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AN ORATION, delivered by Richard Rush, on the 4th of July, 1812, in the Hall of the House of Representatives, at the Capitol, Washington. Delivered at the request of the committee of arrangement for the celebration of that day, and, at their request published.

ORATION.

SENSIBLY as I feel, fellow citizens, the honor of having been selected to address you on such an occasion as this, I am not less sensible of the difficulties of the task. Not that there is any thing intrinsically arduous in a celebration, in this form, of the most brilliant political anniversary of the world; but as the subject has been repeatedly exhibited, under so many points of view, I am apprehensive of tiring, without being able to requite, the attention with which you may be good enough to honor my endeavors. The fruitful subject must still sustain me, and I proceed, with unfeigned diffidence, and the most profound respect for this distinguished and enlightened assembly, to perform the office assigned me.*

During each return of this day for nearly thirty successive years, our country rested in all the security and all the blessings of peace. But the scene and the aspect are changed. The menacing front of War is before us, to awaken our solitudes, to demand at the hands of each

* The President of the United States, Heads of Department, members of Congress, &c. as well as citizens and strangers, were present at the delivery of this discourse.

citizen of the republic the most active energies of duty; to ask, if need be, the largest sacrifices of advantage and of ease. The tranquillity, the repose, the enjoyments, the schemes, the hopes of peace, are, for a while, no more. These, with their endearing concomitants, are to give place to the stronger and more agitating passions, to the busy engagements, to the solemn and anxious thoughts, to the trials, to the sufferings, that follow in the train of war.

Man, in his individual nature, becomes virtuous by constant struggles against his own imperfections. His intellectual eminence, which puts him at the head of created beings, is attained also by long toil, and painful self denials, bringing with them, but too often, despondence to his mind, and hazards to his frame. It would seem to be a law of his existence, that great enjoyment is only to be obtained as the reward of great exertion. "She shall go to a wealthy place," but her way shall be "through fire and through water." It seems the irreversible lot of nations, that their permanent well being is to be achieved also through severe probations. Their origin is often in agony and blood, and their safety to be maintained only by constant vigilance, by arduous efforts, by a willingness to encounter danger and by actually and frequently braving it. Their prosperity, their rights, their liberties, are, alas, scarcely otherwise to be

placed upon a secure and durable basis! It is in vain that the precepts of the moralist, or the maxims of a sublimated reason, are levelled at the inutility, if not the criminality of wars; in vain that eloquence pourtrays, that humanity deplores the misery they inflict. If the wishes of the philanthropist could be realised, then, indeed, happily for us, happily for the whole human race, they would be banished forever from the world. But while selfishness, ambition, and the lust of plunder, continue to infest the bosoms of the rulers of nations, wars will take place: they always have taken place, and the nation that shall, at this day, hope to shelter itself by standing, in practice, on their abstract impropriety, must expect to see its very foundations assailed—assailed by cunning and artifice, or by the burst and fury of those fierce, ungoverned, passions, which its utmost forbearance would not be able to deprecate or appease. It would assuredly fall, and with fatal speed, the victim of its own impracticable virtue.

Thirty years, fellow citizens, is a long time to have been exempt from the calamities of war. Few nations of the world, in any age, have enjoyed so long an exemption. It is a fact that affords, in itself, the most honorable and incontestible proof, that those who have guided the destinies of this have ardently cherished peace; for, it is impossible, but that during the lapse of

such a period abundant provocation must have presented, had not our government and people been slow to wrath, and almost predetermined against wars. It is a lamentable truth, that during the whole of this period we have been the subjects of unjust treatment at the hands of other nations, and that the constancy of our own forbearance has been followed up by the constant infliction of wrongs upon ourselves. When, let us ask with exultation, when have ambassadors from other countries been sent to our shores to complain of injuries done by the American states? what nation have the American states plundered? what nation have the American states outraged? upon what rights have the American states trampled? In the pride of justice and of true honor, we answer none; but we have sent forth from ourselves the messengers of peace and conciliation, again and again, across seas and to distant countries—to ask, earnestly to sue, for a cessation of the injuries done to us. They have gone charged with our well founded complaints, to deprecate the longer practice of unfriendly treatment; to protest, under the sensibility of real suffering, against that course which made the persons and the property of our countrymen the subjects of rude seizure and rapacious spoliation. These have been the ends they were sent to obtain—ends too fair for protracted refusals, too intelligible to

have been entangled in evasive subtilties, too legitimate to have been neglected in hostile silence. When their ministers have been sent to us, what has been the aim of their missions? to urge redress for wrongs done to them, shall we again ask? No, the melancholy reverse! for in too many instances they have come to excuse, to palliate, or even to endeavor, in some shape, to rivet those inflicted by their own sovereigns upon us.

Perhaps the annals of no nation, of the undoubted resources of this, afford a similar instance of encroachments upon its essential rights, for so long a time, without some exertion of the public force to check or to prevent them. The entire amount of property of which, during a space of about twenty years, our citizens have been plundered, alternately by one or the other, or by both, of the two great belligerent powers of Europe, would form, could it be ascertained, a curious and perhaps novel record of persevering injustice on the part of nations professing to be at peace. Unless recollection be awakened into effort, we are not ourselves sensible, and it requires at this day some effort to make us so, of the number and magnitude of the injuries that have been heaped upon us. They teach in pathology, that the most violent impressions lose the power of exciting sensation, when applied gradually and continued for a long time. This has been

strikingly true in its application to ourselves as a nation. The aggressions we have received have made a regular, and the most copious part of our national occurrences, and stand incorporated, under an aspect more prominent than any other, with our annual history. Our state papers have scarcely, since the present government began, touched any other subject; and our statute book will be found to record as well the aggressions themselves as peaceful attempts at their removal, in various fruitless acts of legislative interposition. It may strike, even the best informed, with a momentary surprise when it is mentioned, that for eighteen successive years the official communication from the head of the executive government to both Houses of Congress, at the opening of the annual sessions, has embraced a reference to some well ascertained infringement of our rights as an independent state! Where is the parallel of this in the history of any nation holding any other than a rank of permanent weakness or inferiority? As subsequent and superior misfortunes expel the remembrance of those which have gone before, so distinct injuries as we have progressively received them, have continued to engross for their day, our never tiring remonstrances.

Still, it may be said, we have been prosperous and happy! So we have relatively. But we have, assuredly, been abridged of our full and

rightful measure of prosperity. Of a nation composed of millions calamitous indeed, beyond example, would be its lot if, in its early stages, the domestic condition of all, or the chief part of its inhabitants was, in any sensible degree, touched with misery or overwhelmed with ruin. This marks the fall of nations. It is not the way in which national misfortunes and an untoward national fate begin to operate. We protest against the principle which inculcates constant submission to wrongs. To ourselves, to our posterity, this is alike due. With what palliation would it be replied to the plunder of a rich man, that enough was left for his comfortable or even easy subsistence? If our ships are taken, is it sufficient that our houses are left? if our mariners are seized, is it a boon that our farmers, our mechanics, our laborers are spared? that those who sit behind the barriers of affluence are safe? To what ultimate dangers would not so partial an estimate of the protecting duty open the way? Happily, we trust, the nation on a scale of more enlarged equity and wiser forecast, has judged and has willed differently. Having essayed its utmost to avert its wrongs by peaceful means, it has determined on appealing to the sword, not on the ground of immediate pressure alone, but on the still higher one that longer submission to them holds out a prospect of permanent evil, a prospect rendered certain by the experience we have

ourselves acquired, that forbearance for more than twenty years has not only invited a repetition, but an augmentation of trespasses, increasing in bitterness as well as number, increasing in the most flagrant prostrations of justice, presumptuously avowed at length to be devoid of all pretext of moral right, and promulgated as the foundation of a system intended to be as permanent as its elements are depraved.

It is cause of the deepest regret, fellow citizens, that while we are about to enter upon a conflict with one nation, our multiplied and heavy causes of complaint against another should remain unredressed. It adds to this regret, that, although a last attempt is still depending, the past injustice of the latter nation, wantoning also in rapacity, leaves but the feeblest hope of their satisfactory and peaceful adjustment.

Some there are who shrink back, at the idea of war with Britain! War with the nation from which we sprung, and where still sleep the ashes of our ancestors? whose history is our history, whose fire sides are our fire sides, whose illustrious names are our boast, whose glory should be our glory! Yes, we feel these truths! We reject the poor definition of country which would limit it to an occupancy of the same little piece of earth! A common stock of ancestry, a kindred face and blood, the links that grow upon a thousand moral and domestic sympathies should

indeed reach farther, and might, once have been made to defy the intermediate roll of an ocean to sunder them apart.

But, who was it that first broke these ties? who was it that first forgot, that put to scorn such generous ties? Let their own historians, their own orators answer. Hear the language of a member of the British House of Commons in the year 1765: "*They children planted by your care!* No! your oppression planted them in America. They fled from your tyranny into an uncultivated land, where they were exposed to all the hardships to which human nature is liable—to the savage cruelty of the enemy of the wilderness, a people the most subtle and the most formidable upon the face of the earth; and yet they met all these hardships with pleasure compared with those they suffered in their own country, where they should have been treated as friends. *They nourished by your indulgence?* No, they grew by your neglect. When you began to care about them, that care was exercised in sending persons to rule over them, who were the deputies of some deputy, sent to spy out their liberty, to misrepresent their actions, to prey upon their substance; men whose behavior has caused the blood of those sons of liberty to recoil within them. *They protected by your arms?* They have nobly taken up arms in your defence; have exerted their valor, amidst

their constant and laborious industry, for the defence of a country the interior of which has yielded all its little savings to your enlargement, while its frontier was drenched in blood.* Yes, who was it we ask first tore such generous sympathies? Let the blood of Concord and of Lexington again answer! Our whole country converted into a field of battle, the bayonet thrust at our bosoms! and for what? for asking only the privileges of Britons; while they claimed "to bind us in all cases whatsoever." Against all that history teaches, will they raise upon us the crime of rending these ties. They compelled us into a rejection of them all—a rejection to which we were long loth—by their constant exercise of unjust power; by laying upon us the hand of sharp, systematic, oppression; by attacking us with fierce vengeance. With the respect due from faithful subjects, but with the dignity of freemen, did we, with long patience, petition, supplicate, for a removal of our wrongs, while new oppressions, insults, and hostile troops were our answers!

When Britain shall pass from the stage of nations, it will be indeed, with her glory, but it will also be with her shame. And, with shame, will her annals in nothing more be loaded than in this.

* So actively did the American colonies co-operate with Great Britain in the memorable seven years' war, to which this speech of Colonel Barre alludes, that they are said to have lost nearly thirty thousand of their young men. See *Marshall's Life of Washington*, vol. 5, p. 85.

That while in the actual possession of much relative freedom at home, it has been her uniform characteristic to let fall upon the remote subjects of her own empire, an iron hand of harsh and vindictive power. If, as is alledged in her eulogy, to touch her soil proclaims emancipation to the slave, it is more true, that when her sceptre reaches over that confined limit it thenceforth, and as it menacingly waves throughout the globe, inverts the rule that would give to her soil this purifying virtue. Witness Scotland, towards whom her treatment, until the union in the last century, was marked, during the longest periods, by perfidious injustice or by rude force, circumventing her liberties, or striving to cut them down with the sword. Witness Ireland, who for five centuries has bled, who to the present hour continues to bleed, under the yoke of her galling supremacy; whose miserable victims seem at length to have laid down, subdued and despairing, under the multiplied inflictions of her cruelty and rigor. In vain do her own best statesmen and patriots remonstrate against this unjust career! in vain put forth the annual efforts of their benevolence, their zeal, their eloquence; in vain touch every spring that interest, that humanity, that the maxims of everlasting justice can move, to stay its force and mitigate the fate of Irishmen. Alas, for the persecuted adherents of the cross she leaves no hope! Wit-

ness her subject millions in the east! where, in the descriptive language of the greatest of her surviving orators, “sacrilege, massacre and perfidy pile up the sombre pyramids of her renown.”

But, all these instances are of her fellow men of merely co-equal, perhaps unknown, descent and blood; co-existing from all time with herself, and making up, only accidentally, a part of her dominion. *We* ought to have been spared. The otherwise undistinguishing rigor of this outstretched sceptre might still have spared *us*. *We* were descended from her own loins: bone of *her* bone and flesh of *her* flesh; not so much a part of her empire as a part of herself—her very self. Towards her own it might have been expected she would relent. When she invaded our homes, she saw her own countenance, heard her own voice, beheld her own altars! Where was then that pure spirit which she now would tell us sustains her amidst self sacrifices in her generous contest for the liberties of other nations! If it flowed in her nature, here it might have delighted to beam out; here was space for its saving love;—the true mother chastens, not destroys the child: but Britain, when she struck at us, struck at her own image, struck too at the immortal principles which her Lockes, her Miltons, and her Sydneys taught! and the fell blow severed us forever as a kindred nation. The crime is

purely her own; and upon her, not us, be its consequences and its stain.

In looking at Britain with eyes less prepos-
sessed than we are apt to have, from the cir-
cumstance of our ancient connexion with her,
we should see, indeed, her common lot of excel-
lence, on which to found esteem, but it would
lift the covering from deformities which may
well startle and repel. A harshness of indivi-
dual character, in the general view of it, which
is perceived and acknowledged by all Europe; a
spirit of unbecoming censure as regards all cus-
toms and institutions not their own; a feroci-
ty in some of their characteristics of national
manners, pervading their very pastimes, which
no other modern people are endued with the
blunted sensibility to bear; an universally self-
assumed superiority, not innocently manifesting
itself in speculative sentiments among them-
selves, but unamiably indulged when with
foreigners of whatever description in their own
country, or when they themselves are the tem-
porary sojourners in a foreign country; a code
of criminal law that forgets to feel for human
frailty, that sports with human misfortune, that
has shed more blood in deliberate judicial se-
verity for two centuries past—constantly in-
creasing too in its sanguinary hue—than has
ever been sanctioned by the jurisprudence of
any ancient or modern nation civilized and re-

fined like herself; the merciless whippings in her army, peculiar to herself alone; the conspicuous commission and freest acknowledgement of vice in her upper classes; the overweening distinctions shown to opulence and birth, so destructive of a sound moral sentiment in the nation, so baffling to virtue;—these are some of the traits that rise up to a contemplation of the inhabitants of this isle, and are adverted to, with an admission of qualities that may spring up as the correlatives of some of them, under the remark of our being prone to overlook the vicious ingredients while we so readily praise the good that belongs to her.

How should it fall out that this nation, more than any other that is ambitious and warlike, should be free from the dispositions that lead to injustice, violence, and plunder? and what rules of prudence should check our watchfulness or allay our fears in regard to the plans her conduct is the best illustration of her having so steadily meditated towards us? Why not be girded as regards her attacks, wary as regards her intrigues, alarmed as regards her habit of devastation and long indulged appetite of blood! Look at the marine of Britain, its vast, its tremendous extent! What potentate upon the earth wields a power that is to be compared with it? what potentate upon the earth can move an apparatus of destruction so without rival, so little liable to any

counteraction? The world in no age has seen its equal. It marks a new era in the history of human force; an instrument of power and of ambition, with no limits to its rapid and hideous workings but the waters and the winds. Why should she impiously suppose the ocean to be her own element? why should she claim the right to give law to it—any more than the eagle the exclusive right to fly in the air? If ever there was a power formidable to the liberties of other states—particularly those afar off—is it not this? If ever there was a power which other states should feel warned to behold with fearful jealousy, and anxious to see broken up, is it not this? The opinion inculcated by her own interested politicians and journalists, that such a force is designed to be employed only to mediate for the rights of other nations, can hold no way before the unshackled reflections of a dispassionate mind. All experience, all knowledge of man, explode the supposition. So, more particularly; does the very growth and history of this extraordinary power itself. It has swelled to its gigantic size, not through any concurrence of fortuitous or temporary causes, but through long continued and the most systematic national views. It was in the time of her early Edwards that she first began arrogantly to exact a ceremonious obedience from the flags of other nations, since which the entire spirit of her navigation laws, her com-

mercial usages, her treaties, have steadily looked to the establishment of an over-ruling marine. This is the theme from which her poets insult the world by singing, "Britannia's is the sea, and not a flag but by permission waves." It is the great instrument of annoyance in the hands of her ministers with which they threaten, or which they wield, to confirm allies, to alarm foes, to make other states tributary to their manufacturing, their commercial or their warlike schemes;—even the multitude in their streets, their boys—the halt and the blind, learn it in the ballads, and at every carousal, "Rule Britannia" is the loud acclamation, the inspiring sentiment, the triumphant echo of the scene! The end so long pursued with a constant view to unlimited empire throughout that element which covers two thirds of the globe has been obtained, and Britain finds herself at this era the dreaded mistress of the seas! With what rapacious sway she has begun to put forth this arm of her supremacy, we, fellow citizens, have experienced, while the flames of Copenhagen have lighted it up to Europe in characters of a more awful glare.

When the late Colonel Henry Laurens left England, in the year 1774, he had previously waited on the Earl of Hillsborough, in order to converse with him on American affairs. In the course of conversation Colonel Laurens said, the duty of three pence a pound on tea, and all

the other taxes, were not worth the expense of a war. "You mistake the cause of our controversy with your country," said his Lordship; "*You spread too much canvas upon the ocean: do you think we will let you go on with your navigation, and your forty thousand seamen?*"*

The same hostile spirit to our growing commerce has actuated every minister, and every privy council and every parliament of Great Britain since that time; and it is the spirit she manifests towards other nations. The recent declarations made upon the floor of the House of Commons in debate upon the orders in council, add a new corroboration to the proofs that this monopolizing spirit has been one of the steady maxims designed to secure and uphold her absolute dominion upon the waves. But to that Being who made the waters and the winds for the common use of his creatures do we owe it never to forego our equal claim to their immunities.

In entering upon a war it is our chief consolation—that will give dignity to the contest and confidence to our hearts—to know that before God and before the world, our cause is just. To dilate on this head, altho' so fruitful, would swell to undue limits this address, and betray a forgetfulness of the informed and anticipating

* The writer derived this anecdote through one of our principal statesmen who has been abroad.

understandings of this assembly. Our provocation consists of multiplied wrongs, of the most numerous injuries, of the most aggravated insults. They have been fully placed before the world in the recent authentic declarations of our government. In these declarations will be read the solemn justification of what we have done, and our posterity will cling to them as a manly, yet pure and unblemished portion of their inheritance. In the language of one of them flowing from the highest and the purest source, founded on authentic history, and which exhibits a state paper alike distinguished by its profound reasoning, its elevated justice, and its impressive dignity, we have

*“ beheld, in fine, on the side of Great Britain
 “ a state of war against the United States;
 “ and, on the side of the United States, a
 “ state of peace towards Great Britain.”—*

It is the same pen, too, ^{it} which has been officially employed for so many years in combatting our wrongs and striving for their pacific redress, with a constant and sublime adherence to the maxims of universal equity as well as of public law, which now solemnly declares our actual situation. Can Americans then hesitate what part to act? whither would have fled the remembrance of their character and deeds? whither soon would flee their rights, their liber-

Mr Madison — then Retired.

ties? where would be the spirits, where the courage, of their slain fathers? Snatched and gone from ignoble sons! What should we answer to the children we leave behind, who will take their praise or their reproach, from the conduct of their sires—and those sires republicans! who, rejecting from the train of their succession the perishing honors of a ribbon or a badge, are more nobly inspired to transmit the unfading distinctions that spring from the resolute discharge of all the patriot's high duties! Why should we stay our arm against Britain while she wars upon us? are we appalled at her legions? do we shrink back at her vengeance? No, fellow citizens, no! we have faced those legions, braved and triumphed over that vengeance. Powerful as she is, old in arms and in discipline, upon the plains of America has she once learned that her ranks can be subdued and her high ensign fall. Not in a boastful, but in a temper to encourage, would we speak it, British valor has yielded to the equal, spontaneous valor, but the more indignant fire which freedom and a just cause could impart, when opposed to the hired forces of an unjust king. And is there less to inspire now? Let a few short reflections determine.

While I abstain from any enumeration of the other encroachments of Great Britain upon us as an independent nation, through their succes-

siye accumulations until they have ended in making the whole trade of our country in substance and in terms colonial, suffering it to exist, and to exist only, where it subserves her own absorbing avarice, or what she calls her retaliating vengeance, I must nevertheless solicit your indulgence to pause with me, for a little while, upon a single wrong.

The seizure of the persons of American citizens under the name and the pretexts of impressment, by the naval officers of Great Britain, is an outrage of that kind which makes it difficult to speak of it in terms of appropriate description; for this, among other reasons, that the offence itself is new. It is probable that the most careful researches into history, where indeed of almost every form of rapine between men and between nations is to be found the melancholy record, will yet afford no example of the systematic perpetration of an offence of a similar nature, perpetrated, too, under a claim of right. To take a just and no other than a serious illustration, the only parallel to it is to be found in the African slave trade; and if an eminent statesman of England once spoke of the latter, as the greatest practical evil that had ever afflicted mankind, we may be allowed to denominate the former the greatest practical offence that has ever been offered to a civilized and independent state. With the American govern-

ment it has been a question of no party or of no day. At every period of its administration, the odious practice has been constantly protested against, and its discontinuance been demanded under every form of pacific remonstrance. With all our statesmen, while engaged in exercising the public authorities of the nation, it has been deemed, if not otherwise to have been abrogated, legitimate cause of war. The only imaginable difference among any of them, has been, as to *the time* when it would be proper to use this imperious resort—as if the time was not always at hand for a nation to redeem such a stain upon its vitals, and as if an encroachment of this nature does not become the more difficult to beat back with each year, and with each instance, in which it is permitted. But it best accorded with the genius of our government, with its love of peace, and perhaps with what was due to peace, to attempt at first its pacific removal. General Washington, when at the head of the government, is known to have viewed it with the sensibility that such an indignity could not fail to arouse in his bosom, and had he lived until this day to see it not only unredressed and unmitigated, but increased, amidst all the amicable efforts on our part for its cessation, there is the strongest reason for supposing that his just estimate of the nation's welfare, that his lofty and gallant

spirit, would have stood forth, had it been but the single grievance, the manly advocate for its extirpation by the sword. But if our submission to it so long has incurred a just reproach, happily it is in some measure assuaged in the reflection that our forbearance will serve to put us more completely in the right at this eventful period.

That our enemy has invariably refused to accede to such terms as were answerable to the indispensable expectations of our own government, as the organ of a sovereign people, upon this head, is a point susceptible of entire proof. Avoiding other particulars, it will be sufficient to introduce a single one. It is a fact, which the archives of our public departments will show, that in order to take from Great Britain the remnant of her own excuses for seizing our men under the pretext, at all times disallowable, of invading the sanctuary of our ships in search of her own, it was proposed to her, that the United States would forbear to receive her seamen on board of their vessels, provided she, in her turn, would abstain from receiving our men on board of hers. This would wholly have destroyed the insulting claim set up by her to break in with armed men upon our vessels while peaceably sailing on the ocean under color of forcibly taking her own mariners, for, the regulation, if adopted, would have given

the previous assurance that her own were not there to be found. But this proposal, it is also a fact, she declined. As rapacious of men, as greedy of riches and grasping at dominion, she neglected to avail herself of a regulation that would curtail her in this new species of plunder—this plunder in the flesh and blood of freemen, of which she has afforded the first example, in all time, to the eyes of an insulted world. But it forcibly marks the devouring ambition of her naval spirit; and that if public law is ridiculed, justice scoffed at, sovereignty prostrated, and humanity made to shudder and to groan—still, her ships must have men.

Under a mere personal view of this outrage, and considering it on the footing of a moral sin, it is strictly like the African slave trade. Like that it breaks up families and causes hearts to bleed. Like that it tears the son from the father, the father from the son. Like that it makes orphans and widows, takes the brother from the sister, seizes up the young man in the health of his days and blasts his hopes forever. It is worse than the slavery of the African, for the African is only made to work under the lash of a task master, whereas the citizen of the United States, thus enslaved, receives also the lash on the slightest lapses from a rigorous discipline, and is moreover exposed to the bitter fate of fighting against those towards whom he has no

hostility, perhaps his own countrymen—it may be, his own immediate kindred. This is not exaggeration, fellow citizens, it is reality and fact.

But, say the British, we want not *your* men; we want only our own. Prove that they are *yours* and we will surrender them up. Baser outrage! insolent indignity! that a free born American must be made to *prove* his nativity to those who have previously violated his liberty, else he is to be held forever as a slave! That before a British tribunal—a British boarding officer—a free-born American must be made to seal up the vouchers of his lineage, to exhibit the records of his baptism and his birth, to establish the identity that binds him to his parents, to his blood, to his native land, by setting forth in odious detail his size, his age, the shape of his frame, whether his hair is long or cropt—his marks—like an ox or a horse of the manger—that all this must be done as the condition of his escape from the galling thralldom of a British ship! Can we hear it, can we think of it, with any other than indignant feelings at our tarnished name and nation? And suppose through this degrading process his deliverance to be effected, where is he to seek redress for the intermediate wrong? The unauthorised seizure and detention of any piece of property, a mere trespass upon goods, will always lay the foundation

for some, often the heaviest retribution, in every well-regulated society. But to whom, or where, shall our imprisoned citizen, when the privilege of shaking off his fetters has at last been accorded to him, turn for *his* redress? where look to reimburse the stripes, perhaps the wounds he has received—his worn spirit—his long inward agonies? No, the public code of nations recognizes not the penalty, for to the modern rapaciousness of Britain it was reserved to add to the dark catalogue of human sufferings, this flagitious crime.

But why be told that, even on such proofs, our citizens will be released from their captivity? We have long and sorely experienced the impracticable nature of this boon which, in the imagined relaxation of her deep injustice, she would affect to hold out. Go to the office of the Department of State, within sight of where we are assembled, and there see the piles of certificates and documents, of affidavits, records and seals, anxiously drawn out and folded up—to show why Americans should not be held as slaves—and see how they rest, and will forever rest, in hopeless neglect upon the shelves. Some defect in form, some impossibility of filling up all the crevices which British exaction insists upon being closed; the uncertainty, if, after all, they will ever reach their point of destination, the climate or the sea where the hopes of gain

or the lust of conquest are impelling, through constant changes, their ships; the probability that the miserable individual to whom they are intended as the harbinger of liberation from his shackles may have been translated from the first scene of his incarceration to another, from a 74 to a 64, from a 64 to a frigate, and thus through rapid, if not designed, mutations, a practice which is known to exist—these are obvious causes of discouragement, by making the issue at all times doubtful, most frequently hopeless. And this Great Britain cannot but know. She does know it, and, with deliberate mockery, in the composure with which bloated power can scoff at submissive and humble suffering, has she continued to increase and protract our humiliation as well as our suffering, by renewals of the visionary offer.

Again it is said, that *our* citizens resemble *their* men, look like them in their persons, speak the same language, that discriminations are difficult or impracticable, and therefore it is they are unavoidably seized. Most insulting excuse! And will they impeach that God who equally made us both? who forms our features, moulds our statures and stamps us with a countenance that turns up to his goodness in adoration and love! Impious as well as insulting! The leopard cannot change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin, but *we, we,* are to put off our bodies



and become unlike ourselves as the price of our safety! Why should similarity of face yoke us exclusively with an ignominious burden? why, because we were once descended from them, should we be made at this day, and forever, to clank chains? Suppose one of *their* subjects landed upon *our* shores—let us suppose him a prince of their blood—shall we seize upon him to mend our highways, shall we draft *him* for *our* ranks? shall we subject him in an instant to all the civil burthens of duty, of taxation, of every species of aid and service that grow out of the allegiance of the citizen, until he can send across the ocean for the registers of *his* family and birth? What has her foul spirit of impressment to answer to this? Why not equally demand on *our* part that every one of her factors who lands upon our soil should bring a *protection* in his pocket, or hang one round his neck, as the price of *his* safety? If this plea of monstrous outrage be, only for one instant, admitted, remember, fellow citizens, that it becomes as lasting as monstrous. If our children, and our children's children, and their children, continue to speak the same tongue, to hold the same port with their fathers, *they* also will be liable to this enslavement, and the groaning evil be co-existent with British power, British rapacity, and the maxim *that the British navy must have men!* If our men are like theirs, it should form, to any

other than a nation callous to justice, dead to the moral sense, and deliberately bent upon plunder, the very reason why they should give up the practice, seeing that it is intrinsically liable to these mistakes, and that the exercise of what they call a right on their part necessarily brings with it certain, eternal, and the most high-handed wrongs to us.

I am a Roman citizen, I am a Roman citizen! was an exclamation that insured safety, commanded respect, or inspired terror, in all parts of the world. And although the mild temper of our government exacts not all these attributes, we may, at least, be suffered to deplore with hearts of agony and shame, that while the inhabitants of every other part of the globe enjoy an immunity from the seizure of their persons, except under the fate of war, or by acknowledged pirates—even the wretched Africans of late—to be an *American citizen* has, for five and twenty years, been the signal for insult and the passport to captivity. Let it not be replied that the men they take from us are sometimes not of a character or description to attract the concern or interposition of the government. If they were all so, it lessens in no wise the enormity of the outrage. It adds indeed a fresh indignity to mention it. The sublime equality of justice recognizes no such distinctions, and a government founded upon the great basis of equal right, would forget one

of its fundamental duties, if in the exercise of its protecting power it admits to a foreign nation the least distinction between what it owes to the lowest and meanest, and the highest and most exalted of its citizens.

Sometimes it is said that but *few* of our seamen are in reality seized! Progressive and foul aggravation! to admit the crime to our faces and seek to screen its atrocity under its limited extent. Whence but from a source hardened with long rapine, could such a palliation flow? It is false. The files of that same department, its melancholy memorials, attest that there are thousands of our countrymen at this moment in slavery in their ships. And if there were but one hundred, if there were but fifty, if there were but ten—if there were but one, how dare they insult a sovereign nation with such an answer? Shall I state to you a fact, fellow citizens, that will be sufficient to rouse not simply your indignation, but your horror, and would that I could speak it at this moment to the whole nation, that every American who has a heart to be inflamed with honest resentment might hear;—a fact that shows all the excess of shame that should flush our faces at submission to an outrage so foul. I state to you, upon the highest and most unquestionable authority, that two of the nephews of your immortal Washington have been seized, dragged, made

slaves of on board of a British ship! Will it be credited? It is nevertheless true They were kept in slavery more than a year, and as the transactions of your government will show, were restored to their liberty only a few months since.* How, Americans, can you sit down under such indignities? To which of their princes, which of their nobles, to which of their ministers or which of their regents, will you allow, in the just pride of men and of freemen, that those who stand in consanguinity to the illustrious founder of your liberties, are second in all their claims to safety and protection? But we must leave the odious subject. It swells indeed with ever fruitful expansion, to the indignant view, but while it animates it is loathsome. If the English say it is merely an abuse incident to a right on their part, besides denying forever the foundation of such right where it goes to the presumptuous entry of our own vessels with their armed men, shall we tolerate its exercise for an instant when manifestly attended with such a practical, unceasing, and enormous oppression upon ourselves?

This crime of impressment may justly be considered—posterity will so consider it—as transcending the amount of all the other wrongs we

* They were the sons of the late Fielding Lewis, of Virginia, who was immediate nephew to General Washington, for all which see the papers on file in the office of the Secretary of State.

have received. Notwithstanding the millions which the cupidity of Britain has wrested from us, the millions which the cupidity of France has wrested from us, including her wicked burnings of our ships—adding also the wrongs from Spain and Denmark—the sum of all should be estimated below this enormity. Ships and merchandise belong to individuals, and may be valued; may be endured as subjects of negotiation. But *men* are the property of the *nation*. In every American face a part of our country's sovereignty is written. It is the living emblem—a thousand times more sacred than the nation's flag itself—of its character, its independence and its rights—its quick and most dearly cherished insignium—towards which the nation should ever demand the most scrupulous and inviolable immunity, being instantly sensitive under the flagrant indignity of the slightest infringement of its beaming, vivid, attributes of sovereignty! Man was created in his Maker's own image—"in the image of God created he him." When he is made a slave, where shall there be reimbursement? No, fellow citizens, under the assistance and protection of the Most High, the evil must be stopped. His own image must not be enslaved. It was deservedly the first enumerated of our grievances in the late solemn message from the first magistrate of our land; on the eighteenth of June of this memorable year we

appealed to the sword and to Heaven against it, and we shall be wanting to our eyes, to our posterity—we shall never stand erect in our sovereignty as a nation if we return it to the scabbard until such an infamy and a curse are finally and effectually removed. The blessings of peace itself become a curse, a foul curse, while such a stain is permitted to rest upon our annals. Never, henceforth, must American ships be converted into worse than butchers' shambles for the inspection and seizure of human flesh! We would appeal to the justice and humanity of their own statesmen, claim the interference of their Wilberforces—invoke the spirit of their departed Fox—call upon all among them who nobly succeeded in their long struggles against the African slave trade, to stand up and retrieve the British name from the equal odium of this offence.

If it be true that injuries long acquiesced in lose the power of exciting sensibility, it may be remarked, in conclusion of this hateful subject how forcibly verified it is in the instance of robbing us of our citizens. When it happens that some of them are surrendered up, *on examination and allowance of the proofs*, it is not unusual to advert to it as an indication of the justice and generosity of the British! The very act, which, to an abstract judgment, should be taken as stamping a seal upon the outrage, by the acknowledgment it implies from themselves

of the atrocity because the unlawfulness of the seizure, is thus converted into a medium of homage and of praise! Inverted patriotism! drooping, downcast, honor! to derive a pleasurable sensation from the insulting confession of a crime!

Next to a just war, fellow citizens, we wage a defensive one. This is its true and only character. Our fields were not, indeed, invaded, or our towns entered and sacked. But still it is purely a war of defence. It was to stop reiterated encroachment we took up arms. Persons, property, rights, character, sovereignty, justice, all these were contumaciously invaded at our hands. Let impartial truth say, if it were for ambition, or conquest, or plunder, or through any false estimate of character, or pride we appealed to the sword. No, Americans! No! Republicans, there will rest no such blot upon your moderate, your pacific councils. It is an imperfect view of this question which takes as a defensive war, only that which is entered upon when the assailant is bursting through your doors and levelling the musket at the bosoms of your women and children. Think how a nation may be abridged, may be dismantled of its rights, may be cut down in its liberties, this side of an open attack. The Athenian law punished seduction of female honor more severely than it did force. And the nation that would adopt

it as a maxim to lie by under whatever curtailments of its sovereignty, resolving upon no resistance until the actual investment of its soil, might find itself too fatally trenched upon, too exhausted in resources, or too enfeebled in spirit, to rouse itself when the foe was rushing through the gates.

The war whoop of the Indian had indeed been heard in the habitations of our frontier; and it is impossible to abstain from imputing to the agency of our enemy this horrid species of invasion. Their hand must be in it. For although it may not be directly instigated by their government on the other side of the water, yet past proofs make it to the last degree probable that the intrigues of their sub-agents in the Canadas are instrumental to the wickedness. Nor will a rational mind hesitate to infer that the same spirit which, from that quarter at least, could send, for the most nefarious purposes, a polished spy through our cities, would also, varying the form of its inequity, let loose upon us the hatchet and the scalping knife. Great Britain indeed had not *declared* war against us *in form*, but she had *made* it upon us *in fact*. She had plundered us of our property, she had imprisoned our citizens; nor can any accommodation now erase from our memories, although it may from our public discussions, the bloody memorials of her attack upon the Chesapeake.

Since, fellow citizens, that through all these motives a war with Britain has been cast upon us, while bearing up against whatever of pressure it may bring with the energy and the hope of our fathers, let us deduce also this of consolation: that it will, more than any thing else, have a tendency to break the sway which that nation is enabled to hold over us. I would address myself on this point to the candid minds of our countrymen, and to all such among them as have bosoms penetrated with a genuine love for our republican systems. We form, probably for the first time in all history, the instance of a nation descended, and politically detached from another, but still keeping up the most intimate connexions with the original and once parent stock. The similarity of our manners and customs; our language being one, and our religion nearly one; the entire identity in individual appearance, and in all things else, which is spread before the American and the English eye; our boundless social intercommunication; the very personal respectability, in so many instances, of those of that nation who, in such numbers, come to this; pecuniary connexions so universal and unlimited; dependent upon her loom, dependent upon her fashions, dependent upon her judicature, dependent upon her drama—reading none but her books, or scarcely any others; taking up her character and actions chiefly at the hands

of her own annalists or panegyrists ; nothing in fine that comes from that quarter being regarded as foreign, but as well her inhabitants as her modes of life and all her usages, being taken to be as of our own—these complicated similitudes operate like cramps and holdings to bind us insensibly to her sides, yielding to her an easy, an increasing, and an unsuspected ascendancy.

It may be said this is an advantageous ascendancy; that, as a young people, we may profit of the intimacy, have her arts and her manners, copy her many meliorations of existence, eat of her intellectual food and get stamina the more quickly upon its nourishment. But stop Americans! do you not know that this same people are the subjects of an old and luxurious monarchy, with all the corrupt attachments to which it leads; that if not their duty, it is naturally their practice to breathe the praise and inculcate the love of their own forms of polity. Do you not know, that if not the correlative duty, it is, as certainly, their correlative practice, to deal out disapprobation, even contempt for our own, and the habits which alone they should superinduce? And is there not cause for apprehension that the superiority which we so easily, often so slavishly, choose to yield her on all other points—that the moral prostration in which we consent to fall before her footstool—may also trench upon the reverence due

to our own public institutions, producing results at which all our fears should startle? If, fellow citizens, our freedom, our republican freedom, which, to make lasting, we should cherish with uninterrupted constancy and the purest love, has a foe more deadly than any other, it is probably this; this is the destroying spirit which can make its way slowly and unperceived, but surely and fatally. If we stood farther off—much farther off—from Britain, we should still be near enough to derive all that she has valuable, while we should be more safe from the poison of her political touch. Just as, at this day, we can draw upon the repositories of genius and literature among the ancients, while we escape the vices of paganism and the errors of their misleading philosophy. But if Athenian citizens filled our towns; if we spoke their language, wore their dress, took them to our homes; if we kept looking up to them with general imitation and subserviency, the truths of Christianity themselves would be in danger of yielding to the adoration of the false gods!

This war may produce, auspiciously and forever, the effect of throwing us at a safer distance from so contaminating an intimacy, making our liberty thrive more securely, and ourselves more independent—privately and politically. From no other nation are we in danger in the same

way; for, with no other nation, have we the same affinities, but, on the contrary, numerous points of repulsion that interpose as our guard. Let us have a shy connexion with them all, for history gives the admonition, that for the last twenty years, every nation of the world that has come too close in friendship with either our present enemy, or her neighbor, the ferocious giant of the land, has lost its liberties, been prostrated, or been ravaged. After the war of our revolution, we were still so much in the feebleness of youth as to take the outstretched hand of Britain, who could establish our industry, shape our occupations, and give them, involuntarily to ourselves, the direction advantageous to her views. But, henceforth, we shall stand upon a pedestal whose base is fixed among ourselves, whence we may proudly look around and afar—from the ocean to the mountains, from the mountains to the farthest west, beholding our fruitful fields, listening to the hammer of our work-shops, the cheerful noise of our looms:—where the view, on all sides, of native numbers, opulence and skill, will enable us to stamp more at pleasure the future destinies of our happy land. Possibly, also, the sameness of our pursuits in so many things, with Britain, instead of pointing to close connexions with her, as *her* politicians so steadily hold up, will at length indicate to the fore-

sight of our own statesmen unalterable reasons to an intercourse more restrained—it may be the elements of a lasting rivalry.

Animated by all the motives which demand and justify this contest, let us advance to it with resolute and high beating hearts, supported by the devotion to our beloved country, which wishes for her triumphs cannot fail to kindle. Dear to us is this beloved country, far dearer than we can express, for all the true blessings that flourish within her bosom; the country of our fathers, the country of our children, the scene of our dearest affections—whose rights and liberties have been consecrated by the blood whose current runs so fresh in our own veins. Who shall touch such a country, and not fire the patriotism and unsheath the swords of us all? No, Americans! while you reserve your independent privilege of rendering, at all times, your suffrages as you please, let our proud foe be undeceived. Let her, let the world learn, now and forever, that the voice of our nation, when once legitimately expressed, is holy—is imperious! that it is a summons of duty to every citizen; that when we strike at a foreign foe, the sacred bond of country becomes the pledge of a concentrated effort; that in such a cause, and at such a crisis, we feel with but one heart and strike with our whole strength! We are the only nation in the world, fellow citizens,

where the people and the government stand, in all things, indented; where all the acts of the latter are immediately submitted to the superior revision of the former; where every blow at the general safety becomes the personal concern of each individual. Happy people, happy government! will you give up, will you not defend, such blessings? We are also perhaps the only genuine republic which, since the days of the ancients, has taken up arms against a foreign foe in defence of its rights and its liberties. Animating thought! warmed with the fire of ancient freedom, may we not expect to see the valor of Thermopylæ and Marathon again displayed! The Congress of eighteen hundred and twelve, here, within these august walls, have proclaimed to the world that other feelings than those of servility, avarice, or fear, pervade the American bosom; that in the hope and purity of youth, we are not debased by the passions of a corrupt old age; that our sensibilities are other than sordid; that we are ambitious of the dignified port of freemen; that while pacific we know the value of national rights and national justice, and with the spirit due to our lasting prosperity as a republic, design to repel authenticated outrages upon either. That we will and dare act as becomes a free, an enlightened, and a brave people. Illustrious Congress! worthy to have your names recounted

with the illustrious fathers of our revolution! for what grievances were those that led to the great act which made us a nation, that have not been equalled, shall I say have not been surpassed, by those which moved to your deed? and what noble hazards did they encounter which you ought not to brave!

If we are not fully prepared for war, let the sublime spectacle be soon exhibited, that a free and a valiant nation, with our numbers, and a just cause, is always a powerful nation; is always ready to defend its essential rights! The Congress of '76 declared Independence and hurled defiance at this same insatiate foe, six and thirty years ago, with an army of seventeen thousand hostile troops just landed upon our shores; and shall we *now* hesitate? shall we bow our necks in submission, shall we make an ignominious surrender of our birthright under the plea that we are not prepared to defend it? No, Americans! Yours has been a pacific republic, and therefore has not exhibited military preparation; but it is a free republic, and therefore will it now, as before, soon command battalions, discipline, courage! Could a general of old by only stamping on the earth raise up armies, and shall a whole nation of freemen, at such a time, know not where to look for them? The soldiers of Bunker's hill, the soldiers of Benning-

ton, the soldiers of the Wabash, the seamen of Tripoli contradict it!

By one of the surviving patriots of our revolution I have been told, that in the Congress of 1774, among other arguments used to prevent a war, and separation from Great Britain, the danger of having our towns battered down and burnt was zealously urged. The venerable Christopher Gadsden, of South Carolina, rose and replied to it in these memorable words: "Our sea-port towns, Mr. President, are composed of brick and wood. If they are destroyed, we have clay and timber enough in our country to rebuild them. But, if the liberties of our country are destroyed, where shall we find the materials to replace them?" Behold in this an example of virtuous sentiment fit to be imitated

Indulge me with another illustration of American patriotism, derived from the same source. During the siege of Boston, General Washington consulted Congress upon the propriety of bombarding the town. Mr. Hancock was then President of Congress. After General Washington's letter was read, a solemn silence ensued. This was broken by a member making a motion that the House should resolve itself into a committee of the whole, in order that Mr. Hancock might give his opinion upon the important subject, as he was so deeply interested from

having all his estate in Boston. After he left the chair, he addressed the chairman of the committee of the whole in the following words: “It is true, sir, nearly all the property I have in the world is in houses and other real estate in the town of Boston; but if the expulsion of the British army from it, and the liberties of our country require their being burnt to ashes—*issue the order for that purpose immediately.*”

What has ancient or modern story to boast beyond such elevated specimens of public virtue? and what inspiring lessons of duty do they teach to us? War, fellow citizens, is not the greatest of evils. Long submission to injustice is worse. Peace, a long peace, a peace purchased by mean and inglorious sacrifices, is worse, is far worse. War takes away a life destined by nature to death. It produces chiefly bodily evils. But when ignoble peace robs us of virtue, debases the mind and chills its best feelings, it renders life a living death, and makes us offensive above ground. The evils of ignoble peace are, an inordinate love of money—rage of party spirit—and a willingness to endure even slavery itself rather than bear pecuniary deprivations or brave manly hazards. The states of Holland and of Italy will be found, at several stages of their history, strikingly to exemplify this remark.

War in a just cause produces patriotism: witness the speech of Gadsden! It produces the most noble disinterestedness where our country is concerned: witness the speech of Hancock! It serves to destroy party spirit, which may become worse than war. In war death is produced without personal hatred; but under the influence of party spirit inflamed by the sordid desires of an inglorious peace, the most malignant passions are generated and we hate with the spirit of murderers.

Could the departed heroes of the revolution rise from their sleep and behold their descendants hanging contentedly over hoards of money, or casting up British invoices, while so long a list of wrongs still looked them in the face, calling for retribution, what would they say? would they not hasten back to their tombs, now more welcome than ever, since they would conceal from their view the base conduct of those sons for whom they so gallantly fought, and so gallantly fell? But stop, return, return, illustrious band! stay and behold, stay and applaud what we too are doing! we will not dishonor your noble achievements! we will defend the inheritance you bequeathed us,—we will wipe away all past stains, we will maintain our rights at the sword, or, like you, we will die! Then shall we render our ashes worthy to mingle with yours!

Sacred in our celebrations be this day to the end of time! Revered be the memories of the statesmen and orators whose wisdom led to the act of Independence, and of the gallant soldiers who sealed it with their blood! May the fires of their genius and courage animate and sustain us in our contest, and bring it to a like glorious result! may it be carried on with singleness to the objects that alone summoned us to it—as a great and imperious duty, irksome yet necessary! May there be a willing, a joyful, immolation of all selfish passions on the altar of a common country! may the hearts of our combatants be bold, and, under a propitious heaven, their swords flash victory! may a speedy peace bless us and the passions of war go off, leaving in their place a stronger love of country and of each other! Then may pacific glories, accumulating and beaming from the excitement of the national mind, long be ours:—a roused intellect, a spirit of patriotic improvement in whatever can gild the American name;—in arts, in literature, in science, in manufactures, in agriculture, in legislation, in morals, in imbuing our admirable forms of polity with still more and more perfection—may these then and long be ours! may common perils and common triumphs bind us more closely together! may the era furnish names to our annals “on whom late time a kindling eye shall turn!”

Revered be the dust of those who fall, sweet their memories!—their country vindicated, their duty done, an honorable renown, the regrets of a nation, the eulogies of friendship, the slow and moving dirges of the camp, the tears of beauty—all, all, will sanctify their doom! Honored be those who outlive the strife of arms!—our rights established, justice secured, a haughty foe taught to respect the freemen she had abused and plundered—to survive to such recollections and such a consciousness, is there, can there be, a nobler reward!

Washington City, July, 1812.