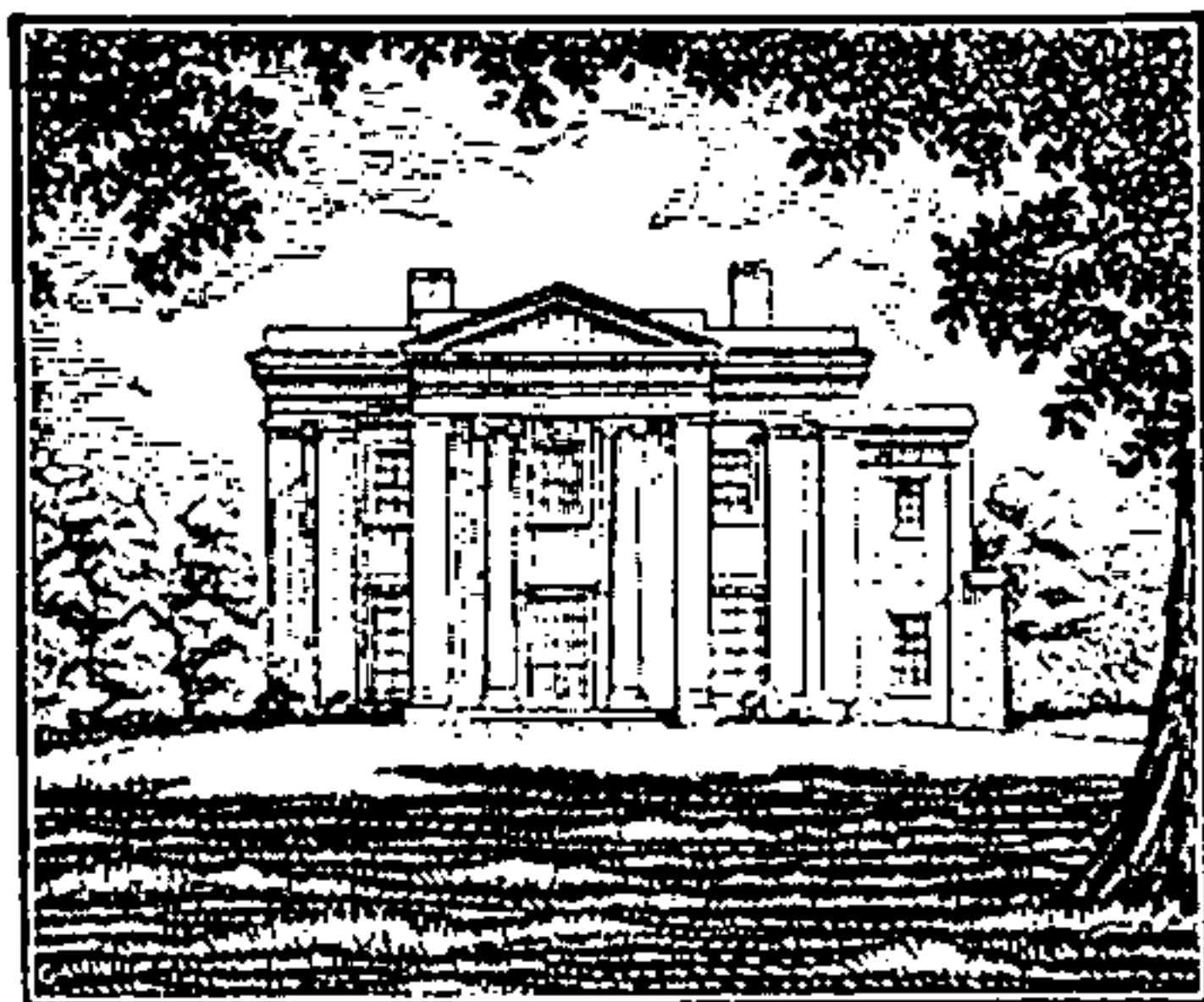


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ORATION,

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IN THE

City of Washington,

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THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1825,

By ASBURY DICKINS.

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ORATION.

IN yielding to the call of my fellow-citizens, whose partiality has assigned to one so humble as myself, the honor of addressing the enlightened auditory of the American Metropolis, on an occasion so solemn as the celebration of the Independence of a great people, and the promulgation of those eternal principles of political truth, on which the freedom and social happiness of man are founded, the apprehension of my own inability has been overcome in the desire to do public homage to my country and to liberty. And, though genius and learning have, here, poured forth rich strains of eloquence in honor of this glorious day, I still cherish the hope, that the devotion of a fervent heart may not be a rejected offering.

In the high ministry to which you have called me, it is not for me, in this year of jubilee, when peace and goodwill should reign in every breast, to revive in you those feelings which our fathers' wrongs produced in their bosoms. Nobly were those wrongs avenged; and generously should they be forgotten. Happily, the occasion offers other, and richer, and more congenial themes; in the blessings which the glorious event that we commemorate, has brought to us and to mankind; in the virtue and courage of the patriots by whom it was achieved; and in grateful joy for what, under the favor of Heaven, we owe to their sacrifices, their toils, and their example.

Whether as a philosopher or as a statesman, it is with a swelling bosom that an American looks back to the origin of the republic of which he is a citizen. Of his high ancestry beyond the seas, the unfading verdure of British fame justly makes him proud. Yet, when he recollects the circumstances under which his forefathers sought to create for themselves a freer country in the wilderness of this new and distant continent, he sees, in their high sense of right, their strong love of liberty, their daring spirit of enterprize, their hardy contempt of suffering and of danger, the elements and the promise of a higher destiny. But it is when he approaches nearer to his own times, that he feels all the glory of the race from which he springs; when he finds his fathers, after resisting with firmness and moderation the encroachments of power upon their rights, casting off, with dignity, the authority under which they had been born and had lived—not because it had lost its force, but because it had forfeited their respect—and then, instead of suffering the social fabric to fall into anarchy, or placing it under the protection of other rulers, calmly investigating the elements of civil society, and the true object of political institutions, establishing for themselves a system of self-government, and identifying the foundation of their state with the promulgation of the eternal principles of political truth.

In honoring, therefore, this glorious epoch, it is not alone the foundation of our republic, great and dear to us as it is, that we now celebrate. We celebrate the triumph of right over force, of patriotism over ambition; we celebrate the liberation of a whole people from political bondage; and we celebrate their still more glorious emancipation from moral thralldom. For what thralldom can be more degrading to the human mind, than the belief that man is incapable of self-government? Man, whom the Deity has formed after his own image, whom he has

placed at the head of the created beings of this world ; whom he has endowed with a soul so lofty, so great, and so incomprehensible, as to be deemed an emanation of the divine essence ; man, who is hereafter to dwell with God in eternity ;—that a being so constituted, whose origin and whose destiny are so noble, even with all the aids derived from the revelation of the divine will, is incapable of self-government ! Monstrous and profane dogma ! If the acquisition of national independence, or the triumph over political oppression, be objects worthy of grateful and proud remembrance, what honors are too great for the epoch of that glorious liberty which restored man to the dignity of his nature ? And, if to have achieved that independence, and that triumph, confer honor and renown, what cause have we not to be proud of our name and our country, since it was by the American people, by our venerated fathers, that glorious liberty was proclaimed and established ; not for our benefit only, but for the benefit of all nations, kindreds, and tongues.

As the foundation of this republic was illustrious, so was the struggle for its establishment glorious. Their battles on the land and on the sea—battles which have immortalized many a hill and plain, many a town and village, many a stream and lake, and honored many a nameless spot on the desert ocean,—battles which have decked the page of history with many a gallant name of heroes who nobly conquered, and of champions who not less nobly perished in the unequal fight,—these have given to our fathers a renown in arms, which the most distant posterity will honor. Nor was their fortitude in suffering less general or less exemplary than their bravery was brilliant. During the many long and gloomy years of the dread contest against their mighty adversary, amidst the slaughter of fathers, husbands, and sons, the desolation of wives and children, the destruction of their dwellings,

the ravaging of their fields ; amidst the poverty and ruin that pervaded the whole land—never was the thought of submission entertained : and, though but a nominal submission would have restored peace and plenty to their homes, every burden was borne, every sacrifice made, every toil encountered, every suffering endured, with a fixed resolution to triumph or to perish ; with a hope in God whether for life or for death. But it was not more in their bravery and fortitude than in the higher moral qualities, that they excelled. Amidst all the dangers and sufferings and death, on the one side, and all the allurements of wealth and power on the other, but a solitary traitor could be found ; no speculator dared to enrich himself from the coffers of his suffering country ; and no selfish ambition appeared, either in the council or in the field, to seek power at the expense of the public liberties. Though civil war called forth those passions which belong peculiarly to itself, the cruelties which have stained the histories of other nations were here unknown : and though society was resolved into its simple elements, no country, where even the wisest laws maintained their fullest authority, ever exhibited fewer crimes. And if in her **WASHINGTON**, greatest of all great names, her **FRANKLIN**, her **HANCOCK**, her **ADAMSES**, her **JEFFERSON**, her **WARREN**, and **GREENE**, and **GATES**, and **MONTGOMERY**, and the whole high host of patriots, heroes, and sages, whose names will live forever in her heart, and in the world's history, she presented to mankind bright examples of greatness ; so, in her citizens, did she exhibit a whole nation, not less worthy by their virtues to share the triumphs than the toils of the illustrious contest.

From such a struggle, in such a cause, and with such a people, there could be but one result. An honorable peace, founded on the acknowledgment of that independence which our fathers had asserted, crowned their

heroic efforts: wise institutions followed; and public prosperity and private happiness are the rich fruits.

Oh! ye Patriots of the Revolution, nobly did you redeem the pledge, which, in the day of peril, and in the fervor of self-devotion, you made, before God and before men, of your lives, your fortunes, and your sacred honor! The toils which you endured, and the freedom which we enjoy, are the proofs that you made no empty pledge. Brave, generous, virtuous spirits, eternal remembrance and eternal gratitude be yours! You it was who gave to us for our inheritance, freedom, country, fame, happiness. You it was who taught to the whole human race, those sublime principles of human rights, which, in their influence upon the well-being of mankind, are inferior only to those sacred truths of religion which the Deity himself hath condescended to reveal. You it was who proved, by your conduct, that freedom is to be gained without subverting social order, without violating the restraints of morality, and without sacrificing the affections and sympathies of our nature. That liberty, these institutions which we enjoy, precious as they be, are not more precious than your example. And dear, ever dear, to us and our children's children, be your memory. Though ye be, now, almost all gone from us, to reap, in a better world, the reward of your good deeds, some few there are, venerated friends, whom heaven still permits to dwell among us: and long, long may they live, to behold the growing prosperity of this happy land, which they made free, and to share in the gratitude which a generous nation cherishes for her founders.

Withdrawing, awhile, from this grateful theme, let us, on this jubilee of human freedom, survey the improved condition of man since the memorable epoch which we this day celebrate. Though the progress of truth and liberty has been often obstructed: though the conflict

which they have maintained against tyranny and error, has sometimes been of doubtful and wavering success, and though, when almost at the moment of victory, a melancholy reverse has sometimes thrown them far behind in the contest, still, throughout the civilized world, the moral and political condition of man has improved. Though no truths can be more certain than those which constitute the peculiar basis of our political system, it is not for me, standing here in the Capitol of a nation, which alike respects the rights of nations and of men, to arraign the systems under which other nations and other men may choose to live. The institutions of a country must be adapted to the condition of the people; when this changes, those change with it. The generous and enlightened spirit of philanthropy which distinguishes the American character, wishes, for every nation, all the happiness of which their condition is susceptible; and, whatever may be their systems of government, it is too just to withhold from any the applause that may be due.

Looking abroad, then, in this spirit, we see in Europe that proud nation from whom we descended—a nation famed in arts, in arms, and in empire, yet owing her greatness most to the freedom of her people—still leading in the career of political improvement. Imbued with the light of the age, and profiting, as all enlightened nations must profit, by the memorable example which our prosperity affords of the transcendant influence of liberty upon the well-being of states, she tempers with its spirit those institutions which have descended to her from feudal times. The sanguinary maxims of her penal code, which the benevolence of her people had long refused to execute, are gradually abrogated. The restraints which have so long fettered the industry and enterprize of her subjects, she is now removing. But she owes it to their patriotism, to her own honor, and to the spirit of

the times, to take from their conscience those bonds which will not permit them to serve their country without sacrificing their religious faith. If, under her authority, deeds are sometimes done, at which the genius of her fame drops a tear; if her government is sometimes betrayed into measures adverse to liberty, or sometimes turns a deaf ear to the cries of suffering humanity; yet her generous people are never slow to regret wrongs done in her name, and they are among the first to sympathise with the oppressed and distressed in every quarter of the globe: and the crown itself, yielding to the liberal sentiments which pervade the nation, has readily followed our own example, in acknowledging the new republics of America.

In France, that nation, who, from her early friendship, and from the munificent aid which she afforded to us in our time of need, will always hold a place in our affections—that nation, who, from her natural policy, as well as from the feelings of her inhabitants, will always be our friend—that nation in whose reverses and in whose glory we shall always sympathise—how different is the political condition of the people! A constitutional government, in which the principle of popular representation is one of the great elements, exercises its sway under the salutary influence of an enlightened public opinion; justice is administered under a wise and mild code; the trial by jury has taken place of the *lettres de cachet*; religious liberty is secured; the avenues to public honors are thrown open to every class; and vassalage is obliterated in the rights given by the charter and the laws to all the French people. If, to our eyes, her rulers seem to guard the powers of the government with too many restraints upon the people; if, frightened by the excesses which have been committed in the name of the rights of man, they seek to confine his conduct to the practice of his duties, some apology may perhaps be found in the recollection of the

past. But, whatever may be the errors of her present system, they will yield, as, among enlightened nations all errors yield, to the instructions of experience.

In Russia, which, from her vast power, enjoys a prominent place in the affairs of the world, and which, from the good will that she has always manifested towards us, claims our best wishes, the progress of knowledge prepares the way for liberal institutions. The mighty Autocrat who controls her destinies, while he guards with a watchful eye and firm hand, the interests of the throne, dispenses among his subjects, according to their wants and capacity, in the form of imperial edicts, many a solid and wholesome improvement. By slow degrees, he assimilates his system to those of more enlightened nations. In the abolition of servitude on the estates of the crown, and the application of his revenue to purchase liberty for the serfs of his nobles; in the total abolition of torture; in the suppression of the secret council of inquisition, and the establishment of the Senate; he inspired the early hope that humanity would owe much to his reign: and even at this late period, so great is his power, that, if, leaving to other princes the adjustment of the relations between them and their subjects, and listening only to the benevolence of his own heart, he would devote himself to the happiness of his vast empire, he might still realize the hopes of his early friends, who, desirous only of his true greatness, wished to see the great conqueror's renown eclipsed in the higher glory of the benefactor.

In Portugal, where the spirit of freedom has been kindled in the struggle against foreign domination, the people look with confidence for the fulfilment of the promise made to them by their King, of a National Cortes. In Switzerland, they still preserve, with their simple manners, their Republican feelings. In the Netherlands,

where the Government has changed only in name, a constitutional system exists, along with a practical acquaintance with the principles of freedom. In Sweden, the new sovereign repays, by attention to the interests of his kingdom, the confidence which she manifested by his selection. In Denmark, under a government despotic in form, the subject is freed from oppression by the mild and pacific character of its policy. In all these States, the general progress of improvement is manifested in the ameliorated condition of the people and the laws.

In some of the States of Germany, which, at the epoch of our Independence, were despotic principalities, constitutional governments exercise their paternal influence : In others, though promised in the day of royal need, they are still withheld. But, even the promise of free institutions is a triumph to liberty—since it is an acknowledgment of the rights of man. Though by the inferior boon of good laws some governments seek to reconcile their people to the privation of that freedom which is their natural right, let us hope that it will not be delayed too long for their own welfare, or for the repose of the world. The light has gone forth ; the hopes of people, and the alarm of despots, show that its influence is felt, where it ought to be felt. And, if there be an alliance for maintaining the rights of kings, it is but a tribute to the power of freedom, and an evidence of the progress of truth. It will be in vain for such an alliance, if indeed such an alliance exists, to attempt to grasp in their own hands the power of withholding or dispensing those rights which the people seek, and which, sooner or later, they must obtain. To stifle truth—to destroy liberty—thanks to our own free institutions, and to the power of the press, is now impossible. Men, now, know both their own rights, and the rights of those who govern. And, if the peace of nations be dear to such an alliance ; if their own tranquillity, and the welfare of their people,

be precious to them, let them seek, as the best means of securing all, not to break down and destroy the spirit of truth and liberty, by chains, and by the sword, but, by wise and free institutions, to foster and to lead it to its only legitimate object, social happiness.

Though in Spain and in Italy—Spain, the discoverer of this new world—Spain, our early friend ; and Italy, the preserver of letters, amidst the darkness of barbarism—their former glories be now dimmed ; and though bondage and exile, pain and want, ignominy and death, are the hard rewards of many a gallant spirit who struggled in their cause,—still the struggle has not been altogether vain. The vestal flame of truth and liberty is still kept bright and pure on the altar of many a patriot heart ; and, even in distant lands, many a fervent wish is offered up, that its benign light may soon beam forth, and illumine their fertile regions.

Extending our view, it is in Greece that the soul-stirring prospect is presented, of a people rising in the majesty of their strength, and resolving to live free or die. Greece, the ancient land of patriots, heroes, and sages, the Muses' birth-place, the Graces' home, and of Genius the resplendent dwelling. Awakened, at last, from the moral and intellectual lethargy, under which for ages she has lain prostrate, the pity of the free, and the scorn of the oppressor, with the consciousness of her degradation has returned the memory of her former glory. On her mountains, amidst the ruins of her temples, in her sacred groves, and on her sea-beaten shores, has the voice of liberty resounded. From her fields, more prolific than in the fabled days of her origin, have sprung up bands of soldiers ; and her seas, not less fertile in the means of her deliverance, have brought forth armed ships. Wherever her enemy appears, he meets her victorious defenders. With the spirit and the energy of her heroic ancestors, proudly does she bear herself in the contest.

Though it is under the sacred banner of the Cross that she fights for liberty and for knowledge, still no free, no civilized, no Christian nation, aids in the holy struggle. Yet, alone, but self-sustained, thus far, in victorious splendor, she has waged the unequal war against her mighty foe, her blood-stained oppressor. And, if there be virtue in the prayers of the free, the brave, and the good, who, in every clime, and in every nation, her name, her cause, and her sufferings, have made her friends,—liberty, peace, and happiness, will soon crown her glorious efforts.

From the anxious contemplation of a people struggling to be free, we look with joy to a whole family of nations, which, in this new world, have passed through long and great tribulation, from enslaved and dependent colonies, to sovereign and free states. There, throughout a vast region, which, a few years ago, was shrouded in more than barbaric darkness, and over a numerous people, whose degraded condition the philosopher contemplated with dismay, and the philanthropist in sorrow, light and liberty are now enjoyed, and whole nations of freemen now dwell. Of these, Colombia, Mexico, Guatimala, Buenos Ayres, Chili, and Peru, all following the example given to them by our fathers on the great day which we here celebrate, have adopted, also, their political faith: Republicans in name and in principle, they have founded their social system on the rights of man, and now enjoy the glorious privilege of self-government. Brazil, though preferring the form of the political institutions of Europe, under a constitutional government, is, nevertheless, united in the great policy which directs the course of the American nations—justice and peace. It is in this American family, of which it is our pride to be the oldest member, that, whatever may betide the old world, the elements of rational liberty will be preserved to mankind; it is by their joint wisdom that the princi-

ples which should govern nations, in their conduct towards each other, whether in peace or war, will be established; it is over their vast territories, where liberty reigns, that knowledge will diffuse her benign influence. What event could be more worthy to mark this jubilee of American liberty, than the enfranchisement of so many American nations; and it requires no spirit of prophecy, to predict that, before another jubilee rolls round, the whole American hemisphere will be a land of freemen.

In this hasty sketch of the improved condition of the world, we are brought at length near home. But, before we turn our eyes to the gay scene which our own prosperity affords, let us not, on this occasion, overlook the other benefits which mankind has derived from the progress of truth—in the wide diffusion of the mild precepts of Christianity; in the abolition of the slave trade; in the termination of Christian captivity among the rovers of Barbary; in the revival of industry in Egypt; in the foundation of flourishing colonies, from which civilization is to be spread through Australasia, Polynesia, and even Africa itself; and, though last, not least, in the extension and improvement of the useful and polite arts, of literature and of science.

Come we now to our own home; to this dear and cherished spot, from which, liberal as you are, I feel that I have too long detained you. It is here, in this favorite abode of truth and liberty, in this land of peace, gladness, and plenty, that, by the favor of Heaven, the true results are to be seen of that glorious event which we this day commemorate. Our little, neglected colony, changed to a mighty republic; our limits extended from ocean to ocean; our few hardy peasantry grown up into a numerous nation, rivalling the world in every art and every pursuit to which the diversified genius of man is directed, and, though loving peace, feeling, in the results of two

wars, no other regrets than for the brave men who fell in their country's cause ; a nation rich in honor, that safeguard of liberty and virtue, rich in the patriotism and valor of her citizens, rich in their enterprise, their industry, their knowledge, and their genius. Though the pure manners and upright feelings of our fathers left but little room for improvement in moral conduct, yet, in all else that gives charms to social life, and prosperity to nations, how have we surpassed the most sanguine dreams of enthusiasm ! Where, then, the prowling savage placed his solitary hut, populous cities now raise their stately piles ; towns and villages now occupy the ground where then were the dens of the panther and the bear ; golden fields and ruddy orchards have supplanted the primeval forests ; roads and canals now pass over wilds through which the Indian had not then ventured to make his hunting path ; and over rivers which were then unknown, the steamboat, man's proud triumph over nature, transports in safety the varied riches of every clime, in return for the superabundant products which industry now gathers from what were then but inaccessible wildernesses. On every sea our commerce spreads its flowing sail ; and on every sea rides our proud navy, protecting by its renown not less than by its power, the wealth and the people which American enterprize spreads over the vast expanse of waters. Our coasts, no longer inviting aggression by their defencelessness, are guarded by batteries that defy attack : and, as a monument emblematic of all our improvements, this vast and magnificent edifice, where then stood the rugged oak, now rears its lofty dome among the clouds, displaying for future ages the patriotic munificence with which a free, powerful, and polished people honors the seat of its national councils.

Nor is the happy condition of our country more worthy of admiration than the benevolent spirit which

pervades her policy. Unambitious of conquest, she calmly pursues her own happiness, without disturbing the repose of others. What she needs of others she repays by ample equivalents. Wrongs she inflicts on none; preferring, in every doubtful case, rather to suffer than to injure: and, for her own wrongs, seeking justice first by reason and persuasion. Though, when at last, safety and honor compel her to strike, dreadful is she in the hour of retribution. Yet, even then, she seeks not vengeance. Though the strength and bravery of her arms would make her revenge terrible, yet her wars are but a last appeal for justice; and, if she seeks victory, it is only to maintain, by the sword, those rights which could not be sustained by reason. But, though pacific in her wishes, and moderate in her character, she has, in the only two wars that her short history contains—one for her liberty, the other for her rights—established for herself a renown in arms surpassed only by her fame in peace. The achievements of those wars are too well known to require a recapitulation. They form part of the moral wealth of each citizen among us; they are the gems which he treasures up in the casket of his memory; and which, on the gala days of his country's glory, beam with all their refulgence on his breast. From Lexington and Bunker's Hill to York, in the first war; and, in the second war, from the capture of the *Guerriere*, on one ocean, to the capture of the *Penguin* on the other; from Chippewa, in the North, to New Orleans, in the South; over land and over sea, wherever a foe was to be met, there shone the glory of her arms. Yet, it is not in war, though there so glorious, that she places her chief glory: It is in the happiness and in the affections of her people, and in doing to all nations as she would have all nations do to her.

Time is wanting to exhibit all the features of that benign policy which she is striving to introduce into the laws, and into the conduct of nations. Of these, among which the abolition of the slave trade ranks first in importance, her statutes and her treaties are the best record. Her internal policy bears the same benignant impress. A government, whose power is never felt by her citizens, but when stretched forth for their service or protection; a people relieved from taxation; great portions of the national domains set apart for the support of education; large sums applied from the public revenue to the opening of roads and construction of canals; and the national munificence shown, not in monuments of pomp and splendor, but, in providing for the old age of those who bore arms in the sacred war of her Revolution, and in restoring to affluence the brave and good man who risked more than affluence in her cause, and who, by his devotion to liberty in the new world and in the old, has lost all but his own virtue and the gratitude of the free. With all this, she is surrounding herself with ample means of security on both elements; and, instead of raising great armies to endanger her own or other nations' tranquillity, preserving military knowledge in her schools and her garrisons; and, for her chief safety, trusting, as she has most gloriously trusted before, and as the martial and patriotic ardor which now manifests itself among her youth, assures her she may securely trust again, to the only true defence of republics—arms in the hands of freemen.

These, Oh! Liberty, are thy works! These are the fruits of thy benignant influence! Here, on the great day which we commemorate, was thy reign proclaimed. Here, alone, thy starry banner, planted by thy hand on our soil, waves over peace, virtue, freedom, and happiness. It is here only that thy true attributes are known to man. If,

in other times, and in other lands, the mists of ignorance or passion obscured the benignity of thy features; if the brightness of thy eyes, sparkling only with innocence and joy, seemed to thy too zealous votaries the glare of passion; and if, in the olive branch which graced thy hand, they saw only the lighted torch, here hast thou revealed thyself in all thy charms, and in all the mild radiance of thy full glory. Here mayst thou ever dwell; in the hearts of this people mayst thou ever find pure and fervent altars.

But, in the midst of our joy and of our hopes, let us not forget, that, on the Union which binds us together as one people, and on that national feeling which connects this whole people in their affections, both our freedom and our peace depend; that it is the diffusion of knowledge alone, that can preserve and perfect our social and political institutions; and that, without virtue, liberty itself ceases to be a blessing.

These sacred objects then, let us cherish. Here, in this, the chosen temple of patriotism and freedom, and on this, their glorious jubilee, while our bosoms are warmed with the consciousness of the blessings which we enjoy through the virtue, wisdom, and courage of our fathers; let us remember our solemn duty, to transmit them improved to our children.

Here, too, in this Hall, where the Representatives of a free people make laws to perpetuate freedom, and to extend their country's happiness, and where are now assembled to do homage at their common shrine—the Chief Magistrate of the nation; the dispensers and executors of the laws; the venerable patriots of the Revolution; the gallant men, who, by their exploits in the war just waged for our rights and honor, have raised for their country and for themselves, an imperishable renown; the martial bands, who have voluntarily enrolled themselves

for the first dangers of future wars ; the reverend ministers of religion ; the dear and beautiful beings, who give to life its sweetest charm ; the ingenuous youth, who form their country's hope ; and this great company of free, enlightened and happy citizens—here, let us all unite in devotion to their common good. It is here that foreign nations, whose respect we prize, and whose goodwill we cherish, witness, by their worthy representatives, the sincerity of our patriotism and the liberal spirit which tempers it. And, if it be permitted to the spirits of the just to revisit the earth, it is here, also, that the shades of our patriots and heroes—whether their mortal remains still slumber on the fields where, for their country's weal, they made the fervent offering of their lives ; or, whether they lie buried in the great deep, under that flag whose stars are emblems of the immortality which awaits its defenders ; or whether in the silent grave they rest after their mortal toils were done ;—it is here, in this consecrated spot, in the centre of that nation which they founded, and on this solemn occasion, that they would be assembled. And if, as our fond fancy dreams, Oh venerated manes, in this space ye be now present, invisible to human sight, you would we invoke to witness our devotion, while, within these lofty walls, which, defying the ravages of time, will be seen in many an after age, and now stand here as witnesses for posterity, we offer up our pious vows for liberty and for our country—imploping, in humble reverence, the favor of the Supreme Being upon their sacred cause.