

ORATION

DELIVERED AT

S A E E M,

ON THE

Fourth of July,

1864.

By JOSEPH B. SPRAGUE.

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SIR,

THE COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS present their unfeigned thanks to you for your elegant and spirited Oration, delivered before the Republicans on the FOURTH DAY OF JULY instant, and respectfully ask a copy for the Press.

In behalf of the Committee,

JOSEPH WINN,

JOSEPH E. SPRAGUE, Esq.

AN ORATION.

Friends and Fellow Citizens,

ILLUSTRIOUS actions and important revolutions have been commemorated by all nations with public celebrations and national festivals. The Birth Days of the Great and the eras of important events, have in all ages been consecrated with public games, the lays of minstrelsy, or the strains of eloquence. And at this day, in every civilized nation, some memorable event is celebrated with an annual public festival. It has been, in despotic governments, the policy of the sovereign, by increasing the number and pomp of public festivals, to enkindle in his subjects a veneration for his munificence, and a forgetfulness of their own servitude, and thus to lull the restless spirit of liberty. In free governments, public celebrations serve to excite a spirit of emulation. By extolling the deeds of valor and virtue, we direct that ambition into a beneficial channel, which, left to itself, would seek advancement by intrigue. They afford the fittest occasion to pay the tribute of gratitude to national benefactors; to inculcate those maxims by which freedom is supported, and to point out the dangers which menace its destruction. The mind of man, soaring on the pinions of curiosity through the regions of hope, in pursuit of higher attainments and more exalted pleasures, loses sight of present enjoyments. National blessings, grown familiar, are forgotten, and their existence endangered. From this disposition to neglect whatever has not the stamp of novelty, arises the necessity that peculiar privileges should be frequently brought to view, and the dangers which threaten their destruction often pointed out.

Such, fellow-citizens, are the principles which should induce us to commemorate, with at least one annual celebration, the great, the peculiar, and preeminent liberties and blessings we enjoy. Let us then, my friends, on this

hallowed anniversary of that Day which proclaimed us a Free, Sovereign, and Independent People, prostrate ourselves before Him in whose hands are the destinies of Nations; and adore that Providence, which in a dark and eventful hour, led us safely through a perilous revolution, and enabled us in infancy to triumph over an ancient and powerful nation. May we, on every return of this auspicious day, swear at the Altar of Liberty, that we will live true to those principles, which gave birth to our Independence:—That we will remember with gratitude, and bless with our latest breath, the Sages, the Patriots, and the Warriors, who conceived and effected that glorious Revolution which gave us a name and a standing among the nations of the Earth, and which freed us from a Tyrant who sought “to bind us in all cases whatsoever.”

That all men are born free and equal; that they have the right to worship their Creator according to the dictates of their own consciences, and that governments were instituted for the benefit of the governed, are axioms which are not called in question in this country, altho' practically contradicted by all other nations. A firm conviction of the truth of these maxims, and a fixed determination not to submit the modes of their belief to the regulations of the government, induced our ancestors to quit the fertile coasts of Britain, endeared to them as the place of their birth and the abode of their friends.—Rather than sacrifice their integrity and bend to the mandates of arbitrary power, they tore asunder the ties of society, friendship and country; they abandoned their comfortable homes, in the dead of winter, and after traversing the tempestuous ocean, settled on the barren coast of Cape Cod. In a land of strangers, in a country of uncivilized barbarians, who sought every opportunity to sacrifice them to their cannibal appetites, our pious forefathers erected the Temple of Liberty.

The same spirited opposition to oppression which induced our ancestors to quit their pleasant homes and settle in a savage wilderness, descended uncontaminated and undiminished to their children, and discovered itself

in opposing the arbitrary edicts of the mother country. After the French war, in the middle of the last century, in which these provinces had exerted their utmost efforts to advance the projects of the mother country, instead of rewarding them like a kind parent with her favor for their exertions, she sought without their consent "to bind them, in all cases whatsoever." That spirit of liberty which had descended undiminished from sire to son, revolted at this arbitrary and oppressive proceeding. After the cup of reconciliation was exhausted, after humble petition on petition, and remonstrance after remonstrance was treated with contumely and contempt, the sages of the revolution, on the 4th of July, 1776, published to the world the Manifesto of Independence. This monument of human virtue, wisdom and valor, like its immortal author, the Sage of Monticello, and its illustrious defender, the Warrior of Mount-Vernon, will be regarded with veneration by the remotest ages. This Declaration, like a decree of Omnipotence, fired every bosom and nerved every arm. America rose in the majesty of her strength—she endured fatigue, want, and misery—she fought, she bled, and she conquered.

Our first duty, fellow citizens, on the return of this eventful day is to pay the tribute of our gratitude to the God of Battles, and the instruments of his providence in accomplishing the revolution. Let it not be said that the subject is trite and uninteresting. To those who venerate liberty, who prize the boon bought with the best blood of the country, the subject can never cease to be interesting, the repetition of the deeds of valor of that time can never prove tedious. The bosom that beats with a single pulse of affection for the rights of man will always throb with renewed pleasure at the recital of the valor that won our liberties—and the eye of every patriot will yield the ready tear of commiseration at the tale of persevering toil and suffering virtue by which our revolution was accomplished. Those to whom our freedom is hateful will receive no pleasure from the recital of the deeds of the revolution. Those who would have defeated its success will feel no commiseration for the suffer-

ing valor that atchieved it. Let us, fellow citizens, walk in fancy over the hallowed ground, consecrated by the blood of Patriotism. We first see our raw and undisciplined militia, fired by a holy zeal for liberty on the plains of Lexington and the sacred Hill of Bunker, almost destitute of arms and ammunition, immolating to Liberty the veteran troops of Britain. We next behold our yeomanry destitute of every thing but a sacred zeal for their country in the middle and southern states, braving and triumphing over climate, tempest, toil, suffering and hunger, defeating and making prisoners the finest troops of the most powerful nation in Europe. View with me the horrors of the prisonships and hospitals. See cruelty presiding over suffering virtue; your countrymen crowded in pestiferous hulks, their food bread overrun with vermin, their drink the noisome bilgewater, putrified and poisoned. Amidst this complicated misery, persons feeling one human weakness, might have been expected for a single cup of pure water to have renounced their country. But these Patriots, over whose memory we now ask the tear of pity, of gratitude and commiseration, altho' by renouncing a country engaged in a doubtful struggle, they might have secured themselves immediate relief from these sufferings, and restoration to liberty and the comforts of life—yet we see them revolting from a thought against their country as the blackest treason, and expiring in agonies rather than one moment to deny her. Can we look at such valor without pity and pride? Shall we lightly esteem what was purchased at so high a price? No—Sainted Spirits of our departed countrymen, we will not be insensible to the inestimable blessings your heroism has procured for us. Smile benignantly from the Throne of Valor on high on our country, rendered free by your exertion. Be its Guardian Angels still. Hover over this temple, consecrated to your valor. Protect our country from foreign foes and domestic conspirators. May its liberties be transmitted to the latest period of time. May that valor and love of liberty which have

distinguished you, our fathers, be conspicuous in the lives and actions of your sons.

After the invincible bravery of the heroes of the revolution had compelled Great Britain to acknowledge our Independence, an event memorable and singular in its nature occurred—Thirteen independent governments met by common consent and framed a federal government, by which each state gave to the common head some of the most essential branches of its sovereignty. This confederation proving inefficient, they again met, and formed a new government. After the establishment of the present Constitution, another event as singular in its nature, and as honorable to the people of this country, occurred. Washington, the father of our country, the hero who had led our armies through toil to victory, and had occupied that post at which jealousy and envy hurl all their weapons, was unanimously elected President.—Wonderful people! In other nations trivial alterations in the government or the election of a chief magistrate have uniformly produced war, revolution and bloodshed.

After the first Presidential term Washington was again unanimously re-elected. Had he consented to stand a third time as candidate, he would unquestionably have been re-elected with the same unanimity, so convinced were the people of the purity of his motives, notwithstanding some measures had been adopted really prejudicial to the country, through the influence, the intrigues, and indefatigable exertions of executive advisers. But tired with the incessant intrigues which had in some instances eluded his detection and mislead him; seeing the efforts to produce a jealousy of the Southern States, and convinced of the injury resulting from that treaty, to which he had with so much reluctance given his signature, he determined to withdraw from office. This determination, he announced in an Address to the people of the United States. In this invaluable legacy, with that magnanimity which disdains to defend its own measures, when convinced that those measures are injurious, he thus condemns this treaty: Have with foreign nations, "as little political connection as possible. So far

“ as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith -- Here let us stop.” And with a prophetic voice he warned us of that unfounded jealousy of the Southern States which some of his cabinet Councillors were then exciting, and which has, this last year, jeopardized our union. He says,

“ Indignantly frown on any attempt to alienate any portion of the country from the rest. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together ; the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint efforts and joint councils, of common dangers, sufferings and successes. Designing men may endeavor to excite a belief, that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts, is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings, which spring from those misrepresentations.”

At the third election, the people were about equally divided between two of our most illustrious Citizens and Patriots. Mr. Adams, one of the candidates, had from the earliest period of the revolution, labored for its success ; he had likewise been the greatest part of his time during the contest, at different Courts of Europe to procure resources to carry on the war, and to secure such alliances as should insure its success ; he had also filled the office of Vice President during Washington's administration. Mr. Jefferson, the other candidate, had in the first stages of the revolution, in his native State and in Congress, rendered himself conspicuous as one of its ablest advocates. From his eloquent pen proceeded the Declaration of our Independence. He had also been employed in forming those treaties in which that Independence was recognized. From this last employment, he was immediately, on the election of Washington, recalled to the most important office in his gift, that of his principal Councillor. In that place he continued until he discovered that the intrigues of his fellow councillors were operating to the injury of his country. This election

terminated in the choice of Mr. Adams to the Presidency, and Mr. Jefferson to the Vice-Presidency. Under the administration of Mr. Adams, laws odious and unconstitutional were enacted. And an army raised without any ostensible object except the enforcement of these laws. The intrigues that had commenced in the former administration were now carried to their height. These measures, though they were contrary to the wishes of Mr. Adams, were carried into effect through the intrigues of the Cabinet, and their influence over Congress. That spirit that imputes to the President all the odium of the acts of Congress laid all these measures to Mr. Adams' account. Although he withdrew all confidence from the grand projector of these schemes, and dismissed from office his humble instruments, yet the confidence of the nation was shaken, and at the next election a majority declared for Mr. Jefferson.

After the election of Mr. Jefferson, Republicanism became practical. Men friendly to the Democratic Institutions of the country were called to the Cabinet. All odious and obnoxious measures disappeared, and the national debt was reduced in a most rapid manner.

So thoroughly convinced were the nation of the virtues and preeminent talents of this illustrious statesman, that on the expiration of the term for which he was elected, he was again called to the chair of state with an unanimity more surprizing than that which attended the election of the first President. For at this time calumny with her hundred tongues had attributed to him the blackest actions of which man is capable, and detraction had opened her flood-gates to overwhelm him. His election was likewise vehemently opposed by a party powerful by their talents and wealth, and the aid of a foreign power. This party saw in the practical illustration of republicanism in his administration, the seal of fate to their schemes of erecting a monarchy or aristocracy. Notwithstanding these exertions, aided by the spirits of darkness, he was re-elected by a vote nearly unanimous. His second presidential term was a perfect counterpart to the first.— The fondest expectations of his friends were surpassed.

And a practical illustration of our constitution administered in its purity, was afforded to all future presidents, and a standard erected by which the people can accurately judge the merits of all their future First Magistrates. Amongst the most illustrious actions of this administration, is the purchase of Louisiana. By this our peace was secured, foreign collision avoided, and our union strengthened and confirmed. Another honorable measure of this administration was the abolition of the slave trade. The existence of slavery in this country is its greatest reproach. That slavery should be tolerated amongst freemen, is in the most eminent degree disgraceful: it fosters an aristocratic spirit in the slave holder, inducing him to see amongst children of one common parent, several orders of beings—one created for dominion, the other for servitude. Genius of Liberty! how long shall this detestible bondage continue to disgrace our country, and remain a standing contradiction to all our professions and institutions? We believe, fellow citizens, the day is not far distant when the children of those miserable Africans, who were torn by avarice from their country, their families and friends, shall in the enjoyment of the liberties and institutions of this country, be amply repaid for the servitude of their parents. To the honor of this country, fellow citizens, the importation of slaves into it, has from its first settlement, been contrary to the wishes and principles of its inhabitants. Year after year, whilst we were colonists, have these states with Virginia at their head, petitioned parliament to terminate this nefarious traffic. But the spirit of fostering her colonies, only to prey on their resources, which until 1808, prevented the parliament from abolishing the slave trade, did, during our colonial subjection, prevent our being freed from this national calamity. But a desire to abolish slavery is now almost universal in this country, and nothing has hitherto prevented it but the danger of changing at once the situation of one sixth of its inhabitants from slavery to freedom. Jefferson, Wythe & Pendleton have devised a plan by which this evil may be avoided and that blessing secured. That this plan will soon be adopted, that avarice