

AN
ADDRESS,

DELIVERED

AT

FLEMINGTON,

ON

THE ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

4th July, 1817.

BY CAPTAIN PETER I. CLARK.

NEW-BRUNSWICK

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1817.

Flemington, July 4th, 1817.

SIR,

Accept the thanks of the Committee of Arrangement, for the Address you delivered this day, and be so obliging as to favor them with a copy for publication.

By order of the Committee,

J. T. BLACKWELL, *Chairman.*

Capt. PETER I. CLARK.

July 4th, 1817.

SIR,

I yield with much embarrassment to the request of the Committee of Arrangement, as the Address was written upon a notice of a few days previous to the 4th, and amidst the hurry of other duties which devolved upon me as a member of the Committee. You will therefore observe in the Address an abruptness and necessary haste in passing from one subject to another. It was written for the exclusive purpose to harmonize the feelings of an assembly which was composed of men of different political feelings, and to give scope to a sentiment which should predominate on that day.

With respect,

Your obedient servant,

PETER I. CLARK.

J. T. BLACKWELL, Esq.

Chairman of the Committee.

ADDRESS,

Et c.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

CALLED suddenly and unexpectedly to address you, I feel no small anxiety to elicit matter interesting from a subject which is familiar to us all, and which is interwoven with the best feelings of our nature.

For no common purpose are we assembled.—This day, hallowed by a recollection of unnumbered endearments, and illustrated as the dawn of our country's glory, brings with it the record of our fame and the history of our prosperity. This day the veteran of 'seventy-six, living o'er again the days of his toil, and leaning upon his staff to sustain the burden of years, comes forth, to animate the surviving companions of his better days, to bid them perhaps a last farewell, and to cheer the brightened hopes of future time.

Millions, who at the eventful era we now celebrate, lay buried in the womb of time, this day assemble round the altar of our common country, unite with us in shouting the praise of well earned fame, and the invaluable blessing of a national character.

There are few free countries whose history does not furnish themes to rejoice the hearts of their citizens, to elevate their public feeling, and ennoble their honourable pride.—

The wars of mad ambition, the strife of a nation's prowess in the field of fight, may raise the boast of conquest and the sound of triumph: these alone, if unconnected with any general good, as the result, are as ephemeral as the occasion that gave them birth: they are, but to be forgotten; they are recorded, because they were.

But when a nation, is inspired by a general hate of the tyrant that oppresses it, and by a generous resolution, under the guidance of heaven, to unbind the victims of oppression, to be free and independent; when the objects of a free, equal and independent government, founded upon the basis of free and equal rights, is its aim; when for these victory perches upon the standard of the oppressed, its recollection is as perpetual as the blessings it entails, and the return of its anniversary is the grave of dissention, and the triumph of patriotism. Such a day, it is *our* pride as Americans to commemorate.

Suffer me to make a few remarks on the influence of great political events, if directed by a proper intelligence, as the source of that elevation of feeling and honorable pride, which ennoble and dignify a nation; and to suggest some motives for the commemoration of this day.

Independent of those physical and moral causes which exist in local situation, constitution and form of government, and in the ordinary pursuits of civil life, every nation is more or less indebted to its history for the features of its character, and the lineaments of its distinction.

The accomplishment of great political events is the effort of great talents exercised for their completion, through a gradation of revolutions great and splendid. Great emergencies in a country is the womb of great men, and tests of its latent powers. But for these, a listless apathy would forever brood over its progress, and it would be remembered merely as an insignificant *minimum* on the map of the globe. Blot from the annals of its history, the record of its trials, of its victories, and even of its defeats, and where is the elastic spring, that gives energy to the soul or vigor to the intellectual powers of man?

What was it, in ancient days, that gave its value to the title of Roman citizen? what was it that made the neighbouring people of Rome so ambitious to be ranked amongst the number of those who worshipped at her altars and sat down at her feasts? It was because Rome had rendered herself illustrious by her conquests and the production of great men. With triumph may we ask, what is it that gives its value to the title of American citizen? Because it is associated with unsullied patriotism, dauntless heroism, untainted virtue, and a liberty, the fruit of unwearied toil, the reward of valor, and the purchase of generous blood.

Talk to an American of his country, and with instinctive fondness and fervor will he revert to that portentous moment, when, with a solemn appeal to heaven for the justice of their cause, his fathers determined to be free and independent. His character is bottomed upon that spirit, that shone undiminished in 'seventy-six, and he rates the value of his citizenship from the standing of those who were actors at that period.

Passing through his country, he every where traces the march of the armies of the revolution, and as he treads the field where fell in triumph her choicest sons, the tear of grateful sorrow is succeeded by a generous resolution to perpetuate the blessings their valor has bought.

What, but an event like the one to which we have adverted, could have called forth a WASHINGTON? and without him, how blank would be the story of our fame! Yes, but for this glorious struggle, the Farmer of Mount Vernon might have passed his career in life unknowing and unknown, and devoted to the humble, but not less worthy charities of life, virtues and talents that have immortalized his country, and shaded the lustre of the brightest diadem. But he lives on the pages of our history; he lives in our hearts; he lives, as the pledge of the boast that we are American citizens.

Imagine for a moment that the American people had crept into existence by the force of circumstances of an ordinary kind, and by the kindly influence of time, that changes every thing in its progress, and where would we have been? True, the influence of wealth, of education, and of moral habits, may have fitted us for the ordinary purposes of self-government, and the désultory duties of varied life: we may have been distinguished for talents and intellectual attainments; but where, let me ask you, would be the common standard to rally our strength; where the tie to bind us as a brotherhood; where the sentiment to be the pledge of our allegiance; where the altar of a common sacrifice? Yes, fellow-citizens, our meeting here this day, seals the truth of the influence of great political events, if directed by a proper intelligence, on our national character. Our meeting, did

I say ! Not a village in this our free and independent confederacy, where peace is wont like the dove to build her hallowed nest, but this day is gladdened with the hum of busy preparation to add something to the general joy.

But it is only when these great events are the commencement of great good, that their influence can be propitious. The annals of despotism, teem with blood shed for the gratification of boundless ambition, and the lust of conquest. The heart of sensibility chills at the recital, and they are read with as little interest, as the tales of the genii, or the imagery of romance. Thank God we are not here assembled to sing *Vive le'Roi*, or *Vive l'Empereur*, and compelled to pay homage at the shrine of titled nobility or kingly majesty, but to render the free will offering of our hearts to God and our common country.

If then this great political event of our national independence, and the various struggles in its accomplishment, have such a beneficial influence on our national character and feeling ; how imposing is the obligation to cherish their remembrance as the earnest of our future greatness and continued prosperity.

To commemorate great events has ever been a tribute which civilized and even savage nations have paid. The polished Greeks and Romans had their games and feasts, either in commemoration of some propitious influence of their deities, or to perpetuate some national custom or prejudice ; and while they celebrated in solemn triumph the glory of the victor, the works of their artists in their public places, transmitted to succeeding ages the general impulse, and

gave life to their national feelings. Even the untutored savage will perpetuate in the feast and dance, the remembrance of his triumphs, and chaunt in rude song the numberless trophies of the scalping knife.

We need not resort however to the ancients, nor to the customs of the savage for examples as incentives to commemorate a day, which is the beginning of our existence as a free and independent people.

Switzerland has commemorated the days of her Tell, and Holland her William, as the beginning of their deliverance from the house of Austria. Yet these small republics, though they nobly asserted the rights and privileges of freemen, were weakly confederated together, and in the days of their degradation, became an easy prey to their enemies.

The revolutions in Europe of later days, (which threatened the destruction of every thing like liberty, and the dissolution of the ancient order of things) though they may have given birth to events that have dazzled the world by their splendor, have afforded to the philanthropist little cause to rejoice in the amelioration of the condition of society. These revolutions may throw light upon the future speculations of cabinets, and happy for the human family, if they destroy the venom of that philosophy, which excludes God from its tenets, and religion as its basis. We are yet to be instructed, whether their present repose will result in the free and permanent enjoyment of life, 'liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' We fear, that like most of the revolutions of that portion of the globe, the rights and privileges of the people, though they may be modified by the course

of revolution, and the effect of accident, will ever partake of the character of the government in which they exist, and will never be entirely changed from their original aspect.

Not so with us. Engrafting our form of government upon no stock of foreign growth, improving upon no model, and deriving our rights from no charter of feudal tradition, we planted the tree of liberty, in a soil congenial with its growth, to nourish by its shelter and its fruit, all who ventured to enjoy their influence : and though often assailed by the rude blasts of jealousy and hate, its tender scions were defended by veteran valor ; it was encircled by the patriots' care, and bedewed with the patriots' tears, till its top has reached to the heavens, its roots have struck deep into its genial bed, and its luxurious branches have furnished a protection and a home to millions of the human family.

Associated with the proud recollections which this day calls into exercise, its commemoration is doubly valuable, as it constitutes a common bond of union for the American people.

No matter what political differences may sever us ; no matter how wide the breach in our ways of thinking ; no matter what candidate fills the post of honor or of profit ; to-day, we are citizens of one common country, children perhaps of fathers who fought side by side in the tented field ; brethren of one family, and subjects of the same feelings ; WE ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS. Bearing this title, we entomb dissention, and bury the hatchet of our animosity.

My fellow-citizens, I cannot look back on the past returns of this anniversary, without exulting in the present harmony of feeling that pervades all descriptions of men among us.

That busy intermeddling partizan who fixes his career to the fortunes of his favored candidate, and whose life is a tissue of low intrigue and paltry sycophancy ; that boisterous infatuate, who revels with greedy delight in the confusion his busy and licentious tongue has created, are expiring like the grub-worm in the blissful sunshine that glows around us. The honest man of every party meets his fellow, on the broad and unshaken basis of free, just, equal, and independent rights. We hail this event, as the auspicious harbinger of better days, as the surest pledge of our highest happiness.

The commemoration of this day, brings also with it a renewal of our obligations to our country, to transmit unimpaired to generations yet unborn, the dear, the sacred purchase of our ancestors : we swear to be faithful to her interests, and to bear in her defence the weapons of war. Contemplating our constitution and free form of government, and felicitating ourselves in the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, the soul becomes warmed with fervid enthusiasm, and with a burst of rapture we exclaim, who would not bleed for such a land as this !

“ What pity 'tis that we can die but once to save our country ! ”

In the lapse of time, and amidst the little strife of human things, has the flame of patriotism become almost extinct.— Is avarice, like the canker, eating up our public virtue, and the luxury of wealth, like the voice of the siren, lulling us to

repose? This day quickens us by its return; this day, the love of self is lost in the love of country.

What mind so unfeeling, not to be moved with the recital of his father's valor; what heart so cold not to be excited by the scars of heroic ancestry? Look at him whose mind relaxed by ease and luxurious indulgence, seems to have forgotten the root from whence he sprang; whose spirit unnerved by the habits of a miserable life has made him an unprofitable citizen, and a still worse man. But remind him that he is the son of a war worn veteran, tell him of a father's virtuous heroism, that for this day, he devoted himself a martyr for his country—he resuscitates his inactive powers, he feels his consequence as a citizen and a man; and while he loiters on the description, and ponders on the tale, the soul of the sire is transfused into the bosom of the son, and he lives anew, to be the ornament of his country and the boast of his fellow-citizens.

'Tis from feelings like these, that we this day renew our obligations to our country, and swear to perpetuate the purchase of our ancestors—'Tis thus that we instil the generous principles of freemen into the breasts of the rising generation, and teach them early to be good citizens and good men.

In the commemoration of this day, the mind in fond retrospection is also carried back to trace the progress of our country, from its auspicious dawn to the present moment. I shall not here detail the various changes, which improvements in the internal management of our nation have necessarily created, and recount the various gradations by which

we have arrived at our present stature.—But to omit the mention of the change effected by the late war, would be a poor compliment to our feelings as American citizens.

Laying aside all discussion as to its propriety or expediency, and the objects lost or gained in the issue, and throwing a veil over disasters which are peculiarly the fortune of war; its effects upon our national character will be as permanent as its conquests have been resplendent.

Ere this important crisis, the nations of the old world began to imagine that the fancied want of energy and power in republics, and the inefficiency of the Executive branch of the government, were insufficient and contradictory to a declaration and state of war, and that, should war be declared, a want of co-operation in the people would palsy every effort for its success. True indeed, a state of war is not congenial with the spirit of a republican form of government like ours: but there is an energy and power in the government; there is a virtue and valor in the people.

In reviewing the events of this last struggle, we congratulate ourselves, that we have added confirmation to our character, as emphatically one of the powerful nations of the globe. Our Navy, which seemed to claim for her protection the vigor of riper years, ere she would dare to mount the wave against her enemies, has borne in triumph her gallant sons: she who but a few years since laughed at our stripes and our stars, has seen the Cross of St. George wave beneath them, while her ships have groaned with our shot.—Victory upon victory has taught her, that the native oak of our

mountains, and the sons of our soil, can breast and conquer a Britton's valor and a Britton's boast.

Nor have our efforts on the land redounded less to our honor and our fame. Untutored in the discipline of military life, with no great standing armies to keep alive the spirit of military ambition and subordination, we became conquerors in a day. Chippewa, Niagara, Fort Erie, Sackett's-Harbour and York, will live in our remembrance, and New-Orleans will be the watch-word, that the veterans of Europe, skilled by their choicest generals, may fall before the raw but well directed valor of the West. Europe and the world read with amazement these feats of our prowess, and have given us a reputation of which time can never rob us.

Permit me in this place to observe, that at this day it is no small cause of congratulation, that the Chief Magistrate of our country, reposing in the safety and security of those institutions under which we live, is at this moment seeking in person the welfare of the people over whom he presides.— Where is the Potentate who dare thus leave the centre of his sovereignty, and walk abroad undefended and alone? We challenge a parallel.

In conclusion, I cannot withhold the wish, that every return of this anniversary may give us fresh cause for congratulation, and that the remembrance of this famed era of our history, may be ever cherished, as the proud pinnacle of our greatness, and the bright dawn of our national existence.