

WITHERSPOON.

PROCEEDINGS AND ADDRESSES

AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER-STONE

AND AT THE

UNVEILING OF THE STATUE OF

JOHN WITHERSPOON,

IN FAIRMOUNT PARK, PHILADELPHIA.

COMPILED BY THE

REV. WM. P. BREED, D.D.

1877

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of church government, which is both scriptural and republican.

“Let us sacredly cherish the spirit of our patriotic ancestors, and preserve inviolate their principles of civil and religious freedom. Let us remember that ‘the price of liberty is eternal vigilance,’ and for its maintenance let us renewedly pledge ‘our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.’”

The corner-stone having been duly laid, a procession was formed, and proceeded to Machinery Hall, of the Centennial buildings. The Rev. Wm. P. Breed, D. D., occupied the chair. After the singing of the hymn,

“All hail the power of Jesus’ name,”

the following address was delivered by the Rev. William Adams, D. D., LL.D., of New York.

THE ADDRESS.

“Not for a vain show, but for a great public utility, we have laid this day the foundation of a monument in honor of one of the fathers of the republic. The name thus to be commemorated in popular apprehension may have less familiarity and brilliancy than many others in our earlier and later history, but it is associated with a certain well-defined influence which, in the judgment of a large number of our fellow-citizens, deserves to be held in everlasting remembrance.

“John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey, emigrated to this country from his

native Scotland more than a century ago. He was an accomplished scholar, a sound theologian, a brave patriot and a zealous friend of true liberty. In particular excellencies he had, probably, many equals—perhaps superiors; but in that rare combination of qualities which fitted him for the special service which he rendered to his adopted country he stands unrivaled. It was his high fortune as a delegate from the State of New Jersey to subscribe his name to the Declaration of American Independence and to the Articles of the National Confederation. It was not, however, any one quality of his character or any one signal achievement of his life which has prompted so many throughout the land to rear a monument bearing his name, so much as the conviction that he represents a certain element of our nationality which deserves a distinct and grateful recognition.

“For a believer in the unity of historic development under the superintendence of one mind—the only philosophic conception of history—nothing can be more profitable than the study of events in their continuity and interdependence. None have greater need of a thorough knowledge and sober judgment of their obligations to the past than the people of these United States. Elated by immediate success and dazzled by visions of future growth in territory, population and wealth, above all nations we need the balance and ballast which come from a wise and rational remembrance of ‘the days of

old, and the years of ancient times.' National pride may be fanned to a flame by the high-wrought descriptions of ephemeral politicians, to a total oblivion of those great moral causes which give to our affairs all their importance and to our history all its glory. From the style of inflated self-complacency with which, unfortunately, we are too familiar, descriptive of *the* enlightened century through which we are passing and the prodigious country in which we live, one might suppose that our American nationality was a new and sudden creation, bursting upon the world like a certain divinity in Grecian mythology, hatched from the egg of Night and spreading its radiant wings on universal gloom and barbarism. In fact, it was no improvised achievement. It was the logical result of pre-existent events. It was the growth and fruitage of historic roots in ancestral lands beyond the sea. We have a well-authenticated pedigree at which no man can blush. We trace our national life back to reforms, protests, revolutions and martyrdoms which have made and marked the progress of the Old World through many generations. Whatever truth there may be in the words of Carlyle, expressed in his usual mannerism, 'The best thing England ever did was Oliver Cromwell,' it is certain that this work was not finished when Cromwell was buried in Westminster Abbey more than two hundred years ago, nor when his weak and incapable son afterward abdicated the Pro-

tectorship. Forms may change, names may rise and fade, events may advance and recede as the waves of the incoming tide swing forward and backward, but the English Commonwealth is working now as a vital force in the heart of the world; and the great men of those remote times are to-day living, speaking, toiling, with greater vigor than ever in advocacy of human rights on both sides of the sea.

“That our American colonial life sprung from religious forces is a fact too familiar to need repetition. But these religious elements were by no means homogeneous. The Puritan of England, the Covenanter of Scotland, the Huguenot of France, the Waldensian of Italy, the refugee from Switzerland and the Netherlands, the Lutheran from Germany and Sweden, trained by different processes and impregnated with the qualities of the different soils from which they came,—each contributed his specific part to the composition of our new nationality, just as numerous metals were combined to form the famous brass of ancient Corinth.

“The purpose for which we are now met suggests a few thoughts concerning Scotch Presbyterianism, one of those constituent elements entitled to a grateful commemoration, as represented by the name and character of John Witherspoon. Surely no one will suspect me of designing to pervert this occasion by protruding ecclesiastical preference or appealing to ecclesiastical prejudices. Palsied be my

tongue if, at a time when it should be the aim of every good citizen to fuse all minor distinctions into one sentiment of American citizenship, catholic and magnanimous, I should say anything by way of fostering what is sectarian and sectional! We are here as American citizens, and not exclusively as Presbyterian ecclesiastics. But we cannot be blind to the lessons of history. No intelligent man, whatever his convictions and preferences may be as to church order and worship, would think it invidious to refer to the different circumstances in which Protestantism assumed form in Northern and Southern Britain.

“Protestantism, as first organized in England, was largely a political measure. It was an exchange of popes with rival claims. Henry VIII. was no less a pope because he bore the name of king. Never was pontifical supremacy asserted in a more absolute form, both in Church and State, than by this burly and passionate monarch. In part a political measure, and in part a religious conviction, English Protestantism took the form of a compromise, and like all compromises where great interests are involved, this entailed discontent, restlessness and antagonism. Two parties, like Esau and Jacob, bound together from their twin conception, have been struggling and wrestling for the ascendancy in all successive stages of English history. Controversies are to-day agitating courts, convocations and parliaments concerning forms and dresses which would not have

importance enough in themselves to redeem them from the category of puerilities, trifles such as were described by Milton,

‘Gewgaws fetched from Aaron’s old wardrobe or the flamen’s vestry,’

if they were not understood by all parties to be the symbols and badges of the old ancestral antagonism.

“Protestantism in Scotland had a different birth, and so has had a different type and development. It was no political expedient, born of a monarch’s lust, avarice and ambition. It was a rational, religious conviction, and not a mere change of despotisms. The great Reformer of Scotland, John Knox, educated for the Romish Church, so soon as he discovered that he could not be fettered by antiquated authority, whether priestly or scholastic, by one bound sprung to the ultimate principle, the paramount authority of the Bible and the supremacy of Christ above all the pretensions and assumptions of men. The sharp and irreconcilable distinction between these two opposite systems was caught by the Scotch Reformers as by intuition. Those words, ‘Christ’s Crown,’ which Scotch Protestantism early inscribed upon that flag which afterward was borne so bravely through storm and battle, the pride of lowly cottage and lordly castle, were no unmeaning device. The ‘lords of the congregation,’ as the noble leaders of the movement were

significantly styled, in their first covenant bound one another before the majesty of God to set forth, maintain and honor the most blessed word of God, in opposition to all tyranny, superstition and idolatry. Here we have the key to Scottish history for the last three hundred years—a history having as distinct a type as Scotland's lakes and highlands. When the crowns of England and Scotland were united, many but fruitless were the attempts of the English monarchy and prelacy to force their own Church system upon Scotland. In the Antiquarian Hall in Edinburgh there is still preserved the small oaken stool which Jenny Geddes hurled at the head of the dean of Edinburgh when, in obedience to a command of his royal master, he attempted to force the English service upon the reluctant ears of an indignant people—a singular projectile, but the signal shot of a great revolution, the reverberations of which have not yet died out of the world. No portion of modern history furnishes more interesting material than Scotland in her successive struggles for religious liberty. Greatly is it to be regretted that the genius of Walter Scott was not in closer sympathy with the Presbyterianism of his native land; but how graphically has he portrayed the atrocities of Claverhouse when dragooning the Covenanters! and the honesty and simplicity of religious faith have been immortalized by him in the character of Jeanie Deans, the one insect of a swarm embalmed in a drop of amber.

“ We have not hazarded the assertion that even in Scotland the exact and well-balanced truth as to the relations of Church and State was reached at once. Many of Scotland’s noblest men have always maintained the obligations of the State to aid and uphold the institutions of religion; but the one principle running through all the divisions of her Presbyterian population has been that the Church is in no sense the creature of the State or dependent on its power. No nation can boast of a nobler army of martyrs than Scotland in defence of that principle, from the days of Patrick Hamilton to the men of our own times whom you and I have known and admired, who with bravery and martyrdom worthy of their ancestry gave up their churches and manses, and went forth in the face of poverty and suffering, rather than lower the old standard, ‘Christ’s Crown,’ to the dictation of the civil power, thus verifying the memorable words of the duke of Wellington: ‘The battle of establishments is to be fought in Scotland.’

“Such was the land and Church from which came that element of our nationality which is recalled by the name of Witherspoon. It spread itself widely, and planted itself deeply, on this continent. It made a home for itself on the granite hills of New England. It was strong and potent in Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina. It uttered its clarion voice in the Mecklenburg Declaration. It inscribed its testimony by more

than one hand on the Declaration of National Independence. In all times of trial, in all times of danger and darkness, it has proved itself a brave and trusty power.

“Scotch granite forms a firm foundation, even if it does not admit of so fine a polish as Italian marble. Scotch Presbyterianism has often been charged with stiffness, sourness and rigidity. It must be admitted that it is wont to hold its opinions with somewhat of that manner which one of its own representatives has designated a ‘gracious pertinacity.’ Sometimes it would seem as if determined to sing a solo strain in the general anthem. But who expects the ‘gnarled and unwedgeable oak’ to be as flexible as the osier? Some metals do not fuse and assimilate so readily as others. But the national element which I describe has in it sturdy strength. It is no lay-figure. It is no sham. It is not driven to and fro by every wind of doctrine. It is characterized by downright honesty. We need more of this Petrine quality, which is as a rock for firmness and endurance. Should questions ever arise in this country affecting its honesty and integrity, whether as to the administration of government, or the import and value of the national currency, or the disposal of the national debt, there will be no doubt which side this portion of our population will espouse. Strange as it may seem, after the experience of ages the question of the relations of Church and State is not yet settled in the Old

World. On this subject Protestantism as well as Vaticanism enacts its mistakes. Signs are not wanting in our horizon that the question of the relation of Church and State will demand a new discussion in this country. 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' Should the time ever come when Cæsar should attempt to stretch his arm across this wide distinction; should civil government, national, State or municipal, presume to lend itself to what is sectarian, fumbling about our schools and churches, those foundations of our republic; should the old, old question of religious liberty be revived in any form by reason of the dictation of any hierarchy, foreign or domestic,—then shall we see the use and value of that particular element in our nationality which we this day commemorate—a quality disciplined and toughened by the sufferings of ages; then you may be sure the old blue flag of Scotch Presbyterianism—a flag that was never trailed in the dust before tyranny or superstition—will be in the very front of the fight.

“While this occasion has demanded a special reference to one form of Protestantism, with its republican simplicity, the parity of its clergy, its liberal patronage of schools and colleges, its ardent patriotism and its firm faith in the ultimate extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, I do not forget that this is only one part of our common heritage.

There is no such thing as a monopoly in the fame of our ancestors by any sect. As they, coming from various countries and churches, joined hands and hearts to found the institutions which are our priceless heritage, so may we, oblivious to all unworthy and narrow distinctions, unite to transmit these institutions, not only uninjured, but refined and perfected, to those who shall come after us. Let us lift the forms of our canonized fathers high on their pedestals and often gaze on their serene and beautiful features. Let us teach our children to recognize their names, rehearse their deeds, to catch inspiration from their great achievements and copy their great examples. So long as granite and bronze and marble shall perpetuate their forms and features let us pledge ourselves to the promotion of morality and religion, the life-blood of our republic—to supreme faith in the word of God as the only sure pledge of liberty for the whole earth, and the certain promise of a time when the kingdoms of this world shall all acknowledge the crown and supremacy of Jesus Christ.”

While Dr. Adams was speaking the storm ceased, the heavy mass of clouds rolled up from the west, and the sun shone out in all his glory.

At the conclusion of the oration a handsome Presbyterian flag was presented by the young ladies of West Spruce Street Presbyterian church of Philadelphia to the Centennial Committee of the