

AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED IN SALEM,
ON THE FIFTH
OF
JULY, 1813,
IN COMMEMORATION
OF OUR
NAVAL VICTORIES,
AND
NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

By JOSEPH E SPRAGUE, Esq.

The sun of Glory sets not with the brave,
But shines eternal o'er the hero's grave.

SALEM:
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1813.

Monday, 5th July, 1813.

SIR,

THE Republican Committee of Arrangements for the Celebration of the Anniversary of our National Independence, beg leave to request that you would furnish them with a copy for the press of the patriotic Oration delivered by you this day.

We are with much esteem your humble servants,

JOSEPH ROPES,

H. ELKINS,

JOHN DODGE,

STEPHEN WHITE,

J. WHITE TREADWELL,

THOS. WHITTREDGE,

Committee.

JOSEPH E SPRAGUE, Esq.

AN
ORATION.

THE day that proclaimed us a free, a sovereign and an independent people, that gave us a name and a standing amongst the nations of the earth, should be religiously celebrated to the most remote period of time. On its return, our national glory should be proclaimed from the high places in the sanctuary; the illustrious deeds of our countrymen should then engage our grateful recollection, and an imitation of their heroic actions should be inculcated on posterity. The evils that threaten our liberties should also be forcibly depicted, and on our national errors beacons of future safety should be erected. In this attempt the ardent feelings which induce the patriot to look with partiality on every effort to exalt the glory of his country will ensure the smiles of complacency on our humble exertions.

A people contending against oppression, and successfully exerting themselves in defence of their liberties, affords the most grateful subject for the contemplation of the philanthropist, and the most interesting page of the historian. Such were the people who settled our pleasant homes, who converted the haunts of savages to fertile fields, and who laid the foundation of our national glory. The same nation, that now denies us the rights of an independent power, denied to our fathers the rights of Englishmen, and to their fathers the rights of men. The varying views of this government respecting religion, instead of inculcating charity to

those who differed from the ruling party in sentiment, and convincing them of the fallibility of all human opinions, served only to blind them with the idea of their own infallibility, and induced them with fire and faggot to compel their subjects to conformity. From this system of persecution our forefathers fled; they abandoned the seat of all their early attachments and earthly allurements, to enjoy liberty of opinion, in a savage land, recently discovered, unfettered by civilized man, and exposed to dangers unnumbered. Left to themselves, they increased rapidly, they converted the seats of the savage and wild beast to populous cities, they aided their parent state in her struggles, with their resources, and bore patiently the wholesome restraints she imposed upon them, and with the fondness of an affectionate child, suffered her to restrict their trade to her own dominions, without complaint. But when the parent state, forgetful of the rights of the colonies, sought to deprive them of their birthright, and to luxuriate and riot upon their resources; when she turned a deaf ear to their humble petitions and respectful remonstrances; then they rose with Herculean strength, burst asunder the unnatural connexion, and determined to be free. They stood not to calculate the cost of the contest, the amount of taxes or loans, or the destruction of lives. Knowing, that without liberty life is a worthless burthen, they counted any price cheap that would purchase it. On the plains of Lexington the Rubicon was passed; at the Thermopylæ of Breed's our determination to obtain our independence was sealed. At that day our native state stood high on the rolls of fame; a son of New-England was a champion of the rights of man. Faction hid her head. In the South the eloquence of Henry was heard in our support; generous Virginia pledged her resour-

ces in our behalf. No selfish views actuated her. She did not stand to calculate the profits she might derive from withholding her aid from a common cause. In her tribunals of law, faction did not weave its web of sophistry. She withheld not her militia. She gave us a Washington to lead our armies to victory, and our country to Independence. She gave us a Jefferson to proclaim to the world our wrongs and our Independence; to rescue "from the rude hands of usurpation the violated constitution of his country," and to "preserve it in form, substance and spirit, a precious inheritance for generations to come." The result of this glorious revolution, and the virtues and heroic deeds of those by whom it was achieved, are too deeply engraven on our memories to require a recital, and have too high claims on our gratitude and emulation ever to be forgotten.

A war waged without any object of ambition or vengeance, but purely in defence of violated rights and national character, must have the good wishes of men and the approbation of Heaven. In such a contest the commercial cupidity of England has involved us. Grasping at universal monopoly; not content with sacrificing millions of human beings in India in pursuit of it; she at last arrogantly denies to independent nations their rights on the ocean. She has attempted to regulate and impose taxes on our trade. To maintain the power to tyrannize over the ocean, she has enslaved the citizens of neutral nations, and compelled them to fight her battles. Under pretence of impressing her native seamen, she has impressed men of every language and tongue. To our demand, that she will cease to enslave our countrymen, she has refused to listen; fearing, as one third of her ships are manned by foreigners, to yield to justice a principle which might unman so

large a portion of her navy. She has wantonly violated our flag and our liberties. The cries of our countrymen in bondage have ascended to Heaven. The vengeance of their country, too long slumbering, is at last awakened; and England now feels the terrible difference between a reciprocity of violence, and violence unresisted. The war in which we are at present engaged was demanded by every thing dear to freemen. Although, like all human undertakings, it has been attended with some disasters, yet it has already emblazoned our national escutcheon with unextinguishable lustre. Slumbering in peace, we had forgot the art of war, and some misadventures were necessary to teach us its rudiments; for adversity is the best instructor; and war is sometimes as necessary to the health of the state, as letting of blood to that of the body. For by too long indulgence in peace, our system becomes too enervated for the exertions of war, and our liberties are easily subdued. And by a long period of commercial prosperity, faction obtains the means of corrupting the body politic. This is now too apparent in our own Commonwealth, where religion is called in to cloak treason, rebellion against the union, to promote the views of the enemy and to defeat the honourable views of our own country, with as much zeal, but with less honesty, than Ravillac covered his assassination of the virtuous Henry. Not content with appealing to the worst feelings and most detestable passions, our wise soothsayers have drawn their omens from the event, and pronounced the misfortune of our arms as indications of the displeasure of Heaven. Impious profanation! Does Heaven frown? What sins have evoked its judgments? None more surely than nursing within our country beings who rejoice at the defeats of their countrymen, who can sport and jest at the murders

and ferocities of the Cannibal Allies. Do they believe that Heaven visits nations for the sins of their subjects? Let them look well to themselves, and stand in awe of the curse pronounced against those who refused to go up to the assistance of the Almighty; who refused to aid their countrymen in the prosecution of a righteous contest.

But we will quit a subject, our detestation of which, language is inadequate to paint; warning our countrymen that if in such a cause they suffer themselves to be governed by the views of this faction, the world will consider that they merit that loss of liberty which will surely ensue, and are unworthy of sympathy. We will drop a subject which harrows up every feeling of our souls, and turn to a most important cause for our gratulation—the evidence that our countrymen are yet deserving of liberty: in the triumph of our constitution over every engine of ambition, faction, corruption and foreign influence, in the re-election of the illustrious statesman who drafted that most excellent instrument, who has administered it in its purity, and who, with a noble independence, at the risk of his popularity, has dared to vindicate it against one of the most powerful nations on earth, and to wage war in its defence.

National character is absolutely essential to the happiness of the subject, and the existence of the state. As in private life no one respects a person who has no respect for himself, so a nation which suffers another nation to infringe its rights, induces other nations to make similar encroachments. Nor does this forbearance tend to the preservation of peace; for a nation suffered to make one encroachment to day, to-morrow will make a second, nor will it cease until it has overturned the liberties of the nation that submits to its vio-

lence. On the other hand, a nation that promptly meets force by force, and repels injury, checks the progress of violence, obtains redress of wrongs, and the respect of other nations. Patriotism cannot exist in a nation that does not respect itself. Though we may pity the insect that is crushed without the power of resistance, yet we despise the man, who, capable of efficient defence, suffers himself to be abused with impunity. So a nation which uniformly submits to indignities, not only sinks into contempt with other powers, but its own subjects are ashamed of their country. On the other hand, a nation true to itself, that spiritedly defends itself, will not only gain the applause of the world, but the love and admiration of its own subjects. For in all nations they will find, that according to the character of their country, will be the respect they receive. What American will doubt this position? Who will say that the last year has not made him proud of his country?

Every volume of history is replete with proof of the necessity of national character. But our own history contains too humiliating evidence to require more distant research. The spirited resistance, by a small people, without government and without resources, during our revolution, of one of the most powerful nations on earth; gave us an exalted station in the eyes of mankind, and the actors in that scene acquired immortal renown. This high character remained unimpaired until in the year 1792 we suffered Great Britain to depredate on our commerce. Want of spirited opposition to Great Britain induced France to claim the same impunity. Thus our national character was degraded, and our peace with both nations alternately jeopardized. Since 1800, the same passive submission has induced England, France and Spain to repeat similar acts of vio-

lence and plunder. And two years since, our character was so humble, that Napoleon confiscated our ships and cargoes with as little ceremony as he levied contributions on his conquered provinces; our commerce was as much controuled by the orders of the English King in Council, as that of his own subjects; and the seamen on board our ships on the high seas were as liable to be taken by the press gang, as in the streets of England. Such the humiliating effect of non-resistance, such the inseparable incident to loss of character.

But these disgraces are easily obliterated. The splendid deeds which have attended our well timed exertions will bury the recollection of these times we blush to name. When it shall be told to future ages, that the intrepid Eaton, with a handful of men, passed through the deserts of Lybia, and, aided by our little navy, did more than Europe had ever effected to humble the piratical states of Barbary. When the poet, borrowing from real life, deeds which fancy cannot heighten, and romance cannot excel, shall narrate the deeds of Decatur—how at dead of night, he made a splendid day of glory for his country, and of dismay to its enemies. How with the Turk, the fell murderer of his brother, he fought in single combat—how hope exulted when he raised his sword to hew the Turkish spear—how she fainted, when that sword broke at the hilt—how he warded the deadly thrust, and, clasped with his foe-man, fell—and how, parrying the drawn dagger from his heart, he sent the dread assassin to his long account.—And how the generous tar, who had no hand to ward the blow aimed at his chieftain's life, presented his ready head, which opening, seized the hostile scimitar!—These splendid deeds will be remembered, when our days of humiliation are forgotten.

However we may have been degraded heretofore, a brighter scene of glory has now opened on our country. The deeds of the past year must make us proud to bear the name of Americans. An era has arrived in our affairs, which challenges the splendour of any age or nation. Our troops, unused to war, have faced and defeated veteran soldiers, and even our militia, when engaged, have left little to regret but their precipitate zeal. That most of the British provinces are not now in our possession, is owing to events that no foresight could controul. For though we have had some checks, we have not been disgraced. Treachery and cowardice are common to all climes; and if unfortunately either of them have been found in our ranks, it cannot attach disgrace to the country or its soldiers. The soldiers who were surrendered at Detroit did not disgrace their country, nor are they disgraced. The men that fought at Brownstown and Tippecanoe, will never disgrace their country, or be disgraced by their own conduct. Our troops, whenever they have been permitted to fight, have given the most convincing proofs of their valour and good conduct.

From rendering justice to troops whose valour faction has endeavoured to defeat and obscure; we now turn to a view which has astonished our own country and the world, and has spread consternation amongst the thousand ships of the enemy. England had long usurped the dominion of the ocean. No power could resist her prowess. And with nearly an equal force, she was sure to conquer every thing that swam. Such was the character of the navy of England in the opinion of the world, when the American banner was unfurled in vindication of the freedom of the seas. Then, the most sanguine of us, in our pride of country, dared scarcely hope, as the result of a meeting between

our ships and theirs, more than a parting on equal terms, without disgrace. At the moment when our bosoms were glowing with solicitude for the result of an action; the frigate Constitution, commanded by the modest and unobtrusive Hull, met the proud frigate Guerriere, who for months previous had borne at her mast head defiance to our navy. The meeting was short, but decisive. The stars of America beamed with the rays of victory, and the stripes of liberty drove from the ocean the arrogant champion of oppression. The charm which had encircled the British navy was dissolved. The idea of the naval superiority of England sat forever; and the world, convinced that "more could have been done, in a contest requiring more," unhesitatingly pronounced, that a British frigate could not meet single handed an American. This action was the most fortunate event that could have occurred to give freedom to the seas. It has taught other nations that England is not invincible, and even the most incredulous of us, that a navy is a defence the most terrible and effectual in our hands, against our enemies. It has laid the foundation of a national character, which will be respected for ages. It has bound us with new and inseparable ties to our country, and has created a national pride, which will eventually destroy the serpent faction, that is struggling to stifle it. England had but just learnt the news of her defeat, when the Wasp engaged the Frolic, a vessel every way her superior. In the commencement of the action, the Wasp was wounded in her spars, and rendered in a great degree unmanageable. Yet in this situation, amid the tumult of the elements, she raised a storm to her enemy more terrific than the convulsion of the ocean. In a few moments scarce one solitary messenger was left, to tell to England her new disaster. The Wasp and

her prize were captured by a British ship of the line. England had then an opportunity to compare our nondescript with her ship of superior size, to witness her own inferiority, and Jones's immortality. In ten days from this action the gallant Commodore Decatur captured confessedly the best frigate in the English navy, new, just out of dock, commanded by an excellent officer, and bravely defended, she was compelled to acknowledge American superiority. And with the Macedonian his prize, Decatur crossed the Atlantic, and at her mast head is now displayed, "*Free Trade and no Impressment.*" The deeds of Decatur had, previous to this victory, raised him to the highest place in the temple of fame: but whilst his country has a foe, or the ocean a laurel, his unextinguishable enterprize will never flumber satisfied with the honours he has won. This series of decisive victories drew from our enemy a confession of our superiority, and attracted the admiration of the world. But other heroes panted for glory, and of the thousand ships of England, some of her frigates were without convoy. The finest frigate that Decatur had left to her navy, manned with a number of seamen greatly exceeding her complement, and with every advantage of position, was destined to afford the Constitution a second victory, and to wreath the brow of Bainbridge with laurels. The consternation produced by this splendid succession of victories was so striking, that the *Bonne Citoyenne* dared not accept the challenge of Capt. Lawrence in a vessel of inferior size, but sought safety under the convoy of a ship of the line. The wish, however, of Capt. Lawrence to meet the enemy, was not long ungratified; and the destruction of the *Peacock* is the most wonderful specimen of execution on the record of time, and the most decided instance of our superiority.

With the smallest marine of any maritime power, we had now contended nine months with a nation whose marine greatly exceeded the united marine of the rest of the world, and whose power on the ocean was undisputed. We had five times met in combat, and had five times been crowned with victory. Not a single ship of ours had been taken in battle by the enemy. His pride writhed in agony. Every mean was taken to cover his disgrace. Our frigates were overrated. Ships of the line, with a few guns taken from them, were called frigates, and sent for the express purpose of contending with the despised navy of America; a navy so small, that when its numbers were mentioned in Parliament, it excited the risibility of the members. Commodore Broke, in one of their finest ships, with a select crew, and with part of the crews of other ships, practised daily in our sight for months in firing, appears as the champion of the fallen honour of England, and bids defiance to our arms. When the Shannon appeared, the Chesapeake, a ship of inferior force, the worst in our navy, not quite ready for sea, with a crew that had not been on the ocean for two months, many of whom never, a crew fresh from dissipation, with young officers, midshipmen acting as lieutenants, and a captain who had taken the command but a few days—with all these disadvantages the Chesapeake took up the gauntlet. The action was the shortest and most sanguinary in the annals of history. The cross of England was raised over the stars of America; but the honour of America was not stained. Her superiority was as decided as in any previous action, and the Shannon would have found the ocean's bed in less time than the Peacock, had not a mere series of accidents—chance shots, which, neither skill or bravery could foresee or avert, have thrown the Chesapeake into

such a position, as enabled the enemy to take possession of her, before the men below deck could be brought to oppose them. The American flag, however, was not struck by Americans.

We had in our former actions evinced our skill in conquering the ships of the enemy. In this we have shown with what desperation we defend our own. The whole force of the enemy brought against less than half our force could not conquer until every officer on board the ship, and every seamen on deck, was killed or wounded. In our victories over the enemy, their ships were incapable of further resistance, and their crews were in great measure killed or wounded; whilst in this engagement our ship received very little injury, and our men were in a situation, but for accident, to have repelled the whole force of the enemy. This circumstance most conclusively shows, that accident, not skill, gave England the victory; that our honour is not tarnished, but rendered more resplendent. And we have only to regret the fate of the fallen heroes.

Of this rapid and uninterrupted display of valour, skill and bravery, duty and pride demand our admiration. Shall we admire the actions of other nations and times, and look coolly on those heroic deeds of our own countrymen, which challenge a parallel in history? Shall we, like those canting hypocrites of faction, who have nothing of religion but a cloak, bury in oblivion every deed which has not a direct tendency to promote their detestable views? No; whilst memory holds a place, while a page of history remains; until the day of desolation seals forever the lips of the minstrel and poet, and obliterates the finest subjects of the painter's canvass; the deeds of the heroes whose valour we

now celebrate will remain, and their actors be revered.

Nor will the deeds of our naval heroes be alone cherished. The memory of the brave soldier, who fell in the cause of his country will ever be dear to its friends. With Wolfe and Montgomery, thy name, heroic Pike, shall ever be repeated. The brave general, whose mind was stored with science, whose heart was attuned to humanity, and whose setting sun was irradiated with victory, shall be held in veneration by the last of his countrymen.

Nor shall memory delight to dwell on those alone who have fallen in the arms of victory. Over thy tomb, Lawrence, thy country will ever weep. Europe, Africa, and both Americas, have witnessed thy unsurpassed valour. Master of the seaman's art, and every branch of science connected with naval warfare, thy example and instruction shall lead future heroes to glory in striving to imitate deeds which cannot be surpassed. Thy youth has been devoted to thy country, and in the prime of thy life thou hast yielded it a sacrifice to her honour. When Decatur made the successful and desperate attempt to burn the Philadelphia, Lawrence was by his side in glory. The coast of South America has seen the foeman shrink from thy arms; the West Indies can attest with what dread certainty thou aimedst the deadly weapons of destruction; and our own eyes have witnessed the closing and most heroic scene of thy existence. Fortunately we were so removed, that our feelings were not agonized with the melancholy view of the wounded hero supporting himself by a pike, and refusing to leave the deck; and even when the deadly ball had pierced his body with a mortal wound, still he continued encouraging his men, still commanding them not to yield to the foe, until the ebbing tide of life left its channel, and sen-

sibility and reason fled. Shall cold censoriousness impeach thy last act as rash? Had the issue been otherwise, such sentiments would not be heard. That it was not, was mere accident, which nothing could controul. Those men, whose honour sits lightly about them, are not competent judges of the motives and conduct of honourable men. Heroes are heroes' peers. From rashness their verdict will honourably acquit thee. Thy country's honour was given thee in charge, thou knewest the valour, the skill and superiority of thy countrymen would not admit a question, as the Shannon's hull bears thee incontrovertible testimony. Thou wouldst not suffer the honour given thee in charge to be challenged, but thou hast fought and vindicated it. No man has done more to exalt his country's character than Lawrence. No one has greater claims on his country, to place in ease and independence those who, deprived of a companion and a father, have a right to demand of that country a father's and protector's care. Suffer not, my countrymen, the imputation of ingratitude to sully a national character exalted by such heroic deeds.

Amongst other causes of national gratulation and pride, the manner in which the war has been conducted on our part is not the least. Our officers have been as distinguished for their modesty and simplicity in the accounts of their own victories, as for their humanity to the conquered. A contrast with the arrogance of the enemy affords a most honourable and marked distinction to our country. Whilst the English have let loose the savage of the wilderness to torture and butcher the surrendered prisoner, old age, decrepitude and infancy; whilst, proving themselves worthy allies of savages, they have burnt and plundered our villages, and brought back the practices of Goths, Vandals and barbari-

ans ; the war on our part has been conducted with the most mitigated hostility. Our vanquished enemies have found friends in their conquerors, and, instead of being deprived of their private property, and called upon to surrender their swords, they have received the hands of their conquerors. Lawrence victorious, lost more lives in preserving the vanquished, than in obtaining the victory. And from their private purses our generous tars supplied with clothing the crew whose baggage had sunk with their ship. Lawrence conquered, his officers and seamen surrendered, and calling for quarter, are massacred in cold blood, and plundered of every thing.

May this glorious distinction ever mark our character. May we be as distinguished for our humanity, as we are renowned for our valour. In a war waged for such principles as those for which we are now contending, and conducted in a manner as marked by honour and humanity, as our cause is by justice ; we cannot fail of the applause of the world, and the smiles of Heaven. If we fail, we fail in defence of the rights of man, and the last refuge of liberty. And we cannot more honourably terminate our existence, “ than by lashing ourselves to our gallant tars, and dying in defence of

FREE TRADE AND SAILORS' RIGHTS.”