

*Have been thinking
you S. J. Abbott*

MR. ^{Daniel} WEBSTER'S ADDRESS

AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE

OF THE

ADDITION TO THE CAPITOL;

JULY 4, 1851.

Gray & Co., Printers.

MR. WEBSTER'S ADDRESS

C +

AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE

OF THE

ADDITION TO THE CAPITOL;

JULY 4TH, 1851.

0

"STET CAPITOLIUM
FULGENS;
LATE NOMEN IN ULTIMAS
EXTENDAT ORAS."

WASHINGTON:
GIDEON AND CO., PRINTERS.
1851.

5
US
964
WEB

A D D R E S S .

FELLOW-CITIZENS: I congratulate you, I give you joy, on the return of this Anniversary; and I felicitate you, also, on the more particular purpose of which this ever-memorable day has been chosen to witness the fulfilment. Hail! all hail! I see before and around me a mass of faces, glowing with cheerfulness and patriotic pride. I see thousands of eyes, turned towards other eyes, all sparkling with gratification and delight. This is the New World! This is America! This is Washington! and this the Capitol of the United States! And where else, among the Nations, can the seat of government be surrounded, on any day of any year, by those who have more reason to rejoice in the blessings which they possess? Nowhere, fellow-citizens; assuredly, nowhere. Let us, then, meet this rising sun with joy and thanksgiving!

This is that day of the year which announced to mankind the great fact of American Independence. This fresh and brilliant morning blesses our vision with another beholding of the Birthday of our Nation; and we see that nation, of recent origin, now among the most considerable and powerful, and spreading over the continent from sea to sea.

Among the first colonists from Europe to this part of America, there were some, doubtless, who contemplated the distant consequences of their undertaking, and who saw a great futurity; but, in general, their hopes were limited to the enjoyment of a safe asylum from tyranny, religious and civil, and to respectable subsistence, by industry and toil. A thick veil hid our times from their view. But the progress of America, however slow, could not but at length awaken genius, and attract the attention of mankind.

In the early part of the next century, Bishop Berkeley, who, it will be remembered, had resided for some time in Newport, in Rhode Island, wrote his well-known "Verses on the Prospect of

planting ARTS and LEARNING in AMERICA." The last stanza of this little Poem seems to have been produced by a high poetical inspiration :

" Westward the course of empire takes its way ;
The four first acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day :
Time's noblest offspring is the last."

This extraordinary prophecy may be considered only as the result of long foresight and uncommon sagacity ; of a foresight and sagacity stimulated, nevertheless, by excited feeling and high enthusiasm. So clear a vision of what America would become was not founded on square miles, or on existing numbers, or on any vulgar laws of statistics. It was an intuitive glance into futurity ; it was a grand conception, strong, ardent, glowing, embracing all time since the creation of the world, and all regions of which that world is composed ; and judging of the future by just analogy with the past. And the inimitable imagery and beauty with which the thought is expressed, joined to the conception itself, render it one of the most striking passages in our language.

On the day of the declaration of Independence our illustrious fathers performed the first scene in the last great act of this drama ; one, in real importance, infinitely exceeding that for which the great English poet invoked.

" A muse of fire,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene !"

The Muse inspiring our Fathers was the Genius of Liberty, all on fire with a sense of oppression, and a resolution to throw it off ; the whole world was the stage, and higher characters than princes trod it ; and, instead of monarchs, countries and nations and the age beheld the swelling scene. How well the characters were cast, and how well each acted his part, and what emotions the whole performance excited, let history, now and hereafter, tell.

At a subsequent period, but before the declaration of Independence, the Bishop of St. Asaph published a Discourse, in which the following remarkable passages are found :

" It is difficult for man to look into the destiny of future ages ; the designs of Providence are too vast and complicated, and our

‘own powers are too narrow to admit of much satisfaction to our
 ‘curiosity. But, when we see many great and powerful causes
 ‘constantly at work, we cannot doubt of their producing propor-
 ‘tionable effects.

“The colonies in North America have not only taken root and
 ‘acquired strength, *but seem hastening with an accelerated progress*
 ‘*to such a powerful State as may introduce a new and important*
 ‘*change in human affairs.*

“Descended from ancestors of the most improved and enlight-
 ‘ened part of the old world, they receive, as it were by inherit-
 ‘ance, all the improvements and discoveries of their mother
 ‘country. And it happens fortunately for them to commence
 ‘their flourishing State at a time when the human understanding
 ‘has attained to the free use of its powers, and has learned to act
 ‘with vigor and certainty. They may avail themselves not only
 ‘of the experience and industry, but even of the errors and mis-
 ‘takes of former days. Let it be considered for how many ages
 ‘a great part of the world appears not to have thought at all;
 ‘how many more they have been busied in forming systems and
 ‘conjectures, while reason has been lost in a labyrinth of words,
 ‘and they never seem to have suspected on what frivolous matters
 ‘their minds were employed.

“And let it be well understood what rapid improvements, what
 ‘important discoveries have been made, in a few years, by a few
 ‘countries, with our own at their head, which have at last dis-
 ‘covered the right method of using their faculties.

“May we not reasonably expect that a number of provinces,
 ‘possessed of these advantages, and quickened by mutual emula-
 ‘tion, with only the common progress of the human mind, should
 ‘very considerably enlarge the boundaries of science?

“The vast continent itself, over which they are gradually
 ‘spreading, may be considered as a treasure yet untouched of
 ‘natural productions that shall hereafter afford ample matter for
 ‘commerce and contemplation. And, if we reflect what a stock
 ‘of knowledge may be accumulated by the constant progress of
 ‘industry and observation, fed with fresh supplies from the stores
 ‘of nature, assisted sometimes by those happy strokes of chance
 ‘which mock all the powers of invention, and sometimes by those
 ‘superior characters which arise occasionally to instruct and en-

‘lighten the world, it is difficult even to imagine to what height of improvement their discoveries may extend.

‘*And perhaps they may make as considerable advances in the arts of civil government and the conduct of life.* We have reason to be proud, and even jealous, of our excellent constitution; but those equitable principles on which it was formed, an equal representation, (the best discovery of political wisdom,) and a just and commodious distribution of power, which with us were the price of civil wars, and the rewards of the virtues and sufferings of our ancestors, descend to them as a natural inheritance, without toil or pain.

‘*But must they rest here, as in the utmost effort of human genius? Can chance and time, the wisdom and the experience of public men, suggest no new remedy against the evils which vices and ambition are perpetually apt to cause? May they not hope, without presumption, to preserve a greater zeal for piety and public devotion than we have done? For sure it can hardly happen to them, as it has to us, that when religion is best understood and rendered most pure and reasonable, that then should be the precise time when many cease to believe and practice it, and all in general become most indifferent to it?*

‘*May they not possibly be more successful than their mother country has been in preserving that reverence and authority which is due to the laws? to those who make, and to those who execute them? May not a method be invented of procuring some tolerable share of the comforts of life to those inferior useful ranks of men to whose industry we are indebted for the whole? Time and discipline may discover some means to correct the extreme inequalities of condition between the rich and the poor, so dangerous to the innocence and happiness of both. They may fortunately be led by habit and choice to despise that luxury which is considered with us the true enjoyment of wealth. They may have little relish for that ceaseless hurry of amusements which is pursued in this country without pleasure, exercise, or employment. And perhaps, after trying some of our follies and caprices and rejecting the rest, they may be led by reason and experiment to that old simplicity which was first pointed out by Nature, and has produced those models which we still admire in arts, eloquence, and manners. *The diversity of new scenes and situations,**

*' which so many growing States must necessarily pass through, may
' introduce changes in the fluctuating opinions and manners of men
' which we can form no conception of ; and not only the gracious
' disposition of Providence, but the visible preparation of causes,
' seems to indicate strong tendencies towards a general improve-
' ment."*

Fellow-citizens, this "gracious disposition of Providence," and this "visible preparation of causes," at length brought on the hour for decisive action. On the 4th of July, 1776, the Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled declared that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, **FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES.**

This declaration, made by most patriotic and resolute men, trusting in the justice of their cause and the protection of Heaven, and yet made not without deep solicitude and anxiety, has now stood for seventy-five years, and still stands. It was sealed in blood. It has met dangers, and overcome them ; it has had enemies, and conquered them ; it has had detractors, and abashed them all ; it has had doubting friends, but it has cleared all doubts away ; and now, to-day, raising its august form higher than the clouds, twenty millions of people contemplate it with hallowed love, and the world beholds it, and the consequences which have followed from it, with profound admiration.

This anniversary animates, and gladdens, and unites all American hearts. On other days of the year we may be party men, indulging in controversies, more or less important to the public good ; we may have likes and dislikes, and we may maintain our political differences, often with warm, and sometimes with angry feelings. But to-day, we are Americans all ; and all nothing but Americans. As the great luminary over our heads, dissipating mists and fogs, now cheers the whole hemisphere, so do the associations connected with this day disperse all cloudy and sullen weather in the minds and hearts of true Americans. Every man's heart swells within him ; every man's port and bearing becomes somewhat more proud and lofty, as he remembers that seventy-five years have rolled away, and that the great inheritance of liberty is still his : his, undiminished and unimpaired ; his in all its original glory ; his to enjoy ; his to protect ; and his to transmit to future generations.

Fellow-citizens: This inheritance which we enjoy to-day is not only an inheritance of liberty, but of our own peculiar American liberty. Liberty has existed in other times, in other countries, and in other forms. There has been a Grecian liberty, bold and powerful, full of spirit, eloquence, and fire; a liberty which produced multitudes of great men, and has transmitted one immortal name, the name of Demosthenes, to posterity. But still it was a liberty of disconnected States, sometimes united, indeed, by temporary leagues and confederacies, but often involved in wars between themselves. The sword of Sparta turned its sharpest edge against Athens, enslaved her, and devastated Greece; and, in her turn, Sparta was compelled to bend before the power of Thebes. And let it ever be remembered, especially let the truth sink deep into all American minds, that it was the WANT OF UNION among her several States which finally gave the mastery of all Greece to Philip of Macedon.

And there has also been a Roman liberty, a proud, ambitious, domineering spirit, professing free and popular principles in Rome itself, but, even in the best days of the Republic, ready to carry slavery and chains into her provinces, and through every country over which her eagles could be borne. What was the liberty of Spain, or Gaul, or Germany, or Britain in the days of Rome? Did true constitutional liberty then exist? As the Roman Empire declined, her provinces, not instructed in the principles of free popular government, one after another declined also, and when Rome herself fell in the end, all fell together.

I have said, gentlemen, that our inheritance is an inheritance of American liberty. That liberty is characteristic, peculiar, and altogether our own. Nothing like it existed in former times, nor was known in the most enlightened States of antiquity; while with us its principles have become interwoven into the minds of individual men, connected with our daily opinions, and our daily habits, until it is, if I may so say, an element of social as well as of political life; and the consequence is, that to whatever region an American citizen carries himself, he takes with him, fully developed in his own understanding and experience, our American principles and opinions, and becomes ready at once, in co-operation with others, to apply them to the formation of new Governments. Of this a most wonderful instance may be seen in the history of the State of California.

On a former occasion I have ventured to remark that, "It is very difficult to establish a free conservative Government for the equal advancement of all the interests of society. What has Germany done; learned Germany, fuller of ancient lore than all the world beside? What has Italy done? What have they done who dwell on the spot where Cicero lived? They have not the power of self-government which a common town-meeting, with us, possesses?" "Yes, I say, that those persons who have gone from our town-meetings to dig gold in California, are more fit to make a Republican Government than any body of men in Germany or Italy; because they have learned this one great lesson, that there is no security without law, and that, under the circumstances in which they are placed, where there is no military authority to cut their throats, there is no sovereign will but the will of the majority; that, therefore, if they remain, they must submit to that will." And this I believe to be strictly true.

Now, fellow-citizens, if your patience will hold out, I will venture, before proceeding to the more appropriate and particular duties of the day, to state, in a few words, what I take these American political principles in substance to be. They consist, as I think, in the first place, in the establishment of popular Governments, on the basis of representation; for it is plain that a pure democracy, like that which existed in some of the States of Greece, in which every individual had a direct vote in the enactment of all laws, cannot possibly exist in a country of wide extent. This representation is to be made as equal as circumstances will allow. Now, this principle of popular representation, prevailing either in all the branches of Governments, or in some of them, has existed in these States almost from the days of the settlements at Jamestown and Plymouth; borrowed, no doubt, from the example of the popular branch of the British Legislature. The representation of the people in the British House of Commons was, indeed, originally very unequal, and is yet not equal. Indeed, it may be doubted whether the appearance of Knights and Burgesses assembling on the summons of the Crown, was not intended at first as an assistance and support to the Royal prerogative, in matters of revenue and taxation, rather than as a mode of ascertaining popular opinion. Nevertheless, representa-

tion had a popular origin, and savored more and more of the character of that origin, as it acquired, by slow degrees, greater and greater strength, in the actual government of the country. In fact, the constitution of the House of Commons was a form of representation, however unequal; numbers were counted, and majorities prevailed; and when our ancestors, acting upon this example, introduced more equality of representation, the idea assumed a more rational and distinct shape. At any rate, this manner of exercising popular power was familiar to our fathers when they settled on this continent. They adopted it, and generation has risen up after generation, all acknowledging it, and becoming acquainted with its practice and its forms.

And the next fundamental principle in our system is, that the will of the majority, fairly expressed through the means of representation, shall have the force of law; and it is quite evident that in a country without Thrones or Aristocracies or privileged castes or classes, there can be no other foundation for law to stand upon.

And, as the necessary result of this, the third element is, that the law is the supreme rule for the government of all. The great sentiment of Alcæus, so beautifully presented to us by Sir William Jones, is absolutely indispensable to the construction and maintenance of our political systems:

“ What constitutes a State?

Not high rais'd battlements or labored mound,
Thick wall or moated gate;
Not cities proud, with spires and turrets crown'd;
Not bays and broad arm'd ports,
Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride;
Not starr'd and spangled courts,
Where low-brow'd baseness wafts perfume to pride.
No—MEN, high-minded MEN,
With powers as far above dull brutes endued
In forests, brake or den,
As beasts excel cold rock and brambles rude:
Men who their duties know,
But know their rights, and knowing, dare maintain;
Prevent the long-aim'd blow,
And crush the tyrant while they rend the chain:
These constitute a State;
And SOVEREIGN LAW, that State's collected will,
O'er thrones and globes elate
Sits empress, crowning good, repressing ill.”

And, finally, another most important part of the great fabric of American liberty is, that there shall be written constitutions, founded on the immediate authority of the people themselves, and regulating and restraining all the powers conferred upon Government, whether legislative, executive, or judicial.

This, fellow-citizens, I suppose to be a just summary of our American principles, and I have on this occasion sought to express them in the plainest and in the fewest words. The summary may not be entirely exact, but I hope it may be sufficiently so to make manifest to the rising generation among ourselves, and to those elsewhere, who may choose to inquire into the nature of our political institutions, the general theory upon which they are founded. And I now proceed to add, that the strong and deep-settled conviction of all intelligent persons amongst us is, that in order to support a useful and wise Government upon these popular principles, the general education of the people, and the wide diffusion of pure morality and true religion, are indispensable. Individual virtue is a part of public virtue. It is difficult to conceive how there can remain morality in the Government when it shall cease to exist among the people; or how the aggregate of the political institutions, all the organs of which consist only of men, should be wise, and beneficent, and competent to inspire confidence, if the opposite qualities belong to the individuals who constitute those organs, and make up that aggregate.

And now, fellow-citizens, I take leave of this part of the duty which I proposed to perform, and once more felicitating you and myself that our eyes have seen the light of this blessed morning, and that our ears have heard the shouts with which joyous thousands welcome its return, and joining with you in the hope that every revolving year shall renew these rejoicings to the end of time, I proceed to address you, shortly, upon the particular occasion of our assembling here to-day.

Fellow-citizens, by the act of Congress of 30th September, 1850, provision was made for the Extension of the Capitol, according to such plan as might be approved by the President of the United States, and the necessary sums to be expended, under his direction, by such architect as he might appoint. This measure was imperatively demanded for the use of the Legislative and Judiciary departments, the public libraries, the occasional accommo-

dation of the Chief Executive Magistrate, and for other objects. No act of Congress incurring a large expenditure has received more general approbation from the people. The President has proceeded to execute the law. He has approved a plan; he has appointed an architect; and all things are now ready for the commencement of the work.

The Anniversary of National Independence appeared to afford an auspicious occasion for laying the foundation-stone of the additional building. That ceremony has now been performed, by the President himself, in the presence and view of this multitude. He has thought that the day and the occasion made a united and imperative call for some short address to the people here assembled; and it is at his request that I have appeared before you to perform that part of the duty which was deemed incumbent on us.

Beneath the stone is deposited, among other things, a list of which will be published, the following brief account of the proceedings of this day, in my handwriting:

“On the morning of the first day of the Seventy-sixth year of
 ‘the Independence of the United States of America, in the City of
 ‘Washington, being the 4th day of July, 1851, this stone, designed
 ‘as the corner-stone of the extension of the Capitol, according to
 ‘a plan approved by the President, in pursuance of an act of Con-
 ‘gress, was laid by

‘MILLARD FILLMORE,

‘PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

‘assisted by the Grand Master of the Masonic Lodges, in
 ‘the presence of many members of Congress, of officers of the
 ‘Executive and Judiciary Departments, National, State, and
 ‘District, of officers of the army and navy, the Corporate autho-
 ‘rities of this and neighboring cities, many associations, civil and
 ‘military and masonic, officers of the Smithsonian Institution and
 ‘National Institute, professors of colleges and teachers of schools
 ‘of the District, with their students and pupils, and a vast con-
 ‘course of people from places near and remote, including a few
 ‘surviving gentlemen who witnessed the laying of the corner-stone
 ‘of the Capitol by President Washington, on the eighteenth day
 ‘of September, seventeen hundred and ninety-three.

“If, therefore, it shall be hereafter the will of God that this
 ‘structure shall fall from its base, that its foundation be upturned,

‘and this deposit brought to the eyes of men, be it then known,
 ‘that, on this day, the Union of the United States of America
 ‘stands firm, that their Constitution still exists unimpaired, and
 ‘with all its original usefulness and glory; growing every day
 ‘stronger and stronger in the affections of the great body of the
 ‘American people, and attracting more and more the admiration
 ‘of the world. And all here assembled, whether belonging to
 ‘public life or to private life, with hearts devoutly thankful to
 ‘Almighty God for the preservation of the liberty and happiness
 ‘of the country, unite in sincere and fervent prayers that this
 ‘deposit, and the walls and arches, the domes and towers, the
 ‘columns and entablatures now to be erected over it may endure
 ‘forever!

“GOD SAVE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

“DANIEL WEBSTER,

“*Secretary of State of the United States.*”

Fellow-citizens: Fifty-eight years ago Washington stood on this spot to execute a duty like that which has now been performed. He then laid the corner-stone of the original Capitol. He was at the head of the Government, at that time weak in resources, burdened with debt, just struggling into political existence and respectability, and agitated by the heaving waves which were overturning European thrones. But even then, in many important respects, the Government was strong. It was strong in Washington’s own great character; it was strong in the wisdom and patriotism of other eminent public men, his political associates and fellow-laborers; and it was strong in the affections of the people.

Since that time astonishing changes have been wrought in the condition and prospects of the American People; and a degree of progress witnessed with which the world can furnish no parallel. As we review the course of that progress, wonder and amazement arrest our attention at every step. The present occasion, although allowing of no lengthened remarks, may yet perhaps admit of a short comparative statement between important subjects of national interest as they existed at that day and as they now exist. I have adopted for this purpose the tabular form of statement, as being the most brief and the most accurate.

COMPARATIVE TABLE.

	Year 1793.	Year 1851.
Number of States	15	31
Representatives and Senators in Congress	135	295
Population of the United States	3,929,828	23,267,498
Population of Boston	18,038	136,871
Population of Baltimore	13,503	169,054
Population of Philadelphia	42,520	409,045
Population of New York (city)	33,121	515,507
Population of Washington		40,075
Population of Richmond	4,000	27,582
Population of Charleston	16,359	42,983
Amount of receipts into the Treasury	\$5,720,624	\$43,774,848
Amount of expenditures of the U. States	\$7,529,575	\$39,355,268
Amount of imports	\$31,000,000	\$178,138,318
Amount of exports	\$26,109,000	\$151,898,720
Amount of tonnage (tons)	520,764	3,535,454
Area of the U. States in square miles	805,461	3,314,365
Rank and file of the army	5,120	10,000
Militia (enrolled)		2,006,456
Navy of the United States (vessels)	(none.)	76
Navy armament (ordnance)		2,012
Treaties and conventions with foreign Powers	9	90
Light-houses and light-boats	12	372
Expenditures for do.	\$12,061	\$529,265
Area of the Capitol	one-half acre	4½ acres.
No. of miles of railroad in operation		10,287
Cost of ditto		\$306,607,954
No. of miles in course of construction		10,092
Lines of telegraph, in miles		15,000
Number of post offices	209	21,551
Number of miles of post route	5,642	178,762
Amount of revenue from post offices	\$104,747	\$5,592,971
Amount of expenditures of Post Office Department	\$72,040	\$5,212,953
Number of miles mail transportation		46,541,428
Number colleges	19	121
Public libraries	35	694
Volumes in ditto	75,000	2,201,632
School libraries		10,000
Volumes in ditto		2,000,000
Emigrants from Europe to the U. S.	10,000	299,610
Coinage at the Mint	\$9,664	\$52,019,465