

AN ORATION.

BY DOCT. THOMAS W. MINER,

Delivered at a Democratic Celebration, at Wilkesbarre, Luzerne Co., July 4, 1838.

Hail, auspicious day! consecrated to National Independence and the Liberties of the people!

FELLOW CITIZENS:

The annual celebration of this day, by every demonstration of respect and joy, far from being a mere pleasing and idle pastime, I regard as a momentous duty which should be cherished as a matter of sacred obligation. It not only commemorates the deeds of our fathers in defence of freedom, but it should also be considered as an annual renewal of the oath on our part—on the part of the whole people—on the altar of liberty, before Heaven and earth, of our unchangeable hatred to tyranny—our undying respect for the worthies of the Revolution, who achieved for us the rich blessings we enjoy—and our firm resolve, live or die, to defend the great cause of popular rights, assail them who dare, and come the danger from what quarter it may.

Freedom is to be preserved only at the price of ever-waking vigilance. The free nation that sleeps over its liberty, whether from indolence, fatigue, or luxury, reposes like the strong man in the lap of a betraying harlot, and will assuredly awake shorn of its strength, and be made to grind in the prison house of tyrants. Arouse ye, then, fellow citizens, now and every succeeding Fourth of July. Meet together and renew your vow of fidelity to popular rights. Teach your children the glorious lesson. Let the cannon thunder in the morning; bid your bells at noon ring out a peal for liberty; let patriotism cheer the night; let hilarity and joy prevail through the day; let at every meeting some one be delegated to speak in the cause, advert to its origin, and discuss some topic that may advance the object to which the day is consecrated.

I stand here this day by your favor as the advocate of popular rights. Such was the stand our fathers took at the Revolution. We were colonies of Great Britain; they thought to make us slaves; they asserted the right to tax us without our consent; they proclaimed the power to make laws binding us in all cases whatsoever. These established, what would there be left? These points yielded, every thing would be held in America, life, property, and reputation, at the will of a master. War or slavery was the alternative; and our fathers nobly preferred war, as many their sons ever do, rather than submit to be slaves. You all know the story of the seven year's contest. Britain poured her thousands and her tens of thousands upon our shores, armed, disciplined, well fed and well clothed. They denounced us as rebels, and let loose the fell demon of war to devastate the land. The fire was kindled at Lexington and Bunker's Hill, and spread far and wide. We suffered deeply, but the enemy found it no holiday parade. Wherever the tyrants struck, the sons of liberty gave a blow in return. Thus may it ever be. Deeply, deeply, we suffered. Numbers, organizations discipline seemed for a moment to give the ascendancy to the enemy; and the memorable winter campaign of '76, in the Jerseys, cannot be too often recalled. Literally the soldiers of liberty marched their way over the frozen earth with blood from their naked feet. There was patriotism worthy your emulation. The cry of victory rose from all along the British lines; they said we were beaten; it was all over. The immortal Father of his Country, in that hour of gloom, conceived and executed the glorious enterprise against the enemy at Trenton, and afterwards at Princeton. He re-kindled the beacon fire of hope in every bosom in the land. Six hundred Hessian mercenaries laid down their arms, and the proud Lord Cornwallis, with his red coats, was driven back to New York. The rising spirit of insolvent Toryism was rebuked, and confidence was restored throughout all the country. It is not my purpose to go thro' the whole of the war to its glorious termination at Yorktown, though full of interesting matters for reflection; but I advert to this winter campaign of 1776, as it teaches this instructive lesson—that those engaged in the best cause may be sorely pressed, but that fortitude and spirit will eventually triumph—and to draw the conclusion, pertinent to the topic selected for this day's discussion, that the patriot, while engaged in the just and generous cause of popular rights, should never despair.

The war over, divisions arose among ourselves. It was natural. It was inevitable. Many thought the form of the British government, with its king, and hereditary peers, and its church establishment, were well enough, only that in the case of America it had been badly administered. Wealth asked to perpetuate itself in family establishments. With the very considerable degree of liberty enjoyed in America, there were still many vestiges of Aristocracy which had not yet been stricken off. In some of the states the law of primogeniture still prevailed, which gave the father's property not to all the children alike, but to the oldest son a chief part or a double share, so as to keep up a family name and establishment. The friends of popular rights justly regarded this as hostile to liberty, and strenuously contended for its abolition. In this cause the great leader of the Democratic party in the United States led the way. The repeal of these odious relics of aristocracy in the Assembly of Virginia, was moved by Thomas Jefferson, and adopted under

the auspices of his genius. In establishing the Federal constitution, the high-toned party—the Aristocracy, honest and sincere no doubt, though mistaken—sought to infuse undue energy into the new government. They wanted a strong government; they wanted a constitution of great power and energy. On the other hand, the friends of popular rights contended that the true strength of every just government was the confidence and good will of the people. There lay the sustaining power, the potent energy which would preserve it. Forms might be established, and every thing else left free to the people—that then the Government must and would be administered with reference to the interests of the great body of the people; whereas, if rules were entrenched behind constitutional bulwarks, beyond the reach of the popular will, it would be as the history of human nature has shewn it ever has been—aristocratic feelings would grow up, and the government be administered for their own benefit, to the sacrifice of the great cause of popular rights. The struggle was severe; and if all was not obtained that the Democracy desired, yet in the main the cause of the people gained much, and our federal constitution, the work of compromise, should be cherished by every patriot as our bond of union—our safeguard against foreign encroachment, and our sure defence against domestic violence. Beautiful edifice! thou splendid tower of National Union and Independence! Withered be the hand that would break down one pillar that sustains thy splendid and protecting dome!

I come now to my native state—beloved Pennsylvania—the Key-stone of the Federal Arch. Here for half a century the contest has been going on between the aristocratic, or as it has sometimes been termed, the conservative principle & the principle of more extended liberty and popular rights.

I mean to speak plainly and freely—for before Heaven and on my conscience, I believe I am defending the best interests of my country; but I do not wish to speak offensively to any. By the aristocratic party, I do not mean to say that its members are enemies to liberty, and wish to see the people reduced to a state of slavery; but that their general course is and has been hostile to the extension of popular rights. In the convention that formed the constitution of Pennsylvania, the ground was inch by inch sharply contested between the aristocracy on one side and the Democracy on the other; the latter seeking to infuse a much larger portion of liberal and republican principles into that instrument. But the conservatives, though they were compelled to yield something to the spirit of freedom, retained far too much. A Senate for four years—life tenures in the Judiciary—a Government for three years, re-eligible for nine, with an almost boundless patronage—no restrictions on corporations: these were the triumphs of the aristocracy over the popular party, which the recent Convention—many thanks to the talents and perseverance of our own distinguished representation—have proposed to be modified and brought nearer the standard of the cause I this day advocate; the sacred cause of popular rights, and the happiness of the people.

After the Constitution went into effect, the conflict between the Aristocracy and the though popular party was renewed on other grounds. Our laws and proceedings, much ameliorated and improved, were still extremely burdensome and oppressive to the common people. For every disputed account over twenty dollars, a debtor might be forced into court of course at the county town, and involved in costs and expence ruinous to a poor man, who might as well submit to oppression and imposition at home as to go abroad and be ruined in pursuit of justice. The arbitration principle was extremely limited. Nothing could be done in entering up judgments in the public offices, or in the transaction of legal business of any sort however simple, without a lawyer and a fee. To correct these errors—to amend these really oppressive laws and rules of proceedings, was the next great object of the democracy of Pennsylvania. They brought forward their plan—they reasoned—they wrote—they spoke—they debated the matter at home and in popular meetings. The Conservatives met them lance to lance, and defended the wrong with all the zeal of interest and all the eloquence of long practice and talented advocates. But the cause of popular right gloriously succeeded, and I here before you all hazard the assertion that if a party were to replace these things as they were thirty years ago, so unendurably oppressive would the galling chains be felt, that the great body of the people, lovers of peace as they are, would rise in their might and at one blow level such party, and restore suits, arbitrations, and legal proceedings to their present just and salutary forms. With confidence may the assertion be made, that by these continued and persevering efforts of the Democracy resulting in success, the expences of the administration of justice in Pennsylvania were reduced more than one half, and the system rendered in every respect more fair and efficient in settling controversies between individuals.

Though the friends of popular rights were sometimes beat back, yet with a zeal that was irrepressible and fortitude that could never be subdued, they have rallied again and again to the conflict. They have done much. They have accomplished great good, and have every incitement that can operate on virtuous minds still strenuously to persevere. Our motto should be—

When men first began to breathe the atmosphere of active life, they gathered all the ardor of youth, adopted the opinions of their fathers, imbibing the feelings and opinions of those nearest around them. Reflecting minds, as they advance and improve by experience, take a broader ken, examine questions of policy and scrutinize principles for themselves; and with conscientious sincerity adopt the course of policy their hearts and judgments approve. Such was the course of Madison, who, when first in public life, co-incided with the Conservatives; but his pure heart and deep reflection soon led him to unite with the Republican party as the supporter of popular rights, of which he was so long the safe guard and distinguished ornament.—Such, too, was the course of the eminent statesman, the honor and pride of Pennsylvania, James Buchanan, who is destined we hope to promotion commensurate with his mind and ability. His wisdom is looked at as among the safest guides of our august Senate, where his eloquence commands applause and his courtesy and virtues inspire confidence and esteem. Popular rights find in him one of their most warm and able supporters. All improvement implies change; and I would earnestly invite all our young men especially, whatever may have been their way of thinking heretofore, to join the popular party, combine with the sons of freedom, and contend with us for the great and wholesome principles of Democratic liberty. Among the earliest battles in which Madison took the lead in behalf of popular rights, was in 1791 and 2, when Hamilton introduced the funding system. It will be wholesome for our young men to understand this matter, and I will briefly state it. The federal party proposed that all debts due from the public growing out of the Revolution, amounting to one hundred million of dollars, should be funded at par, and for which stock should be issued by the government chiefly bearing interest. Now it so happened that from the close of the war in 1783 to 1791, the government was totally destitute of money, and the soldiers holding certificates of debt, the price of their services—of their blood—and their sufferings in the army, were without bread and in want of all the necessaries of life, literally starving, and they were compelled by dire necessity to sell their certificates of debt to speculators at two and six pence on the pound— one-eighth of their value; thus getting but one year's pay for eight year's service. Many millions had thus been bought up by speculators, sharpers who lived then as they live now upon the miseries of the poor. Hamilton proposed to pay the whole amount of these certificates, in whose hands soever they might be, at their face, at par, in full. "No," said Mr. Madison, "that would neither be just to the public, to the speculator who has given only 12 cents for a dollar, nor to the poor soldier who is entitled to his pay at your hand. Let us divide this thing—pay the speculator one half; he will then get two or three hundred per cent for his money, and we will allot the other half to the poor and meritorious soldier who so hardly earned it." Is it not obvious that this would have been just? Was not this a noble effort in behalf of popular rights? Though it failed, yet the effort rendered the name of Madison dear to ever true lover of justice and freedom, and was one of the corner stones of that beautiful edifice of character and patriotism that raised him to the station of President of this Republic.

The contest of the aristocracy, the speculator, the money changers on one side, and the advocates of popular rights is still and ever going on, though upon new ground—and this hour demands all your zeal and all your vigilance. The encroachments of avarice, ambition, and power, like time never cease their onward course; and are often the most dangerous when noiseless. Their commencement is often minute as the filament of the silk worm grows to a thread increasing from twine cord, until at length the community of themselves bound like the strong man bands that resist their power to sever. Thus it has been with Corporations. In the early part of the Republic, asked for evidently beneficial purposes—for turnpike roads, or the carrying on some manifestly useful work. Soon private interest, and grasping avarice, see the advantage that may be made to result; and private charters are solicited—charters for Coal Companies—charters for manufacturing—charters especially for banking—great monied corporations; corporations that do in effect coin money, build marble palaces, hold the destinies of half the business population in their hands, and therefore by the unerring laws of nature holding in a measure the control over their independence. Hence around these monstrous monied corporations grows up an aristocracy of pride and wealth; wealth obtained by speculation not by labour. Distinctions grow up in society. The mechanic, the farmer, the laborer's sons and daughters find no access to the splendid sources of these Bank note nabobs. Then you shall hear, whispers first, and then more audibly, this language in relation to the common people: "These fellows! why—that mechanic's vote counts as much as mine. There is no security where the rabble have equal rights of suffrage with men of property." And thus came doubts, ominously hinted of the utility, at least the stability, of Republican institutions. This is no fancy sketch. At the present session of Congress, a patriotic and eloquent member from Massachusetts, who knew the evil, its great and dangerous

extent, its increasing tendency and how widely this Anti-Republican spirit was prevailing, took upon himself, on the floor of the House of Representatives, openly to state its alarming existence, and emphatically to rebuke it. Let me tell you, Fellow Citizens, this would not have been done unless these aristocratic croaking against our Republican institutions had arrived at a startling pitch, and needed bold and public denunciation.

I speak facts. I appeal to your reason. I would arouse the democracy of the State to take a broad view of the subject—to remember that every effort for popular rights, and every meeting obtained in their favor, has been led on by the democracy, and can only be sustained by the union, harmony and energetic action of the party. But I have not yet done with these corporations, the crying evil of the times. In their very nature and constitution wholly antagonistic to Republican principles and Democratic institutions. I say with emphasis that they are dangerously numerous, they are alarmingly increasing, and ought with firm hands to be restrained and diminished. They are vast machines, of immense power, with all the most dangerous of passions, but without principle to restraint or guide—for they have no souls, and the legal avowal of my lord Coko is justified by their conduct. Self interest is their moving principle, and they roll on like the car of Juggernaut, their destined round, careless alike of who rides or who is crushed, so they fulfil their destiny.

Have we not lately seen one of these corporations in its high blown pride, with daring insolence, set the whole constituted authority of this nation at defiance? Have we not witnessed the degrading, the humiliating spectacle, of one of these Behemoth corporations purchasing a charter of enormous amount from this Commonwealth, in defiance of the known and manifest will of the people? Have we not seen the President of that Institution subsidizing if not corrupting the Press. You all remember the case of Webb, at the head of a leading daily print in New York of extensive circulation and influence opposed to the bank, but needy and unprincipled, he approaches the President of the Bank. The powerful emotion of kindred sympathy drew them to each others embrace. Webb wants the trifling sum of 25,000 dollars, but with the express reservation of his virtuous principles. He is opposed to the Bank—that must be understood. President Biddle, with the most amiable respect for his independence asks no pledge, expects no favor; but without consulting a single Director just happening to have 25,000 dollars in his breeches pocket, hands it over to the true and unsuspected and unsuspecting editor; and then forgets, it was such a trifle, for some weeks to mention the fact or put it in the loan books of the institution. Shameful prostitution! Was there ever a sale in the stables or in market more open? And Webb forthwith, as in duty bound, came forth the advocate of the Bank. And for alluding to this poor Cilley lies low in his murdered grave, and any citizen who dare re-expose it to public reprobation, does it at the risk of assassination.

Follow this corporation on. Behold its power. The Bank of England has not been sufficiently accommodating to Mr. Jaudon, agent of our Pennsylvania Mammoth in London, and Mr. Jaudon in his quiet way is able to make the Bank of England tremble and come humbly to his terms. The whole Cotton crop of the South is bought up with Resurrection notes, the defunct and ought to be cancelled bills of the old bank of the United States, most improperly put in circulation.

Thucydides long ago remarked that the plague chased all other diseases from Athens or obliged them to assume some of its symptoms. So too, this over-ruling and controlling corporation has furnished a livery for all lesser institutions of the same type and character, and forced it upon them.

Operating then in all the South, in Pennsylvania, and in Europe, with such immense resources, can a reasonable man doubt but that the derangement in the exchanges is entirely the work of this corporation? Thus are the people oppressed. Thus is the general government of our country bearded and set at defiance. Let me say to you in soberness, that such a corporation acting beyond all effective control on your part, thus irresponsible and of such extensive power, is a tremendous engine of aristocracy, and in the hands of men, were they pure as angels, dangerous to popular rights and the best interests of the people. As wealth and luxury thus acquired prevail, all history and all experience show that the moral sense of a community abates something of its tone and the pure spirit of independence, partaking of the general lassitude, loses its vigor and droops before this encroaching influence.

Behold again the president of this institution nominally subject to annual election, but in truth more permanently seated on his golden throne than the Autocrat of Russia—with the lordly ambition of Woolsey and the fanatical indelicacy of Beckett, he counteracts the government. While the President addresses the nation through Congress or by proclamation, President Biddle sends forth his messages to the world in the name of the associated banks of Philadelphia, not in the name of the Directors of his own Bank—but in the imperial style—"It is I." I will regulate the currency—I will resume specie payments, "Sic volo—sic jubeo." Then what do we hear?

Seated like a Demigog on his eminence, sycophants, flatterers, and toad-eaters surround his throne; and the universal cry is "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." We hear of the Biddle subscription, the Biddle donation, the Biddle ball, until even the humble subserviency of Whig pride revolts and speaks openly as it dares, "too much of a good thing, by Jupiter—a little civet good apothecary."

I disavow all personal enmity to Mr. Biddle; the private virtues we are told find no where more respect; but as the head of that mammoth State institution, he has sown a power and a will dangerous in my opinion to the liberty of my country, and hostile to popular rights and therefore do I warn you of the danger. And here let me again advert to the measures of the late Convention, to amend the Constitution. We are greatly indebted to the Republican party, and especially to our delegation, for their efforts to infuse new and wholesome popular principles into that instrument; and if it were only for that provision which goes to curtail the dangerous and growing influence of these institutions, the amendments ought to be adopted. This for the present seems our chiefest hope; for the rest we must look to the intelligence & spirit of the people.

Fellow Citizens—I have endeavored to show you that popular rights, the natural prey of aristocracy, have ever walked their way in danger and owe their healthful existence and vigorous growth to the steady and well directed efforts of the Democratic party. Men may err—men do err—men will err. Principles are eternal. Popular rights, if they still flourish, must forever be indebted to the vigilance, union and spirit of democracy. Let me then adjure you, by your love of liberty and your country, never to be weary in well doing. Let no jealousies distract, let no sinister influences divide you—but be true to yourselves, your cause, and your country. I wish I could make my voice heard through every valley, to every mountain top; in Pennsylvania. I would say—Arise! Arise! The Philistines, Sampson, are upon you! Gird on your armor to go forth to this new contest. Our motto, from Lake Erie to the Delaware, streaming forth like a meteor on the troubled winds, rousing to action—let it be union and harmony in the Democratic party—the strenuous defence of Mr. Van Buren and his administration in their just measures to throw off the chains of dependence which the banks have been too successfully weaving around us. At home the cheerful and vigorous support of the Democratic candidate for Governor, David R. Porter—the republican amendments to the Constitution, abolishing life tenures and restricting corporations—these are the grand objects of the campaign, worthy the united efforts of the friends of freedom and popular rights throughout Pennsylvania.

Irish Lawyer.—Although full and satisfactory evidence has been published that Gen. David R. Porter, the Democratic candidate, is the son of a Revolutionary soldier, a native of Montgomery county, Pennsylvania, born and raised on a farm, which he assisted his father to cultivate until somewhat advanced in life, and a lawyer by profession, yet the Ritzer office holders sneeringly call him an "Irish Lawyer." This ridicule of the Irish will be treated by the German citizens, with the contempt such baseness deserves, while it will induce the Irish voters to declare through the ballot boxes, that a set of desperate office holders shall not abuse them with impunity.

Republican Compiler.

We have never witnessed, on any occasion, such a universal concentration of public opinion in favor of any candidate for office, as that which has settled down on David R. Porter. The support which he receives in the ranks of democracy, borders on enthusiasm. The abuse lavished upon him by a few personal enemies and political opponents only elevates him higher in the estimation of his friends, and draws those ties which have long endeared him to his numerous personal acquaintances, everywhere throughout Pennsylvania, still closer around him; is there a man among us who would not feel proud to see this commonwealth honored by an executive possessing preeminent abilities, combined with unassuming manners—correct moral principles—gentlemanly deportment, and unimpeachable character? If there is let him oppose David R. Porter, the candidate of the democratic party. If on the other hand, our farmers, mechanics, and labouring men, desire to see the executive chair of Pennsylvania, filled by a chief magistrate, possessing the qualities just mentioned, let them support David R. Porter, the long tried, faithful public officer, and the poor man's friend. Go into Huntingdon county, and inquire of her industrious, honest labouring citizens, who has been their most useful & enterprising citizen. Ask them to point out their greatest benefactor—the man among all parties and denominations, most esteemed, and a voice from every mountain glen—from every hill and valley of that extensive—populous and intelligent county, would echo the name of David R. Porter. Well may Huntingdon county call him her own; and proudly may she say to the citizens of Pennsylvania, we know him, and therefore we support him—here he has lived in prosperity and adversity, and who that regards truth can say aught against him.

Democracy and the people on the one side, aristocracy and the banks on the other.