

THE INDEPENDENT.

Thursday, July 20, 1876.

1776. 1876.

July Fourth.

Orator delivered at the Grand Banquet at Gaston by the Hon. Jos. Gaston.

(Published by request of the audience.)

Fellow Citizens, Ladies and Gentlemen—One hundred years ago to-day, in the City of Philadelphia, there were convened in a small room fifty-six earnest men. They were not nobles and princes, except in the sense that every true hero and patriot is a nobleman, but plain men delegated to consider the injustice and oppression imposed on themselves and neighbors by the King of England, and which has been recounted in the Magna Charta of our Independence just read in your hearing. They wrought wiser than they knew, and the great Proclamation of Liberty which they there issued to the world became the chief corner stone of our nation and government, the centennial anniversary of which we are met to celebrate.

When we consider their surroundings and circumstances, and the small means they had to support their cause against the power of King George, and the fact that the royal proclamation had denounced them as traitors to the Government of England and set a price upon their heads, history fails to produce a grander or more heroic deed than that first step in the foundation of a new nation. Before them stood the certainty of a felon's doom on the scaffold with dishonor and shame in case of a failure, or to secure success they must welcome long years of labor, dangers, privations and anxiety. We in our day, in the peaceful enjoyment of the law, have no conception of the risks those men braved, or the great dangers and trials they invited not only for themselves but for every adherent of their cause.

Had any soldier, engineer or great general been given the case of the colonists, with a schedule of their means to defend themselves against the great power of England, he would have told them that their cause was nothing but reckless folly. But they did not stop to count the cost; and had they done so they would have lived and died the celebrants of any particular blessing. But they were thoroughly fired with the flames of patriotism; they saw only the tyranny of taxes without consent, abolishing their rights, public plunder by unjust laws, and general oppression and robbery by the agents of the crown who swarmed through the colonies as useless of Egypt. It mattered not to them that they were few in numbers or weak in means, for earnestly believing in the Scriptures which declare that "the race is not always to the swift, or the battle to the strong," they placed their firm reliance on Divine Providence for protection, and pledged to each other their lives, fortune and sacred honor to make good the declaration "That all men are created free and equal."

The Declaration of Independence on the 4th of July, 1776, was not a proclamation of any newly acquired liberty, or of any new political right, nor was it intended in any way to be a form of government. The people of the thirteen colonies had at that time been in practical rebellion for more than a year, and had seized the liberties by such rebellion, which their representatives formally asserted to be their natural rights, descending to them from the God and Creator of all, and not from the grace of any king or potentate.

The spirit of independence which finally culminated in the formal assertion of the right to a separate national and independent government had been gathering force and volume for several years. As early as March 5th, 1770, one Crispus Attucks, a colored man, had been killed in Boston while resisting the insolence and tyranny of the King's soldiers. And it is not a sad commentary on our boasted freedom that the race that shed the first blood in defense of our rights should be the last to receive the blessing? In December 1773 the act taxing tea was resisted by a public destruction of the tea in Boston harbor. In 1774 the people commenced to arm in view of openly resisting the demands of the King's officers. In March 1775 resolutions were passed by the convention in Virginia calling upon the people to arm themselves, and on which occasion Patrick Henry, the great orator, boldly asserted, "There is no longer any room for hope, we must fight! I repeat it, we must fight. An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us!"

And on the 19th of April, 1775, the war of the Revolution was commenced at Lexington a few miles from Boston by the British troops firing on the Colonial militia. The battle of Lexington fired up the whole thirteen colonies, and all elected delegates to the Convention at Philadelphia.

I am thus particular to give the historical order of a few of the events which preceded the formal assertion of the rights to a separate independent national existence so that we may the better understand the course and progress of the infant nation one hundred years ago.

The colonists were loth to take the steps so fraught with danger and trial. They sent numerous loyal petitions to the King of England humbly praying for an abatement of the rigors of his government. All these were treated with scorn and contempt. In a speech in the convention at Philadelphia, John Adams said, "It is true indeed, that in the beginning we aimed not at independence. But there is a divinity which shapes our ends. The injustice of England has driven us to arms; and blinded to her own interest for our good, she has obstinately persisted, till independence is now within our grasp. Why, then, should we defer the Declaration? Is any man so weak as now to hope for a reconciliation with England, which shall leave neither safety to the country and its liberties, nor safety to his own life, and his own honor?"

It will thus be seen, that the final act of dissolving all connection with the Mother country by the assertion of the Independence of the Colonies, was not the sudden outburst of public indignation or popular passion but the slow growth of the logic of events.

This Declaration of American Independence is an original idea in the history of nations. I cannot now recall a single precedent example in the history of the world. Napoleon Buonaparte invested his brow with the iron crown of Lombardy, and declared himself King of Italy. The Great Frederick constituted himself King of Prussia by placing the crown on his own head, while Louis the XIV of France always referred to the government by saying, "The State—which is myself." And the world is full of the examples of nations formed by successful generals and great warriors calling the army to support their unlawful usurpation of power over the people, and the proclamation of a government founded upon their own selfish ambition. But our Declaration of Independence was a crown of honor for all citizens and the whole people as one man, placed upon their brows in the self assertion on their rights as freemen.

It was the first example of a self-constituted nation, rising as it were like a veritable Phoenix from a then hitherto undiscovered source of power, so suddenly, so noiselessly, and yet so substantially as to call from its godfathers a declaration of the principles of its foundation, and an unanswerable statement of the rights of man, and an excuse for this great deed saying "that a decent respect for the opinions of mankind" required that much at their hands.

With this reference to the great historical fact which we have met to celebrate, let us briefly review the grand results which have flowed from its successful establishment.

And no review of the history of our Centennial would be either truthful or just which did not in noble words, more noble than I can command, portray the courage, patriotism and trials of our forefathers who gave up all to the cause of national independence. Seven years of long, wasting war and want was the price of our priceless boon of freedom. In all of those anxious, trying, tedious years, which it has been fitly said to be the "times which tried men's very souls," "George Washington was the great central figure, and throughout the whole conflict undoubtedly the mainstay of the hearts and confidence of the people. A plain Virginia farmer, with all the virtues of honesty, truth, justice, courage, modesty and honor, uniting the hero, the warrior and the sage, he so discharged the great duty laid upon him by his trusting countrymen, as to justly go down in history as the "Father of his country," and be proclaimed in all lands and languages as the man "that was first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

And picture too if you can those unselfish revolutionary soldiers in winter quarters at Valley Forge, tracking the frozen earth and icy snow with the blood of washed feet. See them destitute of clothing, with starving supplies of inferior food, and not one pay-day in seven years of war. But when they confronted the well fed soldiers of King George the insolent red-coats, their mighty souls burning to avenge the wrongs of their country, "one was as good as a thousand, and two could put ten thousand to flight." The authors of the Declaration did not appeal to the support of a Divine Providence with misplaced confidence, for if ever a cause seemed to be favored by the Supreme Ruler that cause was the war for American Independence.

The spirit of patriotism gave zeal and courage to the whole people and to none more than the women of those times. They not only gladly accepted the duty of providing for their families and cultivating the farms with their own hands, but they also supplied large quantities of clothing to the ragged army, raising the flax and reducing the straw to cloth through all the processes, hatching and weaving on the home-made looms. And many did even more, and with unconquerable heroism, in the midst of the thickest of the battle, and in the midst of death and carnage, loading the dealing cannon or ministering to the wounded and dying.

Some may ask themselves if the spirit which incited the people to such deeds of danger and heroism had made them welcome such sore trials and want, and even death rather than defeat, if that undying love of country has died out in their posterity in one hundred years. The late rebellion goes to show that it has not; for whatever may be said of the issues which divided the people

of the North and South, nothing could be more manifest, than that both the men and women of to-day are quite as ready to serve and suffer for what they conceive to be right as their ancestors of '76.

But the great and manifest result of American independence has been the establishment of this great nation as one of the most powerful and prosperous on the face of the globe. In the physical development of the soil and material resources of the country, in providing the means of education and intelligence, in the development of the mechanical arts, and the gathering of a population, and the founding of towns and states, the progress of the nation has been the wonder of the world. From a population of scarcely three millions in 1776, composed mostly of scattered farmers occupying a half wild strip of territory along the Atlantic sea shore not larger than California and Oregon, and destitute of wealth and manufactures, and with scarcely public highways, the country has grown in a century to a vast Empire of thirty-eight states, covering the continent from ocean to ocean, with great cities, eighty thousand miles of railway, and forty-three millions of people. When Independence was declared, the pioneers had just commenced to cross the Allegheny mountains into the vast wilderness of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. Daniel Boone was the only white man in Kentucky, and there was not a single American settlement in all the region now covered by the great States of Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama and Florida; while California was in the hands of a half-dozen Spanish priests, and Oregon wholly unknown to the world.

And when we compare this progress with the development of other nations, the rapid rise of our country seems more like a revolution and protest against the former order of human affairs than the slow growth of the other great nations of the Earth. It was eight hundred years from the founding of Rome until the Empire reached the acme of its power. It has taken a thousand years to build the Russian Empire to its present greatness. It is nearly a thousand years since the division of the great Empire of Charlemagne into the powers which now constitute the nations of France and Germany. And yet in one hundred years our free Republic has built up a nation equal to any of these in culture, intellect and knowledge, and inferior to none in arms and physical power.

The achievements of social and political reforms have been equally grand. Here every man has been made a freeman, and every freeman a citizen. Education and knowledge have been practically brought home to the door of all, while here for the first time in the world we find a practical illustration of civil and religious liberty.

Of the character of this progress, society, and especially that class of society known as moralists, will divide in opinion. Those who cling to the traditions of the middle ages and place the public safety only on precedents, look upon all of this bolding power and activity of the nation with distrust, and would restrict it within principles repudiated centuries ago. While another class, knowing that good and evil are ever present in the fairest work of man, hopefully strive to give the mind, heart and labor of the nation a proper direction. And to balance the Bourbonism of one extreme with the Radicalism of another in the equipage of a conservative and steady progress becomes not only the duty of statesmen, but of every patriot and Christian.

And while we contemplate with pride and satisfaction the achievements of the past, it is well in this Centennial year to look forward also and see if perchance there be any rocks in the channel or false lights on the shore to endanger the good ship of State. And in the investigations of these questions we find that in our government all changes for good or for evil must commence with the people themselves. The politicians or the clergy, are powerless to carry any measure until the public mind favors the proposition. There is therefore no power or potentate above or over the people that can promote or restrain the progress of the nation against the will of the people. And it is a striking and suggestive fact that this Declaration of American Independence, so fresh in all its spirit from the heart of the people, has been ever true and consistent to the highest development of the nation. While the Federal Constitution has had to be amended in many particulars, the Declaration has never needed amendment or alteration. As asserting the God-given and natural rights of man, like the Bible it needed no amendment and was not susceptible of improvement. Slavery grew apace and reared its treasonable head, and forth the equality of all men. Then came the bloody civil war between the North and South; slavery was abolished, and the Declaration was vindicated and glorified by the terrible war which made freedom a living truth to the black man of the South.

All the promises of the Declaration are now realized to the people, and in speaking of the death of Lincoln, the eloquent Chas. Sumner remarks:

"The corner stone of national Independence is already in its place and on it is inscribed the name of George Washington. There is another stone which must have its place at the corner also. This is the Declaration of Independence fully filled; and on this stone we will gratefully inscribe the name of Abraham Lincoln."

The first Century of National existence has been devoted to clearing the forests, subduing the prairies, bridging the rivers; to building towns, cities, telegraphs and railroads. The nation has grown rich and powerful, and proud and ungodly. With the accumulation of wealth has come luxury, idleness, extravagance and corruption in public morals; and men of all parties are pained and disgraced at the robberies and thefts of men they have honored and trusted with place and power.

The next Century should be devoted to the eradication of public and private crimes, to the better education of the people, and to such reforms as will give honest industry its just reward, and restrain the power of chartered monopolies within such bounds as will be just to both labor and capital.

You may ask, WHAT SIGNIFIES ALL THIS? The past is a lesson that should be heeded by every citizen of America, and sacredly taught to his children. It is no less true now than it was two thousand years ago, when Demosthenes was endeavoring to arouse the Greeks to their dangers, "that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." As virtue is confessedly the vital principle of the Republic, and as every citizen is an integral part of the government, just in proportion as virtue and patriotism decay in the heart of one citizen or another, in the same ratio is the Republic dying and hastening to dissolution, to anarchy, to the rule of a Dictator or a King. And as the faithful citizen cannot afford to be yoked to the dead body of the traitor to his country, any more than one living body can safely carry the corpse of the dead, for in such case calamity must soon fall upon both, so also must every man who would do his duty and save his own rights and liberties be faithful to teach the principles of virtue to the rising generation, to enforce the laws of his country and stamp out fraud and corruption, and bear aloft the standard of honesty and virtue.

That there has been some decay in public virtue, and general letting down of the stern spirit of justice which actuated our forefathers, is evident from the generally accepted opinion now-a-days that a rich man can escape the punishment due his crimes where a poor man would be speedily punished for the same offense; and that a wealthy man can purchase his way into high office, while a poor man of greater merit and ability could not hope to be available for such honor or trust. Ask any old veteran who can remember the public opinion of fifty years ago, and he will tell you that such ideas had no currency in those days.

THE REMEDY. While there is now a hopeful reaction in public sentiment, much remains to be done to banish from the politics of the country these seeds of decay. The question of administrative reform is not the hobby of any political party, although it ought to be. Party success, even if party men saw success a-riht, requires that it should be. For when it is settled beyond doubt that any one political party will, as sure as the world stands, inexorably punish all offenders against the laws, high and low, rich and poor, alike, and refuse promotion to any but its worthy and competent members, then will the true men of all parties rally to its standard. And such will rule; for I have confidence that those who prefer honest government are largely in the majority. The reforms in political abuses must commence with the citizen himself. Corruption in the public service is not the exclusive distinction of any political party, but unfortunately the disgrace of all. And when the citizen voter so reforms his own mind and disposition, that he will not wait for party leaders or organs to tell him how to vote, but conscientiously seek out the right side, and then support it with unflinching fidelity with which he would defend the honor of his own household, then will the political conventions be careful to place none but tried and true men in nomination; and the cause of good government will have achieved a victory of greater power and consequence than acts of Congress or standing armies.

The law-abiding and tax-paying citizen should never forget election days. They must remember that the driftwood and purchasable material will always be found in full force; and he that neglects to vote for any reason is little less than a criminal himself. And apropos of the evil of such neglect allow me to refer you to an example in history. It seems that on an election day in Rome about two thousand years ago, that one Tiberius Gracchus, the champion and defender of the rights of the people, appeared for re-election to the office of Tribune. Our own historian Bancroft has sketched the event. "The election day for Tribunes was in midsummer; the few husbandmen, the only show of a Roman yeomanry, were busy in their fields gathering their crops, and failed to come to the support of their champion. (Now mark what follows from this failure.) He was left to rest his defense on the rabble of the city, and though early in the morning great crowds of the people gathered together, and though as Gracchus appeared in the forum a shout of glory rent the skies, which was redoubled as he ascended

the steps of the Capitol, yet when the aristocratic party came in a mass, the timid flock of yeomen, yielding to the sentiment of awe rather than cowardice, fled and left their defender, the incomparable Tiberius, to be beaten to death by the clubs of the Senators, together with three-hundred of his most faithful friends were left lifeless in the market place. In the fury of the triumphant passion the dead body of the heroic Gracchus was dragged through the streets of Rome and thrown into the river Tiber."

When the news of this horrible murder of the people's friend went to the country, the farmers armed themselves and rushed into the city, and lit the flames of a terrible civil war in which more than a million lives were lost.—But it was the last expiring struggle of the Roman people to regain their liberties.

This is a lesson that every voter should heed, if we would preserve our free Republic and our liberties. Never neglect to attend the polls and cast your vote conscientiously for the good and the true. Your forefathers bared their breasts to British bullets and bayonets, and fought through winter storms in rags and hunger to secure the inestimable liberties we enjoy, and are we so base as not to fight for the preservation of what they so dearly earned?

The reformation of the public service is the greatest question of the day. And don't rest satisfied until you have placed on the statute books a law as irrevocable as those of the Medes and Persians that every man no matter what his rank or position, who shall be guilty of offering or receiving a bribe for a vote at any election, or to influence any man, in the election or appointment to any office or position, or for the doing or neglect of any official act, or corrupt administration of any office or appointment, or the decision of any court or jury, shall thereby be forever disfranchised, and forever prohibited from voting or holding office in this country, in addition to present statutory punishments (applicable). And drive the thunder-bolt home by making it the duty of judges, grand juries and prosecuting attorneys to prosecute all such traitors to honor and justice, and convict them without mercy and cast them down from the companionship of independent freemen so far that no Governor's pardon can ever restore them to citizenship or equality among honorable men.

"This lovely land," says Webster, "this glorious liberty, these benign institutions, the dear purchase of our fathers, are ours; ours to enjoy, ours to preserve, and ours to transmit. Generations past and generations to come hold us responsible for the sacred trust. Our fathers from behind a monument us with their anxious paternal voices, posterity calls to us from the bosom of the future, the world turns hither its solicitous eye—all, all conjure us to act wisely and faithfully in the relation which we sustain. Then let us go forward 'with malice toward none, and with charity for all,' and labor to secure not only peace and union between all sections of our common country, but union and liberty, one and inseparable; and raise high the standard of American honor and virtue and make the country in fact and truth the hope and blessing of mankind, and a beacon-light to the oppressed of all nations."

And "Thou, too, sail on, oh ship of State, Sail on, O Union strong and great; Humanity with all its fears, Is hanging breathless on thy fate! Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea, Our hearts, our hopes are all with thee, Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears, Our faith triumphant o'er our fears, Are all with thee—are all with thee."

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2. If subscribers order the discontinuance of their periodicals, the publisher may continue to send them until all arrearages are paid.
3. If subscribers neglect or refuse their periodicals from the office to which they directed, they are held responsible until they have settled their bills, and ordered them discontinued.
4. If subscribers move to other places without informing the publishers, and the papers are sent to the former direction they are held responsible.
The Cons have decided that "refusing to take periodicals from the office, or removing and leaving them uncollected, is prima facie evidence of intentional fraud."
Any person who receives a newspaper and makes use of it, whether he has ordered it or not, is held in law to be a subscriber.
If subscribers pay in advance, they are bound to give notice to the publisher, at the end of their time, if they do not wish to continue taking it; otherwise the publisher is authorized to send it on and the subscriber will be responsible until an express notice, with payment of all arrearages to the publisher.

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