

**(John Charles Black wrote the following at the age of 16. It is transcribed from his handwritten notes so there may be some missing words. It is part of an “oration” that he gave at Union Seminary in Danville. He addresses the historical concept of “Empire” as it has found its way through history, ultimately to America. Written in 1856, the start of his last paragraph seems prescient.)**

The Star of Empire; An oration delivered at the close of the winter term in 1856-1867 at Union Seminary N.A. Prentiss Principal

We are told that the soul of man is created in its own destiny of power, and we believe it. We are cast in such mold as best suits us in every transpiring event that is in our pathway through life. Great events, the mighty revolutions of all Earth, are caused but by the promptings of mind over matter, the acting of the invisible upon the visible and the real. The Star of Empire is but the child of man’s energy and where his powers have been most highly excited, where its luster has been the clearest, its glory the most fully developed.

Ages ago, when mighty men sat on the throne of the Pharaohs, guiding in proper channels the elevation of Egyptian greatness, they brought to life this luminary; their palaces rich with the spoils of vanquished nations, and kings paid tribute to their power.

But another competitor arose, another empire was founded, and the star that for a thousand years had glittered in the Nile, passed far away to lighten Baalbek’s domes and gleam in the halls of its mighty ones. From their lands grown weak by reason of years of ease and luxury, the Persians rested the baton of power. Like a mighty ball cast into the sky, it wandered from nation to nation, then passed away to know the Orient no more. Greece, claiming it next, bound it to the cause of her glory, by the eloquence and bravery of his sons. Alexander bore it, battered in

blood, over the Grecians, but Death struck him down---with him went bravery and strength, and eloquence alone remained. Rome's legions won it with their arms, and affixing it upon "the Seven Hills" surrounded it with their spears, and it departed, but when the Soul was gone and corruption crept, festering into every member of the commonwealth. It emerged from the Romans when Mohammed bearing his crescent flag after \_\_\_\_\_ death, and blood from its gleaming folds and gathered kingdom after kingdom to the embrace of his powers. Wrapped in the robe of kings it has passed over the bloody fields of Europe like a meteor in its course arose there, then far away in the north pouring the halo of its glory round the brow of Charles of Sweden, then vanishing from the gaze of Napoleon and Europe, midst the carnage and smoke of Leipzig and Waterloo.

Gone! Eternally Gone! No genius wakes the spirit of the north and calls forth its strength to enchain, or its beauty to enchant a world. No Phoenix powers raises another Napoleon from the ashes of the mighty dead. Europe is fallen! She is bound to the case of his Destiny, and her corruption and infamy driving lives onward to this destruction.

And now, wearied of the rivers of blood, that have burst forth to meet it, in all its past career, that Star has sought another, and more genial climes, one where the arts of peace, and not war were cultivated. And instead of the sodden battlefield where ambition struggled, and crowns were lost, it sees the glory of the West. The sunny prairie and widespread forest subdued and tamed by the restless hand of man. And while it receives the landmarks of national greatness, and mixed with signs of national \_\_\_\_\_, it sees that it has reached the destination of its race, the goal of its labors, and it cried in an ecstasy of joy.

"Hail Union! Hail! Thou land of Freedom's birth Pride of the Main, and Eagle of the Earth Thou second Rome! Where justice, mercy dwell; Whose sons in wisdom as in arts excel."

And the response has been a welcome, clear and deep from the voices of the millions of America; her artisans and yeomen; statesman and her poets; her guards in battle, and her armaments in peace.

And now it is for us to confirm the vision of Empire and America. How shall it be done? Through war? Look to the East for an answer. The gloom of an eternal night hangs over the plains of \_\_\_\_\_ and Thebes where the sun of knowledge first illumined the soul of man. The cloud of Superstition on the ruined Babylon the Mighty. Silence reigns supreme in the halls of the kings of the East.

Greece is desolate! Rome like an aged beggar: protected from dissolution and death, but by the rags of her former greatness which still cling around her, speaking eloquently of those days when “kings ruled the world.”

The form of government alone remains to be supported by fanaticism to “the faithful” of Mecca; a few more generations and the desert wind, the “Red Simoon” will drift the gathering sands over the grave of the “Prophet”, and that religion and another Empire will be with the things that were.

Shall we thrive by conquest and carnage? Look to Europe for an answer. The best blood of her sons has gushed like water from the stricken rock and gone to fertilize her \_\_\_\_\_, their bodies devoured by the vultures of Battle, and gathered to the bosom of Mother Earth from home and quiet churchyard, life’s struggles over, they had hoped to be gathered to rest with the generations of their fathers who had gone before them in the Exodus of Life.

No! War is not for us. Peace be our motto and our shield. Wealth, we possess, and energies. That Star is ours, bound to us by indissoluble ties. California has cast a chain of gold around it; from Maine to Texas the soil is being woven; Nature has for us spread a silver mesh from

seaboard to seaboard and on our lakes and rivers, and on each gleaming thread rests the wealth of kingdoms.