

## DINNER, AT FANEUIL HALL.

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At a public dinner given him on the 5th of June, 1828, by the citizens of Boston (Hon. T. H. Perkins in the chair), as a mark of respect for his services as Senator of the United States, and late their Representative in Congress, after the annunciation of the following toast, "Our distinguished guest,—worthy the noblest homage which freemen can give or a freeman receive, the homage of their hearts," Mr. Webster rose and spoke as follows:—

MR. CHAIRMAN,—The honor conferred by this occasion, as well as the manner in which the meeting has been pleased to receive the toast which has now been proposed to them from the chair, requires from me a most respectful acknowledgment and a few words of honest and sincere thanks. I should, indeed, be lost to all just feeling, or guilty of a weak and puerile affectation, if I should fail to manifest the emotions which are excited by these testimonials of regard, from those among whom I live, who see me oftenest, and know me best. If the approbation of good men be an object fit to be pursued, it is fit to be enjoyed; if it be, as it doubtless is, one of the most stirring and invigorating motives which operate upon the mind, it is also among the richest rewards which console and gratify the heart.

I confess myself particularly touched and affected, Mr. President and Gentlemen, by the kind feeling which you manifest towards me as your fellow-citizen, your neighbor, and your friend. Respect and confidence, in these relations of life, lie at the foundation of all valuable character; they are as essential to solid and permanent reputation as to durable and social happiness. I assure you, Sir, with the utmost sincerity, that there is nothing which could flow from human approbation and applause, no distinction, however high or alluring, no object of

ambition, which could possibly be brought within the horizon of my view, that would tempt me, in any degree, justly to forfeit the attachment of my private friends, or surrender my hold, as a citizen and a neighbor, on the confidence of the community in which I live; a community to which I owe so much, in the bosom of which I have enjoyed so much, and where I still hope to remain, in the interchange of mutual good wishes and the exercise of mutual good offices, for the residue of life.

The commendation bestowed by the meeting upon my attempts at public service, I am conscious, is measured rather by their own kindness, than by any other standard. Of those attempts, no one can think more humbly than I do. The affairs of the general government, foreign and domestic, are vast and various and complicated. They require from those who would aspire to take a leading part in them an amount, a variety, and an accuracy of information, which, even if the adequate capacity were not wanting, are not easily attained by one whose attention is of necessity mainly devoted to the duties of an active and laborious profession. For this as well as many other reasons, I am conscious of having discharged my public duties in a manner no way entitling them to the degree of favor which has now been manifested.

And this manifestation of favor and regard is the more especially to be referred to the candor and kindness of the meeting, on this occasion, since it is well known, that in a recent instance, and in regard to an important measure, I have felt it my duty to give a vote, in respect to the expediency and propriety of which considerable difference of opinion exists between persons equally entitled to my regard and confidence.\* The candid interpretation which has been given to that vote by those who disapproved it, and the assembling together here, for the purposes of this occasion, of those who felt pain, as well as those who felt pleasure, at the success of the measure for which the vote was given, afford ample proof, how far unsuspected uprightness of intention and the exercise of an independent judgment may be

\* The subject referred to is the tariff law of 1828. For a fuller statement of the considerations which influenced the vote of Mr. Webster on that subject, see his speech, in a subsequent volume of this collection, delivered in the Senate of the United States on the 9th of May, 1828.

respected, even by those who differ from the results to which that exercise of judgment has arrived. There is no class of the community for whose interests I have ever cherished a more sincere regard, than that on whose pursuits some parts of the measure alluded to bear with great severity. They are satisfied, I hope, that, in supporting a measure in any degree injurious to them, I must have been governed by other paramount reasons, satisfactory to my own conscience; and that the blow inflicted on their interests was felt by me almost as painfully and heavily as it could be by those on whom it immediately fell. I am not now about to enter into the reason of that vote, or to explain the necessity under which I found myself placed, by a most strange and unprecedented manner of legislation, of taking the evil of a public measure for the sake of its good; the good and the bad provisions relating to different subjects, having not the slightest connection with each other, yet yoked together, and kept together, for reasons and purposes which I need not state, as they have been boldly avowed, and are now before the public.

It was my misfortune, Sir, on that occasion, to differ from my most estimable and worthy colleague;\* and yet probably our difference was not so broad as it might seem. We both saw in the measure something to approve, and something to disapprove. If it could have been left to us to mould and to frame it according to our opinions of what the good of the country required, there would have been no diversity of judgment between us, as to what should have been retained and what rejected. The only difference was, when the measure had assumed its final shape, whether the good it contained so far preponderated over its acknowledged evil, as to justify the reception and support of the whole together. On a point of this sort, and under circumstances such as those in which we were placed, it is not strange that different minds should incline different ways. It gives me great pleasure to bear testimony to the constancy, the intelligence, and the conscious fidelity with which my colleague discharged his public duty in reference to this subject. I am happy also to have the opportunity of saying, that, if the bill had been presented to me in the form it was when it received a negative

\* Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee.

vote from the distinguished gentleman\* who represents this Congressional District, my own opinion of it would have entirely concurred with his, and I should have voted in the same manner.

The meeting will indulge me with one further remark, before parting from this subject. It is only the suggestion, that in the place I occupied I was one of the representatives of the whole Commonwealth. I was not at liberty to look exclusively to the interests of the district in which I live, and which I have heretofore had the high honor of representing. I was to extend my view from Barnstable to Berkshire; to comprehend in it a proper regard for all interests, and a proper respect for all opinions. Looking to the aggregate of all the interests of the Commonwealth, and regarding the general current of opinion, so far as that was properly to be respected, I saw, at least I thought I saw, my duty to lie in the path which I pursued. The measure is adopted. Its consequences, for good or evil, must be left to the results of experience. In the mean time, I refer the propriety of the vote which I gave, with entire submission, and with the utmost cheerfulness also, to the judgment of the good people of the Commonwealth.

On some other subjects, Mr. President, I had the good fortune to act in perfect unison with my colleague, and with every representative of the State. On one, especially, the success of which, I am sure, must have gratified every one who hears me. I could not, Sir, have met this assembly, I could not have raised my voice in Faneuil Hall, — you would have awed me down; if you had not, the portraits of patriots which adorn these walls would have frowned me into silence, — if I had refused either my vote or my voice to the cause of the officers and soldiers of the Revolutionary army. That measure, mixed up of justice, and charity, and mercy, is at last accomplished. The survivors of those who fought our Revolutionary battles, under an engagement to see the contest through, are at length provided for, not sumptuously, not extravagantly, but in a manner to place them, in their old age, beyond the reach of absolute want. Solace, also, has been administered to their feelings, as well as to their necessities. They are not left to count their scars, or to experience the pain of wounds, inflicted half a century ago,

\* Hon. Benjamin Gorham.

in their country's service, without some token, that they are yet held in grateful remembrance. A gratifying proof of respect for the services of their youth and manhood quickens the pulsations of patriotism in veteran bosoms; and as they may now live beyond the reach of absolute want, so they will have the pleasure of closing life, when that time for closing it shall come which must come to all, with the happy consciousness of meritorious services, gratefully recompensed.

Another subject, now becoming exceedingly interesting, was, in various forms, presented to Congress at the last session; and in regard to which, I believe, there is, substantially, a general union of opinion among the members from this Commonwealth; I mean what is commonly called Internal Improvements. The great and growing importance of this subject may, I hope, justify a few remarks relative to it on the present occasion.

It was evident to all persons of much observation, at the close of the late war, that the condition and prospects of the United States had become essentially changed, in regard to sundry great interests of the country. Almost from the formation of the government, till near the commencement of that war, the United States had occupied a position of singular and extraordinary advantage. They had been at peace, while the powers of Europe had been at war. The harvest of neutrality had been to them rich and ample; and they had reaped it with skill and diligence. Their agriculture and commerce had both sensibly felt the benefit arising from the existing state of the world. Bread was raised for those whose hands were otherwise employed than in the cultivation of the field, and the seas were navigated, for account of such as, being belligerents, could not safely navigate them for themselves. These opportunities for useful employment were all seized and enjoyed, by the enterprise of the country; and a high degree of prosperity was the natural result.

But with general peace a new state of things arose. The European states at once turned their own attention to the pursuits proper for their new situation, and sought to extend their own agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial interests. It was evident, that thenceforward, instead of our enjoying the advantages peculiar to neutrality in times of war, a general competition would spring up, and nothing was to be expected without a struggle. Other nations would now raise their own bread,

and as far as possible transport their own commodities; and the export trade and the carrying trade of this country were, therefore, certain to become the subjects of new and powerful competition, if not to receive sudden and violent checks. It seemed reasonable, therefore, in this state of things, to turn our thoughts inwards; to search out the hitherto unexplored resources of our own country; to find, if we could, new diversifications of industry and new subjects for the application of labor at home. It was fit to consider how far home productions could properly be made to furnish activity to home supply; and since the country stretched over so many parallels of latitude and longitude, abounding, of course, in the natural productions proper to each, it was of the highest importance to inquire what means existed of establishing free and cheap intercourse between those distant parts, thereby bringing the raw material, abounding in one, under the action of the productive labor which was found in another. Roads and canals, therefore, were seen to be of the first consequence. And then the interesting question arose, how far it was constitutionally lawful, and how far expedient, for the general government to give aid and succor to the business of making roads and canals, in conjunction with the enterprise of individuals or of states. I am among those who have held the opinion, that, if any object of that kind be of general and national importance, it is within the scope of the powers of the government; though I admit it to be a power which should be exercised with very great care and discretion. Congress has power to *regulate* commerce, both internal and external; and whatever might have been thought to be the literal interpretation of these terms, we know the construction to have been, from the very first assembling of Congress, and by the very men who framed the Constitution, that the regulation of commerce comprehended such measures as were necessary for its support, its improvement, its advancement, and justified the expenditure of money for such purposes as the construction of piers, beacons, and light-houses, and the clearing out of harbors. Instances of this sort, in the application of the general revenues, have been frequent, from the commencement of the government. As the same power, precisely, exists in relation to internal as to external trade, it was not easy to see why like expenditures might not be justified, when made on internal objects. The

vast regions of the West are penetrated by rivers, to which those of Europe are but as rills and brooks. But the navigation of these noble streams, washing, as they do, the margin of one third of the States of the Union, is obstructed by obstacles, capable of being removed, and yet not likely to be removed, but by the power of the general government. Was this a justifiable object of expenditure from the national treasury? Without hesitation, I have thought it was. A vast chain of lakes, if it be not more proper to call them a succession of inland seas, stretches into the deep interior of this northern part of the continent, as if kindly placed there by Providence to break the continuity of the land, and afford the easier and readier intercourse of water conveyance. But these vast lakes required, also, harbors, and light-houses, and breakwaters. And were these lawful objects of national legislation? To me, certainly, they have appeared to be such, as clearly as if they were on the Atlantic border.

In most of the new States of the West, the United States are yet proprietors of vast bodies of land. Through some of these States, and sometimes through these same public lands, the local authorities have prepared to carry expensive canals, for the general benefit of the country. Some of these undertakings have been attended with great expense, and have subjected the States, whose enterprising spirit has begun and carried them on, to large debts and heavy taxation. The lands of the United States, being exempted from all taxation, of course bear no part of this burden. Looking to the United States, therefore, as a great landed proprietor, essentially benefited by these improvements, I have felt no difficulty in voting for the appropriation of parts of these lands, as a reasonable contribution by the United States to these general objects.

Most of the subjects to which I have referred are much less local, in their influence and importance, than they might seem. The breakwater in the Delaware, useful to Philadelphia, is useful also to all the ship-owners in the United States, and indeed to all interested in commerce, especially that great branch, the coastwise commerce. If the mouths of the Southern rivers be deepened and improved, the neighboring cities are benefited, but so also are the ships which visit them; and if the Mississippi and Ohio be rendered more safe for navigation, the great markets of consumption along their shores are the more readily and

cheaply approached by the products of the factories and fisheries of New England.

It is my opinion, Mr. President, that the present government of the United States cannot be maintained but by administering it on principles as wide and broad as the country over which it extends. I mean, of course, no extension of the powers which it confers; but I speak of the spirit with which those powers should be exercised. If there be any doubts, whether so many republics, covering so vast a territory, can be long held together under this Constitution, there is no doubt in my judgment of the impossibility of so holding them together by any narrow, local, or selfish system of legislation. To render the Constitution perpetual (which God grant it may be), it is necessary that its benefits should be practically felt by all parts of the country, and all interests in the country. The East and the West, the North and the South, must all see their own welfare protected and advanced by it. While the eastern frontier is defended by fortifications, its harbors improved, and commerce protected by a naval force, it is right and just that the region beyond the Alleghanies should receive fair consideration and equal attention, in any object of public improvement, interesting to itself, and within the proper power of the government. These, Sir, are in brief the general views by which I have been governed on questions of this kind; and I trust they are such as this meeting does not disapprove.

I would not trespass further upon your attention, if I did not feel it my duty to say a few words on the condition of public affairs under another aspect. We are on the eve of a new election of President; and the manner in which the existing administration is attacked might lead a stranger to suppose that the chief magistrate had committed some flagrant offence against the country, had threatened to overturn its liberties, or establish a military usurpation. On a former occasion I have in this place expressed my opinion of the principle upon which the opposition to the administration is founded, without any reference whatever to the person who stands as its apparent head, and who is intended by it to be placed in the chief executive chair. I think that principle exceedingly dangerous and alarming, inasmuch as it does not profess to found opposition to the government on the measures of government, but to rest it on



other causes, and those mostly personal. There is a combination or association of persons holding the most opposite opinions, both on the constitutional powers of the government and on the leading measures of public concern, and uniting in little, or in nothing, except the will to dislodge power from the hands in which the country has placed it. There has been no leading measure of the government, with perhaps a single exception, which has not been strenuously maintained by many, or by some, of those who all cooperate, nevertheless, in pursuit of the object which I have mentioned. This is but one of many proofs that the opposition does not rest on the principle of disapprobation of the measures of government. Many other evidences of the same truth might be adduced easily. A remarkable one is, that, while one ground of objection to the administration is urged in one place, its precise opposite is pressed in another. Pennsylvania and South Carolina, for example, are not treated with the same reasons for a change of administration; but with flatly contradictory reasons. In one, the administration is represented as bent on a particular system oppressive to that State, and which must ultimately ruin it; and for that reason there ought to be a change. In the other, that system, instead of being ruinous, is represented as salutary, as necessary, as indispensable. But the administration is declared to be but half in earnest in supporting it, and for that reason there ought to be a change.

Reflecting men have always supposed, that, if there were a weak point in the Federal Constitution, it was in the provision for the exercise of the executive power. And this, perhaps, may be considered as rendered more delicate and difficult, by the great augmentation of the number of the States. We must expect that there will often be, as there was on the last election, several candidates for the Presidency. All but one, of course, must be disappointed; and if the friends of all such, however otherwise divided, are immediately to unite, and to make common cause against him who is elected, little is ever to be expected but embarrassment and confusion. The love of office will ere long triumph over the love of country, and party and faction usurp the place of wisdom and patriotism. If the contest for the executive power is thus to be renewed every four years; if it is to be conducted as the present has been conducted; and

if every election is to be immediately followed, as the last was followed, by a prompt union of all whose friends are not chosen against him who is, there is, in my judgment, danger, much danger, that this great experiment of confederated government may fail, and that even those of us who are not among the youngest may behold its catastrophe.

It cannot have escaped the notice of any gentleman present, that, in the course of the controversy, pains have been taken to affect the character and the success of the present chief magistrate, by exciting odium towards that part of the country in which he was born and to which he belongs. Sneers, contumely, reproach, every thing that gentlemen could say, and many things which gentlemen could not say, have been uttered against New England. I am sure, Sir, every true son of New England must receive such things, when they come from sources which ought to be considered respectable, with a feeling of just indignation; and when proceeding from elsewhere, with contempt. If there be one among ourselves who can be induced, by any motives, to join in this cry against New England, he disgraces the New England mother who bore him, the New England father who bred and nurtured him, and the New England atmosphere which first supplied respiration to those lungs, now so unworthily employed in uttering calumnies against his country. Persons not known till yesterday, and having little chance of being remembered beyond to-morrow, have affected to draw a distinction between the patriot States and the States of New England; assigning the last to the present President, and the rest to his rival. I do not wonder, Sir, at the indignation and scorn which I perceive the recital of this injustice produces here. Nothing else was to be expected. Faneuil Hall is not a place where one is expected to hear with indifference that New England is not to be counted among the patriot States. The patriot States! What State was it, Sir, that was patriotic when patriotism cost something? Where but in New England did the great drama of the Revolution open? Where, but on the soil of Massachusetts, was the first blood poured out in the cause of liberty and independence? Where, sooner than here, where earlier than within the walls which now surround us, was patriotism found, when to be patriotic was to endanger houses and homes, and wives and children, and to be ready also to pay

for the reputation of patriotism by the sacrifice of blood and of life?

Not farther to refer to her Revolutionary merits, it may be truly said that New England did her part, and more than her part, in the establishment of the present government, and in giving effect to the measures and the policy of the first President. Where, Sir, did the measures of Washington find the most active friends and the firmest support? Where are the general principles of his policy most widely spread, and most deeply seated? If, in subsequent periods, different opinions have been held by different portions of her people, New England has, nevertheless, been always obedient to the laws, even when she most severely felt their pressure, and most conscientiously doubted or disbelieved their propriety. Every great and permanent institution of the country, intended for defence or for improvement, has met her support. And if we look to recent measures, on subjects highly interesting to the community, and especially some portions of it, we see proofs of the same steady and liberal policy. It may be said with entire truth, and it ought to be said, and ought to be known, that no one measure for internal improvement has been carried through Congress, or could have been carried, but by the aid of New England votes. It is for those most deeply interested in subjects of that sort to consider in season, how far the continuance of the same aid is necessary for the further prosecution of the same objects. From the interference of the general government in making roads and canals, New England has as little to hope or expect as any part of the country. She has hitherto supported them upon principle, and from a sincere disposition to extend the blessings and the beneficence of the government. And, Sir, I confidently believe that those most concerned in the success of these measures feel towards her respect and friendship. They feel that she has acted fairly and liberally, wholly uninfluenced by selfish or sinister motives. Those, therefore, who have seen, or thought they saw, an object to be attained by exciting dislike and odium towards New England, are not likely to find quite so favorable an audience as they have expected. It will not go for quite so much as wished, to the disadvantage of the President, that he is a native of Massachusetts. Nothing is wanting but that we ourselves should entertain a proper feeling on this subject, and

act with a just regard to our own rights and our own duties. If I could collect around me the whole population of New England, or if I could cause my voice to be heard over all her green hills, or along every one of her pleasant streams, in the exercise of true filial affection, I would say to her, in the language of the great master of the maxims of life and conduct,

“ This above all, — to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Mr. President, — I have delayed you too long. I beg to repeat my thanks for the kindness which has been manifested towards me by my fellow-citizens, and to conclude by reciprocating their good wishes : —

The City of Boston. Prosperity to all her interests, and happiness to all her citizens.