A PATRIOTIC GERMAN-AMERICAN

Address of Charles F. W. von Bonnhorst at the Celebration of the Anniversary of American Independence, held at Economy, Pennsylvania, on July 4, 1833

The Harmonists were ever patriotic American citizens, and in many ways manifested their love for their adopted country. No person of long American lineage observed with more ardor the natal day of the Independence of the United States. On July 4, 1833, a celebration was held at Economy which was of more than usual interest. At noon the band began to play on the church tower, and the people commenced gathering in front of the church. From there they marched to the Concert Hall where the ceremonies took place. The proceedings were in German. The Declaration of Independence was read by Carl L. Volz, a prominent resident of Pittsburgh, of German birth, whose son, Ferdinand Volz, was afterward mayor of the city. The address of the day was then delivered by Charles F. W. von Bonnhorst.

Mr. von Bonnhorst deserves more than a passing notice. Born in 1776, in Prussia, the scion of a noble house, he served as an officer in the Prussian army, and after the battle of Jena in 1806, in which he commanded an artillery corps, he emigrated to this country. In Philadelphia he was married to the daughter of an old American family, and in 1810 came west and settled in Mifflin Township, Allegheny County, where he engaged in sheep raising. In 1821 he located in Pittsburgh, became a member of the Board of Alderman, studied law and was admitted to the bar of the county continuing in the legal profession until his death on February 23, 1844. He gloried in his American citizenship, and always practiced the patriotism which he preached on that memorable Fourth of July, 1833. His descendants have been equally distinguished. His son, Sidney F. von Bonnhorst, was postmaster of Pittsburgh under Presidents Lincoln and Johnston, afterward holding various important positions in the city, and at his death was secretary and treasurer of the Peoples Savings Bank, now the Peoples Savings Bank and Trust Company. George M. von Bonnhorst, the son of Sidney F. von Bonnhorst, like his father, was prominent in political life, being recorder of deeds of Allegheny County from 1891 to 1903, the year of his death. The only surviving son of Sidney F. von Bonnhorst is William E. von Bonnhorst, assistant secretary and assistant treasurer of the Dollar Savings Bank, who resides with his three sisters in Chartiers Township, in the old homestead which has been in the family for nearly a century.

ADDRESS OF MR. VON BONNHO RST.

Fellow citizens and friends! The 57th anniversary of the independence of the United States has come to us to-day. It reminds us of our duty to render thanks to the Creator of all things for His assistance in freeing this land from the yoke of insolent tyrants. To every citizen,
whether he was born in this country, or adopted by it, this day is a day of blessing, of thanksgiving and rejoicing. We, have much reason to celebrate this day when we consider the advantages that have accrued to us from the first day of independence, when we remember what disgrace was brought upon us by the despotism which trampled human rights under its feet so long.

Indeed, let us rejoice that the sun of divine freedom enlightened the first patriots of this country with its blessed rays to shake off the yoke of British despotism, to proclaim themselves free, and to destroy the notion that men were created only for the sake of the princes in order to be the wretched tools of their tyranny. Next to God, we are indebted to those noble-minded patriots that we are assembled here today as freemen, and that we are enjoying the blessings of liberty, the protection of liberal laws, and the sacred rights of man. These are blessings that we could never expect in our fatherland, which treated us very unkindly as regards religious, civil, and every other liberty; in which only the arbitrariness of licentious, extravagant tyrants and of avaricious and imperious officials wields the bloody scourge over mankind. Our hearts should be filled with joy and gratitude toward this happy land, which affords us a place of refuge from those blood-stained tyrants who scoff at every human right.

The worthy founder of your society and those who followed him to this country of liberty and of human rights, have learned only too well how far the arbitrariness of a despot can go. Merely because of opinions different from those of the majority, he forced a number of industrious subjects to emigrate, to leave their homes with bleeding hearts, to flee at great hazard to strange people on a strange continent, to undergo every kind of hardship. They had to part with their relations, their friends, the home of their forefathers, the home of their youth, to bid farewell forever to those who were dear to them, in order to seek a new country whose manners, speech, and climate were entirely different from theirs, where they must necessarily expect to struggle with many difficulties.

Notwithstanding, their faith in God's providence was strong; they also relied upon their own strong arms; they were not idlers who wished to enjoy themselves at the expense of strangers. Their own industry combined with God's help, with temperance, and patient endurance, was to be enough to further their common welfare in a strange country. They were not expecting gold mines, their industry and
frugality were to be their gold mines. How well they cal-
culated is demonstrated by your present prosperity, your
green fields, your factories.

Your lot is enviable. You are not obliged to struggle for
a bare existence. You live only for one another like brothers
and sisters, in harmony. There is among you no envy, no
hatred to disturb your peace of mind; hence, you must be
happy. How many millions of our countrymen are languish-
ing in misery, in their own country oppressed by despotis,
robbed by avaricious officials. Right and justice are
trampled under foot! The poor are starving. The more
prosperous are near ruin, since a high tariff hinders and
paralyzes every kind of commerce.

What a picture of our fatherland! And what is the
cause of all this distress? What is the cause of this misery?
It is the fact that the princes are not willing to have their
eyes opened for the good of all. It is because they treat their
subjects not as freemen, but as wretched slaves. What a
sad picture is held out to us by Poland, unfortunate Poland!
Formerly it was an elective monarchy with at least fifteen
millions of inhabitants! How rent by discord it is now!
Thousands of its best citizens are languishing in Siberia
with their wives and children! And why? Because they
tried to gain their freedom by fighting. The bonds of nature
are dissolved there! Fathers and sons in the most terrible
exile; mothers, daughters, and little children, reduced to
beggary, are wandering through their devastated country,
which is drenched with the blood of its best citizens. What
a terrible thought for those exiles!

To know that their wives and children are living in
misery, exposed to the parsimonious pity of an unfeeling
world, and to be unable to help! To see themselves sepa-
rated, perhaps forever, from those who are dear to their
hearts! Their lot must be desperate. However, a day of
retribution will come. The tyrants who, with fiendish vin-
dictiveness, were capable of destroying an honest, unfortu-
nate nation, will some day be compelled to give an account
of their infamous deeds. God is forbearing, but also just. He
will visit their crimes upon them; their dynasties will cease
to exist like those of Alexander, Napoleon and others who
ruled the world with iron rods.

How shall, or can, our unfortunate fatherland be saved,
or a better order of things be brought about? Perhaps by
those demagogues who, through rash steps have only pro-
voked the ill-will and wrath of the princes, and have thereby
made their countrymen all the more unhappy and almost
ruined them? Vain hope! France, England, Ireland, Poland give evidence that an unorganized mass can gain nothing by force against half a million of bayonets as long as discord separates the masses. At present unfortunate Ireland is even placed under martial law. The fate of nations ruled by tyrants must remain undecided until the spark of divine reason shall enlighten their agents, so that the latter really comprehend the misery of their people, or until the masses of the people shall unite to obtain their rights by force in spite of all resistance.

The latter contingency is hardly to be expected, the former will not come about until millions of their best and most prosperous citizens shall have left their homes in order to find a better country free from despotic oppression and from the even more harmful influence of avaricious officials. And where on earth is such a country to be found, unless it be our happy land? Indeed, my friends, millions of our abused, oppressed countrymen, from whom their life-blood has been drawn, will come to this hemisphere, seek the protection of our beneficent laws in order to enjoy here the tranquillity and contentment which were refused them on their native soil. There will be hundreds, nay thousands of German settlements here.

It is to be desired, however, that those masses of emigrants should not include fanatics, but should consist of nothing but industrious Germans who would not disgrace the good name of the Germans. Come, then, ye industrious useful Germans! We will receive you with open arms and help you in every way. Here you will be free, you will no longer be fettered by chains of slavery. Here you will forget the sufferings, the insults which were heaped upon you in your native land. However, remember at the same time that this divine liberty must not be misused, must not become license, but must be enjoyed only by the exercise of reason. How many examples are there found in the history of the world, of men who, freed from the oppression of slavery, fell into a state of absolute lack of restraint. Our constitution, a masterpiece in the art of government, protects the personal rights of every citizen, no official may dare to oppress him without having to fear severe punishment. Our constitution bears the stamp of wise men; by it, it has been made impossible that the few shall rule over the many. The freedom of the press, of speech, of public meetings organized for peaceful purposes, the jury system, are indestructible bulwarks against the arbitrariness of individuals. Here neither the physical nor the mental growth of the people can be
checked. Here free utterance of one's opinions, a free discussion of all subjects are sacred, inviolable rights.

According to the constitution religious exercises are to be respected; and all the states of the Union are forbidden ever to make laws concerning matters of faith, ever to combine a spiritual power with the power of the state. No one must be harmed on account of his opinions in matters of religion. No pretext must be used to force anyone to submit to members of the clergy or, upon the demand of such members, to give even the slightest thing for religious purposes. All this is to be voluntary! Such attitude does not indicate lack of religiousness; it is experience gained only too dearly that gave rise to these principles. People have always observed that greed and fanaticism eagerly seized upon every pretext in order to gain control over the people, to fetter them both intellectually and physically. Where in the world is there a country where these fundamental and most sacred rights of men are exercised or sanctioned as in ours?

What do the laws of antiquity, those of Minos, Lycurgus, Solon, Plato, in short of all Greeks and Romans, amount to in comparison with ours? The former never recognized the equality of rights, the independence of the individual and the people. They knew nothing of our present means of education and communication, the quick reproduction and propagation of writings. Their views were therefore much narrower. Let us compare them with those of Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, Franklin, Henry Ames, Madison, and other founders of our independence and authors of our constitution. This document, which emanated from the inspired genius of these noble-minded men, has obviated every arbitrariness and every encroachment upon man's rights.

Their names, as well as our fundamental laws, will be transmitted to the remotest ages and be mentioned with respect. Also their manes are hovering around us, on this festival day, in order to be witnesses of our gratitude; they, too, in the world of spirits, rejoice in their great deeds, in the triumph of the human rights over despicable tyranny. May their memory be sacred to us, may they rest in peace! Indeed, my friends, such were the men who are the cause of this festival day. And only as far as the citizens submit to this constitution and to the laws of the state, as they observe and respect them faithfully, can they be regarded as good citizens of the state and lay claim to its protection.
Pennsylvania, the keystone in the structure of this state, where thousands, not only of our countrymen, but also of the oppressed of other nationalities, found a place of refuge, is and always will be ready to grant them such a place, as long as it can hold them; otherwise there are millions of acres in other states where the oppressed can find a home.

Under the protection of God's kind providence our happy land is flourishing. We are at peace with the rest of the world. Our flag is respected and feared in all parts of the world. Trade and commerce are flourishing. Our factories offer a rare example of perfection, so that not only here, but abroad preference is given to many articles manufactured in this country above those made in Europe. Our revenues are such that our national debt has been entirely paid. Where in the world is there a state that has done as much? But I also ask: where is there a wiser government, a better constitution, founded upon economy, than ours? And if we should be involved in war, we have sufficient resources to cover its cost without claiming the help of others. Arts and sciences are flourishing. Every stranger admires the colossal enterprises and improvements, our canals, our roads, our bridges and public buildings.

Even the proud British, who never think that there is anything great, imposing, or beautiful, except in their own island, are carried away with admiration; involuntarily they exclaim: "Indeed, this is a great people, whose inventive genius has produced greater results in the brief period of fifty-seven years than the old nations of Europe could produce in five hundred years." But as soon as they recall that this nation defeated their best armies and took their fleets, their indignation rises to its highest point and their admiration ceases.

They are no longer willing to admit that they could discover anything beautiful and imposing. How many other nations are similar to the British! Their jealousy, their petty spirit do not allow them to admit that we are just as far advanced in the arts and sciences, in all branches of industry, in the invention of all kinds of useful things, as the inhabitants of the old world. Many strangers who visit our country feel bored, because they have neither the purpose nor the faculty to make themselves useful in this country. And when their means are exhausted, they abuse and revile the country and its inhabitants, because the latter are not willing to confirm them in their laziness and to feed them. America does not need such people.
Only industrious people reap advantages here. America owes its greatness to its labor and industry, which are founded principally upon liberty and independence. In freemen the mind is also free, no servile disposition fetters it. The legislator's tongue is not paralyzed by servile fear of incurring the displeasure of despots. What made our armies, our fleets victorious? freemen who fought for their own hearths, for their wives and children, and not to please the whim of a prince. To the American liberty is something sacred whose violation he is ready to avenge by sacrificing his last drop of blood. Our sailors are the pride of our country, the terror of our enemies. And like Caesar, they came, saw and conquered. Only freemen can accomplish such deeds. Mercenaries cannot do it. And while they win these laurels, they glorify at the same time the American nation. God, in His supreme kindness, has so far blessed our country most plentifully.

Never have we felt the misery of famine like other countries. And this year again our fields promise abundant crops. Heaven's blessings are seen wherever our eyes turn. Indeed, it almost seems that we are a people especially favored by God. How much more reason have we, therefore, to be grateful to the giver of all good things for His love, His kindness towards us! And although our happy land also has been visited since a year past by that general plague, cholera, which has wrought such havoc in other countries, yet it has been hitherto less harmful than in other regions.

Who does not see that there is also a divine purpose in this fact? God will bring us to our senses so that we may not become too proud, but remember that our lives are in His power. Would that we might take this to heart and by a virtuous life please Him, our Protector, and love, respect, and fear Him above everything! Now, since there are so many reasons why we should be contented, and God's blessings have come to us in such abundance, should we not also strive, in conjunction with our brothers, to live in harmony, to do away with all factious spirit, and call ourselves only Americans so that we may not lose the many benefits, which He has bestowed upon us. May conceit never allure us to suppose that we are the creators of our happiness, our prosperity, but may we recognize and worship, Him, our kind Father, as the final source of everything.

Is it not due to His kind beckoning that our steps were directed to this happy land? Did He not rescue us from the misery and the tribulations, which were the cause of our languishing in our oppressed fatherland? Oh! let us be
thankful! But let us not forget the indigent emigrant, but let us help him as much as is in our power; let us see in him only the indigent brother, of whatever nationality he may be, so that he, too, may say: "Happy the man whose heart is rejoiced and strengthened by a new flourishing country, who found even in the remotest region good people ready to assist him."

Then we shall be worthy of the name of Germans. May God's kind providence protect us and save us from all tribulations! May we all enjoy health so that we may celebrate together a great many more anniversaries of our independence.

Father of all beings! Jehovah! God who art enthroned in Heaven! Reverently we pray to Thee on this anniversary of the Independence of these United States that Thou mayest kindly look at us, and hear our prayer which thy Son Jesus taught us! Holy, holy is Thy name which is worshipped by millions of men! Let Thy holy kingdom, the knowledge of Thee be increased among us on this solemn day! Let Thy will become more sacred to us, give us strength joyfully to do Thy holy will on earth.

Let us daily find the means for our maintenance on earth! Forgive us, kind Father, our debts even as we forgive those who offend us, from the bottom of our hearts. Exempt us from heavy sufferings and temptations! Help us in all our calamities! Give us faith, strength, and courage to endure them. Free us more and more from the power of evil! Let our souls always be filled with good sentiments and resolutions, so we shall always please Thee.

To Thee, our Father, who rulest and canst do everything, to Thee are due worship and adoration forever. Amen.