Mr. MORRILL. I move to print the message of the President just read; and upon that motion I propose to submit a few very brief remarks. At this late stage of the session, I shall not detain the House long, however provocative the occasion; but I do not propose that the communication we have heard from the Clerk’s desk, touching a measure so important in its scope and bearing, shall pass entirely without comment.

The President of the United States has certainly the right to express his opinion upon the subject of the bill, as to whether it is constitutional and expedient or not; but we have also the same privilege. The measure was not introduced here as a party measure, nor was it advocated as a party measure. It has received the cordial support of members of both sides of this House. It fought its way on its own merits. It has been pressed here by petitions and resolutions from the Legislatures of at least thirteen States, and by an indefinite number of memorials from private citizens of the highest character. It is a measure which has been endorsed by agricultural societies and agricultural men throughout the whole country, with unprecedented unanimity. It is a measure dear to the hearts of all farmers, young and old. It would have been approved by all the earlier Presidents, and was especially dear to the heart of Washington, and occupied his last thought. I will again quote from his last message:

“It will not be doubted that, with reference either to individual or national welfare, agriculture is of primary importance. In proportion as nations advance in population and other circumstances of maturity, this task becomes more apparent and renders the cultivation of the soil more and more an object of public patronage. Institutions for promoting it grow up, supported by the public purse; and to what object can it be dedicated with greater propriety?"

Yet, while the President assumes to be the representative, par excellence, of the farmers, taxpayers, and consumers of the country, he comes here to strike the only measure, perhaps, which was proposed especially for their benefit. In my judgment, the President has committed, if not a crime, at least a blunder. It may be that in blunders the Executive has…

“Stept in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o’er.”

If I understand the reading, the President asserts that if this bill passes it will deprive the Treasury of all revenue from the public lands for the next fiscal year. This is a great error, as it would have been impossible for the several States to have the necessary State legislation to enable them to make the grant available in less than one or two years. It is not probable a dollar less would have found its way into the Treasury. At no time could it be expected to operate in this direction to anything like the extent of the military bounty land warrants; and these, so much larger in amount, were scarcely felt at all. But, if the position of the President were correct, it comes with an ill grace from the Magistrate who wasted more than ten million dollars in the grand march of the army to Utah, who is wasting a larger sum by the
grander naval demonstration against Paraguay, and who would waste $30,000,000 more in the grandest of all propositions—for snatching Cuba. With all respect, this can only be regarded as a pretext. The President objects to this bill because he wants to keep the State governments and the General Government separate. Well, sir, this measure by no means combines the State governments and the General Government. It especially leaves the whole matter to the entire control of the several States to arrange, manage, and control, as they may see fit. The States were to be trustees merely for a certain and specific object. This is, indeed, admitted in another place, and objected to. The President wants to endow agricultural professorships, in order that the General Government might institute lawsuits to compel them to adhere to the terms of the trust! But why should the President discuss an alternative to which his veto would have been as prompt as to this bill?

He says the bill would operate greatly to the injury of the new States. Now, sir, when General Jackson, in 1833, vetoed a land bill, he did it mainly because of its giving the new States twelve and a half percent more than the old States; and, therefore, to protect the old States from injustice, he vetoed the bill. But this bill does equal and exact justice to all the States according to the census of 1850; and it provides further that if, by the increase of population, the new States, or any States, shall have an increased representation in Congress in 1860, they shall receive twenty thousand acres for each additional Representative they may then be entitled to. I therefore contend that here is a discrimination rather for the benefit than the injury of the new States, to which this provision would only practically apply. Thus Democratic Presidents differ—agreeing only in the veto, by which the will of the people, as expressed by their Representatives here, shall be crushed out. One is for justice to the old States, and the other for justice to the new States, but neither for justice to all. The objection of the President that the land scrip would be sold at a low price, if true, will hardly be appreciated in the new States. The several States would be quite likely to husband their resources, so as to obtain the largest amount of funds.

But, sir, the President thinks it would be far better to establish professorships in colleges already established. What constitutional difficulty would thus be avoided, I confess, is to me incomprehensible. The wisdom of the suggestion and its feasibility clearly belongs to the President alone. If the object be to excite the jealousy of existing colleges, it is unworthy of notice. I know that the friends of such institutions, men of thorough education, are, in all sections of the country, the cordial and devoted friends of this bill. I do not understand this hint in any other sense than this: that the President was not consulted in regard to the principles of this bill. Had he been thus consulted, or had the details, even, been prepared by some Democratic member, then it might have received his assent. That, sir, is a misfortune. The President wholly mistakes the object of the bill, which was to offer free tuition to the boys of farmers and mechanics—not to enrich corporations and endow professorships—and to enable them, by their own industry, to acquire what might not otherwise be within their reach—a liberal education. If it be a satisfaction to the President to have thwarted such an object, I hardly think it will be highly appreciated; and especially not by those whose hopes are thus destroyed. The telegraphic news of this veto will start a tear from the eye of more than one manly boy, whose ambition will now be nipped in the bud. One great object was to arrest the degenerate and downward system of agriculture by which American soil is rapidly obtaining the rank of the poorest and least productive on the globe, and to give to farmers and mechanics that prestige and standing in life which liberal culture and the recognition of the Government might afford. To all this the President turns a deaf ear.

Mr. Speaker, the Constitution gives to Congress the unreserved and unrestricted power to “dispose of” the public lands; but the President says this does not grant the power to give them away. Sir, I contend that this provision does give to Congress the power to dispose of them in any way not prohibited by the Constitution. It is absolute and unqualified. If there is any limitation in the deeds of cession, which
provides that they shall be disposed of for the common benefit of all the States, this bill is in strict conformity thereto. Nor does this bill propose to give them away at all. Like a prudent proprietor, we adopt a policy to increase the value of the whole landed property of the country. The bill expressly demands a full and proper consideration. That consideration is that the several States shall establish these colleges, “where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific or classical studies, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts.” If this were done, there can be no doubt the interests of the country, the benefits to accrue, would be fifty-fold greater than any sum which would be abstracted from the Treasury. If we cannot give away the lands we already possess, under what clause of the Constitution are we to pour out millions for the purchase of Cuba, only for the purpose of giving it back again to the Spanish slaveholders?

We have heretofore very properly, in our legislation pertaining to new States and Territories, granted one or two auctions of land, in each township, for the especial purpose of establishing schools. This bill is nothing more than a pursuance of the same policy, and was a fit complement of the system. Many literary universities had already been established with the approval of James Buchanan, who, with many other distinguished Democrats, voted for the deaf and dumb school endowed by Congress in Kentucky, in 1827. If we can legislate for the deaf and dumb, may we not legislate for those who can hear and speak? If we can legislate for the insane, may we not legislate for the sane? We have granted lands for railroad purposes, for military services, and we have granted lands to the several States for the promotion of health; that is, we have granted to the States the swamp and overflowed lands within their limits. Now, sir, if we can grant lands for the promotion of physical health, can we not grant them for the purpose of promoting the moral health and education of the people? We granted seven hundred and fifty thousand acres of land for the benefit of the Sault Ste. Marie canal, and also other large grants for canals. Well, sir, if we can grant lands for the benefit of commerce, trade, military service, and health, cannot we grant them for other purposes? Cannot we grant them for education, and for the education of the great mass of the country; and a class, too, which has received no special benefit from any act of Congress?

Mr. Speaker, we sometimes see men who drive horses rather hardly, seeking to find some new spot where they can touch them on the raw. While this is not in any sense a party question, the President has endeavored to make it one; and whether he has succeeded in that or not, and I hope he has not, he has succeeded in uncovering a new spot, as numerous as are his scars—and in that respect he is a veteran—to which to apply the whip. I do not, however, propose, at this time, to enter into any long argument in relation to this matter, and am quite ready that the vote should be taken which the Constitution prescribes.

The President has established his higher law over that of Congress; and we have nothing else to do but to appeal to that higher law—of the people—which will override the Executive veto. I call for the previous question.