

# The Peril of the Republic of the United States of America

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## CHAPTER I. A NATION'S BIRTHRIGHT

The United States comes into existence over a principle

- All men created equal
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The advent of the United States upon history's stage broke the dawn of a new era, not alone for the Old Thirteen, but for all mankind. The principles of freedom enunciated in the immortal Declaration of Independence were pregnant with weal for tens of thousands in other climes, and for millions then unborn, as well as for the embattled farmers who fought at Lexington and Concord. {1899 PTM, PRUS 9.1}

The new nation appealed not to tables of dynasty and royal succession to prove her title to life or her right to existence as a sovereign state among peers. Discarding these, her founders bore her into the arena upon certain self-evident truths. Her people assumed their equal and separate station among the powers of the earth by "the laws of nature and of nature's God." 1 {1899 PTM, PRUS 9.2}

Hitherto the doctrine had prevailed that the Almighty had created one class to govern and another class to be governed. Statesmen had universally held that all men were not created equal, and ecclesiastics had not been slow in seconding their teachings. When from time to time philosophers had arisen inculcating ideas of liberty and equality, they had been branded as anarchists by the state and as atheists by the church. Many a time both the civil and religious powers had buried their own differences of opinion and claims of jurisdiction in order that they might form a union for the sole purpose of more effectively dealing swift and summary punishment to these disturbers of the existing order of things. The rack, the fagot, and all the ingenious and exquisite tortures which the Inquisition could devise had been freely employed to wring from unwilling lips the desired recantation. {1899 PTM, PRUS 9.3}

Prior to the time of our glorious Revolution the doctrine that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed was wholly unknown in national practise. The princes and potentates of the nations of Europe had entrenched themselves behind that wickedest of all political tenets, the divine right of kings. This they amplified till it might better have read, the divine right of kings to govern wrong. With the aid of this as their creed, they had outraged in their subjects the inborn sense of manhood to such an extent that by the time the close of the eighteenth century was reached it was well nigh extinct; and the majority of the human family, worn out by the struggle of centuries, were about to sink into a long sleep of political death from which it seemed almost impossible that there should be an awakening. {1899 PTM, PRUS 10.1}

But the spark of light and life still burned; and a few bold sentences, the reflection of a few brave hearts, kindled a pillar of fire to guide mankind out of the wilderness of medieval political errors into the Canaan of governmental truth. As are the ten commandments and the golden rule in divinity, so are the precepts that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that all men are created equal, in civility. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are indeed the New and Old Testaments in things pertaining to Cæsar, the one serving as a commentary in the light of which the other must be interpreted. Immortal are the words of Jefferson, the sage of Monticello; grand in their simplicity and "noble roughness:"- {1899 PTM, PRUS 10.2}

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. {1899 PTM, PRUS 10.3}

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." {1899 PTM, PRUS 10.4}

The Declaration of Independence is a declaration of great general principles, as well as a recital of certain specific grievances. It was never written to meet the exigencies of one particular time or people. No nation prior to this one had ever declared it as a principle good for all mankind that all men are created equal, or that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. None of the great nations of Europe ever taught or ever believed these precepts. They were born simultaneously with the American Republic. They constituted her christening robe and her birthright, peculiarly her own, and the first infant cry of her national life. That nation of the old world which has ever been the foremost in promulgating doctrines of freedom and liberty did not believe these things, for she it was who fought them. She did not even believe them in their most limited sense for her most limited self,- the isle of England, as distinguished from colony and dependency. Much less, therefore, did she consider them as divine and immortal truths, applicable to all times and places, and worthy of being the basis of government among men in every kindred and nation and tongue and tribe and people. {1899 PTM, PRUS 11.1}

Well has Charles Sumner said:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 11.2}

"The words that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed are sacred words, full of life-giving energy. Not simply national independence was here proclaimed, but also the primal rights of all mankind. **Then and there appeared the angel of human liberation,** speaking and acting at once with heaven-born strength, breaking bolts, unloosing bonds, and opening prison doors; always ranging on its mighty errand, wherever there are any, no matter of what country or race, who struggle for rights denied; now cheering Garibaldi at Naples, as it had cheered Washington in the snows of Valley Forge, and especially visiting all who are downtrodden, whispering that there is none so poor as to be without rights which every man is bound to respect, none so degraded as to be beneath its beneficent reach, none so lofty as to be above its restraining power; while before it despotism and oligarchy fall on their faces, like the image of Dagon, and the people everywhere begin to govern themselves." {1899 PTM, PRUS 11.3}

And again he says:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 11.4}

"These words in the Declaration of Independence were not uttered in vain. Do you suppose them idle? Do you suppose them mere phrase or generality? No such thing. They are living words, by which this country is solemnly bound, and from which it can never escape until they are fulfilled. Your statutes can not contain any limitation which inflicts an indignity upon any portion of the human family." {1899 PTM, PRUS 11.5}

And yet again:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 12.1}

"The Declaration of Independence is the twofold promise; first, that all are equal in rights, and secondly, that just government stands only on the consent of the governed, being the two great political commandments on which hang all laws and constitutions. Keep these truly, and you will keep all. Write them in your statutes; write them in your hearts. This is the great and only final settlement of all existing questions. To this sublime consecration of the Republic let us aspire." {1899 PTM, PRUS 12.2}

In liberty, therefore, was the nation conceived; to these two propositions was it sacredly dedicated and solemnly sealed in the blood of its noblest sons. As the Bible declares that all men are equal before the Lord i.e., that God is no respecter of persons, so the Declaration affirms that all men are equal before the law, and that this equality is their own unalienable and primal right. The Declaration does not mean that all men are equal in all respects. But it does mean and it does say that they are equal in their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And in this it recognizes the nobility of man as the creation of God, and makes no exception or distinction in favor of any human caste or human lineage. {1899 PTM, PRUS 12.3}

"Obviously, men are not born equal in physical strength or in mental capacity, in beauty of form or in health of body. Diversity or inequality in these respects is the law of creation. But this inequality is in no particular inconsistent with complete civil or political equality. {1899 PTM, PRUS 12.4}

"The equality declared by our fathers in 1776, and made the fundamental law of Massachusetts in 1780, was equality before the law. Its object was to efface all political or civil distinctions, and to abolish all institutions founded upon birth. 'All men are created equal,' says the Declaration of Independence. 'All men are born free and equal,' says the Massachusetts Bill of Rights. These are not vain words. Within the sphere of their influence, no person can be created, no person can be born, with civil or political privileges not enjoyed equally by all his fellow citizens; nor can any institutions be established,

recognizing distinctions of birth. Here is the great charter of every human being drawing vital breath upon this soil, whatever may be his conditions, and whoever may be his parents. He may be poor, weak, humble, or black; he may be of Caucasian, Jewish, Indian, or Ethiopian race; he may be born of French, German, English, or Irish extraction; but before the constitution of Massachusetts all these distinctions disappear. He is not poor, weak, humble, or black; nor is he Caucasian, Jew, Indian, or Ethiopian; nor is he French, German, English, or Irish; he is a man, the equal of all his fellow-men. . . . To some it [the state] may allot higher duties, according to higher capacities; but it welcomes all to its equal hospitable board. The state, imitating the divine justice, is no respecter of persons." 2 {1899 PTM, PRUS 12.5}

This is the true doctrine of civil government, this is the Bible doctrine for civil government. {1899 PTM, PRUS 13.1}

There is still another principle in the Declaration of Independence which is worthy of notice here. The doctrine of the nations of medieval times was that "might makes right." If a nation possessed enough arbitrary power and physical force to accomplish a certain end, no matter how criminally aggressive, no matter how tyrannical or despotic that end might be, the power to do was always supposed to prove the rightfulness of the thing done. And back of this time, in the dawn of European history, in the days of the Roman Republic, that nation had held to the doctrine of "Vox Populi vox Dei,"-"The voice of the people is the voice of God;" in other words, the Roman doctrine was that if the majority of the people approved of a thing, it must be right. {1899 PTM, PRUS 13.2}

But the Declaration of Independence, with one simple yet sweeping statement, disowns, disclaims, and discards both the Roman and the medieval theories, and substitutes in their place a principle beyond comparison with them for its lofty and holy teachings. In the last paragraph of that immortal document it is written that these United Colonies as free and independent States "have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent States may of right do." {1899 PTM, PRUS 13.3}

Wrapped in these words was a new doctrine. Here was the enunciation of a principle hitherto unheard of. Heretofore sovereignty had been considered as being unlimited and illimitable. But the Declaration of Independence brought to the birth a new principle, that right is superior to all earthly power, whether vested in prince or potentate or in a republican form of government. With the founders of this government it was not a question of what the nation was able to do, but contrariwise, what was right for the nation to do. I quote once more from the great Sumner:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 14.1}

"But the great Declaration, not content with announcing certain rights as unalienable, and therefore beyond the control of any government, still further restrains the sovereignty, which it asserts by simply declaring that the United States have 'full power to do all acts and things which independent States may of right do.' Here is a well-defined limitation upon the popular sovereignty. The dogma of Tory lawyers and pamphleteers-put forward to sustain the claim of parliamentary omnipotence, and vehemently espoused by Dr. Johnson in his 'Taxation no Tyranny'-was taught, that sovereignty is in its nature illimitable, precisely as it is now loosely professed by Mr. Douglas for his handful of squatters. But this doctrine is distinctly discarded in the Declaration, and it is frankly proclaimed that all sovereignty is subordinate to the rule of right. Mark, now, the difference: all existing governments at that time, even the local governments of the colonies, stood on power without limitation. Here was a new government, which, taking its place among the nations, announced that it stood only on right, and claimed no sovereignty inconsistent with right." 3 {1899 PTM, PRUS 14.2}

In 1837 John Quincy Adams in a Fourth of July oration at Newburyport, said:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 14.3}

"The sovereign authority conferred upon the people of the colonies by the Declaration of Independence could not dispense them, nor any individual citizen of them, from the fulfilment of their moral obligations. The people who assumed their equal and separate station among the powers of the earth, by the laws of nature's God, by that very act acknowledged themselves bound to the observance of those laws, and could neither exercise nor confer any power inconsistent with them." {1899 PTM, PRUS 14.4}

Still further alluding to the self-imposed restraints upon the sovereignty which had been established, he said:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.1}

"The Declaration acknowledged the rule of right paramount to the power of independent States itself, and virtually disclaimed all power to do wrong. This was a novelty in the moral philosophy of nations, and it is the essential point of difference between the system of government announced in the Declaration of Independence and those systems which had until then prevailed among men. . . . It was an experiment upon the heart of man. All the legislators of the human race until that day had laid the foundations of all government among men in power; and hence it was that in the maxims of theory, as well as in the practise of nations, sovereignty was held to be unlimited and illimitable. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed another law, . . . a law of right, binding upon nations as well as individuals, upon sovereigns as well as upon subjects. . . . In assuming the attributes of sovereign power, the colonists appealed to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of their intentions, and neither claimed nor conferred authority to do anything but for right." {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.2}

Well indeed has George Bancroft, America's greatest historian, said:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.3}

"This immortal state paper, which for its composer was the aurora of enduring fame, was 'the genuine effusion of the soul of the country at that time,' the revelation of its mind, when, in its youth, its enthusiasm, its sublime confronting of danger, it rose to the highest creative powers of which man is capable. The bill of rights which it promulgates is of rights that are older than human institutions, and spring from the eternal justice that is anterior to the state." 4 {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.4}

In a speech delivered in the United States Senate, Jan. 9, 1899, Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts, refers to Thackeray's comment upon the great picture in the rotunda of the capitol. So beautifully and forcibly has he woven into his argument this incident, and another with it, that I take the liberty of giving it again in his own words, for they are far better than my own could be:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.5}

"Thackeray, no mean judge of noble art, no mean judge of noble actions, was one day crossing the rotunda of this capitol in company with Charles Sumner. He stopped before the picture where the genius of the great artist of Connecticut has delineated on the imperishable canvas the scene when the Declaration of Independence was presented by Jefferson to the solemn sitting over which Hancock presided, and the new nation, born on the 19th of April, 1775, was baptized in the faith of our new gospel of liberty. He stood for a moment silent, and then said to Mr. Sumner, 'That's your painter.' {1899 PTM, PRUS 15.6}

"Surely he was right. The foremost action of human history is fitly represented by the great work which we fondly hope is to be as enduring as time, enduring as the Republic, enduring as liberty. It is there, in the foremost place of honor which can be found on this earth. No Parthenon, no Saint Peter's, no Palace

of the Escurial, no Sans Souci, not Westminster Abbey itself, can equal, at least to our eyes, this spot, where forever a great and free people declares its constitutional will. {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.1}

"Beneath the great dome to which the pilgrim from afar first repairs when he visits the capital of his country, hangs the great picture which delineates the scene, when the nation was first baptized into immortal life. It was not only the independence of America which was then declared, it was the dignity of human nature itself. {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.2}

"When Samuel Rogers visited the Dominican convent at Padua, an aged friar showed him the famous picture of 'The Last Supper' in the refectory of the convent. He said:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.3}

"I have sat at my meals before it for seven and forty years, and such are the changes that have taken place among us-so many have come and gone in that time-that when I look upon the company there, upon those who are sitting at that table, silent as they are, I am sometimes inclined to think that we, not they, are the shadows.' {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.4}

"As administrations, terms of presidential office, begin and end, as senators and representatives come and go before the silent figures in that immortal picture, it seems to me that we are but the shadows, while Hancock and Jefferson and Adams and Franklin and Ellsworth and Livingston are still deliberating, still acting, still alive." 5 {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.5}

In the Book of books it is written that "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever;" and in another place that that immortal Word "liveth and abideth forever." And it is even so with the great principles of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution of the United States. They are coeval with time, and they will be commensurate with eternity. The government of God in the beautiful world to come will be a government of love, a government founded upon the principles of the consent of the governed; for every soul in that blest home and kingdom, and in all the infinite universe, will desire naught else but that God and Jesus Christ shall rule. This will be the supreme and ever-living desire of every one. Heaven's government is indeed one deriving its powers, which are only just, from the consent of the governed. Every voice in the righteous nation blends in that glad chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Says John, the revelator: "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." {1899 PTM, PRUS 16.6}

Some years ago James Russell Lowell was asked by Guizot, the great French historian, how long the Republic of the United States might reasonably be expected to endure. "So long," replied Mr. Lowell, "as the ideas of its founders continue dominant." {1899 PTM, PRUS 17.1}

No truer answer than this could possibly have been given. The United States obtained its national charter from the hand of Providence with the distinct understanding that its cardinal principles of government should forever be liberty and equality; and also with the express stipulation that the rule of right should always be paramount to the power of the sovereign State. {1899 PTM, PRUS 17.2}

If the Republic shall ever permanently desert these great principles, the star of her genius will set forevermore. By that foul act of disloyalty and treason to "the laws of nature and of nature's God," she will forfeit her own right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Woe be the day when she shall

deny these unalienable rights, these precious God-given boons, to any portion of the family of mankind. In that selfsame hour the bloodless hand will once again trace the dread writing on the national wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, -God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. To her it will be said, "Reward he even as she rewarded others, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double." {1899 PTM, PRUS 17.3}

If we shall ever deny to others the right of government by their own consent, by such a deed we shall ourselves surrender to the Creator the charter of our national life, of our corporate existence. {1899 PTM, PRUS 18.1}

Can it even be that in recent events the treacherous and malignant deed has indeed been done? Has the gloomy cloud which has hovered over and mantled our acts in the far East contained in its folds a Macbethian dagger, which, while slaying inoffensive and semicivilized people in the innocence of their national childhood, is in reality being plunged to the hilt into the fountain of our waters of life to poison them with the dread drug of despotism which sits upon its blade? Is national suicide being committed? Is the seal of state sorrow being set? Is the die of doom even now being cast? {1899 PTM, PRUS 18.2}

To every nation as to every man God has committed its work. The Captain of our salvation sets the course of the man, and bids him steer the bark of his life for a port of spiritual and religious perfection wherein is immortality and everlasting peace. On the chart of the ocean of time the haven which he is to gain is faithfully marked. Happy is the man who knoweth and obeyeth his Creator in this. With the individual man the goal pertaineth to the things of the soul, to the things of spirituality. {1899 PTM, PRUS 18.3}

So also it is with nations. The King of kings sets the course for every ship of state. Happy are the legislators who hold thereto. For the nation God appointeth a harbor of perfection in things civil, just as verily as for man he appointeth it in things religious. Should the nation turn aside and steer another course, naught but the rocks of destruction await it. All this is clearly brought to view in the great Book of books. For it is written that he "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." It is the Lord, then, who determines the time when nations shall rise and when they shall totter to their fall. It is the great I Am who says to the nations concerning their boundaries, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." And Job said: "He leadeth away counselors spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death. He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations and straighteneth them again. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man." 6 {1899 PTM, PRUS 18.4}

With every nation, as with every man, an account is opened on the ledger of life in the record office above. With unerring accuracy the Infinite One keeps an account with every kindred and nation and tongue and tribe and people. "While his mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account will remain open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of his

wrath commences. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. There is no more pleading of mercy in their behalf." {1899 PTM, PRUS 19.1}

With men there is a hereafter. With nations there is not; and as they can not be punished or rewarded in the next world, they must be in this. Will the United States remain true to her trust? That is the question which even now is hanging in the balances of time. {1899 PTM, PRUS 19.2}