

Inaugural Address of Governor Arthur I. Boreman

June 20, 1863

Fellow Citizens:

To be permitted to participate in the most humble capacity in the organization of the State of West Virginia would be an honor; but, to be called by the unanimous voice of her people to accept the highest office in their gift, and to the performance of its duties, at a time of so much difficulty and danger as the present, excites in my heart the profoundest gratitude toward them for the confidence thus reposed in me. And if I shall be permitted to live, I hope in after years to recur to the ceremonies of this day with pride and pleasure, not only for the part that I have taken in them, but as celebrating the most auspicious event in the history of this people.

Yet, I trust, that, in taking upon myself the solemn obligation which I am about to do, I am not unaware of the great responsibility that it imposes on me. In time of peace, and under the most favorable circumstances, the organization of a new State and its introduction into the family of the Union, is a matter of no ordinary moment; but, when fierce civil war rages all around us and in our very midst, one whose experience is as limited as that of him who now addresses you, may well claim, in advance, the indulgence of a generous constituency.

West Virginia should long since have had a separate State existence. The East has always looked upon that portion of the State west of the mountains, as a sort of outside appendage - a territory in a state of pupilage. The unfairness and inequality of legislation is manifest on every page of the statute book; they had an unjust majority in the Legislature by the original Constitution of the State, and have clung to it with the utmost tenacity ever since; they have collected heavy taxes from us, and have spent large sums in the construction of railroads and canals in the East, but have withheld appropriations from the West; they have refused to make any of the modern improvements by which trade and travel could be carried on from the one section to the other, thus treating us as strangers; our people could not get to the Capital of their State by any of the usual modes of traveling, without going through the State of Maryland and the District of Columbia. The East and the West have always been two peoples. There has been little intercourse between them, either social or commercial. Our people seldom visit the East for pleasure. The farmers do not take their stock, grain, wool and other agricultural products there to sell; the merchants do not go there to sell or buy; the manufacturers have no market there; indeed, we have had nothing to do with the Eastern people, except that our Senators and Delegates have gone to Richmond to sit in the Legislature and our Sheriffs have gone there to pay in the revenue as an annual tribute from this section of the State for the inequality and unfairness with which we have always been treated by them. Our markets, our trade and our travel are North and West of Virginia, through natural channels, or those constructed through the enterprise of our own people, or such means as they could procure. The mountains intervene between us, the rivers rise in the mountains and run towards the Northwest; and, as if to make the separation more complete, Eastern Virginia adopted the fatal doctrine of secession, while the West spurned and rejected it as false and dangerous in the extreme. Thus nature, our commerce, travel, habits, associations, and interests, all - all say that West Virginia should be severed from

the East. And now, to-day after many long and weary years of insult and injustice, culminating on the part of the East, in an attempt to destroy the Government, we have the proud satisfaction of proclaiming to those around us that we are a separate State in the Union.

Our State is the child of the rebellion; yet our peace, prosperity and happiness, and, not only ours, but that of the whole country, depends on the speedy suppression of this attempt to overthrow the Government of our fathers; and it is my duty, as soon as these ceremonies are closed, to proceed at once to aid the Federal authorities in their efforts to stay its destructive hand. I do not intend to insult your loyalty or intelligence by discussing before you to-day the dogma of secession. Its bitter fruits are to be seen all around us. It is like the poisonous Upas tree that blights and withers everything that comes within its influence. We have seen and felt enough of it to know that it is fraught with evil, and that continually. The politicians of many of the Southern States, having an inordinate desire for place and power, and it becoming apparent that the great North-West was improving and increasing in population so rapidly that the controlling influence of the Government was soon surely to be with the free States, and that the South must surrender power which they had so long exerted to a majority of the people according to the principles of our Government, they became desperate, and determined if they could no longer control, they would destroy the Government. By fraud and falsehood, and by incendiary speeches, they influenced the public mind in the South and induced them to believe that they were suffering great injury from the General Government; that the rights of the South were not only disregarded, but trampled under foot; that Mr. Lincoln was a sectional President, and that his election was the crowning act of insult and injustice; that if they submitted to it they were reduced to a state of degradation worse than slavery itself; and, fearing that the people still had some reverence and respect for the constitution, they insidiously taught the faithless doctrine that peaceable secession was in consonance with the Constitution, and absolved them from all their obligations to support the Government. All this and much more of a like character they taught until they succeeded in prevailing on the authorities in many of the States to embrace their doctrine and attempt to carry it into execution, and thus they inaugurated a war of rebellion, and have prosecuted it for over two years with a zeal and energy worthy of a better cause. It has assumed fearful proportions, and it demands all the energies of the Government authorities and of the loyal people to defeat its ruinous purposes.

Under these circumstances what course should the loyal people of West Virginia pursue? But before I state what we should do, I will state that it seems to me that the position of our people in the beginning of the troubles, and their condition since, have not been understood by our friends around us. In the commencement of these difficulties we were part of a Southern State, whose convention passed an ordinance of secession, and this fact inclined many to sympathize with the South without reflecting whether it was right or wrong. We were situated between the South and the North, and in case of a collision it must necessarily result that ours would be contested territory; that if we adhered to the Union the South would deal with us much more severely than if we were a part of a Northern State, or of one that had not attempted to secede; and that we would be, what we have since been so truthfully called by many, the great "breakwater" between the North and those in rebellion in the South. All these matters were weighed and considered by us, but we determined, with a full belief of what would occur, and what has since occurred, that

the Government was too good to be lost, and that the rights and immunities which we knew we were enjoying were too precious to be surrendered on the uncertainty of the results of experiments in the future. We thus took our position with our eyes open; knowing what civil war had been, and what it could only be again if once commenced; and we have not been deceived. Our State has been invaded by traitors in arms against the best government that a kind and beneficent God ever inspired man to make; they have applied the torch to public and private property; they have murdered our friends; they have robbed and plundered our people; our country is laid waste, and, to-day, gaunt hunger stares many families of helpless women and children in the face. This picture is not overdrawn. It is a simple statement of facts. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the Union men of West Virginia have not looked to the right or the left, but through all these difficulties and dangers they have stood by the Government. And I now repeat the question which I asked awhile ago: Under these circumstances what course should the loyal people of West Virginia now pursue? Shall we coincide with those who carp and cavil at everything that is done by the administration at Washington to put down this rebellion? Shall we object to the suspension of the *habeas corpus* and thereby attempt to prevent some traitor from receiving his just deserts? Shall we object that slavery is destroyed as the result of the acts of those in rebellion, if the Union is thereby saved? But there are those who say that we should stop the war and make peace. If we stop the war on our part will that make peace, unless we submit to be ruled by the rebels, or to a separation of the Union? If we could not consent to give up our Government in the beginning and thus save ourselves the war, but determined to fight it out to the bitter end, shall we now submit to the humiliation and disgrace of permitting the success of the rebellion and the loss of our Government? In behalf of the loyal people of West Virginia I respond to all these interrogatories with an emphatic no - no - never! We want no compromise: we want no peace, except upon the terms that those in rebellion will lay down their arms and submit to the regularly constituted authorities of the Government of the United States. Then, and not till then, will the people of West Virginia agree to peace. We have done much and suffered much already, but we will do more, and suffer on for years, if need be, rather than consent to a dissolution of the Union, which would be nothing less than a surrender of the last hope of human liberty on the face of the earth.

Fellow-citizens, I now come to what is more particularly the purpose of this address: and that is, to state to you those rules of action by which I shall be governed during my term of office:

I shall co-operate with the Federal authorities in all those measures deemed necessary for the suppression of the rebellion. While the war continues I must necessarily be engaged in attending to military matters, and to the defence of the State, and it may not, therefore, be expected that I shall give much time at present to the internal civil policy of the State; but even amidst surrounding difficulties and dangers they shall not be entirely forgotten.

I shall do whatever may be in my power during my term of office to advance the agricultural, mining, manufacturing and commercial interests of the State. And it shall be my especial pride and pleasure to assist in the establishment of a system of education throughout the State that may give to every child among us, whether rich or poor, an education that may fit them for respectable positions in society. And to you gentlemen of the Senate and House of Delegates, I

shall look for aid and assistance and for the exercise of a liberal policy in these times of trial; and I feel assured from your known intelligence and patriotism, that I shall receive your cordial cooperation and support in the discharge of the duties of my office.

Fellow-Citizens, we are about to part with him, who has for two years exercised the office of Governor of Virginia in our midst. And I here express how highly are appreciated, not only by myself, but by the whole loyal population of the State, his purity and fidelity, and the ability with which he has discharged the arduous and responsible duties of his office. We regret that he is to leave us, but we have the satisfaction of knowing that he is going to a new and important field where his ability and patriotism are still to be devoted to the good of his country.

If I shall only be able to discharge the duties of my office with as much satisfaction to the people and honor to myself as my predecessor, I shall expect the approbation of a generous public. I shall, no doubt, often do wrong, this is the lot of man; and while I shall always do that which honesty of purpose and my opinion of the good of the country dictates, I shall expect you to exercise that indulgence which is due to a public officer under the surrounding circumstances.