

AN OLD FASHIONED FOURTH OF JULY!

FROM AN 1844 AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL READER

RESPONSIBILITY OF AMERICANS

E. S. Gannett*

The Christian world is passing through a momentous crisis. A struggle has begun, such as the kingdoms of Europe have never before known. The elements of revolution no longer slumber in any of them. Ever and anon, they break forth in tumult and bloodshed. Smothered, they are not idle; pent up in the confinement which sovereigns impose on them, they are but accumulating strength for new eruptions. Two parties exist through out all the states of Europe, with the exception, perhaps, of Imperial Russia,—the popular party, and the party that supports old institutions, either because they know that, if these fall, they shall be buried in the ruins, or because habit has so accustomed them to subjection, that they feel no wish to part with their chains.

The cause of freedom, of human rights, and the world's improvement, depends on the fidelity of the popular party to the principles which they have undertaken to sustain. A fearful contest must ensue, with reciprocal defeat, and mutual obstinacy. If the popular party should prevail, it can only be after long and desperate efforts, under which they will need every encouragement. With this party, our sympathies are inseparably linked. From our example, came the first ray that penetrated the darkness, from which they have awoke. Under its steady influence, they have to press on to the accomplishment of their wishes. If its aspect should be changed, their disappointment would be severe, it might be fatal.

The eyes of Europe are upon us; the monarch, from his throne, watches us with an angry countenance; the peasant turns his gaze on us, with joyful faith; the writers, on politics, quote our condition, as a proof of the possibility of popular government; the heroes of freedom animate their followers, by reminding them of our success. At no moment of the last half century, has it been so important, that we should send up a clear and strong light which may be seen across the Atlantic. An awful charge of unfaithfulness to the interests of mankind, will be recorded against us, if we suffer this light to be obscured, by the mingling vapors of passion, and misrule, and sin.

But not in Europe, alone, will be influenced by the character we give our destiny. The republics of the south have no other guide towards the establishment of order and freedom, than our example. If this should fail them, the last stay would be torn from their hope. We are placed under a most solemn obligation, to keep before them this motive to perseverance, in their endeavors to place free institutions on a sure basis. Shall we leave those wide regions to despair and anarchy? Better that they had patiently borne a foreign yoke, though it bowed their heads to the ground.

Citizens of the United States, it has been said of us, with truth, that we are at the head of the popular party of the world. Shall we be ashamed of so glorious a rank? Or shall we basely desert our place, and throw away our distinction? Forbid it, self-respect, patriotism, philanthropy! Christians, we believe that God has made us a name and a praise among the nations. We believe that our religion yields its best fruits in a free land. Shall we be regardless of our duty, as creatures of the Divine Power, and recipients of His goodness? Shall we be indifferent to the effects which our religion may work in the world? Forbid it, our gratitude, our faith, our piety!

In one way only, can we discharge our duty to the rest of mankind; by the purity and elevation of character that shall distinguish us as a people. And if we sink into luxury, vice, or moral apathy, our brightness will be lost, our prosperity deprived of its vital element; and we shall appear disgraced before man, guilty before God.

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The American Common-School Reader and Speaker, Goldsbury and Russell, 1844