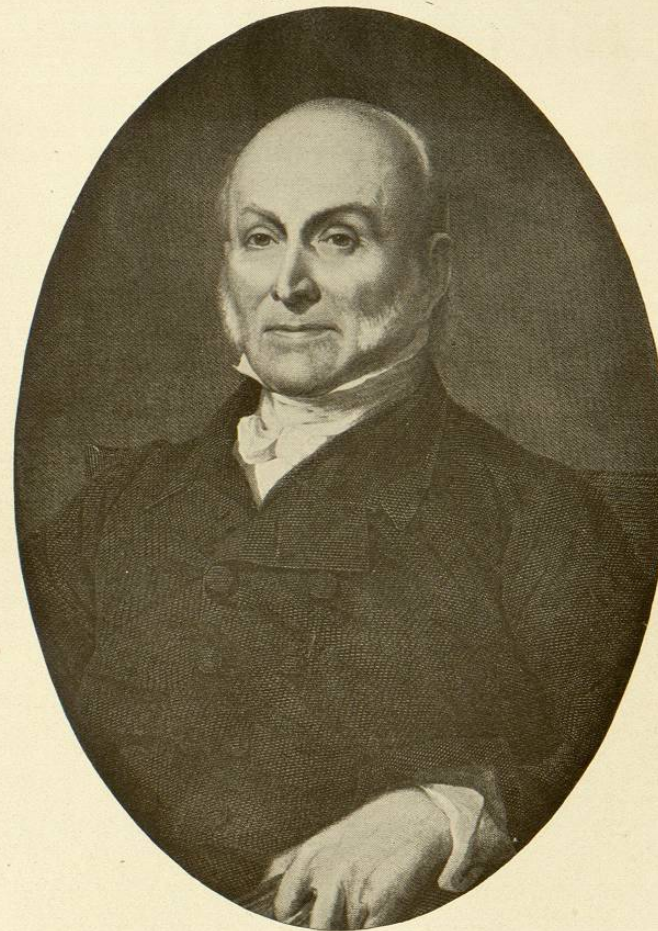


## JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

**J**OHAN QUINCY ADAMS, son of President John Adams, and himself sixth President of the United States (1825-29), was born at Braintree, Mass., July 11, 1767, and died at Washington, D. C., Feb. 23, 1848. Educated at Paris and at the University of Leyden, and subsequently graduating at Harvard, he later on studied law and in 1791 was admitted to the Bar. Being a scholarly man, he wrote with distinction some political essays which gained for him, in 1794, appointment as United States Minister to the Netherlands, and he subsequently represented the nation as Minister at Berlin. Recalled in 1801, he entered the United States Senate two years later as a Federalist, but lost his seat in 1808 in consequence of his vote, given in the previous year, for Jefferson's embargo policy against France and England. After thus separating himself from the Federal party, he filled the period of his retirement from public life by acting for three years as professor of rhetoric and belles-lettres at Harvard. In 1809, he was meanwhile intrusted by Madison with the United States embassy at St. Petersburg, after which he served as one of the commissioners who negotiated the treaty of peace with Britain (1814) and for two years thereafter was our Minister at the Court of St. James. On his return to this country, in 1817, he became Secretary of State in Monroe's cabinet, a post he held throughout Monroe's administration, and was instrumental in it in bringing about the cession of Florida to the United States. In 1824, of the four candidates for the Presidency,—Jackson, Clay, Crawford, and J. Q. Adams,—all of them professing Democrats, a deadlock ensued, since no one of them had the requisite majority. The election therefore devolved on the House of Representatives, which under Clay's influence chose Mr. Adams. Four years later, on seeking reëlection, he was defeated by Jackson, and Mr. Adams for a time retired to private life, only however to be recalled in 1830 to Congress, where he represented his own district until his death by a stroke of paralysis in the Capitol. His oration at Plymouth in 1802, in memory of the Landing of the Pilgrims, given in these pages, belongs to literature and history rather than to politics.

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JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

## ORATION AT PLYMOUTH

DELIVERED AT PLYMOUTH, DECEMBER 22, 1802, IN COMMEMORATION  
OF THE LANDING OF THE PILGRIMS

**A**MONG the sentiments of most powerful operation upon the human heart, and most highly honorable to the human character, are those of veneration for our forefathers, and of love for our posterity. They form the connecting links between the selfish and the social passions. By the fundamental principle of Christianity, the happiness of the individual is interwoven, by innumerable and imperceptible ties, with that of his contemporaries. By the power of filial reverence and parental affection, individual existence is extended beyond the limits of individual life, and the happiness of every age is chained in mutual dependence upon that of every other. Respect for his ancestors excites, in the breast of man, interest in their history, attachment to their characters, concern for their errors, involuntary pride in their virtues. Love for his posterity spurs him to exertion for their support, stimulates him to virtue for their example, and fills him with the tenderest solicitude for their welfare. Man, therefore, was not made for himself alone. No, he was made for his country, by the obligations of the social compact; he was made for his species, by the Christian duties of universal charity; he was made for all ages past, by the sentiment of reverence for his forefathers; and he was made for all future times, by the

impulse of affection for his progeny. Under the influence of these principles,

"Existence sees him spurn her bounded reign."

They redeem his nature from the subjection of time and space; he is no longer a "puny insect shivering at a breeze"; he is the glory of creation, formed to occupy all time and all extent; bounded, during his residence upon earth, only to the boundaries of the world, and destined to life and immortality in brighter regions, when the fabric of nature itself shall dissolve and perish.

The voice of history has not, in all its compass, a note but answers in unison with these sentiments. The barbarian chieftain, who defended his country against the Roman invasion, driven to the remotest extremity of Britain, and stimulating his followers to battle by all that has power of persuasion upon the human heart, concluded his persuasion by an appeal to these irresistible feelings: "Think of your forefathers and of your posterity." The Romans themselves, at the pinnacle of civilization, were actuated by the same impressions, and celebrated, in anniversary festivals, every great event which had signalized the annals of their forefathers. To multiply instances where it were impossible to adduce an exception would be to waste your time and abuse your patience; but in the sacred volume, which contains the substance of our firmest faith and of our most precious hopes, these passions not only maintain their highest efficacy, but are sanctioned by the express injunctions of the Divine Legislator to his chosen people.

The revolutions of time furnish no previous example of a nation shooting up to maturity and expanding into greatness with the rapidity which has characterized the growth of

the American people. In the luxuriance of youth, and in the vigor of manhood, it is pleasing and instructive to look backward upon the helpless days of infancy; but in the continual and essential changes of a growing subject, the transactions of that early period would be soon obliterated from the memory but for some periodical call of attention to aid the silent records of the historian. Such celebrations arouse and gratify the kindest emotions of the bosom. They are faithful pledges of the respect we bear to the memory of our ancestors and of the tenderness with which we cherish the rising generation. They introduce the sages and heroes of ages past to the notice and emulation of succeeding times; they are at once testimonials of our gratitude, and schools of virtue to our children.

These sentiments are wise; they are honorable; they are virtuous; their cultivation is not merely innocent pleasure, it is incumbent duty. Obedient to their dictates, you, my fellow-citizens, have instituted and paid frequent observance to this annual solemnity. And what event of weightier intrinsic importance, or of more extensive consequences, was ever selected for this honorary distinction?

In reverting to the period of our origin, other nations have generally been compelled to plunge into the chaos of impenetrable antiquity, or to trace a lawless ancestry into the caverns of ravishers and robbers. It is your peculiar privilege to commemorate, in this birthday of your nation, an event ascertained in its minutest details; an event of which the principal actors are known to you familiarly, as if belonging to your own age; an event of a magnitude before which imagination shrinks at the imperfection of her powers. It is your further happiness to behold, in those eminent characters, who were most conspicuous in accom-

plishing the settlement of your country, men upon whose virtue you can dwell with honest exultation. The founders of your race are not handed down to you, like the fathers of the Roman people, as the sucklings of a wolf. You are not descended from a nauseous compound of fanaticism and sensuality, whose only argument was the sword, and whose only paradise was a brothel. No Gothic scourge of God, no Vandal pest of nations, no fabled fugitive from the flames of Troy, no bastard Norman tyrant, appears among the list of worthies who first landed on the rock, which your veneration has preserved as a lasting monument of their achievement. The great actors of the day we now solemnize were illustrious by their intrepid valor no less than by their Christian graces, but the clarion of conquest has not blazoned forth their names to all the winds of heaven. Their glory has not been wafted over oceans of blood to the remotest regions of the earth. They have not erected to themselves colossal statues upon pedestals of human bones, to provoke and insult the tardy hand of heavenly retribution. But theirs was "the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom." Theirs was the gentle temper of Christian kindness; the rigorous observance of reciprocal justice; the unconquerable soul of conscious integrity. Worldly fame has been parsimonious of her favor to the memory of those generous companions. Their numbers were small; their stations in life obscure; the object of their enterprise unostentatious; the theatre of their exploits remote; how could they possibly be favorites of worldly Fame—that common crier, whose existence is only known by the assemblage of multitudes; that pander of wealth and greatness, so eager to haunt the palaces of fortune, and so fastidious to the houseless dignity of virtue; that parasite

of pride, ever scornful to meekness, and ever obsequious to insolent power; that heedless trumpeter, whose ears are deaf to modest merit, and whose eyes are blind to bloodless, distant excellence?

When the persecuted companions of Robinson, exiles from their native land, anxiously sued for the privilege of removing a thousand leagues more distant to an untried soil, a rigorous climate, and a savage wilderness, for the sake of reconciling their sense of religious duty with their affections for their country, few, perhaps none of them, formed a conception of what would be, within two centuries, the result of their undertaking. When the jealous and niggardly policy of their British sovereign denied them even that humblest of requests, and instead of liberty would barely consent to promise connivance, neither he nor they might be aware that they were laying the foundations of a power, and that he was sowing the seeds of a spirit, which, in less than two hundred years, would stagger the throne of his descendants, and shake his united kingdoms to the centre. So far is it from the ordinary habits of mankind to calculate the importance of events in their elementary principles, that had the first colonists of our country ever intimated as a part of their designs the project of founding a great and mighty nation, the finger of scorn would have pointed them to the cells of Bedlam as an abode more suitable for hatching vain empires than the solitude of a transatlantic desert.

These consequences, then so little foreseen, have unfolded themselves, in all their grandeur, to the eyes of the present age. It is a common amusement of speculative minds to contrast the magnitude of the most important events with the minuteness of their primeval causes, and

the records of mankind are full of examples for such contemplations. It is, however, a more profitable employment to trace the constituent principles of future greatness in their kernel; to detect in the acorn at our feet the germ of that majestic oak, whose roots shoot down to the centre, and whose branches aspire to the skies. Let it be, then, our present occupation to inquire and endeavor to ascertain the causes first put in operation at the period of our commemoration, and already productive of such magnificent effects; to examine with reiterated care and minute attention the characters of those men who gave the first impulse to a new series of events in the history of the world; to applaud and emulate those qualities of their minds which we shall find deserving of our admiration; to recognize with candor those features which forbid approbation or even require censure, and, finally, to lay alike their frailties and their perfections to our own hearts, either as warning or as example.

Of the various European settlements upon this continent, which have finally merged in one independent nation, the first establishments were made at various times, by several nations, and under the influence of different motives. In many instances, the conviction of religious obligation formed one and a powerful inducement of the adventures; but in none, excepting the settlement at Plymouth, did they constitute the sole and exclusive actuating cause. Worldly interest and commercial speculation entered largely into the views of other settlers, but the commands of conscience were the only stimulus to the emigrants from Leyden. Previous to their expedition hither, they had endured a long banishment from their native country. Under every species of discouragement, they undertook the voyage;

they performed it in spite of numerous and almost insuperable obstacles; they arrived upon a wilderness bound with frost and hoary with snow, without the boundaries of their charter, outcasts from all human society, and coasted five weeks together, in the dead of winter, on this tempestuous shore, exposed at once to the fury of the elements, to the arrows of the native savage, and to the impending horrors of famine.

Courage and perseverance have a magical talisman, before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish into air. These qualities have ever been displayed in their mightiest perfection, as attendants in the retinue of strong passions. From the first discovery of the Western Hemisphere by Columbus until the settlement of Virginia which immediately preceded that of Plymouth, the various adventurers from the ancient world had exhibited upon innumerable occasions that ardor of enterprise and that stubbornness of pursuit which set all danger at defiance, and chained the violence of nature at their feet. But they were all instigated by personal interests. Avarice and ambition had tuned their souls to that pitch of exaltation. Selfish passions were the parents of their heroism. It was reserved for the first settlers of New England to perform achievements equally arduous, to trample down obstructions equally formidable, to dispel dangers equally terrific, under the single inspiration of conscience. To them even liberty herself was but a subordinate and secondary consideration. They claimed exemption from the mandates of human authority, as militating with their subjection to a superior power. Before the voice of Heaven they silenced even the calls of their country.

Yet, while so deeply impressed with the sense of re-

religious obligation, they felt, in all its energy, the force of that tender tie which binds the heart of every virtuous man to his native land. It was to renew that connection with their country which had been severed by their compulsory expatriation, that they resolved to face all the hazards of a perilous navigation and all the labors of a toilsome distant settlement. Under the mild protection of the Batavian Government, they enjoyed already that freedom of religious worship, for which they had resigned so many comforts and enjoyments at home; but their hearts panted for a restoration to the bosom of their country. Invited and urged by the open-hearted and truly benevolent people who had given them an asylum from the persecution of their own kindred to form their settlement within the territories then under their jurisdiction, the love of their country predominated over every influence save that of conscience alone, and they preferred the precarious chance of relaxation from the bigoted rigor of the English Government to the certain liberality and alluring offers of the Hollanders. Observe, my countrymen, the generous patriotism, the cordial union of soul, the conscious yet unaffected vigor which beam in their application to the British monarch:

“They were well weaned from the delicate milk of their mother country, and inured to the difficulties of a strange land. They were knit together in a strict and sacred bond, to take care of the good of each other and of the whole. It was not with them as with other men, whom small things could discourage, or small discontents cause to wish themselves again at home.”

Children of these exalted Pilgrims! Is there one among you who can hear the simple and pathetic energy of these expressions without tenderness and admiration? Venerated

shades of our forefathers! No, ye were, indeed, not ordinary men! That country which had ejected you so cruelly from her bosom you still delighted to contemplate in the character of an affectionate and beloved mother. The sacred bond which knit you together was indissoluble while you lived; and oh, may it be to your descendants the example and the pledge of harmony to the latest period of time! The difficulties and dangers, which so often had defeated attempts of similar establishments, were unable to subdue souls tempered like yours. You heard the rigid interdictions; you saw the menacing forms of toil and danger, forbidding your access to this land of promise; but you heard without dismay; you saw and disdained retreat. Firm and undaunted in the confidence of that sacred bond; conscious of the purity, and convinced of the importance of your motives, you put your trust in the protecting shield of Providence, and smiled defiance at the combining terrors of human malice and of elemental strife. These, in the accomplishment of your undertaking, you were summoned to encounter in their most hideous forms; these you met with that fortitude, and combated with that perseverance, which you had promised in their anticipation; these you completely vanquished in establishing the foundations of New England, and the day which we now commemorate is the perpetual memorial of your triumph.

It were an occupation peculiarly pleasing to cull from our early historians, and exhibit before you every detail of this transaction; to carry you in imagination on board their bark at the first moment of her arrival in the bay; to accompany Carver, Winslow, Bradford, and Standish, in all their excursions upon the desolate coast; to follow them into every rivulet and creek where they endeavored to find a