

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED

AT MR. HARVEY'S, SPRING GARDEN,

BEFORE

A VERY NUMEROUS MEETING OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS,

July 4, 1812,

BY CHARLES J. INGERSOLL, Esq.

[Published at the request of the meeting.]

PHILADELPHIA :

PRINTED BY JOHN BINNS, NO. 70, CHESNUT STREET.

.....

1812.

AN ORATION,

DELIVERED AT MR. HARVEY'S, SPRING GARDEN, BEFORE A VERY NUMEROUS
MEETING OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS, JULY 4, 1812,

BY CHARLES J. INGERSOLL, ESQ.

ON this anniversary, fellow citizens, it has been usual, as it is natural, to recur to the celebrated events of the American Revolution—an era altogether unexampled in the history of nations—when man appeared with a supernatural lustre—with greater courage, constancy and clemency, with less ferocity, selfishness or instability—in purer singleness of heart—in a more devoted immolation of himself on that altar which is next in dignity to the altar of the Most High—I mean the shrine of patriotism—than the proudest periods of former renown can parallel. The revolutions of ancient Greece and Rome, of modern Italy, England and France, have broken out in tumult, proceeded in bloodshed, and subsided in despotism. It remained for the inhabitants of this new world—exiles from the moral and personal subjection of the old—displaying principles as unknown and enviable as the hemisphere they reclaimed for a habitation, to afford the only instance ever annalized of a revolution decreed and begun with congressional deliberation, conducted without mobs, massacres or popular commotion, terminating in organized freedom and the most perfect polity of republicanism. All other revolutions have been the issue of violent and sanguinary efforts: ours was the legitimate offspring of innate love of liberty and perseverance.

But it is not my purpose to call up the ineffable recollections of the times that tried men's souls; nor to bespeak your notice of the actual crisis of our affairs. Whenever I reflect on the destinies of this country, my mind is irresistibly carried forward from the past and the present, glorious and pleasant as they are, to the refulgent anticipations which illuminate the future:—And I propose for the few moments I shall occupy your patience, to turn from the retrospect, to lose sight of what is, and to trace a superficial sketch of what, no doubt, will be the illustrious hereafter.

We are now on the threshold of war with one of the most powerful kingdoms of Europe; the only one that can make us feel the rigors of hostilities—for abjured be the contemptible political superstition which professes that our safeguard from the invasion of one European power lies in the naval bulwarks of that other we are now to fight against. We are equal to our own protection. The conjuncture is by many deemed awful. For myself I am free to declare that I can see no cause to fear the result. Our national adolescence is too vigorous, our capacities are too abundant, our cause is too just, to leave any room for apprehension; and unequal as the struggle may appear, I feel the same confidence in our triumph that a persecuted Christian, wrestling with the wrongs of mankind, but never doubting of the Deity, reposes in his final redemption—I cannot despair of justice and the republic—and if this faith in my country be fallacious, may I expire before I wake from the delusion! No, fellow citizens, from the threshold of war, over which the people of these United States have so long been bent, deprecating its evils, but resolved to endure them, should they prove at last the lowest price

of peace, that high spirited and martial people shall rush into the theatre of combat—inflict innumerable, incurable, wounds on the desperate prize-fighter, whose insatiate sword has so long flashed insult in their sight—and, after humbling his sordid arrogance, return once more to the benevolent avocations of their livelihood—the vices of their prosperity chastened, their native virtues corroborated, their character restored, their tranquility secured, the freest, happiest, most enlightened, most united, only independent, people on the earth. It is to such a time, to the supposable termination of the conflict just entered upon, that I wish to advance your view.

You will permit me then to suppose that a sharp, short, successful war has been waged—some hundred of our privateers have scoured the sea of every rag of British commerce—our gallant little navy has bathed its laurels in the fresh cerulean, contending like the band at Thermopylae against the myriads of the modern Xerxes—the Canadas wrested from the foe, and perhaps some other of his piratical haunts in our neighborhood invaded and dismantled—though many a noble soul be yielded up to the God of battles, yet many more survive the rough exploits of triumphant warfare, to ungird their immortalized swords, and hang them on the obelisks a grateful nation consecrates to the sweet memories of their comrades, who died sword in hand fighting for their country—and finally an honorable peace is the consummation of American achievements. The same constitutional intrepidity, enterprise and resource which have distinguished the inhabitants of North America in every stage of their existence—which effected their independence in earliest infancy—when even the dream of sovereignty had not yet troubled the slavish slumbers of their sister colonies of the southern continent, which, when the ocean was, even partially free, propelled them, in ten years, from the last to the first rank in the race of commercial competition—and, when the ocean was enslaved, and they retired behind their restrictions, advanced them, in three years, from a state of manufacturing helplessness to a very respectable manufacturing competency, together with an amazing excellence of internal improvements, both by water and land—concentrated upon the exigencies of belligerent operation, must produce similar results in that department, and convince an infatuated world that navies and armies, though never so gigantic, can no more turn the irresistible current, of population, exuberance and right, than, in the language of the Latin poet, nature can be expelled with a yeoman's fork.

I might fix my speculations so near as the year 1820, when—as the manly propensities of the American people are to be no longer confined, like hidden fires, to consume their own entrails, but kindled and directed against foreign aggression—I am confident that a part of the vision of their prosperity will have been realized: but as my legend is quite prospective, I beg leave to premise it of the middle of this century—an epoch, distant enough to fulfill all the objects of the proposed anticipation, and yet not so remote but that some of this assembly may calculate on living to witness it—though it is probable that before then the great majority of us will have been gathered to the grave. At all events our children may enjoy the vigor of manhood and this golden age together. What an inheritance to accrue from the beggarly appanage so lately cast on our forefathers! What an august and imposing affluence of national happiness, power and virtue!

Figure to yourselves the overcrawing belligerents, whose inroads have reached the innermost recesses of the decrepid east, and disturbed the transatlantic seats of our sequestration in the athletic west—fatigued with destruction—impoverished of annoyance—their colossal nerves overstrained and unstrung—their enormous fragments pros-

trate and palpitating on the ravaged globe. Inordinate ambition, impressments, conscriptions, perpetual wars—as fatal as occasional wars are salutary—intolerable exactions and depopulation have piled on themselves that subjugation they in vain strove to fasten on each other—every remnant of man's immunities exterminated—not a glimmering of liberty to be seen, even at intervals, to relieve the total darkness of despotic misrule: The maritime supremacy of the one undermined by penury, mutiny, desertion and disaster, the victim of its own rapacity, sunk to mere mischievous piracy and algerine freebooting—and in all the bitterness of despondent debility, Great Britain repenting the gnarledness of her sway: The continental usurpation of the other crumbled into a thousand military feuds, with the harshest features, the sullen pomp, barbarian oppression, and everlasting strife, without the chivalric comity or the blandishments of the sixteenth century—where the dazzling pageant of despotism now glares on his satraps, the melancholy druid re-appearing in the midst of desolation, and repeating the plaintive story of what gay and imperial France so lately was. Figure this to yourselves, fellow citizens, and you have some idea of the consequences of that unnatural conflict, which has unhinged and distracted a whole world, that it may the more certainly effectuate the ruin of its antagonist.

2 Now turn from this inhuman picture to that to be exhibited where freedom and tranquility have founded their last assylum. Suppose the just quarrel we have pledged ourselves to maintain in arms crowned with the success inseparable from such a cause as ours. Suppose a peace—inexorable to diplomacy—capitulated to famine and the sword, and that with re-invigorated impetus, appetite and alacrity the people of the United States, have returned to the harmless paths of their advancement—their numbers dilated by the miraculous multiplication incidental to their position, and augmented with increased migrations from the miseries of exhausted Europe—the luxury of liberty theirs—theirs every variety of every climate—every fruit of every field, every product of every sea, every creation of ingenuity, with their incomparable facilities of cultivating to incalculable advantage the correlative interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce. Suppose them arrived at the year 1850—a population of thirty millions spread over this vast empire, from the shores of Superior to the mouths of the Mississippi—imbued with the various shades of character which some diversity of origin and great difference of climate will create, but all mainly alike, speaking one and the same language, alive to the same national sympathies, with those provincial and local prepossessions to be sure, that are not only inevitable, but even necessary to an ardent love of country, but acknowledging one government, represented in the same Congress, and thro' the electric medium of a free press, in the daily interchange of similar thoughts and opinions.

It is impossible, under Providence, but that this continent must be very soon more happily and better peopled than any other section of the globe: and nothing but their own madness can prevent this people being one nation. War may repel injustice and establish sovereignty; but nature has taken charge of the greatness of this country which must grow till nature herself shall be exhausted. It is here we shall find our safety and our retribution and our grandeur. The sons of our wrong doers will have scarcely succeeded to the languid sceptres of their fathers, before American power will be as terrible as American faith will be proverbial: and for the aggressions now received from Europe, our sons will make return to theirs in magnanimous commiseration and protection and support.

3 We have already supposed the Canadas added to our confederacy. Quebec, the northern capital, receives and delivers the treasures, which the romantic St. Lawrence,

contending the general current of North American rivers, bears eastward on his grand and rapid bosom to those central regions, where big with the floods of unfathomable lakes, he empties his capacious urn into the ocean. Deep in the Northwest the prodigious lakes are bordered with thriving settlements. Down the whole extent of dominion washed by the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Missouri and their tributary streams, turbid with the fatness of the land, the prolific wilderness blooms with cultivation and fertility. An improvement accomplished in the application of steam engines to river boats, which, with the discovery of the quadrant, is due to the genius of America, and which in importance rival the compass itself, brings our immense internal navigation into insatiable usefulness, connects the fiftieth, by easy, rapid and economical stages, with the thirtieth degree of latitude, Davis' sea with the Gulf of Mexico; and with the reinforcement of some few artificial canals, opens an astonishing concatenation of interior trade from Quebec to New Orleans, the northern and southern keys. The only molester of these enjoyments, the untutored savage, with the implement of havoc in his hand—himself too long an implement of havoc, in the hands of insidious foes—won by paternal solicitude within the pale of social being, consents to blend and be happy with the Americans. Nor is there any longer a border foe, more fell than the savage of the desert, to excite his atrocity and embroil our frontiers: but throughout those unexplored western territories, where the most flourishing settlements have begun the progress of their community, with the least portion of the despicable foreign prejudices that infest some of our states, and the truest spirit of enlarged American patriotism, all is felicity and emulation.

The Atlantic coast is copartner in these ultra-montane benefactions:—Instead of the confined foreign commerce, to which monopoly has reduced their exports, dealing in the unrestricted traffic of all quarters of the world—integrity and enterprise conveying their ventures abroad—wealth and quiet their freight homeward. The entire continent of Europe is thrown open to their intercourse—Asia, Africa and South America exchange for their superfluities. To the inexhaustible staples the United States now possess, almost exclusively, in their flour, corn, rice, cotton, lumber and tobacco, hemp and wool are superadded with the emoluments of the unrivalled manufactures, which must attend such a power of staples. The golden fleece of Castile, whose transportation hither is emblematical of the general causes and course of European migration to America, driven from the sacked and desolated domains of his nativity, and in vain attempted to be revived on the bleak and misty heaths of England, finds on this side of the Atlantic unbounded pastures, and a congenial Sun. The arts and sciences, the refinements and elegancies of society must flourish—the supports of life, labor, sustenance and habitation must continue to be universal—the intellectual republic must be munificently endowed—for tho' kingdoms elsewhere, letters and talents will continue to be republican, because attributes common to all here—and morals must be exemplary, where education and employment are at the command of all.

With these advantages of nature and of art, the moral affections will keep pace in exaltation: Religion without intolerance, and patriotism without foreign partiality or prejudice. Above all, those miserable predispositions for European authority, which constitute the only unqualified, and most pernicious, baseness in the American character, eradicated from all hearts, and replaced by that high toned attachment to our country to which it is entitled. The Hindoo in his damp and sultry hut, with a pittance of rice to subsist on, deploras as the last of misfortunes a degradation from his cast, and clings to his native land as the first of blessings. The wretched Greek,

lurking among the monuments of antiquity, unconscious of their fascination, and anxious only to escape the thong of his Turkish task-master, mingles with his daily groans the epic glories of Athens, and aspirations for his country. The clansman of the extreme Hebrides, suspended half way down a frightful precipice on the beach of a tempest-tost ocean, hunting the nests of birds for his food, beguiles the perils of his suspense with the song and the narrative dedicated to Scottish nationality. It is here, and here only, where the God of Nature seems to have opened his bountiful hand without reserve, and all his works are on a scale of unexampled magnificence and fruition, that man, tamely imbibing the absurd and ignorant calumnies of European jealousy, libels his maker and rebukes himself, in the belief that he alone is disproportioned to the scene of his location—putting faith in the assertion of the old world, which Asia applied to Europe as Europe does to America, that man is a superior being there, and submitting to be the admirer and imitator of preposterous littleness and time-sanctioned error. But this cloud of our dawn, which proceeds, with our late rising, from the east, shall be dispersed and disappear before the full orb'd sun of meridian radiance; and the citizens of the U. States learn more gratefully to appreciate their advantages.

I have laid my premises on the supposition—let me add, on the hope, that the war just begun, will not be of long duration, for devoutly do I trust that its afflictions may soon cease even as regards our enemies. Not because I fear their injury as unnerved peace has taught too many of our fellow countrymen to apprehend; but because continued warfare might endanger the purity of our republican institutions. Such, however, are the peculiar local immunities of these U. States, that even perpetual hostilities with Europe would not materially, if at all, protract or prevent the national greatness to which they are destined. Beleaguered as the American shores are by the broad and deep Atlantic moat, over which no enemy can pass in sufficient force to overcome us, and dependant as Europe is on our supplies, we may always wage a war like a peace, or maintain a peace like a war with considerable hostile pressure on an enemy, and without detriment to ourselves.

The tide of population must continue to flow on at that incredible rate which has hitherto marked its progress here; and flow as fast as it may, this teeming continent will still hold out delightful provinces inviting habitation. While population thus multiplies without overstocking the land, prosperity must attend its course as certainly as light follows the sun; and let the tempest rage without, we have all the means of happiness and power within.

Whether the federal union in which these states are now compacted, will endure such expansions of prosperity, I will not presume to foretell; though I believe that, if an independent and undeviating system of general policy be pursued, in which the agricultural, manufacturing and commercial influence shall be duly mixed and administered, the government under which we were arranged by the existing constitution, may with certain modifications sustain the shocks and swells of successive years, till the usual results of over-done good fortune are visited in its dismemberment at a time when dismemberment will be scarcely an evil. But one and the same language, one and the same devotion to liberty and republicanism, universal education, and dependant local interests are stronger ties than ever bound together any other federation.—There is indeed no precedent, no historical example, from which our fate may be divined: and the political wisdom of legislators is almost inapplicable to our situation. It is not the least interesting reflection on the course of the American republic, that it is an experiment on the virtues of humanity. If it fail, the world's hopes in freedom

must fail too. If it succeed, liberty and liberality will become the laws of nations—the super-annuated east receive instruction from the adolescent west, and under the auspices of republicanism and toleration, the world regenerate and live anew.

After thirty years of fat, fastidious peace, the conjuncture has overtaken us when our institutions are to be put to their first great test. Peace is the chief of national blessings: War, at all times to be deprecated, the most abominable of national crimes, if waged for any other end than peace. But nations are as inevitably liable to wars as individuals are to diseases and death. Instead of being appalled then let us brace our nerves, and rejoice at the trial which is a second time to measure our strength with the disjointed force of British power, and the more to be dreaded column of British influence. The war of the American revolution was said by one of its principal supporters to be a bold speculation; and perhaps the present conflict is not less so: but in danger and in doubt to be bold is always the best policy. The duration of this war will depend mainly upon the manner in which it is carried on. It will last, if it languish. It will soon end, if vigorously prosecuted. The republican march to battle has been slow, and with a solemn cautious step: but there is something, even in this calm, that indicates the storm to follow. We behold elsewhere, nations goaded reluctantly into hostilities with each other, to gratify the private passions and aggrandizement of the tyrants, and their vicegerents, who rule over them. Here it is an outraged and indignant people leading forth their government from neutrality to arms. The patience of the brave is long-suffering, but terrible when roused into action. “Troops ready, an exchequer full vivacity of disposition, ambition, interest, a wish to be talked of, determined me, said the famous Frederick, king of Prussia, to carry the war into Silesia.” How different such motives to that the American republic has declared! Just as different as deliberate and conscientious republicanism, from ambitious and vain-glorious despotism. Let what will be said of the tardiness & inefficiency of our preparation, a more interesting, a more animating spectacle has never been presented, than the prelude and onset of the present struggle.—The whole population of a free empire, scattered over an immense range of territory, springing from the ease and enjoyments of profound relaxation, to grasp the rusted sword, and brighten it in the blood of their aggressors—their phalanxes filled with voluntary levies, studded here and there with a relict of the revolution, like well known stars in the firmament, to guide and reflect its general brilliancy. The organ of legislation has scarcely announced the last appeal, ere the cannon’s intonations have poured its report into the strong holds of the foe. A little flotilla of three frigates and two sloops launch into the bosom of the deep—fearful only of not encountering some of the innumerable squadrons which have chased every other combatant from that deep, they have conquered into a very province of Great Britain. Already Fellow-Citizens, before a fortnight has elapsed since the enactment of war, it is flagrant in all quarters of the continent. This day, this birth day of American independence shall be illuminated by the blaze of American valor;—Regions, thousands of miles asunder bear witness this day to the flushing of the battle axe of freedom—marking its re-appearance in memorable characters. While we are here assembled to pledge the righteous cause in festivity and frankheartedness—the clarion is hoarse, and the fire-arms are heated with the reiterated blast of war. Let us mingle with our libations, prayers for the success of those on whom the conflict devolves. May the Lord of Hosts pour into their hearts the unction of patriotism—give them, by night, dreams of glory—and glorious deeds by day.—May those who survive, live honored to a venerable age, to prove that republics are not ungrateful—and may those who fall be received in Heaven, arrayed in that purple, which puts the purple of royalty to shame, the crimson purple of life flowing for liberty and country.