

ECONOMY, July 21, 1846.

MEMOR. A. L. LOVEJOY & OTHERS, Committee:

Gentlemen—I send you a copy of my address on the 4th inst. for publication, as you requested. Some delay has occurred, which the situation of my affairs unwillingly imposed upon me, and which I hope you will have the kindness to excuse. Your friend,

PETER H. BURNETT.

GENTLEMEN & LADIES—

The partiality of your committee of arrangements, has imposed upon me a task I perform with all cheerfulness, notwithstanding it is encompassed with some embarrassments. The subject is not suited to the character of my mind, which is more argumentative than declamatory; and I have not that exuberant fancy so requisite to dress up a subject like this, in its appropriate colors. He who delivers a Fourth of July Oration, at this late day, has either to deviate from the path naturally belonging to his subject, or he must submit to be a copyist; for the reason, that the theme has been exhausted by the greatest intellects, and there is nothing new to be said upon the subject. You must not, however, expect of me any thing novel; although the circumstances under which we assemble, are new and interesting. I shall not, therefore, entertain you with any attempt at display; but shall endeavor to give you a plain, common-sense discourse, combining good feeling and charitable sentiments, with instruction. And while we have met to celebrate the birth-day of the great American nation, of which we are justly proud, we indulge no feeling of ill-will, or sentiments of envy or malice towards others. All nations have their days of celebration; and while American institutions endure, or freedom has a friend, the fourth of July will be remembered above all other days.

There has been read in your hearing this day, that celebrated Declaration of Independence, first proclaimed to the world seventy years ago. The American congress—called the congress of independence—met at Philadelphia in the year 1776, and after due and appropriate deliberation, determined to declare the colonies "free and independent states." For this purpose, a committee was appointed, consisting of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and others of the most able of American statesmen. When the committee met, it was agreed that each member should draw up his declaration, to be submitted to its final decision. When the declarations had been drawn up, it was decided that Mr. Jefferson, as he was the youngest man, should read his first; and when his was read, such was its unequalled superiority, that the other declarations never saw the light; and what they were we never shall know. This declaration underwent a few verbal alterations, and was then unanimously adopted. Among all human productions, of any age or country, it stands out pre-eminent and alone. There is no piece of eloquence so perfect. The style is inimitable, new, and so appropriate, while the sentiments are grand and sublime. The declaration sets out by assuming certain great and leading principles to be true and self-evident, founded and implanted in man, and belonging to man as man, and given him by nature and nature's God—not to be torn from him by force; and which he himself cannot sell, alien or convey. This remarkable declaration does not stoop to discuss the principles thus assumed, for the reason, that they are like axioms or first principles, not to be aided by reasoning, nor fortified by proof. Among the great and noble principles therein contained, we may notice these: "that all men are born free and equal," and "that governments are instituted among men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed." The latter proposition seems necessarily to result from the former—"that all men are born free and equal." And these great, free, and glorious principles, in the beautiful language of the declaration, "are formidable to tyrants only." The great and prominent doctrine of that immortal instrument is this, that government is a sort of political partnership, in which each man of sound mind and memory, has an equal interest, and an equal share. There is something noble, natural, and expansive in this beautiful sentiment, that, in its wide and untrammelled sweep, takes in all humanity, and forms the very basis of all our American institutions, unquestionably the most free, pure and happy in the world.

The event that we this day celebrate, forms, and is destined to form, through all coming

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days, one of the great eras in recorded time. In the annals of nations, few events will occupy so important a place. The American revolution was distinguished, not only for the unbending integrity, the unbribable honesty, and the unyielding heroism of its adherents; but it was equally marked by patient and long endurance, as well as great and distinguished talents. It called into action all the noblest and best powers of the best of men; and such was the pervading sense of the justice of their own glorious cause, which filled the souls of those great patriots, that only one instance of treason occurred among the officers high in command; and that was the ever infamous Arnold. At this distance of time, when there are so few living links that connect us with the soul-stirring scenes of the revolution, we cannot well appreciate the feelings, hardships, and perils of that eventful period. Could we but adequately know and understand the deep-toned feelings, the high and noble resolves that swelled and filled the manly bosoms of those who composed the congress of independence, at the moment when, to the mighty crowd, the great declaration was read, and the reader pronounced the last words, "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor," what a burst of unutterable enthusiasm would fill these walls! It is not my intention to travel over those revolutionary times, in which "there were no sabbaths." I do not wish to excite you. The history of that period is familiar to all. We cannot feel as they felt. We have not suffered as they suffered. But I may be permitted to state to you as an evidence of what was then the intensity of feeling prevalent among the revolutionary patriots; that when the news of the surrender of Cornwallis reached congress, the door-keeper swooned, and an aged patriot in Philadelphia died, through excess of joy.

And now, my fellow-citizens, let me turn your attention to another point. As our government is a great political partnership, in which you and I, and all others of its free citizens, are equal partners, it becomes us all to know something of the nature and character of that peculiar system of happy government under which we live. The result of the revolution was the final establishment of the government of the U. States. Many great and serious difficulties in the formation of our constitution, had to be met and overcome. Many of our gifted statesmen were for forming a limited monarchy, others for a strong government, with senators chosen for life. They urged the instability of all republican systems. The page of history had told us, that of all the great and flourishing republics of ancient times, none now remained; and it was only from history and the mouldering but stately monuments of their departed greatness, that we could know they ever did exist. But the friends of freedom urged the fact, that we were about to try the experiment under more favorable circumstances; and a republican system was finally adopted. And surely the circumstances, for another experiment, were most favorable. We were in a new world, just beginning, untrammelled by old and long established forms of tyranny, to which the people had become wedded and accustomed by time and education. We had thrown off the yoke of colonial vassalage, and had resisted successfully the tyrannical doctrine of taxation without representation. Placed, as our forefathers were, in new and independent circumstances, being at the same time familiar with other systems of government, and especially with the English constitution, whatever was true, just, and free, in the common law of England, they adopted; while, with a prudent hand, they pruned it of all those features not in harmony with republican principles. The peculiar characteristics of the American government, as distinguished from the governments of other nations, consists—

1st. In its popular character. We believe that, in reasoning upon any subject, there are

certain great and fixed truths, self-evident, and not, in the very nature of things, susceptible of any further proof. One of these fundamental truths we hold to be, that all men are born free and equal; and if government be instituted for the common good of all, it follows as an inevitable consequence, that all have equal rights in such government. It follows, also, that as governments cannot be administered without officers, that the governed, being all equal, have the equal right to select their officers. There is something so consonant to nature, in this great fundamental principle, that it cannot be condemned in theory; and the only attempt to evade its force, is to question its practicality. In our country, a man's rights do not depend upon the amount or kind of his property. We think the soul of man as pure, and his mind as free, in the useful mechanic or farmer, as in the great and opulent merchant, or distinguished statesman. We have no artificial distinctions, and all the difference we know among men, is that reputation which his own fellow-citizens spontaneously accord to him for his own merit. We care not for parentage or birth, for we have seen too many of our greatest men spring from the paths of humble life, not to know that talents and virtue are not confined to birth, rank, or station, but may be found oftener and purer, among the great and toiling millions. And we have seen that poverty, in America, does not chill the independent soul of man; for, our revolutionary patriots, though poor indeed, could not be bought or bribed.

2d. In our naturalization laws. We have discarded the low and slavish doctrine of perpetual allegiance. We hold that man, in the pursuit of happiness, is free; and that the accidental circumstance of his birth, does not, and of right, should not, bind him and his descendants forever to the worst of tyranny. We hold that he has a right to change his domicile and his government, and we have no fears of the consequences of such a doctrine. We believe that there is such an irresistible and overwhelming influence in pure and holy truth, as must and will find its way to the hearts and judgments of men; and while we think our government the purest and happiest on earth, we have no fears our citizens will leave our shores to live in other lands. And we think further, that our government, by its equal and just principles, so recommends itself to others, that we can safely open its portals to the oppressed of other lands. Under the influence of this wide and liberal sentiment, the citizens and subjects of other countries can become citizens of the United States, by taking the proper oath of allegiance, and fixing their residence among us.

3d. Its freedom in religion. By the constitution of the United States, congress can make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion; nor can it pass any law for the establishment of religion. All are left free and undisturbed in their religious opinions, without tax, fine, or forfeiture. We look upon the union of church and state, as base and adulterous, tending to degrade the pure spirit of christianity. There is something abhorrent in the very idea, that the meek and charitable religion of Jesus should seek to ally itself with mere temporal power, forcing itself upon unwilling minds, and subjecting its ministers to a servile dependence upon persons in power and place. That any portion of a community should be compelled by law to pay taxes for the support of a religion which they do not believe to be true, seems at once to be a palpable violation of the first principles of justice. We hold that, in relation to the exercise of religion, men should be left perfectly free; and no human government has any right, by earthly penalties, to force it upon the human mind. It is true that, in most countries where there is no established religion, dissenters are tolerated; but they are compelled to contribute tithes as taxes, to the support of that form of religion which they condemn. They can enjoy

their opinions by paying a penalty for it; but that liberty, enjoyed under a penalty, is tyranny. What is freedom with a penalty annexed?

4th. Its exemption from a titled nobility. Our constitution prohibits congress from establishing any order of nobility, and thus creating a distinction without merit. Other lands have fastened upon them a weak, luxurious, and indolent nobility, who transmit their titles and privileges to their descendants without regard to virtue or talents.

Such, my fellow-citizens, are the distinctive characteristics of the American government in theory. Now, how has it worked in practice? No form of government is worth anything, unless it be practical. That which is only beautiful in theory, can never be useful. In relation to the practical operation of our government, we can say, with all confidence, that we have cause to be justly proud. It has been, and is the admiration and wonder of the liberal and enlightened of other lands. It has operated like a piece of perfect machinery—harmonious in every part. If you will grant me your kind indulgence, I will go a little into detail, to show what has been the practical operation of that great and free government, based, as it is, upon the principles set forth in the declaration of independence. The foreign policy of our government has been most liberal and just, and the faith of our treaties has ever been kept inviolate. We have promised nothing that we have not performed, and asked nothing but what we deemed to be clearly right. We have, in pursuance of the advice of the father of his country, kept ourselves free from all entangling alliances. We have interfered with the internal concerns of no other nation, but have left the people of other countries free to reform or abolish their own systems of government. We have carried out the charitable and liberal spirit of our institutions, and have not sought to extend our limits and our principles by fraud or force—we have sacked no cities, laid waste no cultivated districts, and have not left a path of desolation behind us. The wars that we have had, were wars of self-defence, and were conducted in the most humane spirit, prevalent among the most enlightened nations. The internal administration of our government has been no less successful and honorable. We have had ten presidents, and the eleventh is now in office, all men of distinguished ability and acknowledged character, not one of whom has ever been impeached for a misdemeanor in office. Their administrations have all been guided by the most enlightened views, and have done honor to the American government. Our legislative history presents the most satisfactory results. The legislation of congress has been characterized by the most scrupulous regard to the rights of all, and has generally reflected the public will. In only one instance, I believe, has the great principle of human liberty been violated by that body. I mean the alien and sedition laws, which have long since been openly and universally condemned. We may, indeed, refer to the general legislation of our American congress, with triumphant satisfaction. Permit me now to refer to the judiciary of the United States. And where can I find a judiciary, in which justice has been so ably, promptly, and impartially administered? Among the number of judges of the different courts of the United States, not one, to my recollection, has successfully been impeached for corruption in office. And if you go to the state judiciaries you will find corruption among the judges, almost, if not totally unknown. In England, where the administration of justice is purer than in most countries of Europe, from my lord Bacon, who, as Pope says, was

"The greatest, brightest, meanest of mankind,"

down to a justice of the peace, instances of judicial corruption have not been few nor unfrequent. It has been a happy circumstance attending the administration of our system, that our government has not had to enforce its authority by cruel inflictions. If I am not much mistaken, the records of our courts can show no instance of a conviction for treason. In the revolution, we had but one distinguished traitor, and we have had fewer since; and those accused were implicated for alleged aid to our enemies, and not for any serious attempt to destroy the government itself. Our people have been marked for their general obedience to the laws; and, in proportion to population, we have had fewer mobs, and less irregularity, than perhaps any nation in the world. Our country's history has not been