

AN

ORATION

PRONOUNCED IN CLARKSBURG, ON THE

FOURTH DAY OF JULY, 1812, AND

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE:

BY

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GEN. JOHN G. JACKSON.

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CLARKSBURG, VIRGINIA,

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1812.

Oration.

ELLOW CITIZENS,

ANOTHER revolution of the seasons has added one more year to the glorious independence of this nation, which we again unite in commemorating, and of which this day is the anniversary.—The spectacle of a free people increasing in greatness as they increase in numbers, assembled together by one common impulse in every portion of this wide expanded hemisphere, and with hearts grateful to the Supreme Governor of nations for the benedictions bestowed upon them; offering up their prayers upon the altar of Liberty, that Heaven will preserve it to them, and swearing by the Most High that they will guard its holy fires with vestal vigilance, or perish with its expiring flames—presents a scene which the freeman of the present age will continue to contemplate with holy rapture; and the philosopher of after times will delight to dwell upon, as the proudest era of manly virtue and moral perfectability.

The minions of despots in the past and present age have collected together to celebrate the birth days of the tyrants and conquerors who enslaved them.—Oppressed humanity mourns for their fallen state, and exiled from the fertile plains of Europe, where liberty once delighted to dwell, when Aristides and Timoleon and Cato and Leonidas were its proudest champions, flies to the new World—to the land where the rights of man have been consecrated by the blood of WOOSTER, WARREN, MERCER and MONTGOMERY; and the departed FRANKLIN and ADAMS and HANCOCK and WASHINGTON by their labors in the cabinet and in the field, have acquired immortality; and here, as the only resting place upon the face of the earth, has taken up her abode—Here, where the elastic force of mans recuperative energies has burst the chains that enslaved him, and where a great, free, powerful and independent nation of freemen, prompted by no unworthy impulse, hail the birth day of their emancipation with a pure and holy enthusiasm!—She beholds with delight the noble contrast worthy of the great cause we espouse and worthy of ourselves as men—and pointing to our example invites them to imitate it, and intreats us to hand down the rich heritage bequeathed to us by our fathers, and purchased by their valor and their blood to our children, that they may to theirs, and in succession to the remotest ages.

If there ever was a period since the national independence requiring more than any other a strict recurrence to the causes that produced it; a minute examination of the events which have grown out of it; a comparison of our situation produced thereby,

with the rest of the world, and the sacred duty imposed no less by interest than patriotism to rescue it from the usurpations of our enemies—this is emphatically that period. The Declaration of Independence, just read to you, conceived by the head and dictated by the heart of one of the most enlightened and virtuous statesmen the world ever produced, is itself the best history of those causes; and it has the solemn sanction of names dear to all persons in this nation of their reality.

The analogy between the injuries portrayed in that instrument and those we have since received from the same nation; are so striking that it would seem we are again resisting the attempt to reduce us to the humblest state of colonial vassalage. Remonstrance and complaint against them have long been urged in vain, and in place of that indemnity for the past and security for the future due to the justice of our cause and to our friendly forbearance to redress ourselves, fresh outrages have been daily committed, until the first put out of sight by succeeding injuries seemed for the moment to have been forgotten. But, there is a point of endurance beyond which to suffer is to be degraded, and resistance becomes a virtue.—To that we have arrived; and we behold our government, after enduring a long series of insults and injuries hostile to our peace and derogatory to our rights, again engaged in a war with Great Britain; long waged on her part, though recently commenced on ours, and at such a time it behoves all good men to cast off the shackles of party spirit—to bury all family feuds—to put on the armor and assume the attitude of war, in aid of our government, against the enemy of our peace and happiness; and clinging to the first principles of the Constitution in obedience to the paternal advice of the great WASHINGTON in his farewell address, “to rally round the constituted authorities—to denounce those as enemies to our liberties who would attempt to excite distrust against them, and to bear in mind the sacred truth, that our strength consists in our union.” We shall concur in the opinion that the government has no interest separate from ours—that possessing all the lights of experience and information, they are better enabled to decide than we are; and that they have staked the dearest interests held by them, in common with us, upon the issue: for as they have the same sacred pledges of attachment and fidelity to the country which any of us hold dear, and have assumed a greater responsibility than falls to the lot of any others in the nation: it would mark a most distrustful temper to question the correctness of their course—a most shameful dereliction of the duty of good citizens to withhold a zealous co-operation with them, and a criminal destitution of patriotism to weaken the affections of the people. The cause they advocate is the cause of the people—the principles they contend for are inseparable from their liberty and I will not doubt of the co-operation of every genuine American to aid his government in bringing the war to a speedy and successful termination.

But lest it may be erroneously urged that I inculcate the principle of blind acquiescence in unwise measures, and indiscriminate support in an unjust war; I will recur to the hateful subject of our degradation, and recapitulate some of the acts of indignity and of war which have been heaped upon us; and that they may

be the more striking, and the ignominy of disgraceful submission be more apparent. I will compare them with some of the prominent articles complained of in the act of Independence; in the full persuasion that as our fathers braved the dangers of treason and encountered the perils of a revolution to resist them, their sons will not hesitate for a moment to resist them also—

EXTRACTS FROM THE DECLARATION.

He has combined with others, to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation.

For protecting them (his armed forces) by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States.

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world.

For imposing taxes on us without our consent.

He has plundered our seas,

OUTRAGES SINCE COMMITTED BY GREAT BRITAIN.

The British King has endeavoured to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution by enacting orders in council regulating our trade upon the high seas, and subjecting those who refuse obedience, to the perils of confiscation and ruin.

He has protected his naval commanders by a mock trial from punishment for the murders which they have committed upon the inhabitants of these States. John Peirce, a citizen of the United States, sailing from the Chesapeake to New York was wantonly murdered by Captain Whitby, who was afterwards protected from punishment by a mock trial and promoted to a higher station; and Admiral Berkeley by whose orders the murders of the Chesapeake were committed, was also rewarded by promotion.

Our trade with all parts of the world has been cut off by the orders in council, and his ministers declare we shall not trade with any nation with which the British are not permitted to trade, or that refuses to receive the manufactures of Great Britain.

We have been required to carry the products of our industry and our soil to Great Britain; there pay a duty and procure a licence to send them to their destined market, and in all cases to submit to receive a license to trade with the ports of her enemy with which her own subjects carry on a trade by special permission.

ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns and destroyed the lives of our people.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

The ships of war of Great Britain have plundered us on our coast; they have captured our vessels and murdered our citizens.

His naval officers have seized upon the persons of thousands of our fellow citizens; have carried them into a most disgraceful slavery, compelled them to bear arms against their own country, and made them the unwilling instruments of the rapine and murders committed upon their brethren.

In time of professed friendship he has sent an incendiary amongst us to spy out our dissensions, and to sever the union of these states and thereby embroil us in all the horrors of a civil war; arming brother against brother and urging the son to plunge the parricidal dagger into his fathers bosom. The Indians too have been urged on to war by his officers, and with British arms in their hands dashing down from the wilderness have attacked our defenceless frontiers, and with one fell swoop have cruelly murdered the helpless old men, the innocent children and their defenceless mothers; sparing no age, sex or condition from their ferocious barbarities.

The British government has assumed the right of declaring all the ports belonging to her enemies in a state of blockade; and without the pretence that her naval force is employed in the actual blockade of such ports, or even possesses the power to blockade them according to the settled definition of a legitimate blockade: cuts off all our trade with those countries and, as if determined to brave the honest indignation of the whole world, permits her subjects to trade to the places thus interdicted to us.

The principle upon which a belligerent is permitted to interrupt the trade of a neutral with an enemy's port is acknowledged only on the ground of the danger to the neutral from the situation of the blockading force to enter, and the injustice of a trade with him in articles of necessity or subsistence, without which the chances of subduing him are augmented. And to say to the neutral, I will not permit you to supply my enemy and thereby avert the ruin with which I threaten him; and yet supply the enemy here-

self, is to be guilty of a shameful and profligate affrontery.

Great Britain has attempted to palliate her lawless attacks upon us, by the plea that she is justified by the principles of retaliation; to treat us as we are treated by her enemy.—But how this monstrous perversion of the plain meaning of that term is maintained, reason and justice will in vain be resorted to for a solution. Retaliation, is a return of like for like, by the party who is the victim of any aggression: yet, according to the British doctrine, if France invades our rights, Great Britain may also invade them: and, if France inflicts blows upon us, Great Britain is justified in beating us also. If a pretension like that were set up in private life, every individual in society would make common cause against the aggressor, and rid the world of such a monster. What! because a lawless ruffian attacks his peaceful neighbor, shall every other of them, rather than aid in seeing him righted, do him equal injury?—and the principles that are wrong between individuals, cannot hold good between nations, for they are only a congregation of individuals. Yet this odious usurpation of the *Lex Talionis* is made the pretext for outstripping the other wrong-doers in their acts of injustice. We have never submitted tamely to any injuries from any nation: tho' we have been the victims of a delusive confidence in the good faith of all; and whilst they have promised redress, from time to time, without ever seriously intending to render any—judging of them by ourselves, we have believed that, a respect for their own character, and the opinion of the world, would determine them at last to do us justice; and that although long delayed, it would not be deferred forever.

Some of these enormities to which I have alluded, deserve a more minute examination:—The practice of Impressment stands first on the list of grievances; and is unequalled in its wanton cruelties. Upwards of 5000 American citizens have been impressed into the British service! have been torn from their country, from that liberty which they so highly value, and all the tender ties of nature, as to them, have been severed forever. The mind appears to be confounded by the magnitude of the injury; otherwise, how can we account for the long submission and servile entreaties of our government. The rights of persons are the corner stones of our political edifice: upon them we have reared the whole structure of our institutions; and have solemnly engaged that an attempt to sap the foundations of our association, shall be resisted with all the physical strength and treasure of the whole people. The rights of property occupy the most inferior grade among the objects of our constitutional compact;—these may be attacked, without much excitement—while those never can be infringed with impunity. The latter may become the prey of lawless freebooters; but the former must be maintained inviolable at all hazards: otherwise, the constitution is broken—allegiance to the state (which is merely the correlative of protection) is cancelled—and the whole fabric of government is dissolved. In the proud era of the Roman Commonwealth, to spill the blood of a Roman citizen, or, which was worse, to deprive him of his liberty, was punished with war against the offending nation. Liberty and life are as dear to an American as they were to a Roman: all are ready to admit this; and yet we have long falsified the admission.

If the case of a single victim were selected and presented to the view of the nation, without any exaggeration—told in the unadorned language of truth—ten thousand swords would leap from their scabbards, and the cry of vengeance would be reiterated to the extremes of our wide expanded country; and if that individual could collect the whole nation together, and say to them, are you a father, who have tenderly reared an only son, and now when the evening of your days has come, behold him with an affectionate heart repaying the care and solicitude bestowed upon him? are you a wife, devoted to the partner of your life, the beloved of your heart and the father of your children? are you a child, accustomed to the tender caresses of a fond parent, and whose little heart palpitates with joy, when he presses you to his bosom?—by all these tender ties, I conjure you listen to my tale. I too had a father and a mother, who loved me tenderly, and I rejoiced to smooth their brow of care, by repaying their affections.—I had a wife and children whom I adored, and who were interwoven with every ligament of my heart.—From all these, from my country and from liberty have they cruelly torn me: my parents survived the news of my impressment but a few days;—my wife died of a broken heart, and my little children have been thrown upon the bounty of an unfeeling world. I have wept in secret over my misfortunes, and have invoked a kind heaven to terminate my miserable life; but I am still preserved for purposes beyond the reach of mortal ken. The lash of the tyrant still lacerates my body, and I endure a slavery the more cruel and intolerable, because I once was a freeman; I once had a home, a family and a country!! Let me ask you, is there a man in the nation that would refuse to rush on to battle and avenge his wrongs, or perish in one universal ruin? yet it will not be denied, that hundreds of such cases do exist; not in fancy, but in fact.—Not in the heated imagination of an enthusiast, but in the sacred pages of historical truth.

For many years our government have consented to carry on a fruitless negotiation with Great Britain, upon this and all the other topics of just complaint against her daily and accumulating aggressions; and whilst she was professing the sincerest desire to conciliate and do us justice, even at the moment when her Minister here was engaged in an amicable negotiation with the United States, a secret agent was employed by that government, in an endeavour to dis sever the union of the States; who carried on his machinations in the heart of our Country.—And in addition to the proofs furnished by his original and authentic documents, one of the principal ministers of Great Britain, has recently acknowledged in their Parliament, that he “was employed to obtain some information respecting the disposition of some of the American States, with regard to their amity or hostility towards Great Britain.”

This most perfidious act of disgraceful hostility, which no civilized nation ever attempted to justify or palliate in time of peace, and which by the laws of nations subjects the instrument engaged in its execution to immediate death, even in time of war, must have convinced every reflecting mind, that until other Councils and other policy prevailed in Great Britain, war or submission were the only alternatives. The constituted authorities have chosen the lesser evil; they have declared war, and have staked our

high destinies upon the issue. Let us unite in the common cause.

Una salus ambobus erit omne periculum.

It is deeply to be regretted, that France after pausing in her career of hostility, has resumed the practice of injuring us to the full extent of her power. Her naval inferiority with few exceptions, has prevented her vessels from leaving their ports, and hence the injuries received at her hands have been inferior to those of her rival. A negotiation carried on with our Minister there, at one time, promised a speedy and satisfactory conclusion; the last accounts, however, were not so auspicious; but nothing decisively against our claims had taken place; and it may yet be hoped (tho' confidence in the peace is justly shaken) that we shall soon hear something favourable from that quarter: if, however, the expectation should be totally defeated, there can be but one mind upon the question—*War will and must be declared against France also.*

With such prospects before us, and the impending danger of the existing war, it cannot be doubted that all Americans in heart and in sentiment will be united, and the daring, the proud spectacle will be exhibited of a nation of freemen, contending for their rights against the haughty Mistress of the seas and the gigantic conqueror of the Continent. A want of *union* will destroy us. The most powerful states of ancient and modern Europe have fallen a prey to *intestine* divisions: The Republics of Greece maintained their liberties, whilst united, against the whole successive power of Darius and Xerxes; whose armies were as numerous as the sand upon the sea shore, and the latter of whom, at one time, we are informed by the venerable Father of History, brought a force against Greece, exceeding the number of 2,600,000 men. These were resisted three days at the pass of Thermopylie, by a handful of brave men under the command of the immortal Leonidas; whose numbers, at no time, exceeded 4,200: and on the last day, finding resistance at that place hopeless, and unwilling to stake the liberties of all the states upon the contest, the whole force, except 300 men, were withdrawn: yet these, before Leonidas and his Spartan band had fallen, destroyed upwards of 20,000 of the best troops of Xerxes. The remainder of his mighty forces penetrated into the heart of Greece, but unappalled by danger or misfortune, new armies sprang up to oppose them, and although the Persians who constituted a great portion of this force were as brave as the Grecians, Xerxes was obliged to abandon the conquest he had undertaken, and fly across the Hellespont into his own country. So powerful was Greece united, that in the last decisive battle, with 300,000 of the enemy, not full 3000 escaped the sword. Yet Greece once so brave, so powerful and invincible, nursed in the lap of poverty, the guest of virtue, though engaged in petty feuds before her destruction was threatened from without, which rushed them for half a century after its termination, who gave to her human character an energy and a splendor, and to the manners and talents of her people a polish and a profundity of learning, never since equalled—at last became a prey to the ambition and the avarice and rapacity of factions, who stirred up the States against each other, and by dividing them, they soon fell beneath the sword of the common enemy, without a struggle. I have been the more particular in dwelling upon the fate of

Greece, and contrasting her power when united, with the effect of her divisions, because Greece, like us, was a republic of confederated States; and the example of Greece is therefore more deserving of consideration. In modern times, we find Prussia, when united under her great Frederick, a full match single handed for all Europe.—The same Prussia which we have since seen conquered and subdued in one battle, by France alone, because of wavering councils and internal divisions. Spain too, powerful in numbers and in the native bravery of her people, under the government of the perfidious Prince of Peace, has been sold to France; and now endures all the frightful horrors of invasion, disunion, and the alternate preponderancy in its various provinces of the French and patriot arms. I will not swell the melancholy catalogue of subdued, annihilated nations, whose country has been blotted out of the map of the world, in consequence of their divisions. But I entreat you fellow citizens, let us bear in mind their fate; and guard against the causes which produced it, as beacons erected on a stormy coast, to warn the wary mariner of the rocks which threaten shipwreck and ruin to those who approach them. Let us expel the spirit of distrust from our bosoms; let not suspicion have a lurking place amongst us; let us with one heart, as one man, be united; then may we defy a world in arms, and under God we will be victorious, and then the patriot blood of the revolution will not have been spilt in vain. Once for all I conjure you, fellow citizens, let us cling to our union, and prove to the enemies of our system, that it can stand the storms and tug of war, as well as the sunshine of peace. Ours is the last asylum of liberty—here let it flourish, until nature's self shall bend beneath the weight of years. *Liberty* is the first best gift of Heaven to man; it is the sister passion to life itself; and, as they have been united by the fiat of Heaven, perish the wretch who attempts to sever them. We have a practical proof of the influence of *Liberty* upon the minds, the habits and manners of our citizens: the whole world does not afford a people so universally intelligent and well educated. The principles of our government are understood in every quarter of the country, and in the same ratio is the strength of the government augmented. Its strength is now, for the first time, put to the trial; and I confidently believe, there is not a person in the nation, who fears the result. I should do great injustice to my feelings, if the language I have employed, suggested a doubt of the patriotism of my fellow citizens, it has been used for far different purposes; by recurring to the epoch of our revolution, the wonderful effects of united councils and united energies are exhibited; and, by a review of the history of other nations, we behold the effect of their divisions and can avoid their fate by guarding against the causes that produced it.

Let us like faithful centinels stand each one firm at his post. The eyes of the world are upon us; the last hopes of liberty are confided to us; and the spirits of our departed heroes urge us on to a manly effort in support of that freedom which they conquered. We will not disappoint their fond expectations, we will "acquit ourselves as men; and may the God of Armies be our Shield and Buckler."