunciation and eulogy, criticism and praise, there will come, little by little, the truth, and the truth will make us free. I have no fear that the people will adopt error or inflict injustice. I have some fear that, with the inertia begotten of over-reverence for the past, they will allow the truth to stand idle too long, and that they will be unjust, not in what they do, but in what they fail to do.

I was reading the other night the last published chapter of Mark Twain's autobiography. I do not know whether he intended it to be serious, satirical, or humorous, but whatever the state of his mind, he hit the bull's eye so often that the bell rang in my ears for hours. He was writing of Secretary Root's famous speech, lately delivered in New York, which was unfairly construed to advocate the practical abolition of state governments and the concentration of all power in the general government. I quote from Twain:

"He (Root) did not say in so many words that we are proceeding in a steady march toward eventual and unavoidable replacement of the republic by monarchy; but I suppose that he was aware that that is the case. He notes the several steps—the customary steps—which in all the ages have led to the consolidation of loose and scattered governmental forces into formidable centralizations of authority, but he stops there and doesn't add up that sum. He is not unaware that heretofore the sum has been ultimate monarchy, and that the same figures can fairly be depended upon to furnish the same sum whenever and wherever they can be produced, so long as human nature shall remain as it is; but it was not needful that he do the adding, since anyone can do it; neither would it have been gracious in him to do it.

"In observing the changed conditions which in the course of time have made certain and sure the eventful seizure by the Washington government of a number of State duties and prerogatives which have been betrayed and neglected by several states, he does not attribute those changes and the vast results which are to fall from them to any thought-out policy of any party, or of any body of dreamers or schemers, but properly and rightly attributes them to that stupendous power—Circumstance—which moves by laws of its own, regardless of parties and policies, and whose decrees are final and must be obeyed by all, and will be. The railway is a Circumstance, the steamship is a Circumstance, the telegraph is a Circumstance. They were mere happenings, and to the whole world, the wise and foolish alike, they were entirely trivial, wholly inconsequential; indeed, silly, comical, grotesque. No man and no party and no thought-out policy said, 'Behold, we will build railways and steamships and telegraphs, and presently you will see the condition and the way of life of every man and woman and child in the nation totally changed.' Unimaginable changes of the law and custom will follow, in spite of anything that anybody can do to prevent it. The changed conditions have come, and Circumstance knows what is following and will follow. So does Mr. Root. His language is not clear; it is crystal."

And then he quotes a few sentences from the speech, among them:

"Our whole life has swung away from the old state centers, and is crystallizing about national centers."

"That (State) power of regulation and control is gradually passing into the hands of the National government."

"Sometimes by an assertion of the interstate commerce power, sometimes by an assertion of the taxing power, the national government is taking up the performance of duties which, under the changed conditions, the separate states are no longer capable of adequately performing."

"Constructions of the Constitution will be found to vest the power where it will be exercised—in the national government."

And then Twain concludes—

"I do not know whether that has a sinister meaning or not, and so I will not enlarge upon it, lest I should chance to be in the wrong. It sounds like ship money come again, but it may not be so intended."

If this be satire, it is grim and gloomy. If it be humor, it is sharp and dangerous. I intend to touch the subject boldly. There is a truth here that needs to be brought out into the light, so that we may see it and understand it, and better still, so that we may acknowledge it. To adequately meet the revolution which we have witnessed in wealth, transportation, commerce and business, to adequately guard and protect the people from the piracies of the powerful, you know and I know that the National Government ought to have some powers that are not bestowed upon it, either in the letter or in the spirit of the Constitution. You know and I know that in the manner of selecting the President and Vice-President and Senators of the United States, there are lurking dangers which ought to be removed. You know and I know that for years every department that interprets the Constitution has strained it and tortured it and perverted it so that its makers would not recognize it as the instrument which they produced, in order to enable it to answer the demands of the time. This has not been done with any ill intent, but only to make the swaddling clothes of an infant cover the stalwart limbs of a giant; and it is just as true as fate that this process will continue until the Constitution is a mere shadowy name, without force or authority, unless it is so enlarged and strengthened that it will accomplish for us what it accomplished for our forefathers. The inquiry I propound, therefore, is this: Which shall we do; break the Constitution or better it? What do you think the consequences of stretching and shattering the Constitution will, in the end, be? I grant you that the Supreme Court of the United States will, slowly and reluctantly, make the Constitution whatever the imperious needs of the people require it to be, but when that spirit wins its final victory, what will your government be? Then, indeed, when we have forgotten the limitations of constitutions, then and then only may we fear that monarchy will supplant the republic. A land with an unwritten constitution is a monarchy, I care not how it may be disguised with forms.

Do not imagine that I am clearing the way for the conclusion that the powers of the states should be either abolished or curtailed. On the contrary, I believe that the authority which must be exercised by the states has increased, rather than diminished. My proposition is that the development of the country has made it necessary to exercise governmental functions which can not be exerted by the states and never has been; and which can not be employed by the general government because the Constitution

does not create them. The interstate commerce clause of the Constitution is not broad enough for these days, simply because we have an interstate commerce the character of which was not dreamed of when the clause was written. The corporations carrying on interstate commerce can not be adequately regulated by the states for the obvious reason that the jurisdiction of a state, even in the absence of the present prohibition in the Constitution, ceases at its border. We take nothing away from the States when we enlarge these grants to the United States. We only bring into existence a new power, to meet a new condition, and bestow it upon the only hand that can use it. The interstate commerce clause has already been strained to the point of breaking. The taxing authority has already been wrested from its true purpose, and still the courts halt upon the hither side of adequate law. Why should we hesitate to call a Constitutional convention and make our organic law as great and broad and strong as the subjects it is to control? There are two reasons, each of which moves a class of its own.

The first class is composed of those persons who worship the past, have no faith in the present, and little hope for the future. They seem to believe that while the men of 1787 had wisdom and virtue enough to frame a Constitution that would preserve the liberties of the people and protect the interests of the Nation, the men of 1907 are incapable of dealing with subjects so important and vital. They shiver with the fear that a Constitutional Convention would be made up of wild-eyed, crazy-minded iconoclasts, who would delight in destroying all the idols of the patriot and lay the country waste, to be preyed upon by all the forces of disorder and injustice. They even assert that the thirty-five States which must adopt the work of the Constitutional Convention before it becomes effective would be ruled by the same reckless indifference to the ancient landmarks. I can not think that there is the shadow of merit in their opposition. While I am conscious of intense pride and great reverence for the ancestry of the present generation, I believe that the men who are now studying the problems of government can be trusted as implicitly to do the right thing as could the men of a former time. We love our country as deeply as they did. We cherish the flag of our sovereignty with more love and affection than they ever felt. We are face to face with questions which were never propounded to them. We can take the multitude of remedies now proposed, and when they have passed through the crucible of full debate and of mature consideration, nothing will emerge but the pure gold of truth, justice and uprightness.

The second class is composed of persons dominated by the excessive selfishness of the human heart. Out of the incapacity of the government to do the things which ought to be done, they are daily coining inordinate profit. They are the beneficiaries of a species of anarchy which it is their interest to perpetuate. They have become mad in the pursuit of wealth, and they are unable to perceive that a country has any destiny except to grow rich. In their economy the science of production is the crowning glory of a nation's progress. It never occurs to them that the science of distribution is just as vital as the learning of production, and that the happiness of the people will depend quite as much upon fairness in the latter as upon the magnitude of the former. These persons make the air ring with praises for the established order of things, and their constant argument is that reform is the unrelenting enemy of business; that the capitalist will not invest his money when changes in the Constitution and amendments in the laws are under consideration. This is a ghost summoned for the occasion, which frightens many a timid man, and it ought to be banished from the vision of the American people.

I do not counsel precipitation. I do not favor hazardous experiments. Mature thought should precede action. We must not permit, however, either the trembling apprehension of the devotee who is always kneeling at the shrine of antiquity, nor the avarice that finds its opportunity in the incapacity of the Government, to stay or thwart our purpose.

I, for one, stand clearly and unequivocally for amendments to the Constitution of the United States; for an amendment that will give the voters a chance to say, directly, who their Senators shall be; for an amendment that will give the voters a chance to say, directly, who their President and Vice-President shall be; for an amendment that will give the interstate commerce clause scope enough to enable Congress to control and regulate things which the developments of commerce have nationalized; for an amendment that will allow Congress to unify our marriage and divorce laws.

I recur to a suggestion made a few moments ago that nothing proposed in the way of enlarging the power of the United States reduces the real authority of the several States. I believe, with Secretary Root, that the failure on the part of the various commonwealths to do their full duty in bringing their legislation into harmony with existing conditions will necessarily result in the usurpation of functions by the general government. Certain things must

be done. Certain manifest evils must be removed. After all, Congress can justly occupy but a very small part of the field of legislation, and it is impossible to exaggerate the responsibility which rests upon you, Gentlemen of the Assembly.

You have the insurance problem to solve. The business in Iowa has attained tremendous proportions. We are all gratified to witness the prominence that the growth of this interest has given our State. Additional regulations are required, and some are proposed. Instantly, the cry goes up from the companies: "If you touch us we will perish." What I have said about the Constitution, I repeat here. It is this persistent command, "Hands off," and the feeling of danger that it implies, that retard much needed reforms. It goes without saying that nothing should be done that will hurt our insurance companies. After all, there is no great mystery about the business. It is simply an agency to collect money, keep it for a time, diminish it by expenses, increase it by interest, and pay it out again in equitable proportions. Your predecessors made the law under which these companies were organized. They made it to help them, and if you amend it you will amend it to help them. I do not disparage the assistance that men who are engaged in the business can give you through fact and argument; but I do deprecate the idea that the interests involved are imperiled simply because changes are thought to be necessary. In all progress there is some risk of going wrong, but you are not more apt, indeed you are less apt, to go wrong than those who have gone before you, for you have the light of further experience. The officers of insurance companies and legislators are trustees for the policy-holders, and their welfare should be a common object. I would like to see Iowa lead all the other States in the extent of its insurance business, and the only safe and sure path to this eminence is to better guard the interest of the policy-holder here than anywhere else in the Union.

You also have the railway question to answer. In my message, I considered the subject from one point of view—specific recommendations; allow me, now, to look at it from another.

I emphasize every caution ever uttered about proceeding with care and deliberation, to the end that railway property shall receive the full measure of protection, but I repudiate here, as everywhere, that frayed out, puerile maxim of paralysis, "Let well enough alone." I reject the appeal that you cannot touch the management of this public servant without impairing its efficiency.

I deny the implication that while your forefathers had sense, you have none.

I read last night the letter written by the king of railway policy and the prophet of railway destiny to Governor Johnson, of Minnesota. It was probably intended for consumption in Iowa as well as Minnesota, and therefore I may, with propriety, refer to it. He begins by admitting the incapacity of the railroads to carry the traffic offered to them; admits shortage of cars and inadequacy of tracks. His remedy is to buy more cars and build more tracks. His analysis of the situation may be accepted, for we all know that the railroads have more than they can do at the present time; but Mr. Hill did not publish this communication to state so obvious a fact. The lash of the letter was in the warning that if congresses and legislatures did not cease meddling or proposing to meddle with railway property and railway service, capital could not be found to build the needed tracks and buy the needed cars. So we have it again: "Interfere with the magnificent, wonderful structure of prosperity, and it will crumble to pieces before your eyes." The logic is, "If you want good service, you can get it, and only get it by letting the railway companies severely alone." The pity of it is that Mr. Hill really believes what he says, and so do other princes of finance who have grown fabulously rich through the mere manipulation of stocks and bonds. It never occurs to them that an enterprise is worth fostering that will not offer an opportunity to double, treble and quadruple securities without the contribution of a single dollar. I agree that neither Hill nor Harriman would put a penny of their money into the construction of railroads if they believed that they would only secure in return a fair interest upon their investment, even though the investment was as stable as a government bond. It never occurs to them, however, apparently, that there are thousands and tens of thousands of men who do not expect to make an hundred per cent in a single night, or reap a harvest of millions in a single day; and who are willing, nay, anxious, to so invest their capital that they will be rewarded with a remunerative, but reasonable profit. If railroads can not be built upon any other plan than the one hitherto adopted, I concede freely that when you have done your duty, enlargement would be exceedingly slow.

The whole argument, however, is fallacious to the last extreme. The men who in fact have their money in our railroads are paid a very moderate interest upon their investments, and the men who

are making the outcry are the men who never invested their honestly earned dollars in the construction of our transportation system.

We ought to stand as resolutely against any invasion of the real rights of capital as we do against the unfair aggressions upon the privileges of the people; but we ought not to be frightened by the scarecrow set up by those who have already possessed a field to which they have no honest title. When you give the investors of the United States a fair chance to put their money into railroads, knowing that the amount actually put in will measure the amount upon which interest and dividends are paid, and knowing that the man who has made no investment can have no profit, you will find that there will be no difficulty in obtaining all the funds that are required to either construct new railroads or increase the trackage of old ones. It takes some courage, I know, to resist the insidious and insistent appeal, but it is cheering to observe that it is becoming less persuasive every day.

I have referred to but two of all the subjects which are challenging the ripest, best thought of the people. I have referred to them as illustrations, for the spirit which animates us in examining them should move us along every path of reform. We should emancipate ourselves from idolatry with respect to things that are. We should emancipate ourselves from the desire to change simply to effect a change. Because there is much good in the existing order, we should not be turned away from the effort to make it better; but we should not overthrow what has been done simply to prove that we can overthrow it.

We have a great country. It is now, and always should be, the greatest on earth. Whether it will be or not depends upon the fidelity with which the duties of each hour are performed. With the profound hope that Iowa may always lead the march of true progress, and with the confident belief that the banners of righteous reform will never be furled so long as they are borne in your hands, I enter again upon the fulfillment of the trust which the people have committed to my care.