

**AN ORATION DELIVERED
BEFORE THE NEW ENGLAND
SOCIETY, IN THE CITY OF NEW
YORK, DECEMBER 22, 1846**

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An Oration Delivered Before the New England Society, in the City of New York, December 22, 1846 by Charles W. Upham

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CHARLES W. UPHAM

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IN

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DECEMBER 22, 1846.

By CHARLES W. UPHAM.

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At a meeting of the Board of Officers of *The New-England Society in the City of New York*, held at the Astor House December 30th, 1846, it was, on motion of Mr. Fessenden, seconded by Mr. Babcock,

Resolved, that a Committee be appointed by the Chair to wait upon Rev. CHARLES W. URMAN, to tender him the thanks of the Society for his Oration delivered on the late Anniversary, and to request a copy of the same for publication; and that when said Oration is received, it be published on behalf of the Society, under the direction of said Committee.

Copy from the Minutes.

ALFRED A. WEEKS, Secretary.

BOSTON:
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DEVONSHIRE STREET.

ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY,
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

THE topics that claim our consideration, on this Anniversary, are so obvious, and so inseparable from the occasion and the sentiments awakened by it, and those sentiments are so uniform in all hearts, that no ingenious and elaborate exordium is needed to bring your minds into an appropriate frame. The field over which our meditations are led this day, is not a remote point from our spontaneous and involuntary associations, to be reached only by long-drawn approaches, but opens at once upon the vision.

On the 22d of December, in the year 1620, a company of Englishmen landed on the shore of what has since been the township of Plymouth, in the present State of Massachusetts. This circumstance has long been regarded, with a just and felicitous discrimination, as the opening scene in the drama of civilized humanity in the New World.

Voyagers had often before, we know not from how early a period, visited the coasts of America. Scientific philologists, and philosophical students of manners, customs, and other memorials, have imagined themselves to have traced, more or less clearly, evidence of transmigrations from the older continents to this, in the ages of a remote antiquity. European settlements, many of which quickly disappeared, but, in some instances, giving rise to permanent and populous Provinces and States, were commenced at dates anterior to the landing of the Pilgrims on the day we commemorate.

But the attending and resulting circumstances of that event are so peculiar in their character, so momentous in their bearings, and so wide-spread in their influence, that, by general consent, the opening of the continent of America to the civilization of Christendom, is everywhere getting to be considered as dating from the hour when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. It may safely be taken for granted, that, whatever particular interest different localities may feel in contemplating the origin of their own communities, whether before or after the 22d of December, 1620, all will acquiesce and conspire in regarding the Rock of Plymouth as the point from which the ever-advancing and ever-expanding wave of Anglo-Saxon liberty and light began to flow over America. Taking this comprehensive view of the subject, presenting the occasion

as the best example and highest instance of the various settlements by Europeans and Christians on the American continent, we may rely upon the sympathy of those of our fellow-citizens of a different colonial origin from ourselves, who may honor us with their presence, in the sentiments and associations to which we yield our own minds and hearts. While, as the descendants of New-England men, with filial and grateful reverence, we pay honor to their memory, it is my purpose, so far as the privilege and ability are given me to determine the spirit of the day, that the contemplation of your ancestral glories shall convey to your hearts lessons which may be profitably pondered by all Americans, in whatever portion of the republic they may have their abode, and from whatever sources they have sprung.

Before taking up the topics suggested by any more limited view of the subject, I wish to concentrate attention upon the event we commemorate in the light I have suggested, as, by way of eminence, marking the era of the contact and intercommunication of the two hemispheres of our globe. Let us pause, at the outset, and open our minds to receive and appreciate the interest and grandeur of the thought.

From the beginning of time, the great oceans had been impassable walls, keeping the opposite sides of our planet in distant and complete

separation. A mysterious, but all-wise, Providence held them apart. For thousands of years, the earth, as it revolved on its axis, had presented to the sun and the stars the vast double continent of America, shrouded in moral and intellectual darkness. Extending from pole almost to pole, it embraced, in its geographical features, all the forms of sublimity and beauty of scenery, and every advantage which can flow from the arrangement of land and water, rivers and lakes, mountains and meadows; and in the several departments of the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, an unrivalled richness of material and magnificence of display. Its surface, for the most part, remained under the deep shadows of primeval forests, and was traversed by roaming tribes of benighted savages. It is true that, on some parts of the continent, there are vestiges of a peculiar and inexplicable form of barbaric splendor, in vast and shapeless mounds of earth, and structures of masonry and statuary; but there is no indication whatever of the existence and action, at any time or to any extent, on any part of its entire length and breadth, of an element of moral, social and political progress.

The character of the aboriginal American cannot fail to be a subject of interest in all coming times. It exhibited many of the traits and faculties of human nature in an extraordinary development of dignity and strength. Fortitude and manly endurance,

heroism and patriotism, will ever find their brightest exemplars in warrior chiefs whose spheres of glory were the wild scenes and gloomy recesses of American forests. But the traditions that relate their story can scarcely be made to take their place among the records of real and authenticated events. They pass before the mind like shadowy visions of the imagination. We read them as we do the pages of an epic. The mysterious destiny of extinction, which is taking effect upon the race, pressing it off from the surface of the earth, seems to apply to its history also, which is crowded out from its proper department, exhaled as it were into ideal forms, and transferred to the sphere of fancy and romance. The reason of this is obvious. Their origin and progress are buried in utter oblivion. We behold them, as they appeared but for a moment, as in a dream, and then vanished away. They have told us no story of their earlier fortunes, and they have left no traces of their existence, or influence upon the condition of mankind. In that highest sense of history, in which it is to be regarded as the narrative of the continuous progress of humanity, as the memorial of stages of advancement, one leading on to another, by the law of cause and effect in the moral world, no space is occupied by the American tribes; and it is the same, in the comprehensive view I am now taking of the connection of the career of the human race with the two grand divi-