

ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

BRITISH ARTILLERY

AND

CITIZENS OF APPONAUG, R. I.,

ON THE

SEVENTY-EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1854.

BY THOMAS K. KING.

**PROVIDENCE:
GEORGE H. WHITNEY.
1854.**

APPONAUG, July 5th, 1854.

THOS. K. KING, Esq :

Dear Sir:—At a meeting of the Kentish Artillery, held last evening, at their Armory, Col. Westcott in the Chair, a Committee was appointed to solicit, for publication, a copy of your Oration, delivered before said Company and the citizens of this village, on the 4th inst.

The undersigned has the honor to constitute that Committee; and hoping that the solicitation will be agreeable to yourself, and complied with at your earliest convenience,

I remain,

Yours &c.

A. P. KING.

PROVIDENCE, July 10th, 1854.

DOCT. A. P. KING:

Dear Sir:—Yours of the fifth, communicating a vote of the Kentish Artillery, requesting for publication, a copy of my address, delivered before that Company, on the 4th inst., was duly received. With an expression of my gratification at this mark of the approbation of your Company, I transmit to you the copy which you desire.

Yours &c.

T. K. KING.

ORATION.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

The return of our national anniversary again calls upon us to celebrate, in a becoming manner, the great deeds of those men who achieved our national independence, and established the political institutions under which we live. The day furnishes an occasion of rejoicing for the blessings which as a people we have enjoyed and do still enjoy. It is a privilege, and a duty, to manifest by appropriate ceremonies our deep sense of obligation to the founders of our Republic. But the day brings with it other duties. It is our duty to examine our present condition, and ascertain, if possible, whether or not the foundations of our national greatness and happiness so broadly and deeply laid, are still secure. And we cannot more appropriately do honor to the glorious memories of our forefathers, for by so doing we are obeying their most solemn injunctions. Among the rich legacies of wisdom and instruction bequeathed to us by the father of his country, there is none more important than the admonition to "watch with jealous anxiety for the preservation of our liberties."

The charge has often been made against the American people, that we are a nation of boasters. Without admitting that we are in this respect worse than other nations, I think it must be allowed that we are quite enough inclined to pride ourselves upon the greatness and virtue of our ancestors, our glorious constitution of government, the extent and magnificence of our country, and the splendid destiny that is said to be manifestly open for us in the future. We are quite enough inclined to regard the glory of our forefathers as a positive merit in ourselves ; and to talk and to act as though nothing remained for us to do, but to sit down and enjoy the rich inheritance which has descended to us from them. So intent are we upon the delightful recollections of our early history, that we are apt to forget that there may be dangers around us and before us. But our interest no less than our duty demands of us that we endeavor to see ourselves as we are, and to view our prospects for the future as those prospects really exist. Eternal vigilance was long ago said to be the price of liberty, and we must not expect to enjoy that great blessing without paying its price.

No man, whether he be an American or not, will deny that our revolutionary forefathers were great, wise and patriotic men. No man will deny to them

a high place in the temple of fame. Their example of disinterested patriotism, of self-devotion to the good of their fellow men is the common property of mankind. But in order to make example of any practical value, it must be followed. It will not suffice to talk about it, and to admire it, it must be acted on. And if we estimate that example as we pretend, and as we ought, there can be no question more interesting to us as American citizens than the inquiry, whether we are following in the ways of our fathers, or whether we have departed from them. I therefore propose at this time to institute such an inquiry, and for that purpose to make a brief and cursory examination of a few subjects connected with our present social and political condition.

You are familiar with the circumstances and events of our revolutionary war, and of the formation and organization of the government. I will not, therefore, occupy your time with these things, but will proceed to compare, in two or three particulars, the political condition of the country as it appears at the present time, with its condition in the days of the fathers of the Republic.

The most important consideration in the organizing and carrying on of a government, next after the establishment of the government itself, is that of the

selection of agents for its administration. This our ancestors well understood. They did not believe that government is a self-acting machine; and that if properly formed it must operate well, without regard to the character and ability of its officers. Although they believed that principles are to be regarded in preference to men, they rightly judged that ignorant or bad men can not very well possess sound political and moral principles. In their nominations to office, their rule was that the person nominated should be fit for the office, to whatever party or sect he might belong. A bright example of the application of this rule is found in the open advocacy by Mr. Hamilton of the claims of Mr. Jefferson to the office of President, at the time of his second election. Mr. Hamilton believed Mr. Jefferson to be a better man than his rival, and better qualified to discharge the duties of that high office, and therefore, although he belonged to a different party from Mr. Jefferson, he gave him his cordial support. But latterly, political men have adopted and acted upon a different rule. Since the great men of the revolution passed away, candidates have been nominated, not for the reason that they were the best men to fill high and responsible stations, but because, and only because, they would catch votes. In the language of politicians now-a-

days, candidates must be men of "availability." This availability is synonymous sometimes with military reputation, sometimes with wealth, and has even been made to have the same meaning as insignificance or obscurity. We all know that this doctrine of availability has been carried to a most pernicious and shameful extent by all political parties. It is applied indiscriminately to the lowest offices and to the highest. And it is very doubtful whether there has been a single successful nomination to the office of President of the United States, for the last quarter of a century, which was not made almost entirely upon the ground of the availability of the candidate. This rule has not been adopted for the want of great and good men, for even in these degenerate days, there is now and then found a man who would have adorned the purest age of the Republic, and who "had rather be right than be President." But every such man has been made to give place to some candidate with the necessary qualities of availability.

Another rule of modern politicians deserves consideration. I allude to the doctrine now held to by all political parties, that "to the victors belong the spoils." The question asked concerning an applicant for an office in the gift of the general government, in the early days of our Republic was, "Is he honest, is he capable, is he faithful to the Constitu-

tion?" This was the formula proposed by the third President, the immortal author of the Declaration of Independence. And the applicant was appointed or rejected, according as the answer to this question was in the affirmative or negative. What is now the question in relation to a candidate? It is, "does he belong to our party and is he faithful to its bidding?" And the candidate is appointed or rejected as he comes up to this standard or falls below it. This has been the uniform practice of every administration for the last twenty-five years. And so far has it been carried, that at a comparatively late period, it has been openly avowed by government. Considerably less than a quarter of a century ago a cabinet officer, high in the confidence of the President, and speaking by his authority, publicly, and in writing, informed a subordinate officer, that certain applicants for place had been recognized by the administration, as belonging to the party in power, and were *therefore* eligible to office*

Thus has the policy of the fathers in relation to the subject of elections and appointments to office been completely changed. This change has proceeded from false views concerning that subject. Offices are now looked upon almost solely as sources

*Letter of James Guthrie, Secretary of Treasury to G. C. Bronson, Collector of New York, dated Oct. 3d, 1853.

of honor or profit, or as rewards for military or other services; as positions in which the incumbents can benefit themselves, instead of serving their country. Hence the scramble for office which we constantly witness, and the arts to which men resort for success. The new tests of which I have spoken must necessarily shut out from office many, if not most, of the best men; for such men are never demagogues, never resort to dishonest tricks to ensure success, never disguise their honest opinions for fear of offending the people or the government, and are, therefore, seldom available for the purposes of politicians. But I will not argue the point. I will not insult your understanding, by attempting to prove to you that these modern tests are, and must be, deleterious to the purity of elections, demoralizing to the people and dangerous to the prosperity and even the permanency of our government. They are

"Monsters of so frightful mien,
As to be hated need but to be seen."

And I have referred to them only to show that in relation to a most important subject we have departed from the ways of our fathers.

In looking at the political condition of our country at the present time another subject which forces itself upon our attention, is the policy of the government and people respecting the extension of

territory. The policy of the fathers of the Republic in relation to this matter is well known. That policy was to stay at home and develop the resources of the country, and present to the world an example of a free and united, and therefore a happy, people. They believed that this could be as well done within the borders of the territory they then possessed as within the limits of the whole continent. They believed that the character of a government depends upon that of the people, not that the character of the people results from that of the government. They believed that the character of a nation depends upon the intelligence and virtue of the people, not upon the extent of its territory; and that it is unwise to attempt to extend the area of freedom without at the same time extending the *idea* of freedom.

It is true that within less than twenty years after the establishment of the government a portion of territory contiguous to our old possessions was annexed, but that territory commanded the mouth of our greatest river and was the gate of the great Mississippi valley; and it was necessary to obtain it for the purpose of occupying and enjoying in a peaceable and quiet manner what was already our own. The territory was secured for the very purpose of living in peace with our neighbors and

“the rest of mankind;” and moreover was obtained by peaceable means, not by war. It was purchased for a fair equivalent. And besides, so well was it understood at the time that the founders of the government did not contemplate the annexation of new territory, that Mr. Jefferson and other leading statesmen, many of whom took part in the formation of the constitution, believed an amendment of that instrument to be necessary to legalize the act. But the purchase was effected without such amendment on account of the urgency of the case. It was necessary that the ratifications of the treaty should be exchanged, if at all, before sufficient time would elapse to allow the constitution to be amended.

But the people of to-day it is supposed are wiser than their fathers. They suppose they understand the constitution better than those who framed it. Some believe in the inherent power of a form of government to regenerate mankind, while others think it expedient to extend our territory for the purpose of extending and strengthening a certain peculiar institution. Nor are we actuated by any motives of political necessity, but it is said to be our manifest destiny to annex all the territory that is near us and a great deal that is not. Our neighbors possessions are coveted and we must have

them. We will get their land, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must, but the land we *must* have. And our apostles of annexation have begun the work. With the sword in one hand and the American constitution in the other, like the Mohammedans of early times with the scimeter and the Koran, they are advancing.

It is sometimes said that the countries which have been, and are to be annexed to this union will be better governed by the Anglo Saxon race than by the people who have heretofore governed them. And this is made a pretext for annexation. The truth of this proposition may not readily be admitted, especially if the policy of an administration of rather recent date is hereafter to prevail in our new territories. But if it were true, it would not furnish the slightest reason for seizing or obtaining in an unconstitutional or unjust manner the possessions of others. It might be true that a piece of land belonging to a poor neighbor of mine and adjoining my farm—if I had one—would be better cultivated and made more productive than now were it in my possession, but I apprehend that it would not be a logical or legal inference from that fact that I might obtain that piece of property otherwise than according to the laws of the land and the rules of exact justice. We have all heard

the story and laughed over it, of a company of puritan adventurers who came to this country in search of a new home. They wished to possess in a lawful and just manner a tract of very desirable land in possession of the Indians. Accordingly they resolved, first, that the earth belonged to the Saints of the Lord, second that they were Saints of the Lord and therefore the land before them was theirs. And having with this reasoning quieted their consciences they seized the coveted land. It would seem that our manifest destiny gentlemen have been imitating the humility and borrowing the logic of that fabulous band of puritans.

The influence of this expansion of territory upon our national character, and its tendency to affect the stability of our national union, must be evident to all. Its effect to demoralize our Southern and Western countrymen may already be observed in the various expeditions which have been set on foot, on both the Atlantic and Pacific shores of our country, to rob our unoffending neighbors of their possessions. Those who hold to the idea of extending the area of freedom, and the propagandists of slavery, have labored together to extend the area of our country, and which of these parties has got the lion's share of the plunder is painfully apparent upon a survey of the condition of our

newly acquired territory. The mistake is sometimes made of supposing that these States are held together by our constitution. But that instrument is only the effect, the expression, of our union, not its cause. That cause is found in unity of interest and similarity of character; and just in proportion as these elements are wanting will the union be weak. Now the bringing together of so many different and even conflicting interests, so many kinds and degrees of civilization, must inevitably tend to destroy that unity of interest and of character necessary to unity of government.

I shall refer on this occasion to only one other subject, in relation to which, I think we have departed from the ways of our fathers. That subject is Slavery. I hope, standing in New England, on the soil of Rhode Island, I need make no apology for discussing the subject of African Slavery, even on the Fourth of July.

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, African Slavery was permitted by law, in every one of the thirteen colonies. When the constitution was adopted, only one of the States had abolished it. Yet, notwithstanding the general prevalence of the institution, so well was it understood to be a great political and moral evil, that the founders of the Republic, with one heart and one mind, set

about preparing for its gradual and speedy abolition. That the North were in favor of emancipation, is proved by their subsequent action. That the whole South desired and expected the same thing, is beyond question. It is proved by the speeches made and resolutions passed at their abolition meetings, which speeches and resolutions are still extant; and by the writings and acts of their leading men. They did not look upon the Declaration of Independence, penned by one of their own number, as a mere rhetorical flourish, but they believed that all men *are* created *equal*, and that among the inalienable rights of man, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And they justly viewed their own conduct in holding Slaves, as inconsistent with their late act of emancipating themselves from the slavery of the British Government. That Washington and Jefferson, and a large number of other distinguished men south of Mason and Dixon's line, were practical abolitionists is matter of history. The policy of the founders of the Republic was, to prevent slavery from spreading beyond the limits it then occupied, and at an early day to eradicate it entirely within those limits. As showing their determination to prevent the further extension of the peculiar institution, the celebrated ordinance of 1787, may be referred to. And to make this determination more ev-

ident, when, a few years afterward, the people of Indiana, which formed a part of the North West Territory, petitioned Congress to allow them to hold slaves for a limited time, they were met with a stern and decided refusal. And this refusal was made upon the recommendation of a Committee, with a Southern man, and a slaveholder, at its head.

That the general government was not to be a slaveholding government, is evident from the history of the formation of the Constitution, as well as from that instrument itself. When the Constitution was framed, there was not a single Slave except within the exclusive control of the States. Mr. Madison, who took, perhaps, the most active part in the formation of the Constitution, and himself a slaveholder, said "it is wrong to admit into the Constitution the idea of property in man." This was the prevailing sentiment, and the idea of such property was not admitted and cannot be found there. The word slave, or its equivalent, does not disfigure that instrument; and when the persons recognized and held as slaves by the States are referred to in it, the reference is made by words which, it is admitted on all hands, embrace free citizens also. So that, if there are any persons who believe our Constitution does admit the idea of property in man, and I believe some such beings have appeared within a few

years, such persons must adopt the absurdity that it admits the idea of property in persons confessedly free.

Such were the views and such the policy of the fathers of the Republic upon the subject of Slavery. Gradually, however, as those old men passed away, a generation rose up, who knew not or would not acknowledge the rights of humanity. The descendants of the men of the revolution, grew rich and luxurious, their hearts were hardened, and they would not let the African go free. They gradually began to recognize slavery, as a permanent institution within the States where it remained. By gentle steps also, the peculiar institution began its march into new territory. This awakened the free States of the North, to the danger of its agrandizement, and they attempted to stay its progress. After much altercation, no little threatening on the part of slavery, considerable periling and saving of the Union, a compromise, as it was called, was effected between freedom and slavery, between right and wrong. With this compromise slavery professed itself satisfied, and agreed to stand faithfully by it forever. Freedom, though not satisfied, was reconciled to the compromise, by several motives, the chief of which, was the fear of that bugbear disunion.

This compromise existed in its integrity for another generation, when a race of men appeared, who not on-

ly did not acknowledge the rights of humanity, but who would not recognize the obligation of their plighted faith, a race of men who openly insulted the memory of their fathers by repudiating their most solemn compacts. The demoralizing power of slavery had done its work upon them. Deaf to the calls of justice and humanity, blind to their own best interests, they had come to regard slavery as politically and morally right, and an institution to be fostered and extended. And they claimed for it more room. They claimed that our great West should be filled with it. Again the friends of liberty were aroused, and the battle between freedom and slavery was renewed. The soldiers of freedom

“ Fought like brave men, long and well,”

but they were borne down and conquered. And freedom now lies prostrate in the dust, while slavery is heard hoarsely shouting its triumph over the land of Washington. The battle is lost to freedom, and Nebraska is open to the unhallowed tread of the victor. Yes, in the year of grace 1854, the Congress of the United States, the representatives of a people who call themselves the freest on earth, who boast of their government as a model for the benighted nations of the old world, has deliberately and solemnly declared, that a country, within its exclusive control, larger than the

glorious old thirteen States, may forever hereafter be the home of a worse than Eastern despotism.

But it would not be fair to charge the blame of the prospective extension of slave territory wholly to the account of the South. It might have been prevented by the North, and therefore, we are in a great measure responsible for it. With two-thirds of the population of the Union, and a greater ratio of physical power, we have allowed the deed to be done, yea, have helped to do it. The same influences which have changed the views and policy of the South, with still other influences, have had their effect upon us also. Wealth, luxury, love of office, fear of separation from men whom we could not shake from us, and who could not maintain their cherished "institution" without us, want of unity among ourselves, loss of that sensitiveness to every appearance of oppression, which characterized our ancestors, have prepared us for inglorious submission to the demands of the slave power. For years past that power has selected the officers and dictated the measures of the general government. It is well known that no man suspected of a leaning towards the abolition of slavery, can hold office under the general government. Neither Washington, nor Jefferson, nor Madison, were he now alive, could be elected to the office of President, or be appointed

to any office in the gift of the national government, with his recorded opinions upon the subject of slavery.

Thus has the policy of the men of our revolutionary age in relation to slavery, been completely reversed. A perfect expression of that policy was given by Washington, when he said, "It is among my first wishes, to see some plan adopted, by which slavery may be abolished by law." The desire of the slave power now is, to see some plan adopted by which slavery may be extended and perpetuated by law. The continued successes of slavery, and particularly its late great victory, have encouraged it to hope that such a plan may be adopted. It is now preparing to seize, for its wicked purposes, more territory belonging to nations with whom we are at peace. And unless the friends of freedom awake to the danger that threatens them, and array themselves in one united and determined phalanx against the march of slavery, that power will get entire possession of our government, bind us hand and foot, and convert this Republic into a worse, a more degrading despotism than now curses the earth.

And now I ask, most emphatically, have we not departed, almost fatally departed, from the ways of our fathers in respect to the subject of freedom and humanity.

I have thus, fellow citizens, endeavored to pre-

sent to you some facts, tending to show that we have not preserved in their integrity, the principles and practice of the founders of our government. I have told you nothing new, I have attempted only to refresh your minds with what you were already acquainted.

It may be said, indeed, has been said, that our revolutionary ancestors were undoubtedly great and good men, they were admirably adapted to the state of things which surrounded them, and were raised up by Providence specially for the times in which they lived, but they would not be fit to govern America in this enlightened and advanced age. Were they alive now they would be behind the times. We are a progressive people, and the policy of those old men would not be adapted to the altered circumstances of the country and the world.

In relation to matters of detail, it may be true that our forefathers would not be up—perhaps I should rather say down—to our times. But in respect to the important subjects upon which I have spoken, it cannot be true that the policy of the fathers is inapplicable to us. If it is the case that our Constitution has become antiquated, why do we not amend it and adapt it to our circumstances, instead of hypocritically claiming that it is perfect, while we are almost daily violating its provisions.

Have the principles of the Declaration of Independence become obsolete? Is it not true now, that all men, in their relations to one another, are by nature equal, and that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are among the inalienable rights of every human being? Is just and honest dealing with all men and all nations to be ranked among the worn out and disused dogmas of a semi-barbarous age? It is *not* true that the principles of our fathers are not adapted to our times. Those principles are founded in the immutable and eternal laws of justice and right, and are as unchangeable as nature itself. It is still true that "righteousness exalteth a nation;" it is still true, that the nation which will not rule in righteousness shall perish from the earth.

And now, what is to be the result, if continued, of this departure from the path of good government and sound policy? Have not the same errors which we have committed ruined many nations as proud, and apparently as stable as ours? And why should we expect immunity for our misdoings? The chosen race of antiquity, the nation brought from the land of bondage with the mighty hand and stretched out arm of Omnipotence, was, for its persistence in evil ways, cast out and destroy-

ed, and its very name is now a by-word and a scorn among the nations.

But we are told, that, although as a people, we may not have pursued the paths of the fathers, and possibly may have committed acts which would endanger other nations, still, such is the nature of our government, and such the character of our people, that we have nothing to fear for the perpetuity of our national existence, or our freedom. And our Constitution is sometimes referred to, as the rock of refuge to which we can flee when storms and troubles come upon us. But our Constitution is nothing more than the development of our national life and character. In its administration it will be just what we are. Any Constitution of government that has not sufficient elasticity to adapt itself to the varying moods of the life and activity of a nation, is not fit to be the fundamental law of a free people. Ours is not the first nation which has relied upon a written constitution, rather than upon the virtue of the people, for the preservation of its liberties. For the last sixty-five years, France has had a new constitution almost every year, but what has its government been but a pendulum betwixt anarchy and despotism. On the other hand, England has never had a written constitution, and no government in Europe has been so stable, no people so free. If we are

fully set in our hearts to do evil, if we persist in travelling the path that leads to the destruction of nations, our Constitution will avail us nothing to retard our downward course.

The intelligence of our people, and our system of free and universal education are, by ~~some~~ looked upon as a panacea for all our political ills. There might be some foundation for this opinion, if it were true that men were virtuous in proportion as they are intellectually educated, which we know is not the case. It is claimed by the advocates of intellectual cultivation, that our people have been gradually improving in respect to that sort of training since the revolution. This is undoubtedly true. But how much consolation can we derive from the fact, when we reflect that during the time this improvement has been going on, our people have been losing the simple, unostentatious virtues which adorned our revered ancestors, and our government, the honesty and purity which characterized its early administration. Neither our steamboats, nor our railroads, nor our telegraphs, nor even our printing presses, nor any, nor every result of the mere sharpening of our intellects will save us so long as we neglect to educate and develop our moral sentiments, our love of honesty and virtue.

What then, in view of the threatening aspect of

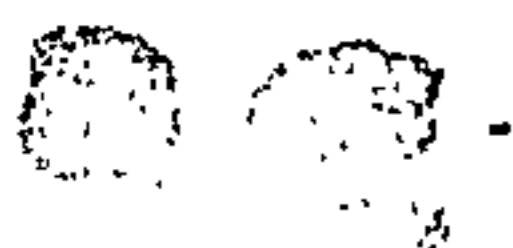
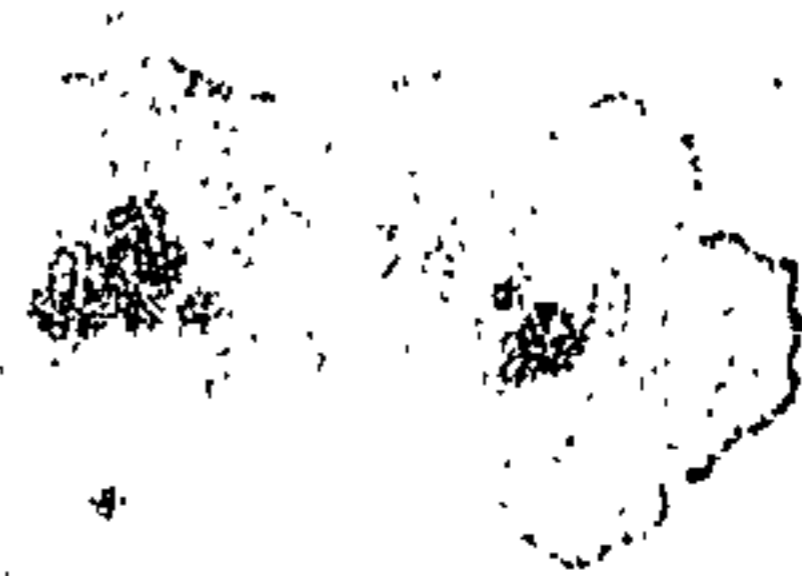
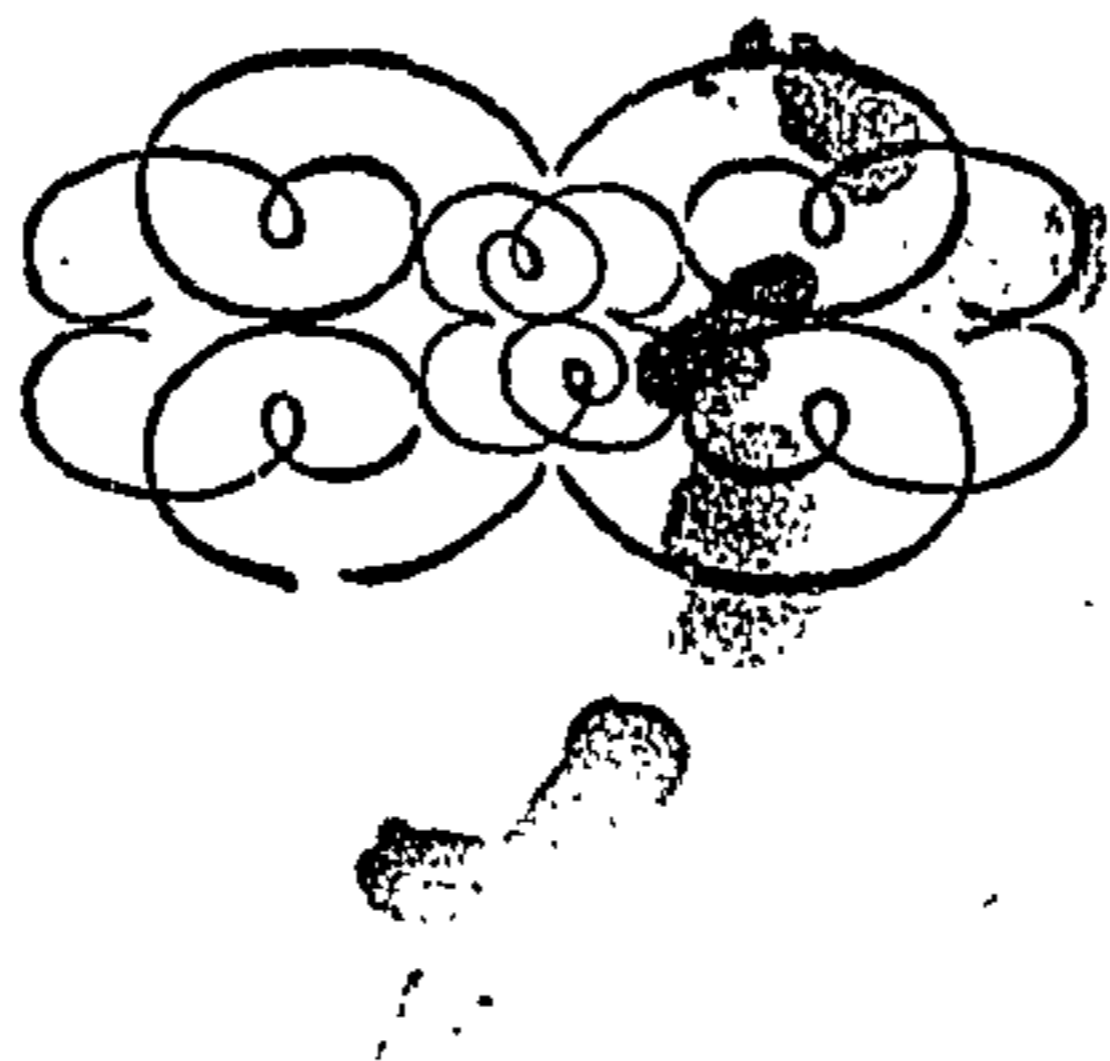
our national affairs, are we called upon to do. Our duty is plain. That duty is to put away party spirit, that bane of popular governments, and make a united effort to recover the ground we have lost, to regain the path first trod by the fathers of the Republic. Along that way stand the majestic forms of those old men pointing us on. In that path, after our errors and our wanderings, we shall find safety and peace.

Not only have we a duty to perform to ourselves, but the oppressed nations of the old world have a claim upon us. We have something, indeed we have much, to do for them. But we are not required to depart from our true policy, the policy of peace, and to furnish them with "material aid." Our duty to them forbids us to make war on their account, or on any account, when we are not compelled to do so in self-defence. Our duty to those nations requires us to set and continue an example of a government which shall protect the rights of all its subjects, whoever and wherever they may be, and which shall be scrupulously just and honorable to every man and every nation. Such an example would do more for the oppressed of other lands than all the armies of the world.

Fellow citizens, seventy-eight years ago to-day was set afloat upon the sea of freedom, the noblest

bark ever launched upon those tempestuous waters. On her deck stood a gallant crew, selected by the unerring wisdom of the Providence of God. At her helm was placed one whose firm purpose was shaken by no difficulties, whose serene spirit was disturbed by no dangers. Around that ship howled the storm of revolution, and in her path lay the quicksands of treason. But she kept steadily on her course, the admiration of the world and the hope of mankind. The storms cleared away and every danger was avoided. One by one, those pilots, worn out by service, left their posts and retired from duty. Their places were filled by men who knew not the hardships of the way, nor had the courage to meet its perils. Again the winds blew high, and that noble vessel was driven from her course, and surrounded thick with difficulties and with dangers. And there she now lies almost at the mercy of the elements. On board that ship we are embarked and our fate is bound up in her fate. Let us then resolve to extricate her from her perilous position. The chart of her first navigators is in our hands, and the sun of hope yet shines. Let us forget all the trivial differences of the past, and with one mind determine that no one shall hold the helm but the most skillful, the most worthy. Let us get our ship upon the course marked out for her by

those who committed her to the waters. Then shall we ride proudly over the waves of empire, and the banner of our country, triumphantly floating in the sight of all the nations, shall be to them the sign of consolation and of hope. Then will our true destiny be manifested, when we shall be conducting all the people of the earth to freedom and to happiness.



ORDER OF EXERCISES

AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH, APPONAUG,

JULY 4, 1854.

VOLUNTARY ON THE ORGAN.

SONG—BY THE CHOIR—“*My Native Land.*”

PRAYER—BY THE REV. BENJ. PHELON.

Reading of the Declaration of Independence,

BY DOCT. KING.

HYMN—BY THE CHOIR—“*America.*”

ORATION,

BY THOMAS K. KING, ESQ.

NATIONAL HYMN—BY THE CHOIR.

BENEDICTION—BY REV. BENJ. PHELON.