

**ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE THE CITY
COUNCIL AND CITIZENS OF BOSTON:
ON THE ONE
HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF
INDEPENDENCE JULY 4, 1893**

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Oration Delivered Before the City Council and Citizens of Boston: On the One hundred and seventeenth anniversary of the declaration of independence July 4, 1893 by Henry W. Putnam

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HENRY W. PUTNAM

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ORATION
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
CITY COUNCIL AND CITIZENS
OF
BOSTON
ON THE
ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

JULY 4, 1893

BY
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HENRY W. PUTNAM, Esq.



BOSTON
PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE CITY COUNCIL
1893

CITY OF BOSTON.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, July 5, 1893.

RESOLVED, That the thanks of the City Council be expressed to HENRY W. PUTNAM, Esq., for the patriotic and eloquent Oration delivered by him before the city authorities on the Fourth of July, in commemoration of the One Hundred and Seventeenth Anniversary of American Independence; and that he be requested to furnish a copy thereof for publication.

Adopted unanimously. Sent down for concurrence.

JOHN H. LEE,
Chairman.

IN COMMON COUNCIL, September 21, 1893.

Concurred unanimously, by a rising vote.

DAVID F. BARRY,
President.

Approved September 27, 1893.

N. MATTHEWS, JR.,
Mayor.

A true copy.

Attest:

J. M. GALVIN,
City Clerk.

THE MISSION OF OUR PEOPLE.

MR. MAYOR AND FELLOW-CITIZENS:

The time-honored celebration of Independence Day by publicly reading the immortal declaration in the city of Faneuil Hall and the Old State House, of the Old South and the Boston Massacre, of Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights, and on this spot but a step from where the Liberty Tree stood, has a significance which similar observances cannot have elsewhere, even in Philadelphia. For it was in our dear old rebellious town that the fires of liberty were kindled and kept aglow until the bolt was forged and welded and driven home. Others elsewhere may equally appreciate the historical importance of the great event and of the principles then proclaimed, and be equally grateful for its beneficent results to posterity; but every Boston man carries the old Revolutionary spirit in his blood in his daily walks through our storied streets. It is his daily bread, his personal and domestic affair. A single spark,

and the old flame blazes up in a moment with all its early glow and fervor. Thus may it ever be! Times and popular habits may change, and do indeed change rapidly; but so long as constitutional freedom reigns in the land may the glorious, familiar story be rehearsed to the hurrying generations on this anniversary in the old historic town of Sam Adams and the Sons of Liberty!

If we turn from the external side of our Fourth of July celebrations, — from the scream of the eagle, the waving of the flag, the ringing of the bells, and that most exquisitely native New England feature, which we have ever with us, the Chinese cracker and the Roman fire-work, — we find even within quite recent times a great change in the attitude of thoughtful people towards the day and towards the event it commemorates. As that event is looked at through the lengthening vista of the years, and especially through the medium of national convulsions like the War of the Rebellion, its importance, indeed, does not diminish, but our historical perspective is enlarged and we see things more in their true proportions. It used to seem as if the world began with our national independence, and as if the American

Republic sprang full-grown and perfect from the front of Jove by a creative fiat; the millennium had come all at once; there had been no before, and there would be no serious hereafter to reckon with. It is true, our national tone of confidence and glorification was pitched a little high and shrill, as if we had some misgiving, a lurking distrust that all was not well; and it was not until the gigantic struggle with slavery had been successfully met that the key was lowered and we adopted the soberer tone that goes with mature life and with the consciousness of the dangers that beset the path of nations and of our ability under God to overcome them.

In this frame of mind, and looking back into the stored wisdom of the past for guiding principles to deal thoughtfully with the thronging questions of the present, our point of view has changed. We see more clearly than before that the principles and deeds of 1776 form but one link in a long chain of historic events which have made us what we are. Our mere political independence of Great Britain is, in this view, a trifling matter compared with the common interests of law, trade, language, political principles and habits, race sympathy and

mission, in which the branches of the English-speaking races are united and mutually dependent. How much more closely inter-dependent, for instance, are we with England to-day, though politically separate, than were our colonial fathers, even before so much as the first sign of serious discord with the mother-country had appeared on the horizon! As we glance back over the majestic current of English history and English law, rising in the dim distance of Roman institutions and Teutonic customs, and follow it down through the times of the great lawgivers and epoch-making rulers, of Alfred, William of Normandy, and Edward I., of Elizabeth, Cromwell, and William III., of Magna Charta, the foundation of the House of Commons, the petitions of right, the struggle over ship-money, the Puritan Commonwealth, how fatuous seems the attempt of a dull and obstinate old Hanoverian tyrant to tax the colonists in defiance of the ancient English principles of right and against the convictions and protests of the great Englishmen of his own time,—the Chathams, the Foxes, the Burkes! As the centuries move on, will this effort of a narrow-minded, alien, and absolutist king, sitting upon the throne of Alfred, a monarch who knew less of the funda-

mental Anglo-Saxon principles of law and government than any tapster in his realm, create so much as a ripple on that great human stream of unity and progress which the English-speaking races are pouring out in the United States, Canada, the Maritime Provinces, Australia, — wherever in the broad world the American or the British flag is carried? Our fathers were but own brothers of the blood to the barons that vindicated the personal liberty of the subject at Runnymede; to the knights that fought with de Montfort at Evesham, and sealed forever with their blood and his the right of the humblest burgher and tradesman in a land of privilege to sit in Parliament and vote on the taxes he was to pay; to the Commoners who fought Charles Stuart to the block ere he should govern and tax by the royal prerogative alone. More far-reaching, indeed, in its immediate results was their work than that of their elder brothers in freedom, for it founded a new polity on a virgin soil where the latent forces of democracy in the world should take root and grow beyond the dream of the statesman or the philosopher; but all these great deeds were essentially equals, that of our fathers merely *primus inter pares*. The independent