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Rynders, Captain Isaac

Oration delivered July 4, 1851
... before the old guard, at their
annual festival.

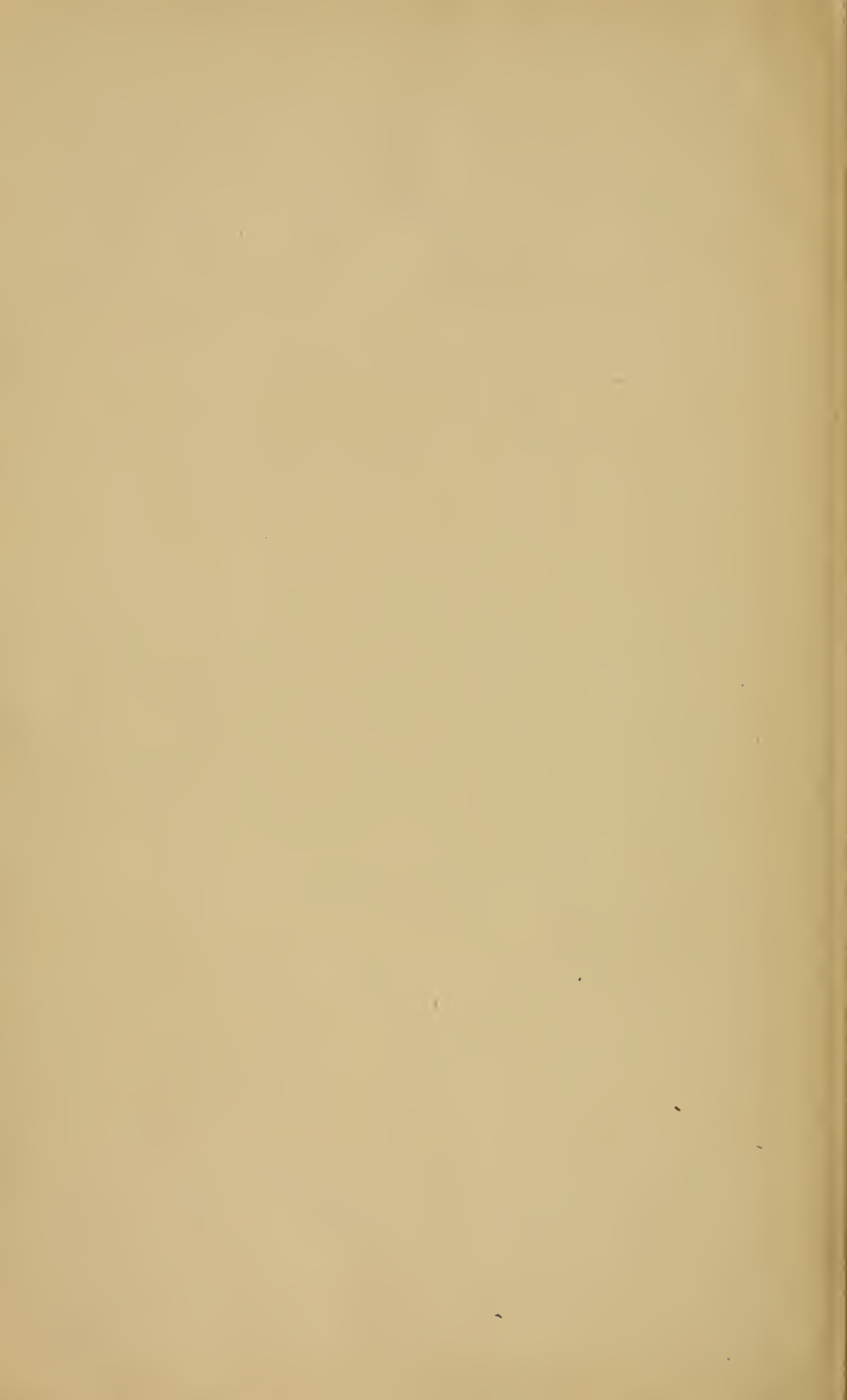




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DELIVERED JULY 4TH, 1851,

(75th Year of our National Independence.)

BY CAPTAIN ISAIAH RYNDERS,

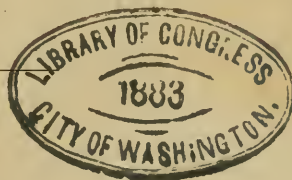
BEFORE THE

OLD GUARD,

AT THEIR ANNUAL FESTIVAL,

HELD AT

THE GEM HOTEL, 324 BROADWAY.



NEW YORK:

PRINTED BY C. C. CHILDS, 178 FULTON STREET.

1851.

Rynders

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O R A T I O N .

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN:—You have assembled for the glorious purpose of celebrating the anniversary of American Independence—a day held sacred in the estimation of every one who loves his country. It is so held, because it is a day on which our nation dates her era of Freedom, and points to it with pride and exultation, as the noblest achievement ever accomplished by human wisdom, intellect and bravery. It is a day which, under any circumstances, excites the warmest and noblest emotions of our hearts; but under the present aspect of our political affairs, when danger seems to threaten us, it is a day which should, and I trust will, inspire every American heart, with a patriotism, and a devotion to the Union and the Constitution, as pure as the light of living truth. And I trust that the fire of Liberty and Patriotism may ever burn as ardently in the hearts of the American people, and that their fidelity and attachment to the Constitution and the Union may be as true and unwavering, as unchanged and as unchanging, as the great luminary of day in his course through the heavens.

It is now three-quarters of a century since a small but noble band of Patriots met together, under the most trying circumstances, to proclaim to the world that they were, *and of right ought to be independent*; and the still greater principle, that *man is capable of self-government*. This, my friends, was no vain boast, or idle declaration; but a high and holy resolve of brave and patriotic men, who pledged “their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors” for the faithful execution of their patriotic declaration, or were determined to perish in the attempt. With a firm reliance on the justice of the cause, and the protection of Divine Providence, they launched the glorious Bark of Freedom, with a gallant crew, and our own noble and godlike WASHINGTON for a Pilot. He conducted them through a perilous voyage of seven

years, with a fidelity, patience, and perseverance, which almost justifies the belief that he was gifted with attributes more than human.

I will not, as is customary on like occasions, revert in detail to the many privations and hardships which had to be endured during the revolutionary struggle. It would be superfluous to speak to you of the many brave but determined battles fought by the friends of independence, and in many instances with signal success, by a small but determined band of half-clad, and half-fed soldiery, against a well-disciplined troop; or of the numerous cases of individual heroism performed during the Revolution. The history of the times is full of evidences that prove that a spirit had been awakened, that the fire of Liberty and Freedom had been kindled, and could not be smothered by the power of an army of hired soldiery, which has ever been the instruments by which tyrants have perpetrated their outrages against the rights and liberties of the mass of the people.

But these things are matters of history, and I strenuously recommend to my countrymen a careful perusal of the history of the revolution, with the hope that the noble and glorious examples of patriotism and fidelity of our forefathers, which are therein portrayed, may yet awaken the lingering sparks of the fire of freedom, which, I trust, is not entirely quenched in the hearts of the American people. Though I fear, that, in these times, when public patriotism is at its lowest ebb, that the noble examples of our forefathers have been, in a measure, lost upon many of their sons of the present day, and that we are becoming more unworthy of the glorious inheritance which they have bequeathed us. I fear we do not properly estimate the great sacrifice which it cost to achieve our independence: nor do we properly appreciate the invaluable blessings which are derived

from it; because we have not experienced the hardships and perils which had to be encountered to accomplish that glorious result. We are now enjoying an age of prosperity and happiness unequalled by any cotemporary nation. While we have been a prosperous republic other nations have experienced bloody revolutions; monarchies have been overthrown, or left tottering on a basis ready to crumble into ruins upon the commencement of a struggle on the part of the down-trodden masses to throw off the yoke of despotism which has so long been fastened upon them. While all Europe has been convulsed with foreign wars and civil commotions, the United States has steadily progressed in her march of civilization, and has concentrated within her republican borders all the elements of national and individual happiness.

It may be regarded, that in the nineteenth century of the Christian era, the free, independent, and intelligent people of the United States have solved a problem that some of the greatest minds that ever lived have firmly believed never would be solved affirmatively. Were it not for the successful experiment of this Republic, for three-quarters of a century, the great majority of the world, at the present day, would have firmly adhered to the opinion that man is incapable of self-government. The human mind is so organized, and the vices of society are so numerous, that even with our successful experiment, a large portion of the human race, regard the great problem as still unsolved. True it is that we have existed but a brief period in the history of nations. But we have grown with such an astonishing rapidity in numbers, power, and wealth, that our progress and example have astonished the world. Our advancement has even astonished ourselves, and exceeded a point far beyond the most sanguinary expectations of those brave patriots who periled their lives in the cause of our independence. We have, from a few dependent colonies, become the rival in commercial and manufacturing pursuits of the greatest nations on the globe. In every such respect our position is a commanding one among the nations of the earth; and second to none in influence, power, and all the natural resources which constitute a great people. Wherever civilization has extended, and commerce penetrated, there our great name is known and respected. Our sails whiten every sea, and the glorious flag of our country—the star-spangled banner—the very name of which causes every American heart to beat with patriotic emotions,

and swell with gratitude, affords a protection to our countrymen in the remotest corners of the globe. The respect for our name, and our country's flag, can only be maintained so long as we show ourselves a united people, and continue to cherish an attachment for the Constitution and the Union.

Upon this point I would respectfully solicit the attention of my countrymen. I would ask them to reflect, to give the subject a profound and serious consideration. I do this, fellow-citizens, because the present aspect of our political affairs, and the sectional asperity which exists among us, urgently demand that all who feel a solicitude for the perpetuity of our government, and the welfare of our people, should examine carefully every great question, the decision of which involves our prosperity, if not our very existence.

I would ask, then, whence did we derive our unparalleled condition of happiness and general advancement of all that distinguishes us as a great and powerful nation? How did we acquire our commanding position, in so brief a period among the great nations of the earth? Whence comes that sudden power which causes the hearts of the patriots, in every part of the world, to look to our country's flag with such deep veneration and almost unbounded respect? And why is it that even monarchical and despotic powers in every quarter of the world regard us as a formidable rival, able to enforce protection to our interests on land and water, at home or in a foreign clime? These are pertinent questions, my friends, calculated to lead to serious reflection. Did we derive all this power and respect of which I have been speaking from the great State of Pennsylvania, the "keystone," as she is termed of the Federal arch, rich in her agricultural resources, in her mines and in her manufacturies? Did we derive the power and influence from the great State of New York, termed the "Empire State," rich in agricultural and commercial resources? These States are great only as portions of a large estate, as members of a powerful family, whose safety depends upon union and brotherly fraternity among those who compose it. Is it the great grain-growing States of the West; the Southern States, rich in their valuable and magnificent staple productions; or the enterprising manufacturing States of the East, from which much of our greatness is derived? No, my friends, our power and greatness come from none of these separately. Our commanding position is due to no section exclusively. Our powerful influence grows out of our

Union, as one people, united under the ægis of our Constitution and the union of States. Under our confederacy we have enjoyed religious and political liberty to a greater extent than any other nation. If we wish to continue our career of glory and power we can only do so under the same auspices as heretofore. We must continue under the protection of the Union and the Constitution.

This is a proper time for all true friends of our Union to manifest their devotion to it, and to the Constitution. I am no alarmist; but it would be wrong to withhold the opinion that there is danger of a dissolution of the Union. No work of man bears upon it the marks of a never-ending existence. Our hope, and our benediction is, that it may be perpetual. Our duty is to do all in our power to prolong its existence while we are members of the community, enjoying its advantages; and each generation should transmit it to the next without a link severed that binds it together. Every friend of the Union should repudiate, by words and actions, every attempt to agitate questions which tend to diminish the respect and confidence that should be cherished between the people of different sections, having different interests of a pecuniary or business character. Enemies of our form of government are frequently found among us; coming generally from abroad, they embrace the opportunity of alienating our people by attacking with virulence the institution of African slavery. They are assisted in these attacks by the fanatics of our own land. Against all these fanatical enthusiasts, or hypocritical pretenders, our people must take a firm and resolute stand, or we may hasten the period when this mighty Union of free and independent States will be broken into many petty and insignificant governments, in which the people will have their sectional prejudices, and antagonistical feelings and interests, ending, sooner or later, into so many petty monarchies, or despotisms, in which human rights and liberties will no longer exist. The experience and the history of the past admonish us that such would be the inevitable result. Break this glorious Union into fragments, rend asunder this magnificent structure of Republican Government, and I know of no rule in logic, or principle in human nature, by which we can reasonably hope to reunite the fragmentary portions upon an enduring basis. Once dissolved, and none will be so blind as not to see that we have lost a valuable and priceless blessing. We may underestimate its value now; but when

we have parted with the noble inheritance we will soon be in a condition to regret the madness of the act.

Now is the time, my countrymen, when a speck of danger appears in our political horizon, for every admirer of the Union, to guard against its growth, to check it in its incipient stage, and resolve to continue to fulfill the destiny which the patriots and sages of the revolution marked out for us through a seven years' struggle amid perils and privations, the recital of which makes humanity shudder. Let not our great Republic be arrested in its brilliant career; let not all our bright and glorious anticipations of the future be stayed in the madness of a dissolution of the Union; let not the sun of American liberty set before it has half attained the zenith of its glory, and thus blast the prospects of millions of the human race. Shall we rashly endanger or destroy the liberty and happiness of a large portion of the family of man, and eventually, perhaps, of the whole civilized world, to gratify the morbid philanthropy of a few fanatical minds, who see no evil in anything but negro slavery, and no good in anything but abolitionism? While millions of our own race are suffering the most abject and degrading poverty, and have a hopeful eye cast towards our comparatively happy land and free institutions, shall we, in the madness of the hour, arrest these hopes by severing the link that binds together so many independent States into one great and prosperous Union? No, my friends! never! Yet, if such is not the direct object and purpose of abolitionism, of those mad fanatics whose only object is to force the South to abandon the institution at their bidding, no matter what the danger to both races may be, it will be the inevitable result of success on their part. There is no excuse for these fanatics. If they abhor slavery, let them strike a blow at the slavery of their own race first. Seek to relieve the destitution and misery of the white laboring classes, and leave the well-fed, and generally well-treated, African slave in the South to the management of those who are by law held responsible for their welfare. The white slaves, the poor white laborers of the greater part of Europe, and many portions of America—the United States included—are not treated with as much humanity as the negro slaves of the South. Our abolition philanthropists have not moved a step towards their amelioration. Our white brethren have certainly all the God-like attributes which adorn the human character, and it

generally admitted that our own race are superior to the negro; and the morality or philanthropy of those mad-brained hypocrites, enthusiasts, or monomaniacs, who would rend the Union asunder to abolish the slavery of the latter, which is quite well fed, at least, and leave the slavery of the former in all its hideousness, is a proof that their charity, benevolence, and love is confined only to those whom the Creator has enveloped in a black skin. It is a preference for color, and wholly disregards the mental, moral, or physical attributes of our own race. There is a principle firmly seated in the human mind, repugnant to slavery in any form, or of any race of men. This principle is perhaps more active in the United States than in any other country. But the Almighty has created different races of men with different degrees of intellect, and the whole civilized world is just emerging from the state of slavery. The habiliments of slavery are yet worn by four-fifths of the human race, of all colors, and in nearly every country on the globe. The miseries of this servile condition of man, without any regard to color, are not seen in the United States to that extent they are in other countries. Nominally it may be abolished in some other countries, but practically it exists in the most horrid condition. As a recognized institution in the Southern States, it has been forced upon them before the States had an independent existence. Having grown to such magnitude its abolition must of necessity be the work of time, aided by more favorable circumstances than are at present existing. Wisdom and justice must direct the movements that look to its abolition. The North has nothing to do with it. The institution is local, and State power is the only agent that can act in the matter.

In a social point of view, my friends, I have had some experience of the institution of Southern slavery. I have lived in the several sections of our Union, and have had an opportunity of judging of that social sympathy and connection between the employer and employed, capitalist and laborer, master and slave. I am satisfied that there is more friendly feeling, more social communion, more real sympathy, existing between the master and slave than there is between the rich capitalist of our northern and eastern cities and the laborers they employ. I firmly believe there is more social equality between the former than between the latter. The capitalists in the Free States seldom associate with the laborers. There is no inter-

mingling between the rich and the poor. They appear in fact to be almost distinct races of men and women. The rich man may meditate an attack upon the virtue of an industrious woman, and have social intercourse that he may accomplish his baser purposes; or he may, if he is a candidate for some lucrative or honorable office, condescend to be very sociable with a poor man just about the time of an election; but for all the nobler objects of mutual sympathy and common improvement, they are strangers to each other—the one is master and the other slave. I distinctly and unhesitatingly declare that this condition of the majority of Northern laborers is worse than that of the Southern slaves.

Under all these circumstances, without a single sentiment or feeling in favor of the slavery of any race, or color, I have never been able to perceive any really well directed humanity or philanthropy in the movements of the abolitionists. If they are sincere they are nevertheless deluded and wrong. It is our duty, as friends of the Union, as friends of freedom, of liberty, of humanity, to defeat their schemes by every practicable effort consistent with the object in view. They endanger the Union, and thereby endanger the liberty of both races. They strike a blow at human happiness that would be fatal, if not foiled by the strong arm of public patriotism and justice. Some of our countrymen may think differently, and they may merit our respect even though differing on so important a question, but their principles should be condemned in solemn and serious earnest, or this Union may be dissolved and our liberties lost. I would not prevent a free expression of sentiment upon any subject that may be embraced within the limits of legitimate political controversy; for it is this right that I now exercise in denouncing abolitionism. But those who declare that they would glory in the dissolution of this Union, if negro slavery is not immediately abolished, I regard as madmen. Such language is treasonable, and in my view of the case no man has a right to promulgate such sentiments. The foreigner who comes among us to promote agitation on this subject, who leaves behind him millions of his own race in a starving condition, and travels many thousand miles to change the social condition of a race that is comparatively well cared for, must have curious ideas of philanthropy. We know of no principle in human nature that should induce a man to visit this country and denounce the institution of well-fed black

slavery, and leave white slavery in a state of starvation at home. The practice of such a man is hypocritical and villanous. He preaches philanthropy where it is least needed, and winks at the most abject and deplorable poverty among his own children. His sympathy is expended among strangers, while his own household is clothed in rags, and the images of his Maker that surround his own fireside have put on skeleton forms. His children have no bread; yet he is in a distant land sympathizing with the condition of the sleek and well-fed African, to whom all physical want is a total stranger. This is an erring philanthropy, a morbid propensity that is anything but commendable.

I may say to you, my friends, in all sincerity, that I coincide with that very common opinion, which asserts that even the evils of African slavery, as it exists in the Southern States, will be the most effectually removed by abstaining from any interference with it on our part. If a blow is to be aimed at it, let it be directed by those who have the right to strike, and not by us, who have it not among us. Our interference tends but to aggravate its evils, and to rend the Union asunder; a calamity far greater than any other which could befall our happy country.

I am aware that I am discussing a subject that has been analyzed by the great statesmen of the country, and the argument has been exhausted by the purest and ablest minds of the day. But it is one which, above all others, involves the happiness and prosperity of the Union. If after all that has been said on this subject, and the experience derived from the history of former Republics, the people are still deaf to the voice of reason, to the patriotic appeals of their wisest and best men, in favor of the Constitution and the Union, then it would seem that there is little hope for the perpetuity of our institutions; and we would be compelled to exclaim that we are the degenerate sons of noble sires; that they bequeathed us a noble inheritance that we lost by our folly and imbecility.

We are often told there is no danger of a dissolution of the Union. This is a very common and natural expression. It is, in fact, a commendable one, as it must generally emanate from those who love the Union, and cannot harbor the thought that this mighty fabric, that has commanded the admiration of the world, will be torn down by the hands or madness of the very men whose rights it protects. It is, therefore, generally a deep and earnest love for this

Union that induces the expression, "there is no danger of its dissolution." But to the more philosophic minds, who have looked more profoundly into the causes of things, who have read more attentively the history of the past, who have studied the motives and actions of the human mind, this Union, like all other works of human wisdom or folly, contains within itself the very elements of decay. True it is that it is the best form of government the world ever saw, and with prudence and wisdom its perpetuity would be handed down through centuries of unborn generations. It is a duty incumbent on us to transmit it to our successors unimpaired. We should indignantly frown upon all those who give to the Constitution, that sacred instrument that binds us together, a visionary construction, whether upon principles of "*higher law*," or "*lower law*." The eloquent warning of the Father of our country, admonishes us to accustom ourselves to think and speak of our Constitution and Union as the palladium of our liberties, our political safety and prosperity; and that there is good reason to distrust those who may endeavor by any means to weaken the ties that bind us together into one common bond of brotherhood. The diversified interests of a country, so great in area, is inevitable; but the general protection of the whole, by a common charter defining the powers of the national government, by direct expression or by necessary implication, far more than counterbalances any and all evils that inevitably result from so many different interests which exist in the several sections of the Union. Those demagogues and fanatics who tell us there is a "*higher law*" than this sacred charter, that would justify us in disregarding its obligations, tell us plainly that we must dissolve the Union. Such would be the inevitable tendency of following the dictates of such men. It is these men against whom the immortal Washington admonished his countrymen to beware, and to treat as enemies of our liberties. They are the insidious foes to our Union, and should be denounced by all true friends of the Constitution.

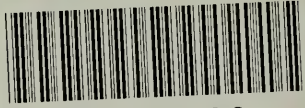
As no human law or government is free from defects, it would be folly to expect perfection in the organization of our government or administration of the laws of the Union. But our republican form of government, and the general liberality of our institutions and laws seem to be as near perfection as it is possible for human wisdom to approach. We should, therefore, be cautious of the bold and reckless innovator upon a system so nearly replete with all

the great principles of liberty and equality, and under which the great mass of the people enjoy more happiness than under any other government on the globe. It is only after mature reflection, and at the suggestion of the wisest and best minds, that any changes in the fundamental laws of the Union should be made. How absurd, then, it is for men holding high positions, to declare that there is a "higher law" existing in the minds of individuals, though wanting entirely the form of law, that we are bound to obey, though the great charter of our liberties be violated.

Now, in conclusion, my friends, I would sincerely admonish you, and all my countrymen, North, South, East and West, that this question of Southern slavery must be let alone by Northern men. I tell you that in the present condition of the world, the degree of advancement of the human intellect, it is not entitled to half that importance which Northern fanatics attach to it. I unhesitatingly declare that, in my opinion, the Southern States have as much right, under the Constitution, to say that we of the North shall establish slavery among us, as that we have to say that they shall abolish it in the South. If this is a true view of the case, and I firmly believe it is, then none of us can fail to see that we have no right to meddle with the institution of slavery in the South. But if we had the right to abolish it; or if the South were willing to abolish it themselves, as a friend of the human race, without any regard to color, I confess that I should fear the result. Why, then, by a series of aggressions upon

Southern rights, by a continual agitation of this subject in the North, do we irritate the South, or endanger the Union? I trust, in all that sincerity with which one man can address another, that our people will meet the crisis as men of intelligence and patriotism; and that instead of a dissolution of the Union, the time is not far distant when it will embrace within its extended borders every foot of land on the continent of North America. But, if, notwithstanding all the warnings of patriotic men in different sections of the Union, it be found necessary to take a bolder stand against the fanatical minds who keep up a continual agitation of this subject, it is my ardent hope, that if this crisis arises there will be a gathering of true and patriotic hearts from the North, the South, the East and the West; from the border State of Maine, the granite hills of New Hampshire, from the lake bound shores of the Empire State; from the rich agricultural, mining, and manufacturing districts of the Keystone State; from the hills and valleys of old Maryland and Virginia, the mother of States; from the plantations of the extreme South; from the wild prairies of the great and mighty west, and last, though not least, from the golden shores of the new State of California, washed by the placid waters of the mighty Pacific. It is our ardent hope that they will all meet on one common platform, and send forth a shout that shall be heard from one extremity of the Union to the other, proclaiming with one united voice that *"this Union must and shall be preserved."*

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