

## **Inaugural Address as Governor of North Carolina, January 15, 1901**

Gentlemen of the General Assembly, Ladies, and Fellow Citizens:

EVERY four years brings us a change of administration, but not always a change of policy. This year we meet under extraordinary circumstances -- one party goes out of power and another comes in; one policy ends and a new one begins; one century passes away and a new century claims our service; a new constitution greets the new century. For thirty years of the nineteenth century we struggled in every way against the evils of a suffrage based on manhood only. We found in the first days of that struggle that theory had outrun practice and reality had yielded place to sentiment. At that time we had just emerged from an unsuccessful and disastrous war. Our property had been swept away, our institutions had been destroyed, the foundation of our social fabric had been overturned -- we were helpless. A victorious, but ungenerous, political enemy had crushed us to the earth; they had forced upon us the recognition of theories that we knew could not be reduced to successful practice. We were poor, weak and defeated. We "accepted the situation." We did our best to prove the falsity of our convictions. We endeavored with

Page 229

sincerity to bring the negroes to a realization of the true dignity of full citizenship. We urgently strove to instil into their minds that their true interests were likewise ours; we sought with great solicitude and with much sacrifice of toil and capital to convince them that parties were the servants and not the masters of the people, and that no past services of a party, however beneficial these services might appear, justified the destruction of good and safe and economical government in order to secure its success. We provided schools for them and spent for them as we spent for our own children. We cared for their insane and opened schools

for the education of their afflicted, and for the care and tuition of those who were left fatherless and motherless. We continued these efforts in the face of repeated evidence of their hostility and abated not our purposes when they repeated their follies. We still hoped that they would follow the example of the whites and divide their vote along the lines of governmental, industrial and moral issues. The result was a disappointment. The negro was always to be counted upon and our opponents did not hesitate at any excess, because they knew that they had 120,000 voters who could be relied upon to support any policy, however ruinous, which bore the stamp of Republicanism. With this vote as a certainty our adversaries when they came to power after twenty years of defeat dared new evils and wrongs. Under their rule, lawlessness stalked the State like a pestilence -- death stalked abroad at noonday -- "sleep lay down armed" -- the sound of the pistol was more frequent than the song of the mocking-bird -- the screams of women fleeing from pursuing brutes closed

### Page 230

the gates of our hearts with a shock. Our opponents unmindful of the sturdy determination of our people to have safe and good government at all hazards became indifferent to or incapable of enforcing law and preserving order. Confident of the support of the ignorant mass of negro voters, the Republican party and its ally forgot the strength and determination of that people who fought the first fight at Alamance against bad government and wrote the first Declaration of Independence in Mecklenburg. They challenged North Carolinians to combat and the world knows the result. The campaign of 1898 ended in a victory for good government. That was not a contest of passion, but of necessity. When we came to power we desired merely the security of life, liberty and property. We had seen all these menaced by 120,000 negro votes cast as the vote of one man. We had seen our chief city pass through blood and death in search of safety. We did not dislike the negro, but we did love good government. We knew that

he was incapable of giving us that, and we resolved, not in anger, but for the safety of the State, to curtail his power. We had seen what a struggle it required to preserve even the form of Republican government with him as a voter. The negro was not only ignorant -- he was clannish. The educated among them who realized the danger to the State in mass voting were unable to free themselves from the power of its ostracism.

## THE AMENDMENT

When the Legislature of 1899 met, it was confronted with those facts and was sincerely anxious to save the

Page 231

good and suppress the evil of those forces which had made our history. They, therefore, submitted to the people for their action an Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids any man to vote who cannot read and write, but excepts from the operation of this restrictive clause all those who could vote in any State on January 1, 1867, or at any time prior thereto, or who are descended from any such voter. This provision excludes no white men except persons of foreign birth not yet familiar with our institutions, and excludes no negro who can read and write, and no negro whether he can read or write or not who could vote prior to January 1, 1867, or who is descended from one who could vote at any time prior to that date. This Amendment to our Constitution eliminates no capable negro. Indeed it sets free those negroes who, believing in certain principles of government, have been restrained by loyalty to the mass from voting their convictions. It does no injustice to the negro. It really benefits him. It does recognize the necessity of having some test of capacity, and it prescribes two rules of evidence by which the capacity may be ascertained and declares that any man capable of meeting either test shall vote. If a white man can read and write he can vote; if a negro can read and write he can vote. If a white man cannot read or write, but is

descended from one who could vote on January 1, 1867, or at any time prior thereto, or if he could vote himself before that time, he can vote. If a negro cannot read and write, but is descended from a person who could vote on January 1, 1867, or at any time prior thereto, or if himself could vote before that time, he can vote. There is, therefore, in our Amendment

## Page 232

no taint of that inequality provided against in the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States; and in order that the question might not even be suggested, and realizing the importance of educating the white and black alike, our Amendment requires every boy of whatever color now thirteen years of age to learn to read and write under penalty of losing his vote. Interpreted in this fashion we may with complacency accept the declaration of the Republican national platform that our Amendment is revolutionary. So was the war for independence distinctly known as the Revolution, and our liberties are founded upon it. Our Amendment may be revolutionary, but it is a revolution of advancement. It takes no step backward, it distinctly looks to the future; it sees the day of universal suffrage, but sees that day not in the obscurity of ignorance, but in the light of universal education. The twilight will grow into the perfect day with the sun of intelligence shining in the sky. That is our hope and promise. We shall not fail.

On a hundred platforms, to half the voters of the State, in the late campaign, I pledged the State, its strength, its heart, its wealth, to universal education. I promised the illiterate poor man bound to a life of toil and struggle and poverty that life should be brighter for him and the partner of his sorrows and joys. I pledged the wealth of the State to the education of his children. Men of wealth, representatives of great corporations applauded eagerly my declaration. I then realized that the strong desire which dominated me for the uplifting of the whole people moved not

only my heart, but was likewise the hope and aspiration of those upon whom

Page 233

fortune had smiled. I had loved the North Carolina people before that time, but I never knew and appreciated the best qualities of many of our citizens until I saw the owners of many thousands as eager for the education of the whole people as I was myself. Then I knew that the hope and task before us, gentlemen of the Legislature, was not an impossible one. We are prospering as never before-- our wealth increases, our industries multiply, our commerce extends, and among the owners of this wealth, this multiplying industry, this extending commerce, I have found no man who is unwilling to make the State stronger and better by liberal aid to the cause of education.

### **EDUCATE ALL THE PEOPLE**

Gentlemen of the General Assembly, you will not have aught to fear when you make ample provision for the education of the whole people. Rich and poor alike are bound by promise and necessity to approve your utmost efforts in this direction. The platforms of all the parties declare in favor of a liberal policy toward the education of the masses; notably the Democratic platform says, "We heartily commend the action of the General Assembly of 1899 for appropriating one hundred thousand dollars for the benefit of the public schools of the State, and pledge ourselves to increase the school fund so as to make at least a four-months' term in each year in every school district in the State," and in the campaign which was conducted throughout the State with so much energy and earnestness that platform pledge was made the basis of the promises which we all made to the people. Poor and unlettered

Page 234

men, anxious about the privileges of their children and hesitating to vote for the Amendment, were finally persuaded to accept our promise and place their children in a position in which they can never vote unless the pledges which we made are redeemed to the fullest extent. For my part I declare to you that it shall be my constant aim and effort during the four years that I shall endeavor to serve the people of this State to redeem this most solemn of all our pledges. If more taxes are required to carry out this promise to the people, more taxes must be levied. If property has escaped taxation heretofore which ought to have been taxed, means must be devised by which that property can be reached and put upon the tax list. I rejoice in prosperity and take delight in the material progress of the State. I would cripple no industry; I would retard the growth of no enterprise; but I would by just and equal laws require from every owner of property his just contribution, to the end that all the children may secure the right to select their servants. There are many important matters which will claim your attention. The problems before us are of the gravest nature, but among them all there is none that can approach in importance the necessity for making ample provision for the education of the whole people.

Appropriations alone cannot remove illiteracy from our State. With the appropriations must come also an increased interest in this cause which shall not cease until every child can read and write. The preachers, the teachers, the newspapers and the mothers of North Carolina must be unceasing in their efforts to arouse the indifferent and compel by the force of public opinion

Page 235

the attendance of every child upon the schools. It is easier to accomplish this since the Amendment to our Constitution raises its solemn voice and declares that the child who arrives at age after 1908 cannot share in the glorious privilege of governing his State nor participating in the policies of the nation unless he can



read and write. This is, therefore, the opportune moment for a revival of educational interest throughout the length and breadth of the State. We shall not accomplish this work in a day, nor can it be done by many speeches. It is a work of years, to be done day by day with a full realization of its importance, and with that anxious interest on our part which will stimulate the careless and will make all our people eager to attain the end which we seek. Our statesmen have always favored the education of the masses, but heretofore interest in the matter has not approached universality; henceforth in every home there will be the knowledge that no child can attain the true dignity of citizenship without learning at least to read and write. This simple fact alone justifies the adoption of the Amendment, for it was its passage that first brought home to all our people the necessity for universal education. We enter an era of industrial development. Growth in that direction is dependent upon intelligence -- not the intelligence of the few, but of all. Massachusetts realized this fact from the day when the Pilgrim fathers landed on Plymouth Rock, and by that clear perception she has won wealth out of bleak coasts and sterile lands. Our forefathers acknowledged the same fact in their first constitution, and from that time to the present our Constitutions and Legislative acts have all looked

Page 236

toward this end; but the whole people have never before been awakened to its advocacy. From this time forth opposition to education will mark a man as opposed to the theory of our Government which is founded upon the consent of the governed, and our Constitution provides that this consent in the not distant future can be given only by those who can read and write.

We need have nothing to fear, then, from any party or any politician when we make liberal provision for education. But if there were opposition, our duty would be none the less clear. It is demonstrable that wealth increases as the education of the people

grows. Our industries will be benefited; our commerce will expand; our railroads will do a larger business when we shall have educated all the children of the State. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance from a material point of view that our whole people should be educated. Care must be taken on your part, gentlemen of the Legislature, to bring the schools in the remotest districts up to the standard of the Constitution which solemnly admonishes you, as it did me but a moment ago when I took the oath to support it, that at least four months of school must be carried on in every school district in each year. Our party platform follows the Constitution and we cannot afford to violate either. If there are districts which are weak they must be strengthened by those who are strong. The Good Book tells us that the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak and the lessons of that great authority are of utility in our political life. There has grown up an idea among strenuous men that only

Page 237

the strong are to be considered and benefited; that the poor and weak are the burden-bearers who deserve no aid and are weak because of their follies. A great State can never act on this theory, but will always recognize that the strong can care for themselves while the true aim of the State is to provide equal and just laws, giving to the weak opportunity to grow strong and restraining the powerful from oppressing the less fortunate. It will be a glorious day for us if our people in the hour of their prosperity and wonderful growth and development can realize that men can never grow higher and better by rising on the weakness and ignorance of their fellows, but only by aiding their fellowmen and lifting them to the same high plane which they themselves occupy. It may require sacrifice to accomplish the promises which we have made and men may be compelled to bear additional burdens, but I am persuaded that the sacrifice will be made and the burdens borne with that cheerfulness which has ever characterized us when we were doing a righteous thing. Our fathers have done well



their work. They have sought this day through many difficulties; illiterate or learned, they have ever striven to do their duty by the State, and they have laid her foundations so strong and deep that we have but to build thereon the splendid home which they saw only in anticipation. Let that home be bright with the shining of ten thousand lights emanating from as many schools. Some of these lights will shine but feebly, mayhap with but four-candlepower, while others shall shine with sixty-four and some few with the radiance of a thousand, but let them all shine together to brighten life and make the State more glorious, and

Page 238

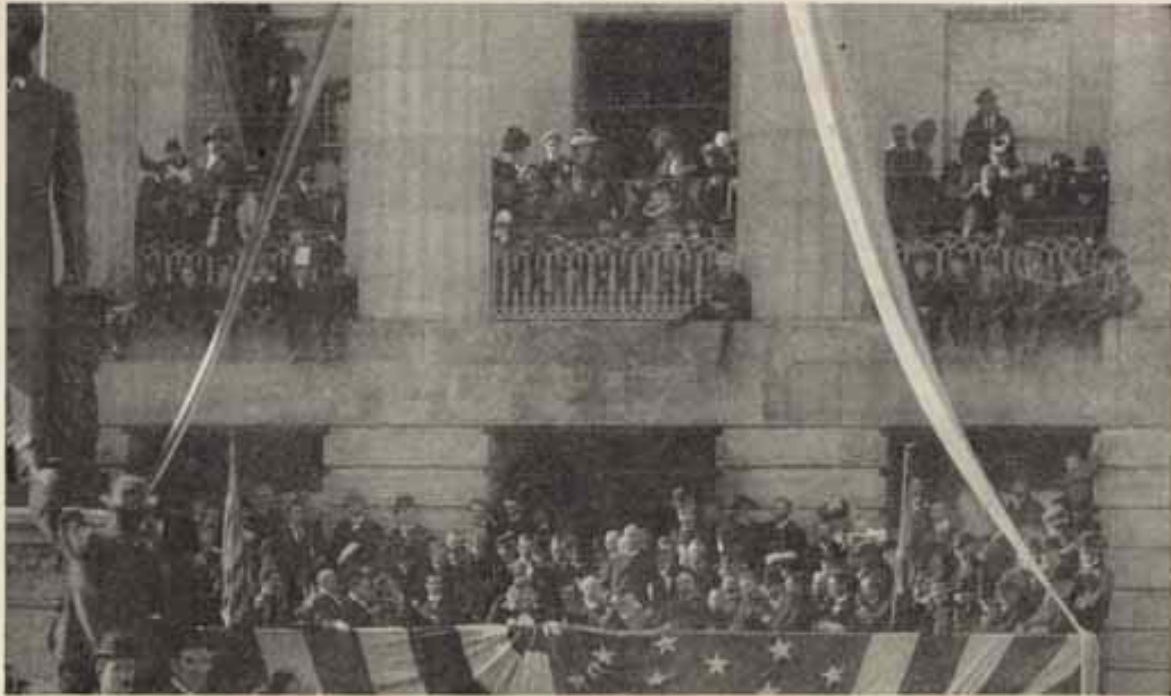
may they all have as their source that God who first said "Let there be light."

I pledge you, gentlemen of the Legislature, such power as the Constitution vests in the Governor and all the energy of my soul and heart to the education of the people, and rely with entire confidence upon you and the promises which each of you have made. With these promises kept there will break upon us a day such as has never before dawned upon our State. Our Government is founded upon intelligence and virtue. We shall provide for intelligence by a system of schools which is designed to reach every citizen. The schools look to the preparation of the voter for the use of the ballot. We admit to the elective franchise every man capable of intelligently exercising that right and so anxious are we to approach as near as may be universal suffrage that we have made the test of intelligence simply ability to read and write, an accomplishment which can be acquired in a few months.

### **VOTES MUST BE COUNTED**

Having thus provided for the right to vote, the further duty devolves upon you, gentlemen of the Legislature, to pass a law by which that right may be made effective, a law by which every voter

qualified under our Constitution shall have the power to cast one vote and have that vote counted as cast. The safety of the State and the liberty of the citizens depend upon your action on this question. The adoption of the Amendment not only furnishes the occasion, but renders indispensable the adoption of an election law which



GOVERNOR AYCOCK DELIVERING HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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Page 239

shall be so fair that no just man can oppose it, and requires an administration of that law in such spirit that no man will doubt that the popular will has been rightly expressed and recorded. From the foundation of our State to the day when the negro was given the elective franchise the fairness of our elections was never questioned. When the ballot was given to the negro the first

election thereafter was known to be a farce and a fraud. That election was held under military dictatorship, lasted three days, and the vote was counted in Charleston, South Carolina. We have denounced, and ever will denounce, that election as fraudulent. When we came to power in 1876 we changed the election law of the State, and from that time down to 1894 all elections were held under laws passed by us. Our adversaries charged that these elections were carried by force and fraud. When they came to power in 1895 they adopted a law which we denounced as providing means for the registration and voting of minors, dead, imported and convicted negroes. They carried the State under that law in 1896. We beat them in 1898 despite their law, and then we passed a new election law, which they denounced as designed to thwart the will of the people. We held the election of 1900 under that law. By the result of that election we have eliminated the ignorant negro from those entitled to vote. If what has been charged by the opposing parties be true and elections have been fraudulent and election laws unfair ever since the negro came to be a power in the State, it certainly ought to follow that with the disqualification of the ignorant negro the State should return to her ancient ways when no man questioned her

## Page 240

integrity. Henceforth our laws and their administration must be so fair that the civilized world shall recognize the high purpose with which we have wrought to see this day. Let history record of us that we have fought our great fight and won our notable victory with no view to perpetuate ourselves in power, but honestly to secure good government founded on intelligence worked out through a perfectly fair election law administered as a sacred trust to be held forever inviolable. Good men go to war only for the sake of peace, and the patriotic citizens of our State have won this victory only for the sake of good government and not for party aggrandizement.

## **WHERE SAFETY LIES**

On every platform in the late campaign I declared our purpose to be to secure good government, safety and peace, to educate all the children, and to bring about that day when even extremest partisanship should not be able to cry out against our laws and our methods. Thousands of Republicans and Populists joined with us in securing our more than sixty thousand majority. I shall, therefore, confidently expect you, gentlemen of the Legislature, without regard to party, to frame an election law fair in every purpose, clear in every detail, and to provide machinery by which every man qualified under our Constitution shall be able to vote and shall know that his vote is effective. We can have safety, security and integrity on no other basis. I now pledge you the whole power of my administration to secure this end. I declared in my speech of acceptance that I should enter upon the discharge of my

Page 241

duties if elected with great fear lest I should fail to interpret adequately the true spirit underlying our change in the Constitution; but I have never for one moment questioned that the ultimate aim of our people was to secure a constitution under which security for life, liberty and property could be found under the forms of law and not in violation of them.

## **IT MUST ENDURE**

Our opponents have denounced the movement which we inaugurated to amend the Constitution, and which will be carried out in the spirit just suggested, as revolutionary. They sought to prevent its success by threats before the election, and in the first moments of passionate disappointment after the election they began prosecutions against certain officers of the State for alleged wrongdoing in connection with the August election. This

movement of ours was carried out with such deliberate high purpose and such noble earnestness that thousands of our political opponents joined hands with us in effort to forever settle a question which had distressed us for thirty years. It was the uprising of almost an entire people. There was about it, indeed, in its spontaneousness, in its enthusiasm, in its determination and sturdiness of purpose and its high aims, something of the revolutionary spirit of 1776. That spirit still lives in the hearts of North Carolinians. It is a part, and a glorious part, of their heritage -- it cannot be destroyed by persecution. A whole people cannot be persecuted, nor will they without the utmost exertion see any of their agents made to suffer for the

Page 242

defeat of those who sought in vain to stem the mighty tide of popular opinion.

### **LAW MUST HAVE SWAY**

We have a great State, rich in noble manhood, richer still in her high-minded womanhood; a State with countless treasures awaiting seekers; with riches in her fields and woods, streams and sounds, hills and mountains, sufficient to satisfy our dreams of wealth; with a frugal and industrious population ready to toil just awakening fully to the possibilities before them. All that we need "to complete the circle of our felicities" is peace. Let hatred and bitterness and strife cease from among us. Let the law everywhere reign supreme. The highest test of a great people is obedience to law and a consequent ability to administer justice. It shall be the earnest aim of my administration to foster good feeling and to enforce law and order throughout the State -- from Currituck to Cherokee the law must have full sway. The mob has no place in our civilization. The courts are the creation of the Constitution and the juries are drawn from the people. If changes be necessary in order to secure a better and more certain administration of

justice, you, gentlemen of the Legislature, can make these changes; but it should be distinctly and finally understood of all men that safety can be found only in obedience to law.

I wish to say to the negroes of this State in this connection, that they have been misinformed if they have heard that this administration will be unfriendly to them. Their every right under the Constitution shall be absolutely preserved; they will

Page 243

find security in right conduct and certain punishment for failure to obey the law. Let them learn that crimes which lead to mob law must cease and then mob law shall curse our State no more. I call upon all upright negroes to aid me in suppressing crime in all its forms. The white people owe a high duty to the negro. It was necessary to the safety of the State to base suffrage on capacity to exercise it wisely. This results in excluding a great number of negroes from the ballot, but their right to life, liberty, property and justice must be even more carefully safeguarded than ever. It is true that a superior race cannot submit to the rule of a weaker race without injury; it is also true in the long years of God that the strong cannot oppress the weak without destruction. I said on April 11, 1900, and I now repeat it as a deep conviction, that "universal justice is the perpetual decree of Almighty God, and we are entrusted with power not for our good alone, but for the negro as well. We hold our title to power by tenure of service to God, and if we fail to administer equal and exact justice to the negro whom we deprive of suffrage, we shall in the fulness of time lose power ourselves, for we must know that the God who is Love trusts no people with authority for the purpose of enabling them to do injustice to the weak."

**FREEDOM OF THOUGHT**



Let us serve the State in this spirit and with wisdom and the people will continue to trust us, but if we depart from this plain and just way, power will drop from our hands, for the Amendment has, I believe and trust, brought with it a freedom of thought, of criticism

Page 244

and of action that will be swift to withdraw a trust abused.

### **STATE'S HIGH DESTINY**

With the education of the whole people, with a fair and impartial election law, with peace everywhere, there will be nothing to prevent us from working out the high destiny of our State. Thought will be set free, opinion can have its full sway and every man will be able to declare the inmost feelings of his heart. We shall have genuine free speech; our newspapers will have an opportunity to address themselves to molding public opinion without fear of injury to the State. Discussions can then take the place of abuse, and argument will supplant passionate oratory. In this new and freer day we shall grow brighter men. Trust in all things high will come easy to us. We shall have problems and differences, but we shall have the intelligence to solve the problems and the good spirit to harmonize our differences.

### **WITH AN HUMBLE HEART**

I come to the high task to which the people have called me with many misgivings. I know, if not adequately, something of my weakness, and I likewise know, if not to the fullest extent, the many difficulties which will beset my way. I come to the work humbly, with deep anxiety and with an earnest desire to serve the people well. The manner of my coming makes it all the more incumbent upon me to search my heart that I may have no impure motive there; one who has been trusted after such fashion as the

people have trusted me owes the highest obligation of uprightness in thought and action.

Page 245

Chosen by my party unanimously, elected by the people by a majority such as has never been given to any other man, I am bound by every obligation to serve to my utmost. The task is a difficult one. I shall make mistakes. When I shall have done the right thing I shall even then sometimes be misunderstood by my friends, who will see my action not from my standpoint as the Governor of the whole people, but from theirs. When I shall have done wrong I shall not expect approval; I do not wish it. I want to know my mistakes to the end that I may correct them, because I am certain that I shall be judged at last by the whole tenor of my administration and by no one particular act.

### **GOVERNOR OF ALL THE PEOPLE**

I have been elected as a Democrat. I shall administer the high office to which I have been called in accordance with the policies and principles of that great party, but I wish it distinctly understood that I shall strive to be a just Governor of all the people, without regard to party, color or creed. The law will be enforced with impartiality and no man's petition shall go unheard and unconsidered because he differs from me in politics or in color. My obligation is to the State and the State is all her citizens. No man is so high that the law shall not be enforced against him, and no man is so low that it shall not reach down to him to lift him up if may be and set him on his feet again and bid him Godspeed to better things.

### **GOD'S BLESSINGS ON US**

I shall need the support of every citizen in the State. My work is your work; I am but your servant, and if I

serve you wisely it will be because my ears shall be constantly open to counsel, and my mind shall know wisdom. But with all the aid which can come from men, I shall fail unless I have the guidance of that God who rules the destinies of States and nations and men, to Whom with reverence I commend this good State and her gracious people.