

COL. PICKERING'S

WITH ACCOUNT TO READING THE

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

JULY 4, 1823.

...CC...

...SALEM...

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1823.

SALEM, July 5, 1823.

SIR,

At the unanimous request of the Committee of Arrangements, I have peculiar pleasure in informing you of their high sense of obligation to you for the great degree of interest which you imparted to the Celebration of our Anniversary, and respectfully request a copy of the history and reflections which accompanied your reading the Declaration of Independence, for the press.

*With considerations of great respect,*

*I am, Sir,*

*Your obedient servant,*

N. W. NEAL, Chairman.

HON. TIMOTHY PICKERING.

SALEM, JULY 7, 1823.

SIR,

Agreeably to the request of the Committee of Arrangements, communicated by your letter of the 5th, I have the pleasure to inclose a copy of the history and reflections with which you were favoured by your reading of the Declaration of Independence on the preceding day; having, I trust, as they appear to have met with the unanimous approbation of the Committee, and to have gratified a very numerous audience, they may be alike acceptable and useful to all who shall receive them from the press.

*With great regard,*

*I am, Sir,*

*Your obedient servant,*

T. PICKERING.

Mr. N. W. NEAL, Chairman of the }  
Committee of Arrangements. }

## Col. Mott's Observations.

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IT has been so common a practice among nations, to indulge in anniversary festivities, to celebrate great national events, that it must be viewed as a natural impulse of the human heart. By divine authority, the feast of the Passover was instituted, to be observed annually by the Israelites, in commemoration of the protection of their first-born, in the dreadful night when all the first-born of their Egyptian oppressors were slain, and when their deliverance from Egyptian bondage commenced. This was a religious festival, at which the recollection of the Divine interposition would call forth the feelings and the expression of gratitude and praise to their GREAT DELIVERER. There is, in like manner, an evident propriety in uniting the solemnities of religion with the festivities of the present anniversary. Reflecting minds have acknowledged, in many occurrences in our revolutionary struggle, and in its happy result, the favour of that DIVINE PROVIDENCE, on whose protection the special actors in the Declaration of Independence, expressly placed their firm reliance.

Having been unexpectedly requested to read to my fellow-citizens who should assemble here this day, that Great Act of the People of The Thirteen United Colonies, by which their Representatives in Congress declared them to be Free and Independent States; I assented to the request, on the ground of its presenting a convenient opportunity to give a concise history of that transaction, with a few remarks on the character of the Declaration itself, and on the spirit and temper which should ever accompany its public repetition.

Our ancestors who migrated from England, and here commenced their settlements on "bare creation," left not their best inheritance behind: they brought with them the Rights of Englishmen, and the knowledge to understand them. In the maintenance and enjoyment of those rights, they flourished, increased and multiplied; until, as colonists, becoming a great people, they excited the jealousy and cupidity of the parent state, whose government observed their rapid growth, yet wished to keep them, for an indefinite period, and in a degraded condition, as dependences of her empire. For this purpose, it was attempted to subject them to laws, especially those imposing taxes, enacted by her authority, without the consent of the colonists, whom, by one sweeping declaration, that government claimed a right to bind, by laws of its enacting, in all cases whatsoever. In this enormous claim, it was impossible for freemen, enlightened as were the colonists, quietly to acquiesce. In various ways, the execution of the acts of parliament for raising a revenue in the colonies, was resisted. The people of thirteen colonies exhibited their claims, founded on their birth-rights, for exemption from such taxa-

tion, and the laws enacted to enforce it. They petitioned and remonstrated: they repeated these peaceable modes of obtaining redress, while any hope of redress remained. But all these modes of application, and the collateral means adopted to render them effectual, though wise and salutary in their influence on the minds of the colonists, made little or no impression on the government which oppressed them.

Driven at length to the necessity of taking up arms in defence of their violated rights—yet scantily furnished with the weapons and munitions of war—without revenues—and destitute of native citizens instructed in military science, or practised in the art of war,—the Leaders in the conflict immediately resorted to the means of obtaining essential supplies, wherever there was a prospect of procuring them. They also early perceived the prudence, if not the absolute necessity, of seeking foreign assistance in support of the great enterprise in which they were engaged. But such assistance was not to be expected so long as we remained in a colonial state. No foreign nation would, by furnishing important aids, hazard a war with Great Britain, but with the view, and in the well founded hope, of essentially diminishing her power, by separating from her so large a portion of her dominions as was comprized in the Thirteen United Colonies. While, therefore, a reconciliation and reunion with the parent state were practicable—as they would have been by a repeal of the obnoxious laws, and a renunciation of the claim on which they were enacted,—it was manifest that no foreign nation would openly and efficiently assist us in the war. Such, however, was the state of the public mind, in

some large portions of the Union, that the boldest leaders in the revolution found it necessary patiently to wait the progress of events, and for such a change in public sentiment as would render admissible the proposition for declaring the Thirteen United Colonies to be Free and Independent States. The time at length arrived when the measure appeared feasible. Accordingly, on the seventh of June, 1776, "Certain Resolutions respecting Independency were moved and seconded" in Congress, by what members the Journals do not mention. Dr. Ramsay, however, in his *History* of the American Revolution, tells us, that "the motion for declaring the colonies free and independent, was first made in Congress by Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia." The Doctor adds, that "He was warranted in making this motion, by the particular instructions of his immediate constituents, and also by the general voice of the people of all the States." The name of the delegate who seconded the motion is not given: but the magnitude of the colony, and other circumstances, render it probable that it was a citizen of Massachusetts, then the second of the colonies in population, as Virginia was the first. But, however this may be, it was an eminent citizen of the former, who, in the subsequent discussion, stood forward as the prominent champion for the great act of declaring the colonies independent. I refer to the still living and venerable John Adams. Without minds like his, discerning, bold and fearless, to take the lead, no revolution, however salutary, and however necessary to preserve or recover the liberties of a People, would ever be accomplished.

On the 10th of June, Congress, in a committee of

the whole, agreed to a resolution, that the United States were, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States ; but postponed the consideration thereof to the first day of July. In the meanwhile, that no time might be lost, they agreed to appoint a committee to prepare a declaration to the effect of that resolution. And on the next day they chose a committee of five. The members chosen were Mr. Jefferson, Mr. John Adams, Dr. Franklin, Mr. Sherman, and Mr. Robert R. Livingston. On the 28th of June, this committee brought in a draught of a declaration. On the first, second and third of July, the draught was examined, discussed and amended ; and on the fourth, being further considered, was agreed to ; and on the same day publicly proclaimed in Philadelphia, where Congress then held its sessions.

It is about a year since it occurred to me, that the accuracy of common report, and even a minute detail of facts, respecting the Declaration of Independence, so far as at this late period attainable, ought to be ascertained and given in the most authentic form. With this view, on the second of August, in the last year, I addressed a letter to President Adams, in which I remarked, that, "as no act of the Congress of the Thirteen United Colonies was so distinguished as that by which their independence of Great Britain was declared, the most particular history of that transaction would probably be sought for, not merely as an interesting curiosity, but to do substantial justice to the abilities and energy of the leaders in that great measure." And after reciting such information on the subject as had come to my knowledge, I added—"I have thought it desirable that

the facts in this case should be ascertained. You alone can give a full statement of them,—to be communicated to whom you think proper.”

On the 6th of August, Mr. Adams most obligingly favoured me with an answer, giving various interesting details. And after alluding to the policy of that period, which gave to ‘the Ancient Dominion’ (the name by which Virginia was often designated) the lead in great public acts, (to which policy I had ascribed the placing of Mr. Jefferson—much the youngest person—at the head of that distinguished committee) Mr. Adams says, “Mr. Jefferson came into Congress in June 1775, and brought with him a reputation for literature, science, and a happy talent at composition. Writings of his were handed about, remarkable for the peculiar felicity of expression. Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank, explicit and decisive, upon committees—not even Samuel Adams was more so—that he seized on my heart; and upon this occasion I gave him my vote, and did all in my power to procure the votes of others. I think he had one vote more than any other, and that placed him at the head of the committee. I had the next highest number, and that placed me the second. The committee met, discussed the subject, and then appointed Mr. Jefferson and me to make the draught.” Mr. Adams then mentions the meeting of the sub-committee, and their amicable contention, which of the two should draught the declaration—each urging the task on the other; Mr. Adams insisting on Mr. Jefferson’s doing it, and the latter yielding his assent.

The draught being made, the sub-committee met.

“and conned the paper over. I was delighted (continues Mr. Adams) with its high tone, and the flights of oratory with which it abounded, especially that concerning Negro Slavery, which though I knew his Southern brethren would never suffer to pass in Congress, I certainly never would oppose. There were other expressions which I would not have inserted if I had drawn it up; particularly that which called the King a Tyrant. I thought it too personal, for I never believed George to be a Tyrant in disposition and in nature; I always believed him to be deceived by his courtiers on both sides the Atlantic; and in his official capacity only cruel. I thought the expression too passionate, and too much like scolding, for so grave and solemn a document; but as Franklin and Sherman were to inspect it afterwards, I thought it would not become me to strike it out. I consented to report it, and do not now remember that I made or suggested a single alteration. We reported it to the committee of five. It was read, and I do not remember that Franklin or Sherman criticised any thing. We were all in haste; Congress was impatient; and the instrument was reported, as I believe, in Jefferson’s hand-writing, as he first drew it. Congress cut off about a quarter part of it, as I expected they would; but they obliterated some of the best of it, and left all that was exceptionable, if any thing in it was.” Then referring to a remark of mine on the declaration, “that it did not contain many new ideas,” Mr. Adams says—“As you justly observe, there is not an idea in it, but what had been hackneyed in Congress for two years before. The substance of it is contained in the declaration of rights, and the violation of those rights, in the

journals of Congress in 1774. Indeed the essence of it is contained in a pamphlet voted and printed by the town of Boston before the first Congress met, composed by James Otis, as I suppose, in one of his lucid intervals, and pruned and polished by Samuel Adams.”

Thus it appears that this celebrated paper was (as in its nature it must in substance have been) a compilation of facts and sentiments stated and expressed in some preceding years, by those who wrote and vindicated the rights of the colonies. A compilation, however, may have great merit by its lucid and forcible arrangement of the matter. But a great national act particularly demanded *precision*, which should exclude every minor idea and comparatively feeble expression. Whether this, among other considerations in Congress, caused a reduction of the reported draught to three fourths of its original size, cannot now be known. In my humble opinion, (having had an opportunity of examining and comparing) by the parts expunged, and by the few passages introduced and others altered in Congress, the instrument was manifestly improved. The declaration, in the form in which it was finally adopted and proclaimed, has ever been received, not only as a most important, but a dignified State Paper.

These details, my fellow-citizens, having occupied so much more time than I had contemplated, I have room to offer but very few additional remarks on the character of the Declaration of Independence, and on the use to be made of its public repetition.

The “high tone” of the Declaration, then so pleasing to Mr. Adams, was in unison with the warm feelings of the time, when ardent patriots were engaged in resist-

ing oppression. The inspiring language of LIBERTY is congenial to the heart of man. But on that great occasion, PUBLIC POLICY doubtless united with a strong sense of real injuries, in describing these in the most forcible and glowing style of excitement, to animate the citizens to a zealous and invincible perseverance in the cause. The effect was such as was desired and expected. The Declaration of Independence was received in all the States with demonstrations of joy ; and all good citizens considered themselves bound by the solemn pledge which their representatives in Congress had mutually given to maintain it.

Having succeeded in the great and arduous enterprise, every heart bounded with joy at the annunciation of peace, after suffering the privations and calamities of eight years of war. In the definitive treaty of peace with Great Britain, the contending parties acknowledge the hand of Divine Providence in disposing the hearts of both “to forget all past misunderstandings and differences that have unhappily interrupted the good correspondence and friendship which they mutually wish to restore ; and to establish such a beneficial and satisfactory intercourse between the two countries, upon the ground of reciprocal advantages and mutual convenience, as may promote and secure to both perpetual peace and harmony.” The solemn profession here recited, regards our best interests as well as our moral obligations ; and is in exact correspondence with the fine sentiment happily expressed by Mr. Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, concerning our then British Brethren—“to hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.” This

sentiment you will hear near the close of the Declaration, which, as an eminent historical document, I am now to read ; a sentiment which should never be forgotten ; and the duties it enjoins should especially be borne in mind on every celebration of this anniversary ; duties of which our national interests, our character as an enlightened people, and our moral and religious obligations, alike require the observance.