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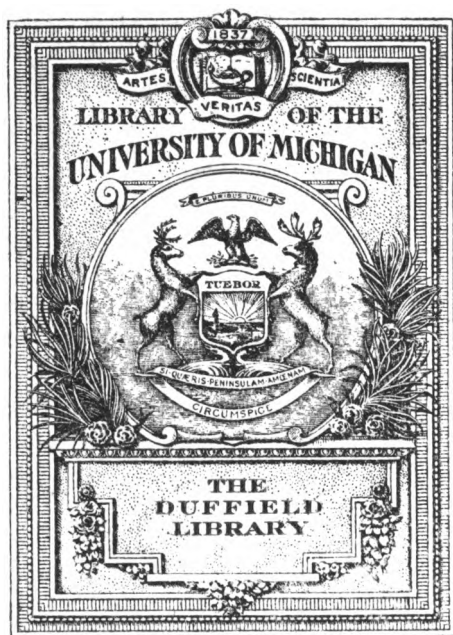
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Blunt - Anniversary

Discourse



**THE GIFT OF
THE TAPPAN PRESBY-
TERIAN ASSOCIATION**

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AN

ANNIVERSARY DISCOURSE,

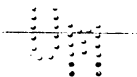
DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

ON

THURSDAY, DEC. 13, 1827.

BY JOSEPH BLUNT.



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1828.

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NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, }
Jan. 15, 1828. }

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY, *That the thanks of this Society be presented to JOSEPH BLUNT, Esq. for the Discourse lately delivered by him before the Society; that a copy be requested for publication, and that Dr. J. W. FRANCIS and CHARLES KING, Esq. be a committee to carry this resolution into effect.*

[Extract from the Minutes.]

FREDERIC DE PEYSTER, JUN.

Corresponding Secretary.

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ANNIVERSARY DISCOURSE.

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Historical Society,

WE live in an extraordinary age. It may emphatically be denominated an age of improvement. Mechanical inventions, scientific discoveries and advances in political knowledge, are daily bringing about great changes in the condition of society; and scarcely have we time to contemplate these changes, and to speculate concerning their probable effects, ere our anticipations are realized, and our attention is occupied by new improvements, whose results are beyond the grasp of the most vivid imagination.

The community in which we live, remarkably exemplifies these striking characteristics of the age. It comprehends within its bosom many, who have seen its day of small beginnings, and who within their own lives have witnessed the rapid growth of a few provincial dependencies into this powerful confederacy. These considerations cannot be overlooked by any

person familiar with American History; and yielding to their influence, I propose, in discharge of the duty assigned to me by the Historical Society, to review the history of the European settlements in America, and their influence upon the condition of the civilized world.

By contemplating the condition of Europe at the time of the first migration to this continent; by reviewing the motives which induced its early settlers to leave their native land for a savage wilderness; by setting forth the principles by which they were governed, and the course of conduct they pursued, we are enabled justly to estimate the extent of their sacrifices, the value of the inheritance which has been transmitted to us, and the nature of our duties towards those who are to follow us. In this manner we associate ourselves with those who precede us in the march of existence; we constitute ourselves a part of those who give character to a nation; we share in their adversity and in their prosperity; we partake of their labours; we rejoice in their success; we identify ourselves with the cause for which they suffered, and at once live with our ancestors and for our posterity.

Such a review has important uses. It compels us to reflect upon the nature of our institutions, the

manner in which they have been built up ; and by recurring to their foundations we add new strength to the principles by which they are sustained. We are animated to fresh exertion in our national career, by going back to the original fountains from which American freedom and prosperity have been derived.

History is experience teaching by example ; but it is not by ordinary examples that her wholesome lessons are taught. The mean and selfish motives, which so often enter into the inducements to glorious achievements, are forgotten in the lapse of ages. The petty intrigues and personal quarrels which so often influence the fate of empires, pass to oblivion with those by whom they were fomented ; and the character of the age, marked by its prominent moral and intellectual qualities, alone remains to animate or to warn succeeding generations.

The distinctive marks of the period, from which we date the commencement of American history, are easily ascertained. The obscurity which hangs over the origin of other nations, and which affords ample opportunity for the erection and demolition of plausible theories, does not darken the period in which the European settlements in America were established. Science and learning shed their full

light upon the communities, from which they migrated. Their motives and actions were exposed to the spirit of inquiry which distinguished the age. The peculiar characteristics of the early colonists are fully detailed and faithfully preserved by their contemporaries, and we are not left to conjecture for the materials of American history.

In examining the annals of the settlements, now composing the North American confederacy, our attention is not attracted, nor a feverish excitement produced, by a series of brilliant military achievements. No splendid conquests nor murderous battles, in which myriads of the human race were sacrificed, to extend a boundary line, or perpetuate a dynasty, enliven the matter-of-fact history of the American people. The tinsel decorations of martial renown are not the appropriate ornaments of our national annals. They have a more real and solid interest. They come down to us adorned with their triumphs; but they are not the triumphs of physical force. They are the triumphs of intellect, of liberty political and religious. They are the triumphs of an enlightened policy over the prejudices of a scholastic and bigotted age; of free institutions over the abuses of the feudal system; of the right of conscience over persecution; of freedom over despotism and slavery. These are victories over which the philanthropist

need not mourn They are debased by no alloy. They are achieved at a comparative small expense of blood and treasure; but they are more valuable to mankind, and more momentous in their consequences, than all the battles ever gained by all the heroic scourges of humanity, who have graced the annals of warlike achievement. They have a permanent interest, which is connected with the improvement of our nature and the happiness of man; with the ascendancy of all that is enlightened and free and ennobling, over what is ignorant and slavish and debasing. We, and all who come after us, participate in such triumphs, and are the rightful heirs to their glorious results. The annals of the American people are thronged with such victories. From their first inception to the present day, they form one great procession of triumphs. Their whole tendency has been to emancipate the human mind from the bonds of prejudice, to extend and perpetuate the sway of reason, to establish political, religious and commercial freedom, all essential parts of one great system, upon a firm and permanent basis.

At the period when America was discovered, the political condition of Europe was of the most arbitrary character, and the tendency of its civil institutions endangered even the few privileges, which

had been preserved from the grasp of civil and religious tyranny. The feudal system had received a fatal blow, but its relics incumbered the face of society and presented the most formidable obstacles to the progress of improvement. All the absurd doctrines, which had taken root during the dark ages, and had grown up under the protecting shade of monastic superstition, still flourished and were received as established truths. The divine right of a certain race to govern a kingdom, was maintained with as much zeal, as if it had been a dogma essential to salvation. The infallibility of the head of the Papal church, or the authority of an individual selected by a few cardinals, to bind the consciences of his fellows in all matters of faith, was still unquestioned. This extraordinary authority even extended to temporal affairs, and the monarchs of the leading powers were in the habit of availing themselves of it, as a great political engine. The principles of commerce were conformable to the general character of the age; and the efforts of those few rulers who made it an object of attention, were directed rather to secure a monopoly, than to extend the trade of their kingdoms, by developing their resources, and by encouraging domestic industry. It was a sort of predatory commerce, instead of a fair and legitimate exchange of the productions of human industry. In short, throughout

Christendom the religious feeling was intolerant, the political system despotic, and the commercial policy narrow and monopolizing.

The first tendency of this state of things was to reduce the newly discovered world to the most abject condition. According to the established code of public law, the American continent with its inhabitants, became the property of the monarchs whose subjects discovered it. Alexander VI, who then filled the Papal chair, arrogating to himself, as Christ's vicegerent, the right of disposing of all heathen countries, divided the new discoveries between the crowns of Spain and Portugal, and these powers immediately began to extend their sway over the western hemisphere. The adventurous soldiers and mariners of those nations, then in the zenith of their power, soon reduced the numerous but timid aborigines to subjection; and measures were at once adopted, to render the wealth and resources of the new possessions available to the European governments. These measures are too faithfully related, by some of the companions of those adventurers, whose hearts were not wholly closed to the appeals of suffering humanity. The predominant feeling of the Christian world is there fully developed in action; and Bigotry, stimulated by Avarice, is seen exciting the followers of Cortez and Pizarro, to in-

discriminate plunder and massacre of a race, whose peaceful and inoffensive habits offered the most powerful plea in their behalf, and whose undeserved fate has excited almost a general regret, that their country was ever exposed to the enterprise and cupidity of Europe. Even submission on the part of the natives, caused no alleviation of their sufferings. Doomed to labour in the mines for gold, to satisfy the insatiable avarice of their conquerors, they found reason to envy the fate of their more fortunate countrymen, who had fallen in battle. If these acts of humanity had been unauthorized, we might have ascribed them to individual depravity ; but unfortunately they are essential parts of the system adopted towards America, and the legitimate results of principles preached from the pulpit and practised by the sovereigns of the age. The discussions between Las Casas and Sepulveda, whether the natives of the new world became the subjects of the Spanish crown, or the private property of the conquerors, show the small estimation in which American rights were held by European casuists. At the present day public opinion could not tolerate the idea, that a people might be reduced to slavery, and their property seized by the conquerors, solely because they were of another religious faith ; but according to the reasoning of that age, the inhabitants of heathen countries were destitute of civil

and natural rights. Religious intolerance erected itself into an infallible tribunal, and adjudged their claims "to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," to be unsupported by gospel or reason. The same anti-social principle—a principle which sprung from the union of scholastic philosophy and Gothic ignorance—soon became ascendant in politics as well as religion, and the doctrine of perpetual and unalienable allegiance was now introduced, to secure the dependency of the European settlements in America, and to reduce their inhabitants to the political level of aborigines. The right of kings to rule was no longer earned by services in the cabinet or field, but was maintained as depending upon religious faith. The doctrine which now infests Europe under the appellation of legitimacy, and is vindicated under the pretence of upholding civil order, then existed as a divine right, which could not be questioned without offending the Deity; and the ominous ruin of church and state, in which religious intolerance and civil tyranny are leagued to sustain each other by alternate appeals to spiritual hopes and human fears, threatened to extend its sway over both worlds, and to deprive the objects of its vengeance of all earthly asylum.

If the claim of the Spanish crown to the whole western continent had been unquestioned, its condi-

tion at this time would probably have resembled that, from which her colonies have so recently emancipated themselves. It is impossible to estimate with accuracy the effect, which the establishment of that claim to this hemisphere, would have produced upon the happiness and freedom of mankind; but the injuries inflicted by the blighting policy of that court upon all territories subjected to its authority, entitle us to presume, that it would have caused results equally extensive and destructive to the best interests of humanity.

Fortunately, however, for the cause of truth; fortunately for mankind, the northern parts of America were claimed by other European powers, and as they did not offer the same temptations to Spanish cupidity, these claims in time acquired a valid character. Neither the climate nor soil allured the first American adventurers to these shores. Avarice could not be easily gratified by the productions of North America, nor could wealth be acquired without labour, by those who established themselves there as colonists. The consequence of this happy poverty was, that the colonists were not men of desperate fortunes and desperate characters, seeking by violence, wealth to squander in the accustomed haunts of vice at home. They were men migrating here to found a nation.

They were seeking here a permanent country, and to build up institutions for themselves and their children.

It is still more fortunate, that whilst these causes preserved the Northern continent from the grasp of Spain, and prevented any premature settlements there, the spirit of reform was actively at work in Europe, and the collision between those who sustained the ancient superstitions, and those who waged war upon them, was preparing fit materials for the population of the transatlantic republics. Persecution and violence on the part of the dominant party, was furnishing colonies for America from among the intrepid, the conscientious, and the pure minded. Those who valued truth, religious faith, and a peaceful conscience above all else, were thus driven into the ranks of the American settlers.

The reformation which commenced shortly after the discovery of this continent, had now fully awakened the public mind in Europe. The first reformers were private individuals unsupported by a party, and only sustained by their unextinguishable enthusiasm and confidence in a good cause. Their first partisans were drawn from the poor—the humble—the oppressed;—from among those, who not being interested in perpetuating old abuses

and deriving no authority from them, added no weight to the side they adopted, except the moral power of their disinterested testimony. They brought no armies, no overflowing coffers, no bands of feudal dependants, to the cause they espoused. Their whole strength was a moral force ; but that lever rested upon public opinion, and the ancient order of things was shaken and overthrown by its omnipotent action. Men began to examine for themselves in matters, before that time regarded as beyond the reach of investigation. A spirit of inquiry pervaded society, and the test of an awakened reason was applied to the claims of the existing religious establishments. The monarchs who then governed the great European kingdoms, were not slow in perceiving, that the surest foundations of their thrones were immediately connected with the superstitions of the church. They accordingly took measures to enforce its denunciations against such dangerous opinions, and Europe soon beheld her sovereigns combining to sustain a religious establishment, that in the plenitude of its power had compelled the proudest monarchs to descend from their thrones, and kneel as suppliants at the feet of imperial Rome.

Political considerations induced some to swerve from this course ; but from the commencement of

the reformation in 1520, until the settlement of Plymouth just a century afterwards by a few English non-conformists, the European governments manifested the most intolerant and persecuting spirit towards all their subjects, who assumed the liberty of thinking for themselves in matters of faith.

In Germany, where the Reformation broke out, a furious contest was carried on for more than a century between the Catholics and Protestants, and the surrounding powers were often involved in the war as allies or arbiters. The treaty of Westphalia in 1648, gave them both peace and religious toleration ; but before that pacification it seemed as if the fiends of darkness had been let loose to carry on the quarrels of the church. It is true, that in this portion of Europe the reforming party maintained itself, and brought the conflict to a successful result ; but this success was purchased by the most painful sacrifices. Their religious freedom was maintained by unremitting efforts both in the cabinet and in the field. It was guarded by a sword constantly unsheathed. So far from being able to offer an asylum to others, they were themselves reduced to the extremity of distress, and were often indebted for their preservation to combinations of circumstances almost miraculous. It was not in a country thus afflicted and overrun by contending armies,

which from the length of the contest degenerated into mercenary bands ready to enlist under the most celebrated leader—seeking wars as their proper employment and plunder for their reward; that Christians, who longed for peaceful toleration, could find the object of their desires.

The other kingdoms of Europe presented similar scenes of confusion and anarchy. The Netherlands were distracted by a rebellion, which was provoked by the impolitic and unrelenting severity of the Spanish court, and terminated in their separation from Spain. This rebellion or civil war grew out of religious intolerance, and continued nearly eighty years, wasting the strength and treasures of Spain in fruitless attempts to reduce the United Provinces to submission, and destroying their security and happiness during this protracted contest.

The contemporaneous history of France does not afford a more favourable account of the tranquillity of that powerful kingdom. The infamous massacre of St. Bartholemew, planned and executed by the court, indicates the spirit in which the religious contest was carried on; while the wars of the 3d and 4th Henrys against their own subjects; the numerous towns, computed at more than 400, de-

stroyed by the contending sects; and the distrust constantly evinced whenever the leaders met in times of hollow truce, all manifest the wide extent of the religious feud and the deeply-rooted rancour harboured towards the Protestants by the dominant party. Scotland and England were governed upon the same intolerant principles.

All Europe was vexed by religious warfare. The quarrels and persecutions of ambitious monarchs and intolerant priests, had wearied the patience of their long-suffering subjects, and they wishfully cast their longing eyes in search of an asylum in that newly-discovered continent beyond the western ocean. The accounts of a new world teeming with plenty and bringing forth spontaneous productions under ever-sunny skies, were now in all men's mouths, and were eagerly listened to by the persecuted—despairing Protestants. It seemed as if in the moment of deepest distress, that their desponding hearts were cheered by the suggestions of some angel-spirit, that beyond the waste of waters which had confined the human race to the old continent, to suffer all that humanity could endure, or tyrants inflict, there was another and a better world. The followers and companions of Du Plessis and Coligny in France; of Barneveldt and Grotius in Holland; of Hampden and Milton in England, all looked to America as an asylum.

It was from this class—this dissenting—persecuted minority, that the ancestors of the American people were drawn; and it was owing to the universality of this feeling among them, that the tide of emigration swelled so rapidly when it began to flow. Whilst the eastern colonies were settled by the English Puritans, the adjacent provinces offered a similar shelter to the Huguenots, and the Dutch and German Reformers. This description of population gave a sobriety of purpose and a religious character to the whole colonies, and prevented the southern settlements from degenerating into mere trading establishments.

It also enforced the necessity of a tolerating spirit. Our English ancestors were not only Protestants in religion, but they were Dissenters from the political faith of their countrymen. In their struggles against the religious supremacy of the crown, they often questioned its temporal authority. They felt a yearning for the dawn of that day of civil freedom, which their descendants now enjoy. They were in fact the vanguard of that stern—austere band of Presbyterians, who in the next generation established the commonwealth upon the ruins of the monarchy, and brought their misguided sovereign to the scaffold, for offences against the people of England. They had not, it is true, such well-grounded ideas of civil freedom, as are now

prevalent. They were not born under a written constitution ; nor had they grown up under a free and well-balanced government ; but they had been taught the value of freedom in the school of persecution. The cruel tyranny which had driven them from their own country ; the hardships and privations they had undergone in establishing themselves here, were all so many testimonials against an arbitrary government, and unanswerable proofs in favour of the rights of man.

In the lapse of a few years, the feelings which were naturally entertained against the particular sects, by whom the first settlers had been exiled, were modified. Succeeding generations became heirs only to the strong dislike against tyranny in general, and the want of rich religious endowments, by depriving theological teachers of all temporal motives to persecution, took away the chief cause of religious intolerance. Accordingly when the mother country undertook to streighten the bonds of government and to reduce the colonies to unconditional submission, we find them overlooking minor points of difference, in order to preserve their political freedom. The Catholics of Maryland, the Episcopalians of New-York and Virginia, the Huguenots of Carolina, and the descendants of the German and Dutch reformers, who were planted in

several parts of the Union, joined with the Puritans of New England in opposing the usurpations of Great Britain. They all felt that unless their resistance was successful, both civil and religious freedom would be at the discretion of the British ministry, and in the presence of the common foe they buried their theological differences. As they had purchased their religious freedom by relinquishing their homes and kindred, they now made a sacrifice of sectarian prejudices upon the shrine of civil liberty and national independence, and religious toleration was thus made the key-stone of the American Union. But though it is a fortunate circumstance that the dissenters of other nations made settlements in this country, there is no reason to regret that the chief provinces, which materially influenced the character of the whole, were settled by English non-conformists.

The country from which they came, though far from furnishing a perfect model for a free government, was infinitely superior in that particular to any then existing in Europe ; and from its arbitrary features and the despotic principles of its ruling monarch, this sect had uniformly dissented. It is not, however, by their partiality for free institutions alone, that the English Puritans were peculiarly fitted to become the founders of a great nation.

The qualities and principles which distinguished this extraordinary sect, are well worthy of a chief place among the circumstances, which formed the character and controlled the destiny of the American people. The Puritans not only rejected the creed of the Catholic church, but they had separated from the Protestant church, because in their judgment it was still tainted with Romish superstitions. They aimed at a more thorough reformation, and to bring their chosen flock back to the primitive simplicity of the apostolic age. Their system of faith was one of self-denial, humiliation and prayer. It rendered every passion subservient to a vehement desire of knowing and executing the will of Providence. All temporal motives, ambition, avarice, self-love, all were swallowed up in this one absorbing feeling. Earthly riches they regarded as dross. Their hearts were fixed on that spiritual wealth, which the meanest member of the congregation claimed as his inheritance. Human honours they despised as transitory and dependent upon the breath of man. They were heirs to immortal crowns, and celestial thrones and eternal honours awaited them, when they were released from the bonds of flesh. For this they relinquished all those objects, which the mass of mankind pursue with such ardour, and became the tenants of a prison, the victims of the Star-chamber, and the subjects of persecution and exile.

Dangers could not deter such men; for death they welcomed as a translation to the realms of bliss. Titles and honours could not seduce; for their imaginations were beyond the reach of temporal motives. In their paroxysms of religious enthusiasm, in their gloomy fits of humiliation and despair, they seemed subjects for pity and commiseration; but when these mental clouds had passed, they came to the business of life with an intensity of purpose and a thorough devotion of every physical and mental faculty, which triumphed over difficulty and trampled every obstacle under foot. This state of religious exaltation proved an admirable support in all parts of their trying career. It enabled them to continue their course with unflinching step, when men under the influence of ordinary motives would have turned back in despair. It sustained them in their cruel persecution at home; in the solemn moment of parting from their native land; in their long and dangerous voyage on the Atlantic; in their many trials in the American wilderness; and in the gloomy hour, when the storm of ministerial wrath which had been so long gathering, burst on their defenceless settlements. In all these trials they acted like men, whose destinies were under the special superintendence of an overruling Providence. The claims of their friends and kindred were in vain presented to their minds. Their hearts yearned towards those objects of affec-

tion and the pleasant places of their childhood; but religious duty forbade them to submit to the commands of an arbitrary government, and they turned their backs upon their native country, with a fixed determination never to return.

A stormy ocean in vain arrayed itself in unusual terrors. Their little bark was laden with a greater burden than Cæsar and his fortunes. It bore the founders of a mighty republic. In their own estimation it contained the chosen church, and they felt as if under the special protection of heaven. The ocean which presented such obstacles to their escape, would preserve them from the corruptions of the old world. It placed them beyond the influence of countries grown old in abuses. A bleak and barren shore awaited them upon their arrival; but there they were free from ecclesiastical persecution and political tyranny. They were freed from the mischievous example of institutions vicious in principle, and were at liberty to establish a social community, whose members were far advanced in civilization upon a broad and natural basis.

With these views upon their landing they entered into a social written compact, the *first* the world ever saw, by which it was agreed that the common will should be the law of the colony. They then

chose a governor from among themselves, and established their republican government far from the debasing influence of Europe, without the sanction of a charter or grant under any royal seal, in the midst of the untouched forest ; with the canopy of heaven for a covering, and the waves of the Atlantic rolling between them and the abodes of civilized man.

Under such circumstances was the first English colony planted, which possessed the power of sustaining itself; and to the hardships which its founders endured, and to the principles by which they were actuated, may be attributed the fearless and uncompromising spirit of the colonists. They were always prompt to oppose the pretensions of England, and when force was resorted to, they were found as ready to play their part in the field, as in the halls of debate.

Another circumstance growing out of the religious feelings, which entered so largely into the inducement to American colonization, had an important influence upon the institutions of the new colony.—Its founders were surrounded by their families, and among the moral causes which contributed to its stability and prosperity, we cannot assign too high a rank to the example of those devoted women,

who left the comforts to which they had been accustomed for the sake of their persecuted friends, and to sustain and cheer them amid their dangers and privations. It was no inconsiderable cause of the success of this settlement, that it was established upon the permanent foundation of domestic happiness; and that its founders felt as husbands and fathers solicitous for the moral and religious education of the rising generation. Their views extended to posterity. They were religious and educated themselves, and they intended that their descendants should be so too. Actuated by these motives, they made provision, shortly after their landing, for teaching the gospel and for the education of the children in the colony. The noble system of common schools, to which the eastern states are indebted for no small share of their reputation and happiness, and which is so fast spreading through the country, dispelling ignorance and preparing the rising generation for the proper administration of our excellent institutions, is a lasting monument of their wisdom, and will long remind their countrymen of the sagacity of the fathers of New England.

These remarks, illustrating the forecast of the eastern colonists, are equally applicable to the manner in which the founders of the British colonies in general, framed their political institutions. It is

true, that in some of the provinces, they were induced by different motives to migrate to this continent; but they all considered these wilds as their permanent homes.

The North American settlements were not like the colonies of Greece and Rome, mere extensions of the parent states to contiguous territories; nor migrations to countries inhabited by people as much advanced as themselves in civilization. They were the commencement of new communities in a new world. Neither did they resemble the European settlements in the East and West Indies. These were commercial establishments, and the adventurers always looked with impatience for a return to their own country, with fortunes accumulated abroad as the reward of their industry and privations. The colony was regarded as a place of banishment, and they sought rather to carry away wealth, than to confer any lasting benefit upon the place of their temporary abode. These views essentially modified their policy and conduct. So long as they were permitted to pursue without interruption their schemes of gain, they took no interest in the welfare of the colony. Its legislation might be impolitic, its privileges invaded, its vital interests neglected; but while they considered themselves merely as sojourners, they did not feel called upon

to make personal sacrifices, in order to vindicate its political rights.

Not so with the settlers of the North American colonies. They had turned their backs upon Europe for ever, from motives which were not liable to be changed by the lapse of time. Their migration was the permanent adoption of another country. It was colonizing upon an original footing. The colonists were intelligent, educated and civilized. They had been taught by bitter, by personal experience, that the political institutions they had fled from, were not fitted to promote the freedom or happiness of the mass of the community. They had no inducements to copy the frame of their government from those, which at home were overgrown with the abuses of antiquity. Privileged orders had no charms for them. They were all equal in rank, in sufferings and in sacrifices. They were not compelled, from their relations with those around them, to erect a feudal system or a magnificent hierarchy in the American wilderness. All this was indissolubly connected in their minds with imprisonment, persecution and exile.

But they were placed here in a productive country, where a virgin soil offered its treasures to their industry ; with all the arts of civilization to aid

them ; possessing all the experience, which the failures in government for four thousand years could teach, and free from the motives and interests, that have planted the principle of corruption and decay in the foundation of other governments. In the vigour of youth, and unshackled by prejudice, they commenced their course from the goal, which other nations had attained after centuries of exertion. Well were these things characterized, by a statesman*, whose eloquence is the ornament of his country, as the “ happy auspices of a happy futurity ! Who would wish that his country’s existence had otherwise begun ! Who would desire the power of going back to the ages of fable ! Who would wish for an origin obscured in the darkness of antiquity ! Who would wish for other emblazoning of his country’s heraldry, or other ornaments of her genealogy, than to be able to say that her first existence was with intelligence ; her first breath the inspirations of liberty ; her first principle the truth of divine religion ! ”

Under the operation of these causes, the colonies grew with unexampled rapidity. Before the close of a century a native population of European origin exceeding half a million, had established themselves

* Mr. Webster’s Oration at Plymouth, Dec. 22, 1820

on the eastern shores of North America. The colonies now began to attract the particular attention of the mother country, and its parental care was displayed in projecting measures to appropriate their resources to its own use, and so to modify their governments as to prevent any effectual opposition to this ungenerous design.

A course of reasoning similar to that, which had deprived the aborigines of all natural rights and appropriated their wealth to European use, now threatened to reduce the colonists to an inferior and dependent condition, and to monopolize their trade and resources. The lapse of a few years had made the inhabitants of the old world forget, that the colonists and themselves had a common origin; and they began to regard them as if they had lost their cast by taking up their abode in a continent, which in their minds was associated with all that is uncultivated, ignorant and barbarous. While these natural associations depressed the colonists in the public esteem, the European monarchs were urging their claims to political sovereignty upon the ground, that their subjects could not expatriate themselves. The duty which a citizen owes to the community in which he lives and by whose laws he is protected from unjust violence, was perverted into the doctrine of perpetual and unalienable alle-

giance, and this principle was made the cornerstone of the colonial system. In establishing this system the European governments had in view a two-fold object. The first was national and was intimately connected with the extension of their trade, and the other political. This latter aimed at the complete control of the colonies and to govern them by officers appointed in Europe. A rich harvest was thus furnished for the dependents upon the court, and the American colonies became the receptacle for the decayed servants of the crown.

The maxims of European policy towards America are few and comprehensive. They consisted in rendering the colony entirely subservient to the interests of the mother country ; in monopolizing its commerce and in retarding its progress towards improvement, in order the more effectually to prolong its dependence. All foreign trade was prohibited to encourage the navigation of the mother country ; and all intercourse with the colonial possessions of other nations was forbidden, lest these commercial regulations should be evaded. In order to protect home industry, laws were enacted discouraging manufactures in the colonies ; and the raw materials produced there were sent to the ports of the parent kingdom, to be thence distributed to other nations, or to be manufactured for the use of the colonists.

Scarcely had they shaken off the bonds of religious intolerance, ere the desire of gain, sought to bind down the American continent, their place of refuge, in the chains of commercial monopoly, and to render it a mere dependency upon Europe. The communities, which were established here, were not only deprived of all transatlantic trade; but of that intercourse with contiguous countries, which was so much more necessary to their comfort and prosperity. They were not only prevented from directing their industry to those employments, which would best repay their labour; and from trading with those countries, which furnished the cheapest supplies and afforded the best market: but by a rigorous application of the system to the whole continent, they were shut out of the pale of improvement; deprived of the stimulus, which a spirit of emulation among adjacent communities imparts in the pursuit of knowledge, and doomed to labour in an insulated colony for the prosperity of a transatlantic power, that rewarded their industry by monopolizing its profits, and repaid their faithful allegiance by obstructing them in their progress to civilization.

A system so inherently unjust necessarily provoked opposition on the part of the inhabitants of the British provinces in North America; and a series

of measures adopted by the mother country to carry it into effect, prepared the way for the success of another essential part of the American system.

The principles by which the colonists were actuated, were entirely at variance with colonial dependence. They were indeed compelled after many violent struggles to partially submit to the navigation acts ; but even this qualified dependence was the cause of continual disputes, and to all pretensions to political supremacy, they offered the most determined resistance.

It is worthy of remark, that in the British United American provinces, representative governments of a popular character were established previous to the British revolution. In the proprietary colonies of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Carolina, and New-Jersey, the political institutions were originally formed upon enlarged views of civil freedom. In Virginia a house of Burgesses was suddenly introduced by the colonists into their frame of government, without any authority from home, and very much against the wishes of the directors of the company. The original settlers of our own state were emigrants from Holland in the best period of her existence ; when that republic was invigorated with the spirit of new-born liberty. We accordingly

find them shortly after the transfer of the colony to the British crown, contending for the privilege of self-government, and compelling the Duke of York, who was the proprietor, to acquiesce in that characteristic right of an American community. The governments of the eastern provinces were essentially democratic, and it may be safely asserted that the public will was early manifested in the acts of all the colonial governments. In consequence of the popular form of their political institutions, their opposition to the pretensions of the mother country assumed an official shape. It was not the hasty ebullition of individual feeling, unauthorized and unsupported, but the result of deliberation, and evinced a widely-extended discontent. It could not be punished as the misconduct of a few riotous persons, but must be treated as the premeditated act of the whole community.

The many instances of insubordination and disobedience in America, which are so much complained of by the English historians, are so many testimonies in behalf of the fearless spirit of the colonists, and show the insecure tenure of royal authority over them. It was never their intention to be controlled by a government on the other side of the Atlantic. They maintained, in the technical language of the

time, " that the laws of England were bounded by the four seas, and did not reach America." The General Court of Massachusetts made this answer to a charge against that colony, of having disobeyed the navigation acts; and on another memorable occasion, upon information that a general government had been projected for all the colonies, the magistrates and clergy of that province unanimously resolved, " that if such governor were sent, the colony ought not to receive him, but to defend its lawful possessions."

The limits of this discourse will not permit an enumeration of the many acts of resistance offered by the inhabitants of the other provinces, to the colonial system of Great Britain, long before those difficulties, which immediately preceded the revolution; but I may be allowed to refer with pride and exultation to the testimony borne by Chalmers, the official historian of the British government, to their refractory spirit of independence. " The Americans," says this writer, " have had all along a reluctance to order and good government, since their first establishment in their country. They have been obstinate, undutiful and ungovernable from the very beginning; from their first infant settlements in that country. They began to manifest this spirit as early as the reign of Charles

“ the First, and disputed our right of fishing on
“ their coasts in the times of the commonwealth
“ and the protectorate.”

In these conflicting principles and views, may be distinctly traced the causes of the revolution. It was impossible, in the nature of things, that communities with such opposing interests and claims; governed upon such different maxims; and so severed by distance and sentiment, should long continue to acknowledge a common authority. The voice of nature had decreed the independence of the United States, long before the continental congress resolved to vindicate that independence by arms.

The expulsion of the French from Canada, soon brought the pretensions of England and her colonies into direct collision. Whilst France held that dangerous position in the interior, and stood ready to assist the colonies in case of difficulty, Great Britain was unwilling to add to the causes of discontent. But after the conquest of Canada, and its cession at the peace of 1763, that obstacle being removed, a more systematic policy was adopted to strengthen the bonds of colonial dependence. The complete subjection of the colonies was to be secured by means of an army stationed in America,

and maintained at their expense. The taxes to be raised, were not, however, to be at the control of the local assemblies, lest in time they might control the army; but were to be laid and collected by the authority of parliament. It was also contemplated to render the executive and judicial departments of the American governments wholly dependent upon the British ministry; to divide the colonies into provinces of more convenient size; and to remodel the colonial department. In order the more effectually to execute this arbitrary design, all settlements in the interior were prohibited, with the view of keeping the civilized population more within the reach of the trade and power of the mother country.

This indication of the arbitrary disposition of the British government, and its manifest determination to reduce the colonists to unconditional submission, united them as one nation in opposition to its authority. The spirit of the people was roused to open resistance. They appealed to the sword to sever the bond of union between England and her colonies, and a power independent of Europe arose on this side of the Atlantic.

The feelings and principles of the civilized inhabitants of America were now represented by an in-

dependent government, and embodied themselves in a course of national policy. This remarkable event, which when justly considered, will not yield in interest and importance to any that ever engaged the attention of historians, soon caused a material modification in the colonial system.

The statesmen of Europe were no longer at liberty to regulate the affairs of America solely with reference to European interests. American interests were urged upon their attention, and were ably sustained by an American government. It is true, that these claims were not readily allowed. Europeans could not at once bring themselves to regard an American state as entirely independent, and of equal rank with the ancient kingdoms of the old world. The court of France considered our independence to be but little more than a transfer of allegiance; and her incessant efforts to obtain an undue influence in our public councils, evince her desire to render us partially dependent upon herself. The other governments of Europe, with the exception of Sweden, were influenced by similar prejudices respecting the communities on this side of the Atlantic, and refused to acknowledge an independence, which was already achieved; until the course of events rendered the acknowledgment of little importance. Their pretensions and princi-

ples with regard to the inferiority of the western continent, had been engrafted by the practice of nearly three centuries upon the law of nations.

The rivers which constituted our boundaries, had been shut from immemorial time by the jealousy of the powers, to whom they belonged, before they became boundary lines. The fisheries on the Grand Bank had been always enjoyed by the subjects of some European government, and participation in them had been regulated by various treaty stipulations. All access to the islands in the American seas was debarred by a rigorous colonial system, and the vast territories which were still dependent upon Europe, and comprehended far the greatest portion of the continent, were subjected to the same strict monopoly.

Besides these obstacles, which were presented by European pretensions to the enjoyment of our independence, there were others growing out of popular prejudices; the condition of the country and the character of the system from which it had just been emancipated. Among these we need only enumerate the state of manufactures and the mechanic arts; the estimation in which domestic productions were held, and the means of internal intercourse at the close of the revolutionary war, to show how dependent we were upon Europe; and by recurring

to the regulations of the British government representing colonial manufactures, and to her jealousy of all intercommunication between the different provinces, we discover the causes of that dependence, and the means of remedying the evil.

The sagacious men, who established the American confederacy and reconciled the discordant interests of its different members under one government, perceived that our independence even then was but partially achieved, and planned a system of policy, well designed to complete the emancipation of this country from all its colonial burdens. The religious liberty, for the sake of which their ancestors came to America, was secured under a free and tolerant government, and made the cementing principle of our union. Political independence had been obtained after a severe struggle, and our right of self-government formally admitted. Commercial freedom alone was wanting. Whilst our intercourse with the rest of America, depended upon the permission of the governments of Europe, and American commerce was shackled by colonial regulations, our independence was incomplete. Free trade, therefore, became necessary to the full enjoyment of our rights as a nation. This constituted an essential part of

the American system, and the efforts of the government were directed to its accomplishment.

Most of its foreign and domestic policy, has had in view the establishment of this principle. The Federal Constitution originated in the desire to free the trade of the United States from the embarrassments, to which it was still subjected by the colonial policy of Europe. The war with France and the late war with Great Britain, grew out of the conflicting principles of the commercial systems of America and Europe, and the influence of this great and important maxim of free trade as promulgated by the government of the United States, may be easily seen in every part of their history. It may well be called a great and important principle. It comprehends within its scope, not only the freedom of the trade of the United States; but the entire emancipation of the rest of the continent from the colonial system, and the establishment of a new commercial policy, founded upon principles of equality and exact reciprocity.

The system of reciprocity in trade, which was so early adopted by this country, was with the view of promoting its success. The government instantly perceived the importance of an unshackled com-

merce, and wisely determined not to sacrifice the essential interests of the country for any present advantage ; but rather to submit to temporary inconveniences, for the sake of permanent benefits. The reciprocal policy is one of self-denial, but it has great and lasting results in view. It aims at abolishing the monopolizing system ; at emancipating all colonies ; at compelling each community to bear its own fiscal burdens ; and at the abrogation of those rules of international law, which have grown out of the colonial system of Europe.

As one of the indispensable means of success, and to diminish the sacrifices which are the price of its ascendancy, it inculcates the necessity of internal improvement. Not merely the improvement of the channels of internal intercourse ; though these are of no small importance in enabling different portions of the Union to supply their relative wants : but the development of our resources, advancement in science and knowledge, the encouragement of manufactures at home, and the naturalization of all those arts and institutions, which distinguish a civilized, from a barbarous community.

The natural state of trade, which consists in a free exchange of commodities, unburdened by imposts and duties, was not applicable to the condi-

tion of a country just emerging from dependence. The inhabitants of the Americas, had not been permitted to apply themselves to such employments, as would best repaid their labour. By commercial regulations and restrictions, they had been confined to the duties which tended to increase the navigation, and give a stimulus to the home industry of the mother country. This artificial state of things interposed insurmountable obstacles, to the entrance of an American into the great mart of nations. She was obliged to contend for her claims to commercial equality, before she could attain after her right to political equality had been formally admitted; and in this latter contest she had only resort, to the comparatively inefficient mode of legislative enactment. After the adoption of the federal constitution had placed these weapons in the hands of the general government, they were actually employed by the revenue acts of the congress.

These laws were formed upon the principles of reciprocity, always keeping in view the necessities of the public treasury—the interests of domestic manufactures, and the ability of the country to supply itself with articles of primary necessity. These considerations were wisely pursued to justify the reciprocal system, which if it

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tion of a country just emerging from colonial dependence. The inhabitants of the American colonies, had not been permitted to apply their industry to such employments, as would best repay their labour. By commercial regulations and colonial restrictions, they had been confined to those, which tended to increase the navigation, and gave employment to the home industry of the mother country. This artificial state of things interposed great obstacles, to the entrance of an American state into the great mart of nations. She was obliged to contend for her claims to commercial equality, long after her right to political equality had been formally admitted ; and in this latter contest she could only resort, to the comparatively inefficient arms of legislative enactment. After the adoption of the federal constitution had placed these weapons in the hands of the general government, they were effectually employed by the revenue acts of the first congress.

These laws were formed upon the great principles of reciprocity, always keeping in view the necessities of the public treasury—the state of all domestic manufactures, and the ability of the nation to supply itself with articles of prime necessity. These considerations were wisely permitted to modify the reciprocal system, which if carried out in

its full extent, would have burdened the staple commodities of each and every country with similar duties, to those imposed by the revenue laws of those nations upon the staple productions of the United States. It was, however, adopted so far as the circumstances of the country permitted, and was particularly applied to the navigating interests, upon which the old colonial system had most severely borne.

Such was the policy, which the circumstances of the country forced upon the government of the United States. It was hostile to the system of Europe, and of course it has encountered a constant opposition from that quarter. The European governments have opposed it by intrigue, sometimes by force. Foreign interests always, and sometimes the prejudices of our own countrymen, have interposed obstacles to its success.

It is not the least, among the evils of a state of dependence, that it renders its subjects unfit for the full enjoyment of the advantages proceeding from a change in their condition. Their habitual mode of thinking, influences them after they have shaken off their bonds. Their movements still indicate, that they were brought up in shackles, and that the iron chains of dependence have sunk deep into their souls. To this state of feeling may be as-

cribed the difficulty, which exists in eradicating the prejudices, that keep all colonists in a condition of habitual dependence, after their political connexion with the mother country has been dissolved.

The statesmen of Europe were not ignorant of this prejudice, and they endeavoured to avail themselves of it, in establishing their commercial relations with the new republics. Shortly after the close of the revolutionary war, the celebrated Brissot wrote a work to persuade the world, that it would be unwise in us to manufacture or produce any thing, that was produced or manufactured in France. The famous work of Lord Sheffield, which produced such a decisive effect upon public opinion in England, and prevented the passage of a law brought forward by Mr. Pitt in 1783, to place our intercourse upon an equal and liberal footing, teaches the same doctrine with regard to British manufactures. It inculcates the principle, that the United States are essentially dependent upon Europe, and that by judicious commercial regulations, the same monopoly of their carrying trade, and the same advantages in their commerce, may be obtained, as existed before their separation from Great Britain.

This work was unfortunately made the text-book of the British government, in all its commercial arrangements with this country, and has proved an

abundant source of difficulties. It aims to secure to England a monopoly of American commerce, and especially of the carrying trade between the two countries. Having relinquished the power of directly effecting that object, it now seeks the same result by imposing burdens on the shipping of the United States, and by availing itself of the habits and prejudices engendered in a state of colonial dependence.

These efforts to stay the progress of a great people have been unavailing. The policy of the federal government has been directed to correct the evils entailed upon us by the colonial system, and to cure the prejudices which were its legitimate results. It has proved eminently successful.

The first half century has scarcely closed since our birth as an independent power, and what momentous changes have taken place! Our own wealthy metropolis even now presents striking marks of the helpless and dependent state of its early inhabitants. Dwelling houses still exist here, which were built of bricks, that the colonists were obliged to import from Holland. Little more than a century has passed since the date of their erection, and what a contrast! On the uncultivated island of the Manhadoes stands a city—the commercial empo-

rium of a new world, greater in importance than any in the native country of its founders. The silent forest has disappeared, and in its stead are crowded streets alive with the bustle of civilized men. A capacious harbour, which then only gave shelter to the canoes of the aborigines, is now filled with shipping, that crowd from every port to pour their tribute into the great mart of American commerce ; and a new application of power by American genius has peopled the then lonely, but always magnificent Hudson, with a novel species of navigation, which move over the waters self-impelled and self-directed.

The parent colony of New England, that in its infancy was saved from famine by the unexpected arrival of a provision ship, has now expanded into six powerful states, rich in a native population, and abounding in wealth, industry, science and all the arts of civilization. Other communities, too, on the banks of the Mississippi and on the shores of Erie and of Huron, claim her as their origin, and surpass in power and numbers, the most sanguine expectations as to the future growth of that infant colony. The states, that were formed from the old North-West Territory—a territory that within the memory of the present generation was the abode of Indian tribes,—now own a population nearly equal to that

of the whole provinces, when some members of this society were in their infancy; and all these great and growing republics, refer back to the landing at Plymouth as the era of their birth, and hail that settlement as their common mother.

Instead of several distinct communities, thinly scattered through thirteen provinces along the sea-coast, we find a dense and united population pouring into the interior, accompanied by the arts of civilization, and the refinements of social and cultivated communities. Educated and intelligent man is taking the place of the savage, and is fast advancing to the borders of the Pacific ocean, making the wilderness to smile like a garden, and "sowing towns and villages as it were broadcast through the country."

The shipping which at the formation of the federal government, was inadequate to the transportation of our own exports, now whitens every sea with its canvass, and bears the varied productions of our soil to every quarter of the globe, that is open to American enterprize. The striped bunting, which has within so few years appeared among the symbols of national authority, now floats in every port, and at the same moment excites the jealousy of a power self-styled, the mistress of the sea, and com-

pels the corsairs of the Mediterranean to pay homage to the laws of civilized nations.

The extensive American territories, all access to which at the era of our revolution, was debarred by European jealousy, as if they had belonged to another planet, have profited by the glorious example of this country, and shaken off their colonial fetters. Their emulation has been excited by our success ; their patriotism, has been stimulated by our prosperity ; their desire of self-government has been warmed by contemplating the operation of our free institutions.

The crepuscular light, which first appeared in the north, and now illuminates the whole hemisphere, was the dawning of their own freedom. They have awakened from the slumber of slavery, assumed their rank in the family of nations, and the American continent from the St. Lawrence to its southern extremity, is declared free as the bounty of Providence created it, to the commerce and enterprize of the human race. Communities, each occupying territories greater in extent than the whole United States, have successively dissolved their colonial connexion with Europe, and at the moment of declaring their own freedom have augmented the independence of those who preceded them, and

pledged their national existence against the re-establishment of the colonial system. The political institutions of nations, whose fathers never heard of the name of civil freedom, are modelled after the popular constitutions of the United States. A community of independent powers, all possessing representative governments, now occupy the western world, and interpose an insuperable obstacle to the pretensions of Europe. The lofty plains of Mexico and Peru; the fertile banks of the Orinoco and La Plata; even the awful summits of the Andes resound with the exhilarating watch-words of liberty and independence!

The great principle of non-conformity—of dissent from the religious system; abjuration of the political institutions; and resistance to the commercial policy of Europe, is at last ascendant.

Advance, then, ye rising generations! To you is entrusted the completion of this great experiment. On you, your country relies for the fulfilment of her hopes. To you, she looks for the realization of that glorious promise, which is held out to mankind by her past history, and her present institutions. To you she confides the sacred deposit of the freedom of the world. By the toils and sufferings of your fathers—by the martyrs of the revolu-



tion—by the blood poured out like water, by the patriots of humanity in every clime and every age, in the same godlike cause—she implores you to be faithful to her trust. She adjures you to persevere in the course, which your history has marked out—to consider nothing as finished, while any thing remains undone, until the American system is triumphant, and you are as completely separated from Europe by character and policy, as by the eternal barrier which heaven has placed between us.

