

## **Seventeen Hundred and Seventy Six: An oration delivered by John Charles Black in the schoolroom at Union Seminary, N. A. Prentiss, Principal**

### Seventeen Hundred and Seventy Six

The first gleam of sunlight that ushered in the New Year of 1776 glittered and danced upon a downtrodden and oppressed world. A world for a thousand ages had tamely submitted to the extortions and demands of Kings and Feudal Lords whose sole focus consisted in the fact that their fathers had done so before them. A world that had suffered in total wrongs and shed rivers of blood in defense of the hand that sheltered and blinded, while it crushed them down to gravel in the dust. It shone upon a power that had built its walls to the clouds and laid foundations deep and surely on the rocks of Superstition and ignorance itself had begun to form amongst the people. It had strengthened its bulwarks and sunk its posts, and lifted on high, it bade defiance to God and to man. But “despise ye not the day of little kings”, there was a counter power at that time – and indeed it seemed to be – that was destined to speedily “grow in growth and strengthen in strength” until it would shake to the base and the opposition tears down its blood-soaked flag, and raises another inscribed “All men are free and equal.” It is an invariable rule that oppression carried beyond a certain limit will provoke resistance.

286 years has come and gone since there landed on the “wild New England shore” a party of exiles, with whose fortune and fame the world has since been made familiar by story and song. “Not as the flying come they” but with faith, and hope, with prayer and with faith in a God who has said he will not forsake, and in hope of a life from the oppressions which had drove them forth from their early homes and rudely severed every tie that bound them there. To be enabled to worship the God of their fathers according to the dictates of their own free will, they bade farewell to home, and friends, and kindred dear, and taking their lives into their hands, they crossed the wide, wide ocean; and landed on a barren shore, thus showing their strong and abiding hatred of lawless power in any shape or form. Surrounded by dangers, they took in one hand the Bible as a guide, and in the other a sword as a defense. Thus situated, they presented around which kindred spirits gathered and gathered until the result was the colonies of Great Britain in North America.

Like produces like: and was it then probable that these sons of Puritans when strong would then submit to kings that would have made their fathers when weak to call on God to rescue? No! They inherited a due proposition that their indomitable love of liberty, and hatred of oppression.

These were the men to whom were committed of sounding the trump of Freedom in the face of Tyranny. They were fully capable of fulfilling the task. They were three million strong. They were fully alive to the dangers of their situation. How well they succeeded we all well know. We are now enjoying the fruits of their labors.

Under their guidance, the “Sun of Liberty” arose. But his sphere was the world, and not America. He crossed the rolling ocean, enshrined in the hearts of soldiers who had so gallantly defended him in the hour of his infancy. As he rose and brightened, France bowed down and as an expression of her devotion the head of the dethroned king rolled from the scaffold. All the

continent felt its regenerating power and that foe to the rights of man. Old England shook to the center of her "fast anchored isle" as she rushed to do battle I the cause of the lonely and oppressed of all nations.

But the shock was bit impulsive. Europe is as yet too firmly fettered by the bonds of ignorance and oppression, crime, venality and ill-directed power. It shines in all its brightness for us, and us alone. Oh! How we should prize it, as dear as the Life, the Peace and the Power. But we cannot hope always to retain it for ourselves alone. Like a bird weary of unwonted flight it but folds its wings to rest until the time shall arise when it will sweep out the more from its nest--- to certain victory and triumph. The necessary blow has been struck; the walls and towers of Despotism totter to the fall, and when it has raised its proud head, the fair face of Liberty will appear and millions shall rejoice, where millions wept before.

The floodgates of Eternity have closed upon the rolling volume of nearly eighty years since The Declaration of Independence sounded its warning in the ears of a slumbering world. And in those eighty years of Freedom and prosperity, this Republic has strode onward from comparative obscurity to grandiose glory, and into the shade all other advancements political or moral that it has been the task of the historians to record, or the Antiquarians to ponder upon. America has laid the foundation for her national greatness and her glory, firmly and true, and is erecting these on the fairest fabric it has ever been the privilege on man to create or to enjoy.

In its goodly full beauty and utility are combined in same proportion. The framework is our churches, and our school rooms, its adornings are the locomotive with its thundering roll and fiendish scream, disturbing the sounds of all Nature waking and sowing broadcast over the land; the "Steamboat of the West", the white sailed ships and "ocean monarchs" of the east Bearing within these dark holds the wealth of princes, and these are indices of our advancement and our prosperity.

These are great results and they are the reward of liberty of heart, of mind, of voice. Look at the time that passed away while they were unthought of and never raised until the clouds of tyranny were displaced, and Liberty arose. We owe them to the men of Seventy Six. And as long as the stars of our bright banner shine may these names ever excite emotion of the deepest gratitude and may the remembrance of their virtues and their greatness ever form the guiding star to Young America.

J. C. Black