NEBRASKA
STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY.
17038

CENTENNIAL

Address of Welcome.

OMAHA.

N
815
C38a

ADDRESS OF WELCOME,

DELIVERED AT

OMAHA, JULY 4, 1876,

BY

HON. CHAMPION S. CHASE,
MAYOR OF THE CITY.

Published by the Committee of Arrangements.

FELLOW CITIZENS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It has fallen to my lot on this auspicious occasion to tender to all those who have come up to join the people of our city in the celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of American Independence, a welcome. More especially have I been deputed to do this honor, in behalf of the fire department of the city of Omaha, to whom we owe so much for this grand display. You have all heard of that institution, I am confident. I need not say to you to whom this welcome is addressed how cordial it is, for the intended courtesies of the day have, I am sure, already been made apparent to you. I will venture here to introduce to those visitors who do not know them as well as we do—as well as I do—the firemen of Omaha. Truer and braver men never fought the great destroyer. To our firemen I will entrust the pleasant duty of making a better acquaintance with all those who have come to join us in our festivities and to witness our display to-day. As joyous as they come, let those joys increase until they go, when the day's enjoyments and the evening's entertainments are over. Again, most heartily in behalf of all who dwell in our city, I extend a most sincere and earnest welcome to the thousands who visit us and join with us to-day, and bid them all remember that this is "Independence Day" *par excellence.* It was on this day one hundred years ago that our forefathers, at old Liberty Hall, in Philadelphia, which to-day witnesses in due form of representation the same ceremony—pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor, that we might to-day be free and independent. To every American, to every citizen, who lives under the old flag—the star-spangled banner—whether born on this or foreign soil, the day we celebrate, possesses features of peculiar and favorable consideration.

One incident of much interest to myself, and which I trust may be of some interest to those of my friends

here who hear it, I have always intended, if it became my privilege to speak in public on the occasion of the nation's Centennial, to relate, and that is, that my father, Clement Chase, who lived and died in Cornish, N. H., was born in that town on the fourth day of July, 1776, and would consequently, had he lived until to-day, have celebrated with the nation the one hundredth anniversary of his birth. At the age of ninety-two, then a hearty old man, after having a few days before made a journey of several hundred miles, he sunk in his chair at the table where he with the family had eaten supper, as usual, and expired. Here let me say to you young men, he owed his great length of life to his habits of temperance and industry, and general sobriety. [Cheers.]

It is indeed most natural that our thoughts on this occasion should revert to the days and the people of the Revolution and fasten upon the events peculiar to that period. Then, the colonists so-called, for the name "United States" was not taken until after independence was declared, numbered about 3,000,000 of people. Now we have fully 40,000,000. Then the inhabitants were poor and often suffered for want of the necessaries of life—now they are far from want, and the comforts, yea luxuries of life are within the reach of all. Then thirteen colonies composed the little circle which made up the union—now, thirty-eight states — for we now gladly count Colorado — several of them nearly as populous as the entire country then was, are included in the list. Then a sparse settlement along the Atlantic coast included all the white people--now not a valley of land from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Niagara to the Rio Grande is exempt from the tread of the legitimate white settler. Then a few towns, the largest New York, but little larger than our own city is now, contained all our commerce, now we have cities with two millions of people, and our commerce whitens every ocean with its sails. Then the total business capital of our country was less than that of individual merchants to-day. Then and for fifty years after, not a steam whistle was heard in the land, while to-day tens of thousands of these clarion tongued harbingers of peace and plenty send forth their notes in token of the power which drives the world. Then the dreaded lightning flashed along the clouded heavens untamed as the whirlwind, now that same flash, familiar as a friend, greets word with word and thought with thought, in the twinkling of an eye. around the world. Then to transfer a likeness of the human face to canvass required weeks if not months, now it is done as quick as thought. In all the industrial departments, too, the same progress has been made. The old scythe with its crooked snath, two nibs, and one man power has given way to the chariot mower, with its hundred scythes, and four horse power. The hoe is superseded by the seed drill and cultivator ; the old plodding plow by the steam furrower; the needle by the sewing machine; the hand weaver by the power loom; the old spinning wheel by the steam jenny; the human finger by the cotton gin; the Franklin press, with its 200 impressions on one side per hour, by the Bullock steam press with its 20,000 sheets printed on both sides, per hour; the mail boy by the steam engine; the pot hook, tramel, crane and old three legged kettle by the cooking range; the old stage coach by the Pullman palace car; the dirt road by the steel track; the bucket by the steam fire engine,

and so on to the end, or rather no end of the chapter.

One hundred years ago the United Colonies of America only extended their domain from the Atlantic to the Mississippi river. All west of that line, including the vast Missouri valley, belonged to Spain, and so did Florida. In 1800 Spain ceded the Missouri valley to France, and in 1803 France sold the same to the United States for $15,000,000—the so-called "Louisiana purchase." Only about seventy years ago, then—it may be within the memory of men now before me—was this magnificent valley in which we to-day celebrate, first explored by white men. At that period Lewis and Clark who were sent out for that purpose by President Jefferson in 1804, traveled up the Missouri to its source and also to the head-waters of the Columbia. In fact, one hundred years ago the Alleghany mountains were, practically. the western boundry of the new Union, and but for the adventurous war spirit of George Rogers Clark, a Kentuckian of the truest type, among the Indians west of these mountains, such might have remained the boundary for many years thereafter, and the settlement of the great west have been thereby greatly retarded.

And what of the events of to-day. Towards the chief one all eyes are turned. To-day at Philadelphia is gathered an immense multitude—a national representation of the people of the United States—there witnessing, at the great centre of all the celebrations of the centennial anniversary of American independence, the grandest display of patriotism, and listening to the most eloquent utterances of patriotic sentiment the world ever saw or heard. From that great heart centre, run in every direction over this land, to-day, those telegraphic arteries of human thought, through which flows the nation's life blood — each one of which is throbbing with noblest impulses of human liberty and self government. Not a city, town, hamlet, or village in all the broad land but is showing in some way, and to some extent, more or less conspicuous, signs that a great national event is transpiring, and the ten thousand cheers, which every moment are ascending witness that the event is joyous and inspiring. Nor must we overlook the significant fact that at the same time the centennial exposition is there open, and that there, in peace and unity, are gathered the representatives of nearly all the nations of the globe vying with the Great Republic in the exhibition of their industrial products and their attainments in the arts and sciences. [Cheers.]

Here, in our own goodly city, are gathered true patriots, patriots who, without regard to their place of birth or early teachings, without regard to their former predilections, now join as one man in commemoration of that event which had its origin in that liberty-loving patriotic element which is found in the mind of every man, no matter where born or how taught, that element which spoke its natural language when it uttered the declaration of American independence one hundred years ago. The grandeur of that event and its results cannot be overestimated. The earnest prayer of the three millions of people who composed the sparsely settled population of this country at that time, has been more, much more than fully answered, and by the all-powerful aid of Him who rules the universe and governs the nations—the God of battles—this people have passed through all the trials incident to national childhood and youth,

and now triumphantly fling their banner to the breeze of free thought, free speech, free schools and free men, in the confidence of the full stature of complete and perfect manhood. [Cheers.]

The principle upon which our national constitution is founded—love of liberty—is one of the noblest impulses of man's nature, while the desire and capacity for united self-government belongs alone to the human species. From the animal kingdom upward to the highest type of the human race, the higher the ascending scale, the more conspicuous this liberty loving, self-governing principle becomes. It has from the earliest times shown itself, and, at several of the earlier periods of the history of the human race, it overcame all other forms of government and established itself upon apparently firm footing. Such was the case with Greece and with Rome, centuries before the Christian era. Greece celebrated her third centennial anniversary of independence and Rome her fourth. The fall of those ancient republics affords us a lesson worthy of study. The former fell, not from lack of unity—her sons stood side by side at Marathon and Thermopylæ—but from over indulgence in those luxuries which wealth and power naturally beget, coupled with the love of adventurous war, while the latter could not survive the jealousies of rival political factions and consequent internecine strife. The Goths, and Vandals and Hunns did not destroy her; she destroyed herself. In art, in science, in literature, and in architecture, the splendor of those ancient republics far surpassed those of modern times, and their sad fall admonishes us of these United States that our stabilty as a republic does not depend so much upon our so-called patriotism, nor upon our material wealth or intellectual greatness as upon the strict integrity, the unflinching honesty of our office-holders, our public men. To-day we are powerful, and boast of national prowess and invincibility. To-morrow our country may shake from its centre to its circumference, through the dishonesty or treachery of its chosen rulers. Over the ancient republics we have, however, apparently one great advantage, and that is the general dissemination of knowledge among the masses by means of our free schools. But even this may not save our nation, and, most assuredly, it will not without uprightness of administration. In our strength may lie our weakness. How oft the proud have fallen, and how great the fall! To-day,

> "Where is Rome ?
> She lives but in the tale of other times;
> Her proud pavilions are the hermit's home,
> And her long colonnades, her public walks,
> Now faintly echo to the pilgrim's feet,
> Who comes to muse in solitude, and trace
> Through the rank moss reveal'd, her honored dust."

Italy—liberty-loving, liberty-deserving Italy—still fails to achieve independence. The struggles of Genoa and Venice availed not. There are to-day but three surviving republics in the old world which attract attention—Switzerland, Liberia and France. Switzerland—I had almost said, ancient Switzerland, so long has that little people, safe in their mountain fastnesses, strong in their weakness maintained its integrity of free government, Worthy descendants of William Tell, long may the continued respect of all nations leave you to the full and free enjoyment of your rock-bound home. Liberia promises stability, and is an honor to her rulers. And what shall we say of France—France, the foster mother of polite literature, art and science? To-day she again stands up a republic, and an apparent majority of her people are in favor of self-government. Her stronghold, like ours, is in her system of public education, a system sustained by the government through its appointed cabinet officer, the minister of education. We will join in earnest hopes that France may in due time celebrate her centennial, as we now do. She is our natural ally and friend. She sent us a Lafayette, the compeer of our own Washington, and to-day several of her most prominent republicans, including such men as Laboulaye, Oscar de Lafayette, Marquis de Rochambeau, Henri Martin, De Tocqueville and Waddington, are designing and constructing as a token of friendship, to be placed upon our soil, an immense, colossal statue representing Liberty enlightening the world, and at a cost of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Its erection upon Bedloe's Island, in the harbor of New York, the place selected, will be a worthy manifestation of the good will of France towards America—a good will fully reciprocated. Not forgetting that other foreign nations aided us in achieving our independence—that Germany sent us a Steuben to teach our men the art of arms, and a DeKalb, who fell pierced by eleven wounds at the battle of Camden; that Poland sent us Kosciusko and Pulaski—and other nations sent us other brave men, we must leave the old world. All the struggles for liberty there, whenever and wherever made, whether in Germany, the land of the brave; in Ireland, the home of the daring ; in Poland, Italy, Greece, Hungary, or elsewhere, are worthy of success, but they are made against well-defined opposition and fearful odds.

Brief as is the time allotted me, and anxious as I know you must be to be listening to the eloquent orators who are to follow me, I cannot omit to notice those republics which, during the last decade have been springing up so rapidly on this western continent. Liberty seems to be indigenous to American soil. The example set by our own republic has proved a beacon light to other nations, and has guided them safely into the harbor of self-government.

In yonder South America is the valliant Argentine Republic which will next year celebrate its semi-centennial anniversary. Of still later origin, the republics of Bolivia, Chili, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In Central America we have Costa Rica, San Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemalia, and Honduras. There are also San Domingo and Hayti, but we cannot say Cuba, quite yet. There too is Mexico, discontented, war-worn, factious Mexico. All she needs is a stable government. Mejia, the unfortunate Mexican general who was executed with Maximilian, and whom I often met while stationed on the Rio Grande during the "late unpleasantness," was right when he said that a protectorate by the United States would afford them a better government than they had lived under during the last century. To all these embryo republics the United States to-day sends a greeting of encouragement and good will. We are ready to guarantee to them all, that wherever the old flag,—the stars and stripes—floats, their principles and their rights shall be respected, and encouraged. [Cheers.]

To-day the United States of America stands, the most powerful, the most respected, and the most patriotic nation on the face of the globe, able at one and

the same time to conquer its enemies from abroad and to keep peace among its people at home. The old emblem of freedom, yonder stars and stripes, speaks to all nations a language all its own. It tells of liberty, equality, and fraternity, it represents bright events in the past, and glows with radiant hopes of a triumphant future. Events, the mention of which stirs up a well spring of patriotism in every American heart, hopes, that a nation of citizens, a good representation of whom I see before me, will not disappoint.

Great as our nation has become, as a government it has not in that regard excelled its advancement in those departments, which mark and encourage individual greatness. Agriculture, trade commerce, manufacture, the arts science, and education of the masses, have all kept pace with the liberty-loving, liberty-sustaining spirit of our people; while among our great historical events the emancipation proclamation of President Lincoln stands boldly out as one of the proudest and noblest. Each one, and all these results, are the natural, the almost spontaneous outgrowth of those sentiments which so fortunately led our ancestors to declare themselves and their posterity free and independent.

To you my countrymen and countrywomen; to you, who to-day are assembled a worthy representation of the patriotic citizens of this union; to you and to those in this broad land who like you, and with you, rejoice that they live under a free government, was bequeathed an invaluable legacy by the immortal sons of seventy-six. Thus far, guided by the Great Author of human liberty, we have traveled safely on our way in the path of freedom. The toils we have endured, the obstacles we have overcome, and the lives which have been sacrificed, both to achieve and to preserve the old union, serve but to render it all the nearer and dearer to us.

By every act, then, let us encourage and promote the true principles of the government. Let the love of Liberty hereafter, as heretofore, be dearer than love of life. Let it be our highest aim to promote and uphold everywhere, in those whom we choose to man the old Ship of State, from the cabin boy up to the captain, a spirit of strict honesty—to purify the ballot box, and perfect the ballot, and 1976 shall be emblazoned on the radiant banners of a still free and independent people, and the citizens of Omaha who stand then, where we stand to-day, to celebrate the second centennial will represent a city of five hundred thousand inhabitants, a virtuous and exalted community living under and enjoying all the institutions of a model republic. [Cheers.]

Ere then other nations in the old world, with confidence in our example, will have developed into powerful republics; and in this new world, other republics shall have been established, and, if it shall have become necessary for the safety of our own government, other territory shall have been annexed, and, it may be, a hundred states shall consult together in the halls of our national congress, and be represented on the old war-scarred banner by a hundred stars spangled on its field of blue; while, long ere the period which shall mark two hundred years of American independence, our national emblem shall float over 200,000,000 of people, peaceful and prosperous, basking then, as we do to-day, in the bright sunlight of civil and religious liberty.

[At the close three cheers for our centennial mayor were called and given with a hearty will.]