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Orations

by John Quincy Adams*

April, 1997 [Etext #896]

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Orations, by John Quincy Adams
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John Quincy Adams, "Orations"

"The Jubilee of the Constitution, delivered at New York,
April 30, 1839, before the New York Historical Society."

Fellow-Citizens and Brethren, Associates of the New York
Historical Society:

Would it be an unlicensed trespass of the imagination to conceive that on the night preceding the day of which you now commemorate the fiftieth anniversary--on the night preceding that thirtieth of April, 1789, when from the balcony of your city hall the chancellor of the State of New York administered to George Washington the solemn oath faithfully to execute the office of President of the United States, and to the best of his ability to preserve, protect, and defend the constitution of the United States--that in the visions of the night the guardian angel of the Father of our Country had appeared before him, in the venerated form of his mother, and, to cheer and encourage him in the performance of the momentous and solemn duties that he was about to assume, had delivered to him a suit of celestial armor--a helmet, consisting of the principles of piety, of justice, of honor, of benevolence, with which from his earliest infancy he had hitherto walked through life, in the presence of all his brethren; a spear, studded with the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence; a sword, the same with which he had led the armies of his country through the war of freedom to the summit of the triumphal arch of independence; a corselet and cuishes of long experience and habitual intercourse in peace and war with the world of mankind, his contemporaries of the human race, in all their stages of civilization; and, last of all, the Constitution of the United States, a shield, embossed by heavenly hands with the future history of his country?

Yes, gentlemen, on that shield the Constitution of the United States was sculptured (by forms unseen, and in characters then invisible to mortal eye), the predestined and prophetic history of the one confederated people of the North American Union.

They had been the settlers of thirteen separate and distinct English colonies, along the margin of the shore of the North American Continent; contiguously situated, but chartered by adventurers of characters variously diversified, including sectarians, religious and political, of all the classes which for

the two preceding centuries had agitated and divided the people of the British islands--and with them were intermingled the descendants of Hollanders, Swedes, Germans, and French fugitives from the persecution of the revoker of the Edict of Nantes.

In the bosoms of this people, thus heterogeneously composed, there was burning, kindled at different furnaces, but all furnaces of affliction, one clear, steady flame of liberty. Bold and daring enterprise, stubborn endurance of privation, unflinching intrepidity in facing danger, and inflexible adherence to conscientious principle, had steeled to energetic and unyielding hardihood the characters of the primitive settlers of all these colonies. Since that time two or three generations of men had passed away, but they had increased and multiplied with unexampled rapidity; and the land itself had been the recent theatre of a ferocious and bloody seven years' war between the two most powerful and most civilized nations of Europe contending for the possession of this continent.

Of that strife the victorious combatant had been Britain. She had conquered the provinces of France. She had expelled her rival totally from the continent, over which, bounding herself by the Mississippi, she was thenceforth to hold divided empire only with Spain. She had acquired undisputed control over the Indian tribes still tenanting the forests unexplored by the European man. She had established an uncontested monopoly of the commerce of all her colonies. But forgetting all the warnings of preceding ages--forgetting the lessons written in the blood of her own children, through centuries of departed time--she undertook to tax the people of the colonies without their consent.

Resistance, instantaneous, unconcerted, sympathetic, inflexible resistance, like an electric shock, startled and roused the people of all the English colonies on this continent.

This was the first signal of the North American Union. The struggle was for chartered rights--for English liberties--for the cause of Algernon Sidney and John Hampden--for trial by jury--the Habeas Corpus and Magna Charta.

But the English lawyers had decided that Parliament was omnipotent--and Parliament, in its omnipotence, instead of trial by jury and the Habeas Corpus, enacted admiralty courts in England to try Americans for offences charged against them as committed in America; instead of the privileges of Magna Charta, nullified the charter itself of Massachusetts Bay; shut up the port of Boston; sent armies and navies to keep the peace and teach the colonies that John Hampden was a rebel and Algernon Sidney a traitor.

English liberties had failed them. From the omnipotence of Parliament the colonists appealed to the rights of man and the omnipotence of the God of battles. Union! Union! was the instinctive and simultaneous cry throughout the land. Their Congress, assembled at Philadelphia, once--twice--had petitioned the king; had remonstrated to Parliament; had addressed the people of Britain, for the rights of Englishmen--in vain. Fleets and armies, the blood of Lexington, and the fires of Charlestown and Falmouth, had been the answer to petition, remonstrance, and address....

The dissolution of allegiance to the British crown, the severance of the colonies from the British Empire, and their actual existence as independent States, were definitively established in fact, by war and peace. The independence of each separate State had never been declared of right. It never existed in fact. Upon the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the dissolution of the ties of allegiance, the assumption of sovereign power, and the institution of civil government, are all acts of transcendent authority, which the people alone are competent to perform; and, accordingly, it is in the name and by the authority of the people, that two of these acts--the dissolution of allegiance, with the severance from the British Empire, and the declaration of the United Colonies, as free and independent States--were performed by that instrument.

But there still remained the last and crowning act, which the people of the Union alone were competent to perform--the institution of civil government, for that compound nation, the United States of America.

At this day it cannot but strike us as extraordinary, that it does not appear to have occurred to any one member of that assembly, which had laid down in terms so clear, so explicit, so unequivocal, the foundation of all just government, in the imprescriptible rights of man, and the transcendent sovereignty of the people, and who in those principles had set forth their only personal vindication from the charges of rebellion against their king, and of treason to their country, that their last crowning act was still to be performed upon the same principles. That is, the institution, by the people of the United States, of a civil government, to guard and protect and defend them all. On the contrary, that same assembly which issued the Declaration of Independence, instead of continuing to act in the name and by the authority of the good people of the United States, had, immediately after the appointment of the committee to prepare the Declaration, appointed another committee, of one member from each colony, to prepare and digest the form of confederation to be entered into between the colonies.

That committee reported on the twelfth of July, eight days

after the Declaration of Independence had been issued, a draft of articles of confederation between the colonies. This draft was prepared by John Dickinson, then a delegate from Pennsylvania, who voted against the Declaration of Independence, and never signed it, having been superseded by a new election of delegates from that State, eight days after his draft was reported.

There was thus no congeniality of principle between the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. The foundation of the former was a superintending Providence--the rights of man, and the constituent revolutionary power of the people. That of the latter was the sovereignty of organized power, and the independence of the separate or dis-united States. The fabric of the Declaration and that of the Confederation were each consistent with its own foundation, but they could not form one consistent, symmetrical edifice. They were the productions of different minds and of adverse passions; one, ascending for the foundation of human government to the laws of nature and of God, written upon the heart of man; the other, resting upon the basis of human institutions, and prescriptive law, and colonial charter. The cornerstone of the one was right, that of the other was power....

Where, then, did each State get the sovereignty, freedom, and independence, which the Articles of Confederation declare it retains?--not from the whole people of the whole Union--not from the Declaration of Independence--not from the people of the State itself. It was assumed by agreement between the Legislatures of the several States, and their delegates in Congress, without authority from or consultation of the people at all.

In the Declaration of Independence, the enacting and constituent party dispensing and delegating sovereign power is the whole people of the United Colonies. The recipient party, invested with power, is the United Colonies, declared United States.

In the Articles of Confederation, this order of agency is inverted. Each State is the constituent and enacting party, and the United States in Congress assembled the recipient of delegated power--and that power delegated with such a penurious and carking hand that it had more the aspect of a revocation of the Declaration of Independence than an instrument to carry it into effect.

None of these indispensably necessary powers were ever conferred by the State Legislatures upon the Congress of the federation; and well was it that they never were. The system itself was radically defective. Its incurable disease was an apostasy from the principles of the Declaration of Independence. A substitution of separate State sovereignties,

in the place of the constituent sovereignty of the people, was the basis of the Confederate Union.

In the Congress of the Confederation, the master minds of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton were constantly engaged through the closing years of the Revolutionary War and those of peace which immediately succeeded. That of John Jay was associated with them shortly after the peace, in the capacity of Secretary to the Congress for Foreign Affairs. The incompetency of the Articles of Confederation for the management of the affairs of the Union at home and abroad was demonstrated to them by the painful and mortifying experience of every day. Washington, though in retirement, was brooding over the cruel injustice suffered by his associates in arms, the warriors of the Revolution; over the prostration of the public credit and the faith of the nation, in the neglect to provide for the payments even of the interest upon the public debt; over the disappointed hopes of the friends of freedom; in the language of the address from Congress to the States of the eighteenth of April, 1788--"the pride and boast of America, that the rights for which she contended were the rights of human nature."

At his residence at Mount Vernon, in March, 1785, the first idea was started of a revisal of the Articles of Confederation, by the organization, of means differing from that of a compact between the State Legislatures and their own delegates in Congress. A convention of delegates from the State Legislatures, independent of the Congress itself, was the expedient which presented itself for effecting the purpose, and an augmentation of the powers of Congress for the regulation of commerce, as the object for which this assembly was to be convened. In January, 1785, the proposal was made and adopted in the Legislature of Virginia, and communicated to the other State Legislatures.

The Convention was held at Annapolis, in September of that year. It was attended by delegates from only five of the central States, who, on comparing their restricted powers with the glaring and universally acknowledged defects of the Confederation, reported only a recommendation for the assemblage of another convention of delegates to meet at Philadelphia, in May, 1787, from all the States, and with enlarged powers.

The Constitution of the United States was the work of this Convention. But in its construction the Convention immediately perceived that they must retrace their steps, and fall back from a league of friendship between sovereign States to the constituent sovereignty of the people; from power to right--from the irresponsible despotism of State sovereignty to the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence. In that instrument, the right to institute and to alter governments

among men was ascribed exclusively to the people--the ends of government were declared to be to secure the natural rights of man; and that when the government degenerates from the promotion to the destruction of that end, the right and the duty accrues to the people to dissolve this degenerate government and to institute another. The signers of the Declaration further averred, that the one people of the United Colonies were then precisely in that situation--with a government degenerated into tyranny, and called upon by the laws of nature and of nature's God to dissolve that government and to institute another. Then, in the name and by the authority of the good people of the colonies, they pronounced the dissolution of their allegiance to the king, and their eternal separation from the nation of Great Britain--and declared the United Colonies independent States. And here as the representatives of the one people they had stopped. They did not require the confirmation of this act, for the power to make the declaration had already been conferred upon them by the people, delegating the power, indeed, separately in the separate colonies, not by colonial authority, but by the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people in them all.

From the day of that Declaration, the constituent power of the people had never been called into action. A confederacy had been substituted in the place of a government, and State sovereignty had usurped the constituent sovereignty of the people.

The Convention assembled at Philadelphia had themselves no direct authority from the people. Their authority was all derived from the State Legislatures. But they had the Articles of Confederation before them, and they saw and felt the wretched condition into which they had brought the whole people, and that the Union itself was in the agonies of death. They soon perceived that the indispensably needed powers were such as no State government, no combination of them, was by the principles of the Declaration of Independence competent to bestow. They could emanate only from the people. A highly respectable portion of the assembly, still clinging to the confederacy of States, proposed, as a substitute for the Constitution, a mere revival of the Articles of Confederation, with a grant of additional powers to the Congress. Their plan was respectfully and thoroughly discussed, but the want of a government and of the sanction of the people to the delegation of powers happily prevailed. A constitution for the people, and the distribution of legislative, executive, and judicial powers was prepared. It announced itself as the work of the people themselves; and as this was unquestionably a power assumed by the Convention, not delegated to them by the people, they religiously confined it to a simple power to propose, and carefully provided that it should be no more than a proposal until sanctioned by the Confederation Congress, by the State Legislatures, and by the

people of the several States, in conventions specially assembled, by authority of their Legislatures, for the single purpose of examining and passing upon it.

And thus was consummated the work commenced by the Declaration of Independence--a work in which the people of the North American Union, acting under the deepest sense of responsibility to the Supreme Ruler of the universe, had achieved the most transcendent act of power that social man in his mortal condition can perform--even that of dissolving the ties of allegiance by which he is bound to his country; of renouncing that country itself; of demolishing its government; of instituting another government; and of making for himself another country in its stead.

And on that day, of which you now commemorate the fiftieth anniversary--on that thirtieth day of April, 1789--was this mighty revolution, not only in the affairs of our own country, but in the principles of government over civilized man, accomplished.

The Revolution itself was a work of thirteen years--and had never been completed until that day. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are parts of one consistent whole, founded upon one and the same theory of government, then new in practice, though not as a theory, for it had been working itself into the mind of man for many ages, and had been especially expounded in the writings of Locke, though it had never before been adopted by a great nation in practice.

There are yet, even at this day, many speculative objections to this theory. Even in our own country there are still philosophers who deny the principles asserted in the Declaration, as self-evident truths--who deny the natural equality and inalienable rights of man--who deny that the people are the only legitimate source of power--who deny that all just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. Neither your time, nor perhaps the cheerful nature of this occasion, permit me here to enter upon the examination of this anti-revolutionary theory, which arrays State sovereignty against the constituent sovereignty of the people, and distorts the Constitution of the United States into a league of friendship between confederate corporations. I speak to matters of fact. There is the Declaration of Independence, and there is the Constitution of the United States--let them speak for themselves. The grossly immoral and dishonest doctrine of despotic State sovereignty, the exclusive judge of its own obligations, and responsible to no power on earth or in heaven, for the violation of them, is not there. The Declaration says, it is not in me. The Constitution says, it is not in me.

"Oration at Plymouth, December 22, 1802, in Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims."

Among the sentiments of most powerful operation upon the human heart, and most highly honorable to the human character, are those of veneration for our forefathers, and of love for our posterity. They form the connecting links between the selfish and the social passions. By the fundamental principle of Christianity, the happiness of the individual is interwoven, by innumerable and imperceptible ties, with that of his contemporaries. By the power of filial reverence and parental affection, individual existence is extended beyond the limits of individual life, and the happiness of every age is chained in mutual dependence upon that of every other.

Respect for his ancestors excites, in the breast of man, interest in their history, attachment to their characters, concern for their errors, involuntary pride in their virtues. Love for his posterity spurs him to exertion for their support, stimulates him to virtue for their example, and fills him with the tenderest solicitude for their welfare. Man, therefore, was not made for himself alone. No, he was made for his country, by the obligations of the social compact; he was made for his species, by the Christian duties of universal charity; he was made for all ages past, by the sentiment of reverence for his forefathers; and he was made for all future times, by the impulse of affection for his progeny. Under the influence of these principles,

"Existence sees him spurn her bounded reign."

They redeem his nature from the subjection of time and space; he is no longer a "puny insect shivering at a breeze"; he is the glory of creation, formed to occupy all time and all extent; bounded, during his residence upon earth, only to the boundaries of the world, and destined to life and immortality in brighter regions, when the fabric of nature itself shall dissolve and perish.

The voice of history has not, in all its compass, a note but answers in unison with these sentiments. The barbarian chieftain, who defended his country against the Roman invasion, driven to the remotest extremity of Britain, and stimulating his followers to battle by all that has power of persuasion upon the human heart, concluded his persuasion by an appeal to these irresistible feelings: "Think of your forefathers and of your posterity." The Romans themselves, at the pinnacle of civilization, were actuated by the same impressions, and celebrated, in anniversary festivals, every great event which had signalized the annals of their forefathers. To multiply instances where it were impossible to adduce an exception would be to waste your time and abuse your patience; but in the sacred volume, which contains the

substances of our firmest faith and of our most precious hopes, these passions not only maintain their highest efficacy, but are sanctioned by the express injunctions of the Divine Legislator to his chosen people.

The revolutions of time furnish no previous example of a nation shooting up to maturity and expanding into greatness with the rapidity which has characterized the growth of the American people. In the luxuriance of youth, and in the vigor of manhood, it is pleasing and instructive to look backward upon the helpless days of infancy; but in the continual and essential changes of a growing subject, the transactions of that early period would be soon obliterated from the memory but for some periodical call of attention to aid the silent records of the historian. Such celebrations arouse and gratify the kindest emotions of the bosom. They are faithful pledges of the respect we bear to the memory of our ancestors and of the tenderness with which we cherish the rising generation. They introduce the sages and heroes of ages past to the notice and emulation of succeeding times; they are at once testimonials of our gratitude, and schools of virtue to our children.

These sentiments are wise; they are honorable; they are virtuous; their cultivation is not merely innocent pleasure, it is incumbent duty. Obedient to their dictates, you, my fellow-citizens, have instituted and paid frequent observance to this annual solemnity. and what event of weightier intrinsic importance, or of more extensive consequences, was ever selected for this honorary distinction?

In reverting to the period of our origin, other nations have generally been compelled to plunge into the chaos of impenetrable antiquity, or to trace a lawless ancestry into the caverns of ravishers and robbers. It is your peculiar privilege to commemorate, in this birthday of your nation, an event ascertained in its minutest details; an event of which the principal actors are known to you familiarly, as if belonging to your own age; an event of a magnitude before which imagination shrinks at the imperfection of her powers. It is your further happiness to behold, in those eminent characters, who were most conspicuous in accomplishing the settlement of your country, men upon whose virtue you can dwell with honest exultation. The founders of your race are not handed down to you, like the fathers of the Roman people, as the sucklings of a wolf. You are not descended from a nauseous compound of fanaticism and sensuality, whose only argument was the sword, and whose only paradise was a brothel. No Gothic scourge of God, no Vandal pest of nations, no fabled fugitive from the flames of Troy, no bastard Norman tyrant, appears among the list of worthies who first landed on the rock, which your veneration has preserved as a lasting monument of their achievement. The great actors of the day we now solemnize were illustrious by their intrepid valor no

less than by their Christian graces, but the clarion of conquest has not blazoned forth their names to all the winds of heaven. Their glory has not been wafted over oceans of blood to the remotest regions of the earth. They have not erected to themselves colossal statues upon pedestals of human bones, to provoke and insult the tardy hand of heavenly retribution. But theirs was "the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom." Theirs was the gentle temper of Christian kindness; the rigorous observance of reciprocal justice; the unconquerable soul of conscious integrity. Worldly fame has been parsimonious of her favor to the memory of those generous companions. Their numbers were small; their stations in life obscure; the object of their enterprise unostentatious; the theatre of their exploits remote; how could they possibly be favorites of worldly Fame--that common crier, whose existence is only known by the assemblage of multitudes; that pander of wealth and greatness, so eager to haunt the palaces of fortune, and so fastidious to the houseless dignity of virtue; that parasite of pride, ever scornful to meekness, and ever obsequious to insolent power; that heedless trumpeter, whose ears are deaf to modest merit, and whose eyes are blind to bloodless, distant excellence?

When the persecuted companions of Robinson, exiles from their native land, anxiously sued for the privilege of removing a thousand leagues more distant to an untried soil, a rigorous climate, and a savage wilderness, for the sake of reconciling their sense of religious duty with their affections for their country, few, perhaps none of them, formed a conception of what would be, within two centuries, the result of their undertaking. When the jealous and niggardly policy of their British sovereign denied them even that humblest of requests, and instead of liberty would barely consent to promise connivance, neither he nor they might be aware that they were laying the foundations of a power, and that he was sowing the seeds of a spirit, which, in less than two hundred years, would stagger the throne of his descendants, and shake his united kingdoms to the centre. So far is it from the ordinary habits of mankind to calculate the importance of events in their elementary principles, that had the first colonists of our country ever intimated as a part of their designs the project of founding a great and mighty nation, the finger of scorn would have pointed them to the cells of Bedlam as an abode more suitable for hatching vain empires than the solitude of a transatlantic desert.

These consequences, then so little foreseen, have unfolded themselves, in all their grandeur, to the eyes of the present age. It is a common amusement of speculative minds to contrast the magnitude of the most important events with the minuteness of their primeval causes, and the records of mankind are full of examples for such contemplations. It is, however, a more profitable employment to trace the constituent principles of

future greatness in their kernel; to detect in the acorn at our feet the germ of that majestic oak, whose roots shoot down to the centre, and whose branches aspire to the skies. Let it be, then, our present occupation to inquire and endeavor to ascertain the causes first put in operation at the period of our commemoration, and already productive of such magnificent effects; to examine with reiterated care and minute attention the characters of those men who gave the first impulse to a new series of events in the history of the world; to applaud and emulate those qualities of their minds which we shall find deserving of our admiration; to recognize with candor those features which forbid approbation or even require censure, and, finally, to lay alike their frailties and their perfections to our own hearts, either as warning or as example.

Of the various European settlements upon this continent, which have finally merged in one independent nation, the first establishments were made at various times, by several nations, and under the influence of different motives. In many instances, the conviction of religious obligation formed one and a powerful inducement of the adventures; but in none, excepting the settlement at Plymouth, did they constitute the sole and exclusive actuating cause. Worldly interest and commercial speculation entered largely into the views of other settlers, but the commands of conscience were the only stimulus to the emigrants from Leyden. Previous to their expedition hither, they had endured a long banishment from their native country. Under every species of discouragement, they undertook the voyage; they performed it in spite of numerous and almost insuperable obstacles; they arrived upon a wilderness bound with frost and hoary with snow, without the boundaries of their charter, outcasts from all human society, and coasted five weeks together, in the dead of winter, on this tempestuous shore, exposed at once to the fury of the elements, to the arrows of the native savage, and to the impending horrors of famine.

Courage and perseverance have a magical talisman, before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish into air. These qualities have ever been displayed in their mightiest perfection, as attendants in the retinue of strong passions. From the first discovery of the Western Hemisphere by Columbus until the settlement of Virginia which immediately preceded that of Plymouth, the various adventurers from the ancient world had exhibited upon innumerable occasions that ardor of enterprise and that stubbornness of pursuit which set all danger at defiance, and chained the violence of nature at their feet. But they were all instigated by personal interests. Avarice and ambition had tuned their souls to that pitch of exaltation. Selfish passions were the parents of their heroism. It was reserved for the first settlers of new England to perform achievements equally arduous, to trample down obstructions

equally formidable, to dispel dangers equally terrific, under the single inspiration of conscience. To them even liberty herself was but a subordinate and secondary consideration. They claimed exemption from the mandates of human authority, as militating with their subjection to a superior power. Before the voice of Heaven they silenced even the calls of their country.

Yet, while so deeply impressed with the sense of religious obligation, they felt, in all its energy, the force of that tender tie which binds the heart of every virtuous man to his native land. It was to renew that connection with their country which had been severed by their compulsory expatriation, that they resolved to face all the hazards of a perilous navigation and all the labors of a toilsome distant settlement. Under the mild protection of the Batavian Government, they enjoyed already that freedom of religious worship, for which they had resigned so many comforts and enjoyments at home; but their hearts panted for a restoration to the bosom of their country. Invited and urged by the open-hearted and truly benevolent people who had given them an asylum from the persecution of their own kindred to form their settlement within the territories then under their jurisdiction, the love of their country predominated over every influence save that of conscience alone, and they preferred the precarious chance of relaxation from the bigoted rigor of the English Government to the certain liberality and alluring offers of the Hollanders. Observe, my countrymen, the generous patriotism, the cordial union of soul, the conscious yet unaffected vigor which beam in their application to the British monarch:

"They were well weaned from the delicate milk of their mother country, and inured to the difficulties of a strange land. They were knit together in a strict and sacred bond, to take care of the good of each other and of the whole. It was not with them as with other men, whom small things could discourage, or small discontents cause to wish themselves again at home."

Children of these exalted Pilgrims! Is there one among you who can hear the simple and pathetic energy of these expressions without tenderness and admiration? Venerated shades of our forefathers! No, ye were, indeed, not ordinary men! That country which had ejected you so cruelly from her bosom you still delighted to contemplate in the character of an affectionate and beloved mother. The sacred bond which knit you together was indissoluble while you lived; and oh, may it be to your descendants the example and the pledge of harmony to the latest period of time! The difficulties and dangers, which so often had defeated attempts of similar establishments, were unable to subdue souls tempered like yours. You heard the rigid interdictions; you saw the menacing forms of toil and danger, forbidding your access to this land of promise; but you heard without dismay; you saw and disdained retreat. Firm and

undaunted in the confidence of that sacred bond; conscious of the purity, and convinced of the importance of your motives, you put your trust in the protecting shield of Providence, and smiled defiance at the combining terrors of human malice and of elemental strife. These, in the accomplishment of your undertaking, you were summoned to encounter in their most hideous forms; these you met with that fortitude, and combated with that perseverance, which you had promised in their anticipation; these you completely vanquished in establishing the foundations of New England, and the day which we now commemorate is the perpetual memorial of your triumph.

It were an occupation peculiarly pleasing to cull from our early historians, and exhibit before you every detail of this transaction; to carry you in imagination on board their bark at the first moment of her arrival in the bay; to accompany Carver, Winslow, Bradford, and Standish, in all their excursions upon the desolate coast; to follow them into every rivulet and creek where they endeavored to find a firm footing, and to fix, with a pause of delight and exultation, the instant when the first of these heroic adventurers alighted on the spot where you, their descendants, now enjoy the glorious and happy reward of their labors. But in this grateful task, your former orators, on this anniversary, have anticipated all that the most ardent industry could collect, and gratified all that the most inquisitive curiosity could desire. To you, my friends, every occurrence of that momentous period is already familiar. A transient allusion to a few characteristic instances, which mark the peculiar history of the Plymouth settlers, may properly supply the place of a narrative, which, to this auditory, must be superfluous.

One of these remarkable incidents is the execution of that instrument of government by which they formed themselves into a body politic, the day after their arrival upon the coast, and previous to their first landing. That is, perhaps, the only instance in human history of that positive, original social compact, which speculative philosophers have imagined as the only legitimate source of government. Here was a unanimous and personal assent, by all the individuals of the community, to the association by which they became a nation. It was the result of circumstances and discussions which had occurred during their passage from Europe, and is a full demonstration that the nature of civil government, abstracted from the political institutions of their native country, had been an object of their serious meditation. The settlers of all the former European colonies had contented themselves with the powers conferred upon them by their respective charters, without looking beyond the seal of the royal parchment for the measure of their rights and the rule of their duties. The founders of Plymouth had been impelled by the peculiarities of their situation to examine the subject with deeper and more comprehensive research. After twelve years of banishment

from the land of their first allegiance, during which they had been under an adoptive and temporary subjection to another sovereign, they must naturally have been led to reflect upon the relative rights and duties of allegiance and subjection. They had resided in a city, the seat of a university, where the polemical and political controversies of the time were pursued with uncommon fervor. In this period they had witnessed the deadly struggle between the two parties, into which the people of the United Provinces, after their separation from the crown of Spain, had divided themselves. The contest embraced within its compass not only theological doctrines, but political principles, and Maurice and Barneveld were the temporal leaders of the same rival factions, of which Episcopius and Polyander were the ecclesiastical champions.

That the investigation of the fundamental principles of government was deeply implicated in these dissensions is evident from the immortal work of Grotius, upon the rights of war and peace, which undoubtedly originated from them. Grotius himself had been a most distinguished actor and sufferer in those important scenes of internal convulsion, and his work was first published very shortly after the departure of our forefathers from Leyden. It is well known that in the course of the contest Mr. Robinson more than once appeared, with credit to himself, as a public disputant against Episcopius; and from the manner in which the fact is related by Governor Bradford, it is apparent that the whole English Church at Leyden took a zealous interest in the religious part of the controversy. As strangers in the land, it is presumable that they wisely and honorably avoided entangling themselves in the political contentions involved with it. Yet the theoretic principles, as they were drawn into discussion, could not fail to arrest their attention, and must have assisted them to form accurate ideas concerning the origin and extent of authority among men, independent of positive institutions. The importance of these circumstances will not be duly weighed without taking into consideration the state of opinion then prevalent in England. The general principles of government were there little understood and less examined. The whole substance of human authority was centred in the simple doctrine of royal prerogative, the origin of which was always traced in theory to divine institution. Twenty years later, the subject was more industriously sifted, and for half a century became one of the principal topics of controversy between the ablest and most enlightened men in the nation. The instrument of voluntary association executed on board the "Mayflower" testifies that the parties to it had anticipated the improvement of their nation.

Another incident, from which we may derive occasion for important reflections, was the attempt of these original settlers to establish among them that community of goods and of labor, which fanciful politicians, from the days of Plato to those of

Rousseau, have recommended as the fundamental law of a perfect republic. This theory results, it must be acknowledged, from principles of reasoning most flattering to the human character. If industry, frugality, and disinterested integrity were alike the virtues of all, there would, apparently, be more of the social spirit, in making all property a common stock, and giving to each individual a proportional title to the wealth of the whole. Such is the basis upon which Plato forbids, in his Republic, the division of property. Such is the system upon which Rousseau pronounces the first man who inclosed a field with a fence, and said, "This is mine," a traitor to the human species. A wiser and more useful philosophy, however, directs us to consider man according to the nature in which he was formed; subject to infirmities, which no wisdom can remedy; to weaknesses, which no institution can strengthen; to vices, which no legislation can correct. Hence, it becomes obvious that separate property is the natural and indisputable right of separate exertion; that community of goods without community of toil is oppressive and unjust; that it counteracts the laws of nature, which prescribe that he only who sows the seed shall reap the harvest; that it discourages all energy, by destroying its rewards; and makes the most virtuous and active members of society the slaves and drudges of the worst. Such was the issue of this experiment among our forefathers, and the same event demonstrated the error of the system in the elder settlement of Virginia. Let us cherish that spirit of harmony which prompted our forefathers to make the attempt, under circumstances more favorable to its success than, perhaps, ever occurred upon earth. Let us no less admire the candor with which they relinquished it, upon discovering its irremediable inefficacy. To found principles of government upon too advantageous an estimate of the human character is an error of inexperience, the source of which is so amiable that it is impossible to censure it with severity. We have seen the same mistake committed in our own age, and upon a larger theatre. Happily for our ancestors, their situation allowed them to repair it before its effects had proved destructive. They had no pride of vain philosophy to support, no perfidious rage of faction to glut, by persevering in their mistakes until they should be extinguished in torrents of blood.

As the attempt to establish among themselves the community of goods was a seal of that sacred bond which knit them so closely together, so the conduct they observed toward the natives of the country displays their steadfast adherence to the rules of justice and their faithful attachment to those of benevolence and charity.

No European settlement ever formed upon this continent has been more distinguished for undeviating kindness and equity toward the savages. There are, indeed, moralists who have questioned the right of the Europeans to intrude upon the possessions of the aborigines in any case, and under any

limitations whatsoever. But have they maturely considered the whole subject? The Indian right of possession itself stands, with regard to the greater part of the country, upon a questionable foundation. Their cultivated fields; their constructed habitations; a space of ample sufficiency for their subsistence, and whatever they had annexed to themselves by personal labor, was undoubtedly, by the laws of nature, theirs. But what is the right of a huntsman to the forest of a thousand miles over which he has accidentally ranged in quest of prey? Shall the liberal bounties of Providence to the race of man be monopolized by one of ten thousand for whom they were created? Shall the exuberant bosom of the common mother, amply adequate to the nourishment of millions, be claimed exclusively by a few hundreds of her offspring? Shall the lordly savage not only disdain the virtues and enjoyments of civilization himself, but shall he control the civilization of a world? Shall he forbid the wilderness to blossom like a rose? Shall he forbid the oaks of the forest to fall before the axe of industry, and to rise again, transformed into the habitations of ease and elegance? shall he doom an immense region of the globe to perpetual desolation, and to hear the howlings of the tiger and the wolf silence forever the voice of human gladness? Shall the fields and the valleys, which a beneficent God has formed to teem with the life of innumerable multitudes, be condemned to everlasting barrenness? Shall the mighty rivers, poured out by the hand of nature, as channels of communication between numerous nations, roll their waters in sullen silence and eternal solitude of the deep? Have hundreds of commodious harbors, a thousand leagues of coast, and a boundless ocean, been spread in the front of this land, and shall every purpose of utility to which they could apply be prohibited by the tenant of the woods? No, generous philanthropists! Heaven has not been thus inconsistent in the works of its hands. Heaven has not thus placed at irreconcilable strife its moral laws with its physical creation. The Pilgrims of Plymouth obtained their right of possession to the territory on which they settled, by titles as fair and unequivocal as any human property can be held. By their voluntary association they recognized their allegiance to the government of Britain, and in process of time received whatever powers and authorities could be conferred upon them by a charter from their sovereign. The spot on which they fixed had belonged to an Indian tribe, totally extirpated by that devouring pestilence which had swept the country shortly before their arrival. The territory, thus free from all exclusive possession, they might have taken by the natural right of occupancy. Desirous, however, of giving amply satisfaction to every pretence of prior right, by formal and solemn conventions with the chiefs of the neighboring tribes, they acquired the further security of a purchase. At their hands the children of the desert had no cause of complaint. On the great day of retribution, what thousands, what millions of the American race will appear at the bar of judgment to arraign their European invading

conquerors! Let us humbly hope that the fathers of the Plymouth Colony will then appear in the whiteness of innocence. Let us indulge in the belief that they will not only be free from all accusation of injustice to these unfortunate sons of nature, but that the testimonials of their acts of kindness and benevolence toward them will plead the cause of their virtues, as they are now authenticated by the record of history upon earth.

Religious discord has lost her sting; the cumbrous weapons of theological warfare are antiquated; the field of politics supplies the alchemists of our times with materials of more fatal explosion, and the butchers of mankind no longer travel to another world for instruments of cruelty and destruction. Our age is too enlightened to contend upon topics which concern only the interests of eternity; the men who hold in proper contempt all controversies about trifles, except such as inflame their own passions, have made it a commonplace censure against your ancestors, that their zeal was enkindled by subjects of trivial importance; and that however aggrieved by the intolerance of others, they were alike intolerant themselves. Against these objections, your candid judgment will not require an unqualified justification; but your respect and gratitude for the founders of the State may boldly claim an ample apology. The original grounds of their separation from the Church of England were not objects of a magnitude to dissolve the bonds of communion, much less those of charity, between Christian brethren of the same essential principles. Some of them, however, were not inconsiderable, and numerous inducements concurred to give them an extraordinary interest in their eyes. When that portentous system of abuses, the Papal dominion, was overturned, a great variety of religious sects arose in its stead in the several countries, which for many centuries before had been screwed beneath its subjection. The fabric of the Reformation, first undertaken in England upon a contracted basis, by a capricious and sanguinary tyrant, had been successively overthrown and restored, renewed and altered, according to the varying humors and principles of four successive monarchs. To ascertain the precise point of division between the genuine institutions of Christianity and the corruptions accumulated upon them in the progress of fifteen centuries, was found a task of extreme difficulty throughout the Christian world.

Men of the profoundest learning, of the sublimest genius, and of the purest integrity, after devoting their lives to the research, finally differed in their ideas upon many great points, both of doctrine and discipline. The main question, it was admitted on all hands, most intimately concerned the highest interests of man, both temporal and eternal. Can we wonder that men who felt their happiness here and their hopes of hereafter, their worldly welfare and the kingdom of heaven at stake, should sometimes attach an importance beyond their intrinsic weight

to collateral points of controversy, connected with the all-involving object of the Reformation? The changes in the forms and principles of religious worship were introduced and regulated in England by the hand of public authority. But that hand had not been uniform or steady in its operations. During the persecutions inflicted in the interval of Popish restoration under the reign of Mary, upon all who favored the Reformation, many of the most zealous reformers had been compelled to fly their country. While residing on the continent of Europe, they had adopted the principles of the most complete and rigorous reformation, as taught and established by Calvin. On returning afterward to their native country, they were dissatisfied with the partial reformation, at which, as they conceived, the English establishment had rested; and claiming the privilege of private conscience, upon which alone any departure from the Church of Rome could be justified, they insisted upon the right of adhering to the system of their own preference, and, of course, upon that of non-conformity to the establishment prescribed by the royal authority. The only means used to convince them of error and reclaim them from dissent was force, and force served but to confirm the opposition it was meant to suppress. By driving the founders of the Plymouth Colony into exile, it constrained them to absolute separation irreconcilable. Viewing their religious liberties here, as held only by sufferance, yet bound to them by all the ties of conviction, and by all their sufferings for them, could they forbear to look upon every dissenter among themselves with a jealous eye? Within two years after their landing, they beheld a rival settlement attempted in their immediate neighborhood; and not long after, the laws of self-preservation compelled them to break up a nest of revellers, who boasted of protection from the mother country, and who had recurred to the easy but pernicious resource of feeding their wanton idleness, by furnishing the savages with the means, the skill, and the instruments of European destruction. Toleration, in that instance, would have been self-murder, and many other examples might be alleged, in which their necessary measures of self-defence have been exaggerated into cruelty, and their most indispensable precautions distorted into persecution. Yet shall we not pretend that they were exempt from the common laws of mortality, or entirely free from all the errors of their age. Their zeal might sometimes be too ardent, but it was always sincere. At this day, religious indulgence is one of our clearest duties, because it is one of our undisputed rights. While we rejoice that the principles of genuine Christianity have so far triumphed over the prejudices of a former generation, let us fervently hope for the day when it will prove equally victorious over the malignant passions of our own.

In thus calling your attention to some of the peculiar features in the principles, the character, and the history of our forefathers, it is as wide from my design, as I know it would be

from your approbation, to adorn their memory with a chaplet plucked from the domain of others. The occasion and the day are more peculiarly devoted to them, and let it never be dishonored with a contracted and exclusive spirit. Our affections as citizens embrace the whole extent of the Union, and the names of Raleigh, Smith, Winthrop, Calvert, Penn and Oglethorpe excite in our minds recollections equally pleasing and gratitude equally fervent with those of Carver and Bradford. Two centuries have not yet elapsed since the first European foot touched the soil which now constitutes the American Union. Two centuries more and our numbers must exceed those of Europe itself. The destinies of their empire, as they appear in prospect before us, disdain the powers of human calculation. Yet, as the original founder of the Roman State is said once to have lifted upon his shoulders the fame and fortunes of all his posterity, so let us never forget that the glory and greatness of all our descendants is in our hands. Preserve in all their purity, refine, if possible, from all their alloy, those virtues which we this day commemorate as the ornament of our forefathers. Adhere to them with inflexible resolution, as to the horns of the altar; instil them with unwearied perseverance into the minds of your children; bind your souls and theirs to the national Union as the chords of life are centred in the heart, and you shall soar with rapid and steady wing to the summit of human glory. Nearly a century ago, one of those rare minds to whom it is given to discern future greatness in its seminal principles, upon contemplating the situation of this continent, pronounced, in a vein of poetic inspiration, "Westward the star of empire takes its way." Let us unite in ardent supplication to the Founder of nations and the Builder of worlds, that what then was prophecy may continue unfolding into history--that the dearest hopes of the human race may not be extinguished in disappointment, and that the last may prove the noblest empire of time.

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