

**THE CENTENNIAL OF A
REVOLUTION: AN
ADDRESS BY A
REVOLUTIONIST**

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The Centennial of a Revolution: An Address by a Revolutionist by John Codman Hurd

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JOHN CODMAN HURD

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THE CENTENNIAL
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AN ADDRESS BY A REVOLUTIONIST.

FELLOW SUBJECTS:—

WE celebrated the 17th of September, 1887, as the centennial anniversary of an event which we chose to call the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States.

The annual return, in the calendar of months, of a day remarked only as coincident with the date of a past event, however great its importance, should not be enough to give it the observance of an anniversary. All true anniversaries look backward upon something which, having once been, has ever since continued to be: not on anything which once was, but is now no longer. For the record of deeds done and things which have been, the inscription of their days and years in the stony mausoleums of history is sufficient. The anniversary, to be one—to be a “return of the day”—should mark another year of duration. The 22d of Febru-

ary, recurring, may mark for us another year of continuation for that political achievement for which Washington stands as representative of his generation's claim on memory. If that achievement has become a dead thing, the recollection of his birthday is only a ghost haunting a sepulchre, and we must choose the natal day of some hero of our more modern history for stimulating the patriotic instincts. Anniversary—annual or centennial—asserts continuance. No index by the finger of time which reminds of what only was and has ceased to be deserves the name. The Christian era and the days commemorated year after year in its rites and churches are what they are only as the life of the Founder and the passages of His earthly existence, are reflected in the lives and discipline of a continuing body of believers.

Had we thought to observe the year 1887 as the centenary of a continuing existence—a continuing event, a continuing action, a continuing something? What and where then is that which as the thing or action, called the Adoption of the Constitution, was once and has since continued to be? Is it the adoption itself? Is that the continuing event? Or was

that one of those deeds which, when done, are done once, have their effect and cease being done ; having no years of duration to be numbered? You may say—Well, what if that adoption was the bare deed of a day, a month, or a year, which being once done had no continuance, was not the result the real event in the *adoption*, and was not this result an existence which then began and which could continue—the continuing Government of the United States, then ordained and established by the constitution then adopted ; a government framed according to that *adoption*? Do we not see it to-day, with our eyes, as our grandfathers and great-grandfathers saw it then? What better continuing thing can there be : adoption or no adoption?

So then, we see now, do we, what our predecessors saw beginning one hundred years ago, when the constitution was adopted in a convention at Philadelphia? Very well. Suppose we should talk together a little, more or less, about this hundred-year-old existence.

By celebrating anniversaries, each successive generation thinks to identify itself with those who in other days and as its predecessors,

established the actual conditions of its own physical, social, and political existence. Yet to each mature individual of the human race his conception of a century of years brings with it the consciousness of the limited span of his own share in that existence. A generation's continuance is brief under the gauging of a century. We accept it as inevitable that none who to-day act and think in the consciousness of social relations will be so acting and thinking at the close of the century lying before us. Four generations may be computed to have shared the duration of the century just passed, and we recognize that none of us who have trod the stage of life among the last, could also have participated in the activity of the first of these generations. And yet you of this generation, celebrating this centennial year, believe that you see the same Government of the United States which the third, the second, and the first of those preceding generations saw.

We assume that we are living in the one hundredth year since a government for a country called "The United States" came into existence ; a government acting by executing,

by legislating, by judging, by president, by congress, by judiciary. But what has been or whatever could be this government, that our fathers in their generations or we in ours should cherish its anniversaries? What is any government? Not what is government in general, or governing in the abstract, as a variety of human action; but what is a government, that it can be said to have begun, to continue, to exist; to be called *the*, or *this* or *that* government; *your*, *our*, *anybody's* government; to be seen or felt, talk and be talked to, as being here or there, in this or any other part of the earth? Is a government, to your minds, some group of individuals, titled and salaried, as executive, legislative, judicial functionaries, fulfilling, officially, duties prescribed, while using powers *delegated* to them as agents, under some *law* resting on the continuing existence, power and will of some one else, some person or persons to whom such officials are individually and collectively subordinate, or as an administration; while these other person or persons hold all powers of political jurisdiction in absolute independence or sovereignty, with capacity to give or withhold, delegate or recall