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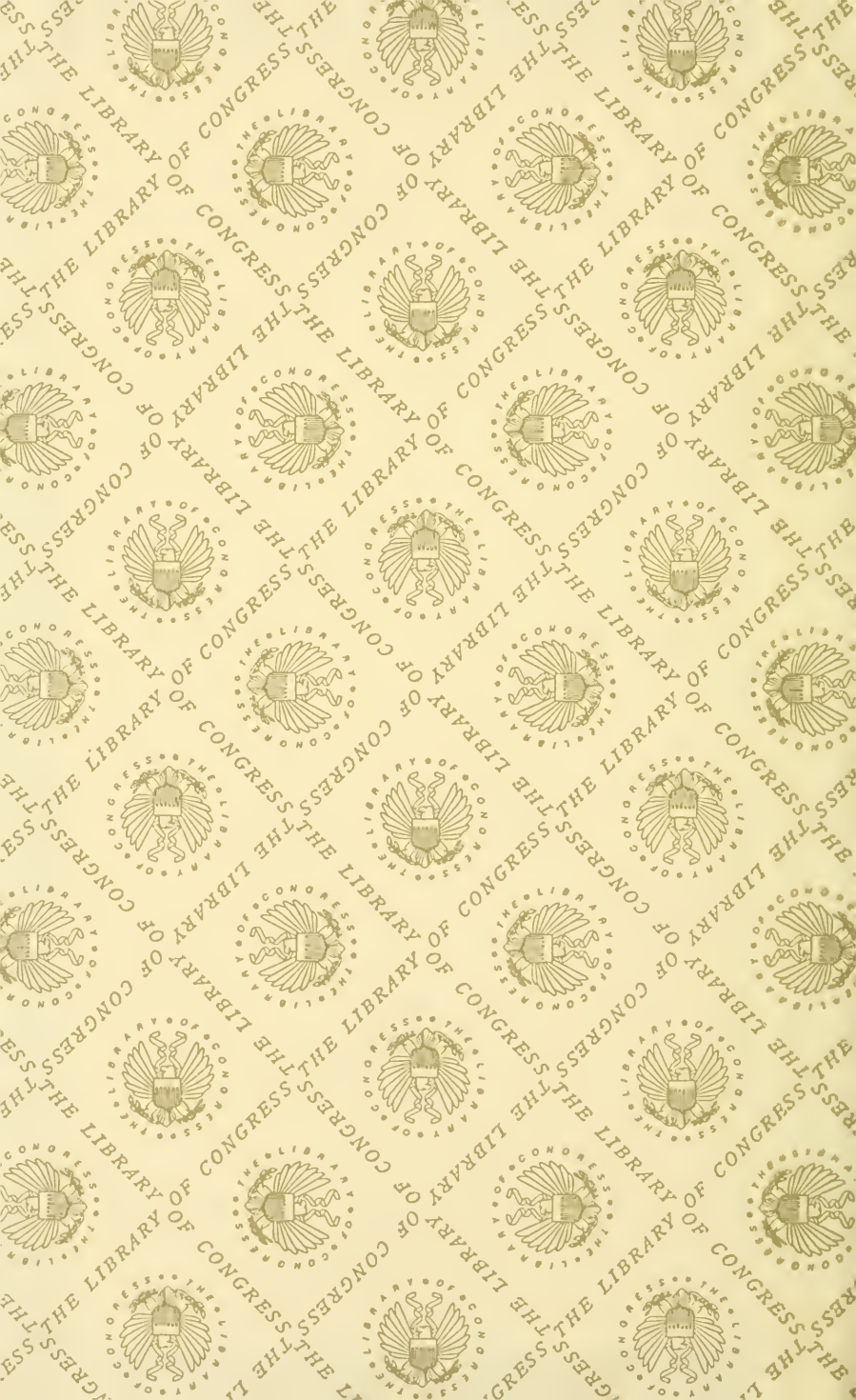
1839

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ORATION,

Delivered on the Fourth of July, 1839.

AT PERU, LA SALLE COUNTY, ILL.

BY

GEORGE W. HOLLEY.



Printed at the Chicago American Office,

Corner of Clarke and South Water Streets.

1839.

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PERU, July 8th, 1839.

GEORGE W. HOLLEY, Esq.

Dear Sir—At a meeting of the Committee of arrangements for celebrating the Fourth of July at Peru, it was *UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED*, That the thanks of this committee be returned to Geo. W. Holley, Esq., for the able, eloquent and patriotic address with which he favored the citizens of Peru, on the late Anniversary of our National Independence, and that he be respectfully requested to furnish the committee with a copy of the same for publication.

H. LEONARD, Chairman,

L. PEARL, Secretary.

PERU, July 10th, 1839.

To H. LEONARD, Esq. Chairman, and L. PEARL, Esq., Secretary.

GENTLEMEN---I have received your flattering note of the 8th inst., and in complying with the request of the committee, I cannot but feel that their kindness and partiality are greater than the merits of the address they propose to publish, a copy of which is herewith transmitted.

Very respectfully, gentlemen

Your friend and fellow citizen

GEO. W. HOLLEY.

ORATION.

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FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS :—

We are met to welcome the annual return of our country's natal day. We are met to welcome the annual return of that day, on which the minions of tyranny and oppression were told in a voice of fearful and decided earnestness, that they could no longer hold dominion in the land which our fathers claimed as their own. We are met to offer our tribute of respect and gratitude to those illustrious men who won, for us, our freedom, and to consecrate their memory anew in our hearts. We are met to offer the sincere homage of humble and grateful hearts, to that Being who crowned with success the efforts of our Fathers in their struggle for liberty, and who hath vouchsafed the continuance of that liberty with all its attendant blessings, to us, their children.

And, on this auspicious day, if some ethereal spirit with a voice that could be heard throughout our land, should bid it 'rejoice,' the invisible winds, as they stirred in the foliage of our groves and forests, would rustle forth, 'rejoice,'—the birds from their lofty haunts would warble forth 'rejoice,'—and the insects from their flowery homes, would prolong the sound, 'rejoice ;'—the gentle streams and mighty rivers, as they wound their way to the home of the waters, would murmur forth, 'rejoice,'—the foaming torrent, with its voice of thunder would say, 'rejoice ;'—and the fathomless ocean, with its deep and solemn tones, would answer back 'rejoice ;'—the flocks on a thousand hills, and the herds in a thousand vallies, would utter forth, 'rejoice,—and the united acclamation of millions of freemen, would be, 'REJOICE !' And wherefore should we not rejoice ? Why should we attempt to restrain that natural, enthusiastic, and almost irresistible impulse, which prompts us to manifest, by every rational method, our heartfelt gratitude for countless blessings received and enjoyed ? Why should not the song of joy be mingled with the anthem of praise, and the shout of gladness be heard with the voice of thanksgiving, on a day like this ? When we compare our condition as a nation, with that of most of the civilized nations of the earth, we find abundant cause to rejoice and be glad that our lines have been cast in such pleasant places, and that our heritage is such a goodly one. And

what, in brief, is the condition of those nations? Sweden and Denmark occupying their places more because their inhospitable clime and rugged soil offer no temptation to the conqueror, than for any other reason; Germany, divided into petty states, and *metaphysiced*, so to speak, into a perpetual fog;—Austria, cunning and intriguing, her sceptre leaning upon the sword, and the bayonet being the chief conservator of her tranquility; Prussia, governed, at present, with prudence, but with an iron sceptre; Switzerland and Portugal, holding their stations through the jealousy of their more powerful neighbors; Russia, grasping and ambitious, and ruled with more than an iron despotism; Spain, once renowned and chivalric Spain, ruined by the long reign of a “booby king,” and now divided against herself, her children pouring out their blood like water, for what or for whom, they scarcely know; France, enlightened and powerful, but torn by factions and internal discords, rendering her government unstable and her people unquiet; the Italian states seeking their chief freedom, limited as it is, in the masks of the carnival, and finding scarcely any thing more fallible than the infallibility of him who is alike the head of church and state; England, the nation from which we are proud to boast our descent, and whose youthful queen is the only reigning sovereign whom we can wish “God speed,” extending her empire into every part of the world, honored and respected abroad, but burdened with a debt which the income of a universe could hardly liquidate, and her people borne almost to the earth by tithes and enormous taxes; Ireland, enthusiastic, whole-souled, whole-hearted Ireland, bound in the fetters of a union which represses her generous spirit and retards her onward progress; Scotland, with her “kirks and cauld,” content with the protection of the same union; and Poland, unhappy Poland,—

“O’er beauty, worth and bravery’s cheek
Should fall the tear that’s shed for thee,”—

thy name stricken from the list of nations,—thy territory divided as the spoil of implacable foes,—thy children dragging out the miserable remnant of existence on the desert wastes of Siberia, or wandering as exiles over the world!

How grateful the contrast—how delightful the contemplation, when we turn to our own favored land! With an empire extending over nearly half a continent, embracing every variety of climate and of soil, producing, in overflowing abundance, all the comforts and most of the luxuries of life—with inexhaustible mineral wealth—free from public indebtedness and perplexing alliances—with a people industrious, enterprising, virtuous, intelligent, and more than all, and above all, enjoying the greatest possible degree of freedom, in thought, word, deed and conscience, holding themselves amenable only to their laws and their God—choosing their own rulers and their own teachers—sitting under their own vines and fig trees with none to molest or make them afraid.

There is upon the pages of history no sublimer record of merely mortal events, than that which contains the story of our rise and progress as one of the independent nations of the earth. And may God, in his mercy, grant that it may need no human hand to write the story of its *decline and fall*, but that *that* story may only be found among those celestial archives which shall contain the records of by-gone worlds! And surely, on this occasion, there can be no more thrilling nor appropriate retrospection, than that which carries us back to the days and scenes of our Pilgrim Fathers. And from such retrospection we may, perchance, appreciate more fully the vastness of the debt of gratitude we owe to those illustrious men; and also discover the momentous responsibility that is devolved upon us as their legatees. A little more than two centuries since, they accomplished that voyage, and formed that compact, which was to constitute them, not merely the pioneers of an isolated and dependant colony, but the founders of the mightiest and freest nation of the earth. Forgiving and forgetting all the injuries they had received at the hands of their countrymen—foregoing all the social comforts and habits of early life and maturer years—sacrificing all the endearments of home and the domestic hearth—severing, at once and forever, all the ties of kindred, of country and of friends—with a purity and firmness of motive and of purpose which knew no compromise, with a boldness that, in any other cause, would have put audacity to shame,—with a trust and confidence in God, which neither principalities ~~and~~ powers, nor any other thing ^{under} heaven could shake, they committed themselves to the terrors of the mighty deep, and sought on a savage continent that civil and religious freedom which had been denied them in their father land. They came not as refugees from justice, they came not as adventurers, they came not as reformers of any of the old social or civil ~~politics~~, they came not as enthusiastic seekers after some imaginary good, some theoretic excellence, but they came as *christians*, as *freemen*, and to seek in a new world, an asylum from religious intolerance and spiritual servitude; to find a home where they and their children might worship their creator in the manner that should seem to them the most appropriate; to establish a community where each person, in seeking his own good, should meet with the surest success in promoting the good of all; where selfishness in the individual should be, not disarmed, but won over as the champion of the community. Upon the trackless ocean, before they had even caught a view of the rugged land whither the chilling winds were bearing them, they drew up, adopted and swore allegiance to the **FIRST CHARTER OF FREEDOM**. In the depth of winter they landed upon the dreary, and then, inhospitable shores of Plymouth. They met only a strange and savage race of beings, with whom they could exchange none of the comities or sympathies of life, and from whom they could only obtain, in scanty allowance, the merest necessaries to existence. Disease rendered them feeble, death thinned their ranks, famine threatened their extinction. But afflictions only increased their devotion, misfortunes only strengthened their fortitude. Undaunted by adversity; unsubdued

by hardships, they still struggled with their destiny--confiding in, and adoring, more and more, that God who chastened but never forsook them. And on the barren rock of Plymouth they kindled the first pale beacon-fire of liberty—a fire whose spreading flame burned up through a revolution that was destined to change all the political theories and politics of ages past; and which, at this moment consumes not, but warms into delightful and glorious existence the inhabitants of an empire extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific; from near the tropic to the arctic circle; and which illuminates and cheers onward the whole civilized world!

And it is neither boasting nor vanity to say, that the eyes of the whole enlightened portion of the human race are now turned, with anxious solicitude, to the progress of our experiment in self-government. Their dearest hopes; their best interests; their highest good; are staked upon the result of our efforts to illustrate and prove to the world that civilized men are capable of well and truly governing themselves. And if, with all our past experience, and all our present knowledge; if with the searching light of the Gospel streaming upon and illuminating our way, revealing the path of duty and making it so plain that the wayfaring man need not err therein; if with all these advantages, we still prove recreant to our high trust, and permit our experiment to fail; if as *American Citizens*, we forget the ties and duties of patriotism; if we become dead to the thrilling memories of the past, and the glorious fruitions of the future and prove a patricidal people; the bitterness of regret, remorse and shame; the greater bitterness of a world's taunts and a world's scorn; the superlative bitterness of anarchy or despotism will be the just retribution of our more than folly--our fool-hardy madness. There is no other world for another Columbus to discover, and unless the wheels of time can be stayed in their tracks, unless the fountains of knowledge can be dried up, unless that revelation which brought life and immortality to light, can be stricken into oblivion, and its sublime prophecies and sublimer teachings can be erased from the records of heaven, unless the immortal aspirations of the human mind can be summoned back from their high soaring and their higher destiny, so that the human race may commence again the journey of mortality, there can be no possible combination of circumstances, no possible series of events, that shall be so favorable to the formation of a pure representative democracy, as those circumstances which were combined, and those events which did transpire, to consummate the establishment of our Government. Freedom, driven from all the old states, sought in this virgin world her last asylum, her noblest, fairest, final home. And here she hath scattered with lavish hand her choicest gifts, her richest blessings; here she hath established her altars and reared her fanes, and accursed forever be the sacrilegious hand that would mutilate or rend asunder either of the twenty-six columns that support ~~the~~ ^{her} hallowed dome!

The discovery and colonization of the American continent, the commencement, progress and termination of the American revolution, the

achievement of American freedom, with the new, inestimable and innumerable blessings resulting from that freedom to the whole human race, are not merely the epochs of a single nation, or a single country; they form one of the sublime eras of a world. And if we of the present generation but appreciate our situation as the inheritors of that freedom, as ~~the~~ guardians and protectors, as the instruments through whom it is to be transmitted, not mutilated and abridged, but enlarged and adorned, to future times, we cannot but be impressed with the momentous responsibility devolved upon us. And it behooves us with anxious solicitude to enquire for, and seek out those means that shall seem most certain to enable us to perpetuate it, and with all our might and an earnest zeal to make a practical application of those means to the desired end. First and foremost among those means we hold to be the establishment and support of the Christian religion. The truth of a proposition which the events and experience of more than eighteen hundred years have demonstrated to a certainty, and have placed beyond controversy, requires neither comment nor illustration. Next to the progress which religion has made in a nation, and the estimation in which it is held, the prosperity and happiness of its people may be measured by the degree of knowledge and virtue which are found among, and practiced by them. Knowledge and virtue are the surest promoters and preservers of liberty, as well as the best and surest sources of happiness to the individual; while on the contrary, ignorance and vice are the worst foes of freedom, and also most fatally destructive, in every sense, to individuals. It does not necessarily follow that, because a nation is free and prosperous, it will therefore be enlightened and virtuous. But it does necessarily follow that, if a nation is enlightened and virtuous, it will, sooner or later, be free and prosperous. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; and vigilance is a concomitant of wisdom. Therefore, will the ignorant never be vigilant; and the vicious will seldom be wise. But knowledge is born to none—to none bequeathed. Unremitting application is the price of its attainment, and whatever progress may be made therein, it becomes a perpetual source of enjoyment which no earthly power can take away. And most emphatically true are the words of Israel's sacred lyricist, that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace."

Among a people, then, desirous of preserving and enjoying the only freedom worth being preserved and enjoyed, a rational, christian freedom, the sources of knowledge and the means of acquiring it, should be abundant and easy of access. Not of that knowledge which is derived from speculative theories, or the vain imaginations of men, nor from the arrogant creeds and systems of sectarians and partisans; but of that knowledge which results from a true comprehension of Philosophy, the sciences, and the arts, diversified, enlivened, embellished, with the refinements of an elegant literature; the whole tempered, chastened, leavened, with that sublimer knowledge—that diviner wisdom which is revealed in the Book of Books, by the King of Kings.

If our premises be true, it follows that wherever we find the places of public worship and the means of public instruction the most abundant, the most fully thronged, the most eagerly sought after, and the most assiduously improved, there we shall also find the most virtuous, the most enlightened, the most free, and consequently the most happy community. What is it that has rendered England the mightiest and freest of the old States, but her system of high schools, of eleemosynary education, her richly endowed academies and colleges, and the sure basis upon which the Christian religion is placed by the State? And what is it that has raised New England above old England, and most of the Eastern States to so high a rank among her sister States, but the system of public education, of common school instruction, and the uncompromising firmness with which the laws of God are enjoined upon and practiced by their citizens? Every church is a magazine of virtue; every school house is an arsenal of knowledge, and every school fund a sinking fund for vice and crime, and consequently for public expenditure and private charity.

Of what vital importance, then, does it become, that we of the West should make unremitting efforts to bring to our aid these powerful means, these mighty levers for raising ourselves to that exalted station among our sister communities, to which our transcendent natural and local advantages permit us to aspire? Every year, every month, every day that we neglect to avail ourselves of these important means for promoting our best interests, is a more than loss, a *waste* of time which ages cannot repair. Hitherto our apology for inaction has been found in the circumstances of our situation. Most of us having left the homes of our childhood to seek our fortunes and a new home in this delightful region, where the lingering echo of the Indian warwhoop may yet be almost heard, and where the Indian footpaths are yet uncrased, have hitherto found ourselves sufficiently occupied in obtaining and securing the comforts and conveniences of life. But now that our numbers are multiplied, our means increased, and our prosperity based upon a foundation as deep as our soil, and as broad as our prairies, let us consider delay inexcusable, if not criminal, and resolve upon a speedy consummation of these high purposes.

Next to the promotion of the interests of religion and knowledge, the most important means for preserving the public liberty, is a strict observance of and obedience to the laws. The laws of our country, of our state, of our community, which every citizen has sworn to obey and support, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, should be deemed paramount over every other obligation—should be placed beyond every exigency—should be considered supreme over every question of expediency. We cannot sufficiently admire the conduct of that ancient magistrate, who, forgetting the father in the judge, condemned his own son to death for an offence against the State, when a tenable position of the law, aided by a petition of his fellow-citizens, would have permitted him to pardon his child. It was a noble and illustrious triumph of justice over affection—of the duties of patriotism over

the ties of kindred. Such a spirit cannot be too prevalent in a civilized community, however deplorable the recurrence of such peculiar instances of requiring its manifestation may be.

The means to which I have alluded are the most important for the perpetuation of our liberties ; and ours be the fault, nay, the *crime*, if they are not faithfully and efficiently applied. And there is every thing to encourage us—every thing to cheer us onward. If we may judge of the future by the past ; if we may reason of probabilities from facts, we can hardly fail to believe that America is, politically speaking, (if the expression may be allowed) God's present Israel. He who sees not the hand of God, in our rise and progress as a nation, must have lost the power of perception, the capacity for comprehension. The evidences of providential direction are crowded thick upon every page of our nation's history. And hereafter, though foreign or civil war may harass or bleed us ; though our pride may be humbled ; though our iniquities may be chastised ; though our prosperity may be checked ; though nullification may rear its horrid head ; though the over-zealous may become the slaves of bigotry or prejudice on the subject of slavery ; though the sublime mysteries or magnificent mummeries of masonry may disturb the public tranquillity ; though sectional interests and prejudices may create sectional animosities ; though questions of internal policy may distract and divide our people ; though that legal system, or rather illegal usurpation, which makes of a single individual judge, jury, sheriff, and executioner, may occasionally *Lynch* our citizens ; though heartless demagogues may occasionally bear sway in our land and their councils prevail ; though foul treason may plot to betray us ; though unholy faction may mature their schemes among us ; though the madness of party may threaten the permanency of our institutions ; though the spirit of mobocracy, with iron heel, may sometimes trample upon our dearest rights, still shall these things all pass away like the storm-clouds of summer, and work together for our good ; still shall the mighty strength of our constitution, the inherent vigor of our institutions, and the latent virtues of our people, bear us triumphantly through every danger and every trial ! still shall the spirit of American freedom come out mightier and purer from every conflict ; still shall the chosen Israel pass unscathed through every fiery ordeal. And just so surely as God, in the course of his good providence, has designed that righteousness shall triumph over iniquity ; that vice shall be brought captive to the footstool of virtue ; that tyranny and oppression in all their forms shall be banished from the earth, and that liberty, as it is the natural, shall also be the political condition of man ; just so surely shall the whole human race one day be brought to share the full fruition of that glorious period when wars shall cease among men ; when the sword shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks ; when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and the little child, as it sports with the one, shall twine its fingers unharmed in the mane of the other ; **WHEN THE WORLD SHALL BE FREE** ; when knowledge and virtue shall be the chief

objects of pursuit ; when the golden rule shall be adopted as the rule of life by each and by all ; when religion and the laws shall be supreme ; when all men shall be brethren in deed and in truth, acknowledging Christ as their common Saviour—God as their common Father ! Then, on the annual return of this day, shall the joyful songs of freedom, mingled with the stirring anthems of praise, be heard through our vallies, and echoed ~~through~~ our mountains, until the rolling waters shall take up the glad sounds, and bear them to the habitants of every nation of the earth—every island of the sea—from whom they shall meet a cheering welcome and a joyous response, the rapturous notes rising and swelling on every breeze, while the universal heart of humanity shall thrill with the harmonious strains of that sublimest melody !

But whatever may be the changes and revolutions among the nations of the earth, the West, the mighty valley of the Mississippi, with a soil of surpassing fertility, traversed and enriched by the noblest rivers of the world, with exhaustless mineral wealth, contains within itself the best elements of national wealth and power ; and with a people true to its interest, might defy a world in arms. With such advantages, every free citizen, so far as equality of condition would permit, might become a *Rasselas* in all save his discontent ; and, beholding the happy valley a thousand fold enlarged, might also behold it bear the palm of superiority even from *his* storied home.

But why should I attempt to speak to you of the west, in the common place language of truth ? *You*, who have seen it, as it were, fresh and glorious from the hand of its Creator, and who know what it *may* become ! What hopes may you not cherish—what anticipations may you not indulge, concerning a land which requires a new dictionary of words of more emphatic meaning, of terms of mightier import, in order to describe it ! A land whose rivers throw those of the old world into *brooks*, in the comparison ; in whose sky the gorgeous and magnificent are *done up* in a style that renders description impotent ; where the thunder storms are of the *mammoth sort*, the rain-bows *full grown*, and the thunder and lightning of ~~the~~ *bill cut* dimensions ; where generosity and hospitality walk open handed, offering the *thickest gum*, with the same good will, to ~~the~~ friend or stranger ; whose soil compared with which, that of old Palastine in its primeval days, was nothing but a *sandy bean patch* ; a soil which might even turn to good account the ingenuity of our Yankee brethren, and astonish them, (if any thing *could* astonish a Yankee, who is the shrewdest and keenest animal that ever went *untrapped*,) by showing them that even bass-wood cucumber seeds would sprout in a week, and soft maple nutmegs, if planted in June, come forth *fully flavored* in August ! !

Excuse this facetious magniloquence, this seeming exaggeration.—In speaking of the West—the glorious, the unrivalled West—magniloquence is but as the sluggish speech of dotage, and the quick step of exaggeration can hardly overtake the dead march of truth !

But pleasantry apart,—when our population shall have become equal to that of the oldest states ; when our broad prairies, those roll-

ing seas of verdure, of bloom and of fragrance, shall have been divided into fields, and rendered subservient to the uses of husbandry; when, along all our streams, shall be heard the busy hum of every species of machinery that can relieve the labor of man, and add to his wealth and comfort; when our rivers shall be burning, as it were, with the fires of that peculiar vessel which alone is competent to their navigation; when cities, towns and villages, increasing in beauty and in wealth, shall have sprung up on every hand; when the whole wide landscape shall have been enriched and adorned by the efforts of art, and over all its broad surface the temples of God, and the places of public instruction shall be thickly sown; when our spiritual and temporal teachers shall be numerous, enlightened, and abundantly patronized; when good morals, good habits and good laws shall have been permanently established among our people; who then shall attempt to limit our wealth and prosperity--our happiness and renown! The West may then be a new and enlarged paradise, occupied by a whole nation, instead of a single pair, of the human race. And let us cherish the hope that it may encounter the wiles of no second serpent; may meet with no second fall.

But if our people remain true to themselves, to their constitution, their laws, and their institutions, by what standard shall we attempt to measure our country's future glory; in what language shall we attempt to speak its fame; in what strains shall we sing its praise? But on a theme like this,

"Imagination's utmost stretch
In languor dies away,"

and the noblest sallies of reason sink impotent in weakness. I will not mar, by minuter details, those reflections upon it which must suggest themselves to every enlightened mind, but will only add, that if some enthusiastic artist should attempt to give you an emblematical sketch of America's future glory, he would represent to you a colossal statue, standing with one foot upon the Atlantic, the other upon the Pacific ocean, with one hand receiving the furry wealth of the frigid zone, with the other gathering in the varied riches of tropical climes. Before that statue he would place the tree of liberty, its roots deep and firmly stricken into the earth, its foliaged branches overspreading, but not shading, the whole of America's vast empire, blooming in perennial beauty, its fruits and flowers offered to all without money and without price. Leaning against that tree, he would picture to you the benignant spirit of a tolerant and evangelizing religion, respected and revered by every member of the wide community, and their free will offerings strown in lavish abundance at his feet. Upon all her waters he would show you the smoking chimnies or the white sails of a humanizing and enriching commerce, bearing home from every navigable water of the globe, the varied wealth of every clime. Her sea-coasts and her rivers would be dotted with magnificent cities, and the whole interior studded with thriving and delightful villages and hamlets, or, resting in the rural and enchanting quiet and beauty of agricultural districts.

And everywhere through the wide landscape, he would show you the cheerful countenances of free and happy beings, giving life and vigor to the scene; and, from the highest summit of her loftiest mountain, he would represent to you, in gigantic proportions, the *Banner of Freedom*—THE AMERICAN FLAG—streaming to the free winds in triumph and in glory, waving in splendor over time's ~~best~~ noblest empire; and, in the enthusiasm of the moment, perchance his overwrought imagination would whisper to him that there that banner should continue to wave, until the contents of the seventh vial shall be poured over the world; and when the thrilling fiat shall go forth, that time shall be no longer, and the heavens and the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, that then that flag shall be, not the emblem of a foreign nation, but the winding-sheet of a departed world!

“Flag of the free hearts’ only home!
 By angel hands to valor given,
 Thy stars have lit the welkin dome.
 And all thy hues were born in heaven.
 For ever float that standard sheet!
 Where breathes the foe but falls before us,
 With Freedom’s soil beneath our feet,
 And Freedom’s banner streaming o’er us!”

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