

PATRIOTISM

...The Sole Depository of the Sacred Fire...

We are trusted with the destinies of this solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights, and the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other regions of the earth shall ever become susceptible of its benign influence. All mankind ought then, with us, to rejoice in its prosperous, and sympathize in its adverse fortunes, as involving everything dear to man. And to what sacrifices of interest, or convenience, ought not these considerations to animate us? To what compromises of opinion and inclination, to maintain harmony and union among ourselves, and to preserve from all danger this hallowed ark of human hope and happiness.

My earnest prayers to all my friends are to cherish mutual goodwill, to promote harmony and conciliation, and above all things to let the love of our country soar above all minor passions. To preserve the peace of our fellow citizens, promote their prosperity and happiness, reunite opinion, cultivate a spirit of candor, moderation, charity, and forbearance toward one another, are objects calling for the efforts and sacrifices of every good man and patriot. Our religion enjoins it; our happiness demands it; and no sacrifice is requisite but of passions hostile to both.

The first object of my heart is my own country, the asylum for whatever is great and good. In that is embarked my family, my fortune, and my own existence. I have not one farthing of interest, nor one fiber of attachment out of it, nor a single motive of preference of any one nation to another, but in proportion as they are more or less friendly to us. There is not a country on earth where there is greater tranquility; where the laws are milder, or better obeyed; where everyone is more attentive to his own business or meddles less with that of others; where strangers are better received, more hospitably treated, and with a more sacred respect; where the virtues of the heart are less exposed to be weakened.

A character of good faith is of as much value to a nation as to an individual. A nation, as a society, forms a moral person, and every member of it is personally responsible for his society. The man who loves his country on its own account, and not merely for its trappings of interest or power, can never be divorced from it, can never refuse to come forward when he finds that she is engaged in dangers which he has the means of warding off. To no events which can concern the future welfare of my country, can I ever become an indifferent spectator; her prosperity will be my joy, her calamities my affliction.

Nothing on earth is more certain, than that if myself particularly, placed by my office of Vice-President at the head of the republicans, had given way and withdrawn from my post, the republicans throughout the Union would have given up in despair, and the cause would have been lost forever. By holding on, we obtained time for the Legislature to come up with their weight; and those of Virginia and Kentucky particularly, by their celebrated resolutions, saved the Constitution at its last gasp. No person who was not a witness of the scenes of that gloomy period, can form any idea of the afflicting persecutions and personal indignities we had to brook. They saved our country, however.

Our fellow citizens have a sacred attachment to the event of which the paper of July 4th, 1776, was but the Declaration, the genuine effusion of the soul of our country at that time. Small things may, perhaps, like the relics of saints, help to nourish our devotion to this holy bond of our Union, and keep it longer alive and warm in our affections. Even should the cloud of barbarism and despotism again obscure the science and liberties of Europe, this country remains to preserve and restore light and liberty to them. In short, the flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776, have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism; on the contrary, they will consume these engines and all who work them.

Looking forward with anxiety to the future destinies of my countrymen I trust that, in their steady character unshaken by difficulties, in their love of liberty, obedience to law, and support of the public authorities, I see a sure guarantee of the permanence of our Republic; and retiring from the charge of their affairs, I carry with me the consolation of a firm persuasion that Heaven has in store for our beloved country long ages to come of prosperity and happiness. God send to our country a happy deliverance.