

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE
REQUEST OF A COMMITTEE OF THE
CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON; ON
THE OCCASION OF READING THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, ON
THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1821**

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An Address Delivered at the Request of a Committee of the Citizens of Washington; On the Occasion of Reading the Declaration of Independence, on the Fourth of July, 1821 by John Quincy Adams

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JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

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THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1821**

W. C. FOWLER.

LAN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED

At the request of a Committee of the Citizens of Washington;

ON THE OCCASION OF READING

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1821.

BY

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

CITY OF WASHINGTON :

PRINTED BY DAVIS AND FORCE, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE.

1821.

R.K.

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WASHINGTON, *July 4, 1821.*

SIR :

THE Committee of Arrangements for the celebration of this day, in presenting to you their unfeigned thanks for the patriotic and able Address which you have obliged them by delivering, solicit the favor of you to furnish them with a copy of it, for publication in a form suited to its merits.

J. P. VAN NESS,
FONTAINE MAURY,
JOSEPH GALES, JR.
JAMES M. VARNUM,
ARCH. HENDERSON.

Hon. J. Q. ADAMS.

To the Committee of Arrangements for the
Celebration of the Anniversary of Independence
at the City of Washington.

WASHINGTON, *5 July, 1821.*

GENTLEMEN :

In placing at your disposal a copy of the Address yesterday delivered in compliance with your invitation, I avail myself of the occasion of expressing through you, to my Fellow-Citizens, the assurance of my gratitude for the indulgence with which it was received.

I have the honor to be,

With great respect, Gentlemen,

Your very obedient servant,

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

ADDRESS.

FELLOW-CITIZENS :

Until within a few days preceding that which we have again assembled to commemorate, our Fathers, the people of this Union, had constituted a portion of the British nation ; a nation renowned in Arts and Arms, who, from a small Island in the Atlantic Ocean, had extended their dominion over considerable parts of every quarter of the Globe. Governed themselves by a race of kings, whose title to sovereignty had originally been founded in *conquest*, spell-bound for a succession of ages under that portentous system of despotism and of superstition which in the name of the meek and humble Jesus had been spread over the Christian world, the history of this nation had, for a period of seven hundred years, from the days of the conquest till our own, exhibited a conflict almost continual, between the oppressions of power and the claims of right. In the theories of the Crown and the Mitre man had no rights. Neither the body nor the soul of the individual was his own. From the impenetrable gloom of this intellectual darkness, and the deep degradation of this servitude, the British nation had partially emerged. The martyrs of religious freedom had consumed to ashes at the stake : the champions of temporal liberty had bowed their heads upon the scaffold ; and the spirits of many a bloody day had left their earthly vesture upon the field of battle, and soared to plead the cause of Liberty before the throne of Heaven. The people of Britain, through long ages of civil war, had extorted from their tyrants not *acknowledgements*, but *grants*, of right. With this concession

they had been content to stop in the progress of human improvement. They received their freedom as a donation from their sovereigns; they appealed for their privileges to a sign manual and a seal; they held their title to liberty, like their title to lands, from the bounty of a man; and in their moral and political chronology, the great charter of Runny Mead was the beginning of the world.

From the earliest ages of their recorded history, the inhabitants of the British Islands have been distinguished for their intelligence and their spirit. How much of these two qualities, the fountains of all amelioration in the condition of men, was stifled by these two principles of subserviency to ecclesiastical usurpation, and of holding *rights* as the donation of kings, this is not the occasion to inquire.

Of their tendency to palsy the vigor and enervate the faculties of man, all philosophical reasoning, and all actual experience, concur in testimony.

These principles, however, were not peculiar to the people of Britain. They were the delusions of all Europe, still the most enlightened and most improvable portion of the earth. The temporal chain was riveted upon the people of Britain by the conquest. Their spiritual fetters were forged by subtlety working upon superstition. Baneful as the effect of these principles was, they could not for ever extinguish the light of reason in the human mind. The discovery of the Mariner's Compass was soon followed by the extension of intercourse between nations the most distant, and which, without that light beaming in darkness to guide the path of man over the boundless waste of waters, could never have been known to each other. The invention of Printing, and the composition of Gunpowder, which revolutionized at once the art and science of war, and the relations of peace;

the revelation of India to Vasco de Gama; and the disclosure to Columbus of the American hemisphere, all resulted from the incompressible energies of the human intellect, bound and crippled as it was by the double cords of ecclesiastical imposture and political oppression. To these powerful agents in the progressive improvement of our species, Britain can lay no claim. For them the children of men are indebted to Italy, to Germany, to Portugal, and to Spain. All these improvements, however, consisted in successful researches into the properties and modifications of external nature. The religious reformation was an improvement in the science of mind; an improvement in the intercourse of man with his Creator, and in his acquaintance with himself. It was an advance in the knowledge of his *duties* and his *rights*. It was a step in the progress of man in comparison with which the Magnet and Gunpowder, the wonders of either India; nay, the Printing Press itself, were but the paces of a pigmy to the stride of a giant. If to this step of human advancement Germany likewise lays claim in the person of Martin Luther, or in the earlier but ineffectual martyrdom of John Huss, England may point to her Wicliffe as a yet more primitive vindicator of the same righteous cause, and may insist on the glory of having contributed her share to the improvement of the moral condition of man.

The corruptions and usurpations of the Church were the immediate objects of these reformers; but, at the foundation of all their exertions, there was a single, plain, and almost self-evident principle—that man has a right to the exercise of his own reason. It was this principle which the sophistry and rapacity of the Church had obscured and obliterated, and which the intestine divisions of the same Church itself first restored. The triumph of reason was the result of inquiry and discussion. Centu-

rics of desolating wars have succeeded, and oceans of human blood have flowed for the final establishment of this principle ; but it was from the darkness of the Cloister that the first spark was emitted, and from the arches of an University that it first kindled into day. From the discussion of religious rights and duties, the transition to that of the political and civil relations of men with one another, was natural and unavoidable ; in both, the reformers were met by the weapons of temporal power. At the same glance of reason, the tiara would have fallen from the brow of priesthood, and the despotic sceptre would have departed from the hand of royalty, but for the sword by which they were protected—that sword which, like the flaming sword of the Cherubim, turned every way to debar access to the tree of life.

The double contest against the oppressors of the Church and State was too appalling for the vigor, or too comprehensive for the faculties of the reformers of the European Continent. In Britain alone was it undertaken, and in Britain but partially succeeded.

It was in the midst of that fermentation of the human intellect which brought right and power in direct and deadly conflict with each other, that the rival crowns of the two portions of the British Island, were united on the same head. It was then that, released from the manacles of ecclesiastical domination, the minds of men began to investigate the foundations of civil government. But the mass of the nation surveyed the fabric of their institutions as it existed in fact. It had been founded in conquest ; it had been cemented in servitude, and so broken and moulded had been the minds of this brave and intelligent people to their actual condition, that instead of solving civil society into its first elements in search of their rights, they looked back only to conquest as the

origin of their liberties, and claimed their rights but as donations from their kings.

This faltering assertion of freedom is not chargeable indeed upon the whole nation. There were spirits capable of tracing civil government to its foundation in the moral and physical nature of man ; but conquest and servitude were so mingled up in every particle of the social existence of the nation, that they had become vitally necessary to them, as a portion of the fluid, itself destructive of life, is indispensably blended with the atmosphere in which we live.

Fellow-Citizens, it was in the heat of this war of moral elements, which brought one Stuart to the block, and hurled another from his throne, that our forefathers sought refuge from its fury, in the then wilderness of this Western World.

They were willing exiles from a country dearer to them than life.—But they were the exiles of liberty and of conscience, dearer to them even than their country. They came too with *Charters* from their kings : for even in removing to another hemisphere, they “ cast longing, lingering, looks behind,” and were anxiously desirous of retaining ties of connexion with their country, which, in the solemn compact of a charter, they hoped by the corresponding links of allegiance and protection to preserve.

But to their sense of right, the charter was only the ligament between them, their country, and their king. Transported to a new world, they had relations with one another, and relations with the aboriginal inhabitants of the country to which they came, for which no royal charter could provide. The first settlers of the Plymouth colony, at the eve of landing from their ship, therefore, bound themselves together by a written covenant ; and, immediately after landing, purchased from the Indian natives the right of settlement upon the soil.