



RUTLEDGE'S

Oration.

1804.

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED IN

ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH,

BEFORE THE INHABITANTS OF

CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA;

ON WEDNESDAY, THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1824.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

American Independence.

BY APPOINTMENT OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION SOCIETY.

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THAT SOCIETY:

AND ALSO OF THE

South-Carolina State Society of Cincinnati.

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CHARLESTON:

PRINTED BY W. P. YOUNG, FREDERICK'S HEAD,

NO. 41, BROAD-STREET.

M.D.C.IV.

Oration, &c.

THE institution of national festivals, is among the number of those usages, which have been transmitted to us by the history of remotest times. It took its rise in the barbarous ages of antiquity; and the progress of civilized society, has served to give the stamp to its utility, by persevering in the custom, whilst other customs, and other habits, have been rejected and forgotten.

GOVERNMENTS, which have most respected, and most attended to the tastes and dispositions of the people, have been the first to promote the solemnization of public festivals; and have, in many instances, found, in this effusion of popular sentiment, the means of advancing both the welfare and the glory of the nation.

THE history of our own day, more especially serves to exemplify the astonishing influence which this practice exercises over the minds of men, and to evince to us that it is a source, from which a nation may draw courage,

rage, and divine energy, in moments of difficulty and of danger.

A great nation, engaged in an arduous contest for the establishment of her rights, has not thought it unworthy of her power, to excite the courage of her citizens, by commemorating the actions they had achieved; and has owed, perhaps, not a few of her victories, to the tribute she has offered up to the merits of her departed heroes.

If then, the wisdom of ages has concurred in giving sanction, to the custom to which we now conform, when, Americans, shall we find, in the annals of history, any single event, more worthy of being recalled to the recollection of a nation, than the event which we have, this day, assembled to celebrate? Where shall we find an epoch, so memorable, as the one, in which, by the publication of a *single act*, a people has, at once, asserted its right to independence, and announced its sovereignty to the world. The moment, which severs from the parent stock so considerable a branch of an enligned empire, is, surely, one well calculated to arrest the attention of surrounding nations; and of which the remembrance ought, by every means, to be perpetuated in the minds of that portion of the human race, who are in the enjoyment of the benefits resulting from so important an act. But it is not to the contemplation of this great act of a contending people, how much soever it may exceed all others in importance, that the mind of an
 American

American can, by any means, confine itself. At the recurrence of every anniversary, the events which produced, and those which gave effect to the declaration of independence, must, necessarily, crowd themselves into his recollection, and present objects, at once calculated to raise his admiration, and to excite his love for his country.

He beholds, in the retrospect, a virtuous and an happy people, full of affection for the parent empire, sharing freely in her dangers, and participating in her glory. But they are a wise and enlightened people, well understanding the sources of their prosperity, and jealous of the rights on which it is founded. He sees them, at the moment of being oppressed by the parent country, meet injury with remonstrance, and oppose outrage with decision: Until at the eve of having all they hold dear, wrested from them at the point of the bayonet, he beholds the bright flame of liberty bursting forth, from every part of the American continent, and descending, with the rapidity of the forked lightning, upon all her opposers.

In fact, what a delightful, as well as astonishing spectacle is presented, when the people of this continent, had seriously entered upon the work of their emancipation. We find all the energies of the nation displaying, and all its resources unfolding themselves, at the requisition of national necessity. What virtue, what talents, what heroic courage, what pure love of country, at an moment,

called into public view, and exhibited to the world on the great theatre of human action.

VIRTUES and talents, which had remained forever obscured under the dark shade of a monarchical government, or at best have been devoted to ignoble purposes, under the paralyzing influence of colonial dependance.

How different their lot; the strong minds advance, and take their station in the front. Those, on whom heaven, in its bounty had bestowed wisdom, fortitude, and a deliberative mind, now, for the first time, feel the value of the gift; they take their seats in the national councils, and devote the strength of their faculties to the use of their country: collected from distant points of an extensive continent, with manners and opinions, in many instances at variance, they astonish, equally by their moderation, and by the unanimity of their resolves.

ENTRUSTED, for the first time, with the great interests of a nation, they betray no marks of a feeble diffidence in their own powers; but, proceeding with the deep reflexion, and the firm decision, which, until that moment, had been the privilege of experienced statesmen, they offer to their country the assurance of success.

IF ever a public body of modern days, has presented to us the image of that august assembly of ancient times. on which succeeding ages have been accustomed to look, with enthusiastic admiration, (the Roman Senate)

it is most assuredly the American Congress, from the dawn of the revolution, to the period of its termination. There is no proof of their having been inferior to that venerable body, in the great articles of public spirit, and devotedness to the cause of the country; and there is ample ground for asserting, that they far surpassed it in the possession of those sacred principles of civil liberty, which, alone, can stamp a value upon the life of man.

I will not entreat your pardon for the extravagance of this comparison, nor will I consent to having it ascribed to the partiality natural to the heart of an American, because I speak the sentiment of one, well fitted to pass his judgment on things of high moment, and who served strongly, in his own person, to remind the age in which he lived, of those great men of antiquity, whose characters have become the admiration of latter times. The illustrious Chatham, that most eminent of statesmen, was pleased to assert before the peers of the British Realm, “that as history
 “had formed his favorite study, and as in the
 “celebrated writings of antiquity, he had
 “often admired the patriotism of Greece and
 “of Rome,” so (said he) “I must declare and
 “avow, that in these master states of the
 “world, I know not the people, or the
 “senate, who, in such a complication of diffi-
 “cult circumstances, can stand in preference
 “to the delegates of America, assembled
 “in general congress at Philadelphia.”

SUCH

SUCH were the words of one, whose opinions have stood the test of experience, and from the soundness of whose judgment, there has been seldom an appeal.

HISTORY, indeed, presents us with no instance of the supreme authority of a nation, under the influence of a revolutionary ardor, charged with the defence of an invaded country, surrounded with dangers, and encompassed with difficulties of every description, having exercised its power with such singular moderation, and having, in so high a degree, respected the rights of the citizen—offering, in its own body, the best illustration of those principles of humanity and of justice, for which it was contending, it set an example to the inferior authorities, which served to produce the most beneficial effects.

IF it be true, that those who give the direction to public measures, are responsible for their remote effects, it will require but little reflexion to convince, how amply the American congress acquitted itself towards the nation, who confided their interests to its care. Persuaded in their wisdom, that it depended upon the supreme legislature, to give a tone to the proceedings of the inferior bodies, and, in short, to regulate, in some degree, the feelings of the people at large, they had the humanity to keep out of view, the fatal object, which has, unfortunately, constituted, but too prominent a figure, in all contests for civil rights—the deadly scaffold.—It is for this, that the thanks of mankind

kind are due to them—It is for this, that the thanks of future generations will be bestowed; for hence is it, that the character of the nation has assumed a mildness, and a moderation, which are the surest pledges of a lasting happiness—Hence, also is it, that the page of our history is not stained with atrocities, committed in the name of the law; that we find no sacrifices to the intemperance of party, under the plea of public necessity, and no scenes of carnage, but those in which the blood of our heroes, is mingled with that of their enemies.

FROM this body of enlightened patriots, issued able negotiators,—men not to be foiled, by the boasted skill of courtiers, hackneyed in the sophistry of the diplomatic school; but who, firm in the interests of their country, carried into the cabinets of princes, a conviction of her rights, and forced from their hearts a confession of the justice of her cause.

THUS by a combination of virtue and of talents, characterized by a most remarkable degree of fidelity to the public cause; having been charged with no instances of individual corruption, they marched with a steady and an equal step, towards the great design of the revolution: Affording a rare instance of exemption from the great error of human frailty, when engaged in scenes, which rouse the passions, that of sacrificing the object in the ardor of pursuit, they fulfilled the most sanguine hopes of their country, in the establishment of an independent government, fitted for a nation of freemen.

IF on the other hand, we turn our eyes from those who filled the civil administrations of our country, to such as were engaged in the more active scenes of personal danger, we behold nothing which can weaken the impression of the magnanimity, that inspired the founders of the republic.

AT the voice of danger, the youth of the country raise the undaunted front; scattered over an extensive wild, at the intimation, that the contest for their rights, was to be a contest of force, and not of reason; seizing their arms they assembled from every direction. Those in whose bosoms, glow the generous sparks of military ardor, are at their head—Already is the banner of liberty unfurled, and soon it waves over her sons, crowding from every part around it: We see their ranks close; the firm battalion is formed, and presents its menacing front to the invading foe.

IT is then that we recognize the genuine descendants of a valiant ancestry, who had preferred the perils and hardships of a savage land, to the protecting arm of a monarchical government. It was then that the world beheld an exhibition, which had been almost lost to its recollection; a spectacle, which served to revive the drooping hopes of those philosophic minds, in every part of Europe, who had nearly relinquished the cause of liberty in despair.

FOR near two centuries, the world had not seen a band of warriors arrayed in the cause of freedom.—For near two centuries, the principle

principle of equal rights appear to have been sinking into oblivion.—From the glorious struggle of the united provinces, to the era which we celebrate, among the nations of the civilized world, the minds of men appear to have relaxed into the settled calm of passive obedience—The principle diffused itself generally—The monarchies every where gained ground—There existed, indeed, confederacies under the name of republics; but were they republics of freemen? Alas! what faint copies of the great models of antiquity. How little marked with those fine features, that characterized the republics of old, and which contrasting the free citizen, with the degraded subject of surrounding empires, justly affixed to the latter the epithet of barbarian.

IT was reserved for the new world to produce a new people; the first fruits of its civilization, who remote from scenes of habitual oppression, should grow up in such strong, and such genuine sensations of natural rights, as to bid defiance to the encroachments of arbitrary power, to which the inhabitants of the elder hemisphere had been accustomed to submit. A people, who setting at nought all the calculations of a mylterious policy, adapted to the systems of old governments, should dare to question the motive of its rulers, and deny its compliance with measures in which its reason refused to acquiesce.

SUCH was the American nation when it arose to the astonished view of the old world, and challenged its admiration in the cabinet, and in the field.

It would far exceed limits, which propriety assigns to this feeble attempt, should I pretend to open to your view the page of history, and point out to your observation; or, more properly, recal to the recollection of many of the audience, in a however cursory a manner the various events which occurred in the course of our struggle for independence. After naming the great act of our fathers, which was promulgated on this auspicious day, and which, most undoubtedly, claims the pre-eminence above all other acts, it would require more discernment than falls to my lot, to show which of the many wise resolves, that emanated from that estimable body, should most engage your attention; whether we call our eyes on their moderation in the hour of victory, or regard their fortitude in the moment of defeat.

EQUALLY unavailing would be the endeavour to render the tribute of just praise to the brave defenders of the country, by a partial relation of the high feats of arms, which distinguished their generous efforts in the public cause. To pass an impartial encomium upon the American soldier, it would be difficult to say whether he merits most your praise, when after acts of heroic courage, he is marching in the full career of victory; or, when, overpowered by numbers, harassed in retreat, and exposed to the most cruel privations, his undaunted spirit refuses to submit.—Who has not seen, at the close of a campaign, which had covered them with glory, both the officer and the soldier a prey to the keenest suffering—
 exposed

exposed, in a miserable encampment, to the inclemency of a severe season, without tents, without cloathing, and, almost, without subsistence, they had little left of the military decoration, but the musket and the sword—deprived, by the penury of the public funds, of those glittering charms, which form no inconsiderable a part of the attractions of military life, and which have been termed the “pomp and circumstance of glorious war,” the American army experienced little else of war than its dangers, its discipline and its fatigues.—It was no uncommon circumstance, for a portion of the troops, who compose the Southern army, to present such a picture of wretchedness, from a deficiency of necessary clothing, as to be unfit to be paraded, except on the day of battle. Yet we do not find in this distressing situation, that the ardor of the soldier abated, or that his murmurs increased—on the contrary, patience and courage appear to form equally a part of his nature—If, indeed, there occurred a few instances of momentary defection from the existing government, they cannot be charged upon them, as an abandonment of the sacred principles for which they were contending, for disdaining all offers of corruption. they never ceased to turn their arms against the enemies of their country.

Such is the American soldier, however much he may now have become the object of partial contempt; or whatever effort may now be made to degrade his character in the public esteem. When we behold an affecta-

tion of unmeaning diffidence in the fidelity of a regular force, composed of our own citizens, we have only to recollect, with what an happy security the nation has heretofore reposed herself upon the virtue of her troops, in times of far greater difficulty than can now arise—we have only to recollect, that at the close of a war, in which the sufferings of the soldiers had been pushed to the extreme, when in short, by their courage, and their labors, they had erected an empire, we beheld them, at the nod of the civil authority, with one accord, pile their arms before the altar of liberty, and retire with the thanks of the country as their sole reward.—Yes, the officers and soldiers, who composed the American army, at the close of the revolution, retired, most of them, with shattered fortunes, and to wasted fields;—many of them to wear out the remainder of their days in indigence, and neglect, and perhaps, to cast a look of envy on the fate of their companions in arms, who rested on the bed of honor—How soon were they also forgotten; can we mention a single act, expressive of a desire in the nation, to rescue from a melancholy oblivion, the names of those gallant warriors, who shed their last blood, in defence of her liberties? Not one. Fields of the north, and of the south, from the frozen regions of Quebec, to the burning plains of Florida; fields, so often dyed with the blood of our soldiers, so often witnesses to their toil, and to their valor; why are you not marked with monuments, erected to their glory? Why
has

has not the national gratitude, by inscriptions on military trophies, consecrated their valor, as an example to the youth of the country, and consigned their virtues to the admiration of remote posterity? But alas! of the victims to the revolutionary war, how many have already escaped from recollection of their surviving countrymen—How small, in comparison, is the number of those heroes, whose names are fated to be inscribed upon the roll of fame? Perhaps, before many years, the scenes in which they exhibited the last proofs of their devotion to the cause of liberty, the very spots where combating in the foremost ranks, they performed their last achievements in her name, shall pass away from our remembrance, and be no longer known: Even now, may we apply to them the words of the poet. “The long grass grows rank over their graves, the sons of the feeble pass over them, and know not that the mighty rest there.”

THERE is little reason, indeed, to expect that it should be reserved for America, to rescue from the characteristic reproach of ingratitude, the form of government, which she has chosen to adopt. It appears to be the necessary result of a free form of government, where the opinions of opposite parties in turn bear sway, that no settled course of political measures should be suffered to prevail, and that we should always find one portion of the nation in disgrace with the other: Still less is it to be expected, that the claims of individual merit should be found to rest upon a more
 certain

certain footing, or that amidst the fluctuations of political opinions, their pretensions should be urged with success. The citizen who renders important services to a republic, has therefore little prospect of a certain reward, and can count upon little else, besides the tribute which his memory shall receive from respect of future generations—How necessary, therefore, does it become, that a people who have chosen this mode of government, should promote, with particular zeal, the cultivation of letters, which alone can rescue from oblivion whatever in the events of the times is worthy of being preserved. Doubly fortunate indeed, are those who perform great actions, when they achieve them among a people, familiar with the cultivation of the sciences, they are at least sure of receiving the tribute of praise, which flows from the pen of the historian.

MAY such prove the fortune of those eminent citizens, whose virtuous deeds have already graced the infancy of our republic: Whilst their great qualities still live in the memory of their countrymen, may there arise among us, some able historian; some modern Plutarch, who shall celebrate their meritorious actions, in terms worthy of transmitting them to the remotest generations of man.

AT their head—At the head of a bright list, he shall place a name, at the sound of which the heart of every American must vibrate with the keenest sensibility, at the repetition of which, arise emotions of pride, and of pleasure,

pleasure, in the breast of every friend to virtue. The most splendid page shall be consecrated to the illustrious, and as he has already been hailed by his country, the IMMORTAL WASHINGTON. Eloquent indeed, must be the author, who shall celebrate his virtues and his actions, in a strain which shall be suited to the generous warmth of his enthusiastic countrymen—Shall there ever arise an historian, who shall present to the world a just picture of that great man, compared with the brightness of whose glory, the glory of all modern heroes appears diminished and obscured?

WHEN I speak of glory, I mean not to imply that deceptive glare, which so frequently usurps its place, and which, produced by a succession of fortunate actions, serves only like a glittering garb, to distract the attention from the deformity it covers.

FAR different is it from that high fame, which constitutes the just tribute, that mankind consents to pay to those great, those rare minds, in which eminent virtues bear their just proportion to eminent talents—who superior to the incitements of a vain ambition, and yielding only to the dictates of a virtuous principle, devote their powers to the advancement of the happiness of man—who unincumbered with the petty passions, which serve to mark the variations of human weakness, move on, in a regular and distinguished course, exciting at once the admiration, and the gratitude of mankind.

It is to such rare, and exalted characters that is due the glory which the philosopher may covet. It is a bright wreath of such transcendent glory, which has adorned the brow of our American chief—far, indeed, is it beyond the scope of my abilities, to do justice to his worth, and it is only left to me to repeat the wish which I have already expressed, that it may be the happiness of America, to possess some able historian, who shall give to his character, that high rank among the heroes of the earth, that shall leave few in the parallel with him—but what we can never expect, is, that any command of language shall be adequate to convey to the conception of future generations, a competent idea of the warmth of affection, with which the hearts of his country men, have been universally inspired towards him.

You, to whom I address myself—some of whom may have participated in scenes of his glory, and many of whom have witnessed the tenor of his life, will ask your own hearts, whether this is exaggeration.

If I appear to be too brief upon the subject of this illustrious character, it is because I am fully sensible, that any encomium, which can fall from my lips, must appear a feeble offering, indeed, before that shrine, at which have already been offered up the hearts of a whole people. I am at the same time aware, that it would seem like little less than a profanation of this sacred day, to pass in silence over that name, which, at the slightest
 mention

vention of the patriotic virtues, is the first to rush into the minds of the Americans.

If the revolution reflects immortal honor on those who were instrumental in achieving it, how incumbent is it on those, who succeeded them in the councils of the nation, and who could not participate in the glory, at least to preserve the advantages of it.

To do this, let them be careful to keep the national reputation, as nearly as possible, up to the height to which it was raised by our successful struggle for independence. It will be impossible to effect this, unless we conceive a just idea of our own strength.—If we suffer to prevail a feeble diffidence of measuring our force with that of other nations, when the honor or the interest of the country shall demand it, we shall behold one benefit after another, snatched from us by those who pursue a bolder policy.—The only inducement which can be conceived, for yielding to this erroneous system, and which has so frequently given the stab to the existence of nations, would be the vain hope of ensuring perpetual peace.—But, without being taxed with indiscretion, we may, with propriety, demand what right America has to expect a much further prolongation of that desirable condition.—Reclined upon the bosom of peace, we have glided down the stream of time for a space of more than twenty years.—Twenty years of uninterrupted peace, is an extensive period in the history of nations.—When contrasted with the wars and perturbations

tions of surrounding countries, it would seem doubly long.—Within that space, empires have disappeared, and others have arisen to our view.—Can we claim for America, an exemption from the usual events which occur in the annals of all nations?—Removed, indeed, by local position, from participating in many of the causes which divide and embroil the powers of Europe, we are, nevertheless, brought into contact with them, by the interests which flow from a widely extended commerce.—War, which is the enemy, is not less the offspring of trade. It might, almost, be pronounced to form an inherent part in the natural state of all nations.—It seems to be, to the political body, what a state of activity, and of exertion, is to animal life; whilst, on the other hand, peace may be compared to that of rest and relaxation.—The people of America ought not, therefore, to shut their eyes to the uncertain tenure, by which that blessing is held—but, whilst they know how to appreciate its value, they ought, also, to prepare with firmness to relinquish it, whenever the sacrifice, which is due to the national character, shall demand it.

THEY ought to determine to meet the change, with a full confidence in their own strength. What have they to apprehend? If America, under the disadvantages of civil discord, maintained a successful war for the acquirement of her independence, against a power already established within her territory, and in the possession of her forts and her harbors, how little has she, in her present situation,

situation, to dread the effect of any force which can be exerted against her?

To compare her actual situation with what it then was—turn her eyes to every quarter of the globe, and she beholds her flag.—Is there a port, in the civilized world, to which she has not found an entrance? Is there a bay, in the most barbarous regions, to which the enterprize of any nation ever conducted it, where her active industry is not to be witnessed? The capital of her citizens, is brought forward in a thousand shapes; it is appropriated, by their sagacity, to the calculations of every chance, from the bold enterprize of an extensive operation, to the minuter objects of a petty traffic.—Their property is every where to be found; it floats upon every wave.

WITH the accession of strength, which we have already gained, what have we to fear from the enmity of foreign powers, if we remain but true to ourselves: provided we are careful to keep alive, those sparks which blazed forth, and which shed so bright a gleam over the American character, during the war of the revolution?—In all questions, which involve the national character, let the voice of party be hushed—let us evince a constant unanimity in maintaining the dignity and independence of the American people. Then, indeed, shall we command the respect of surrounding nations—Then, indeed, may it with justice be pronounced, that we are still worthy of the blood which has been shed in the cause of liberty.