AN

ORATION:

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

OFFICERS OF THE MILITIA, AND MEMBERS OF THE VOLUNTEER COMPANIES OF BOSTON AND THE VICINITY,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1832.

AT THEIR REQUEST.

BY COLONEL EDWARD G. PRESCOTT.

BOSTON:

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M DCCC XXX II.

Boston, July 4, 1832.

DEAR SIR,

At a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements appointed by the Officers of the 3d Brigade 1st Division of the Militia, for the Celebration of the Fourth of July, it was "Voted" That the thanks of this Committee be presented to Colonel Edward G. Prescott for the eloquent and instructive Oration delivered by him this day, and that a sub-committee be appointed to request a Copy for the press."

We have much pleasure in communicating the above Vote, and respectfully solicit your compliance with the request it contains.

Sir,

We are, your Very Ob. Servts.

JOHN S. TYLER
THOMAS DAVIS
JOHN F. BANISTER
} *Sub Committee.*

To Colonel Edward G. Prescott.

Boston July 5, 1832.

GENTLEMEN,

I have this morning received your letter containing the vote of the "Committee of Arrangements appointed by the officers of the 3d Brigade," for which please to accept my acknowledgements.

In compliance with your request, I have the honor to enclose to you the oration. If any inaccuracies should appear in it, let me beg of you to remember that the notice of my appointment was very short, and that necessary public duties have occupied much of my time since.

Very respectfully

Your Obt Svt

EDWD. G. PRESCOTT.

To

John S Tyler
Thomas Davis
John F Bannister
} *Committee.*

ORATION.

BRETHREN,

Among the ancient and time-honored observances of our country, is that of commemorating this anniversary—of keeping high festival upon that day in which our infant liberty was baptized in the blood of our purest and best. If ever there were any occasion which called for remembrance, it was this. It was at that time that there was promulgated the result to which a long series of toils and of contests had brought a nation, and a solemn invocation to that nation, to defend what it had already acquired. The first rejoicings which it called forth, must necessarily have been tempered by sad forebodings. The fetter of the slave was broken, but where was he to rest his head, and how was he to guard his freedom? Without any lights from experience, without the history of a single similar undertaking to guide them, our ancestors had boldly set in motion the vast wheels of a new government, which might roll on in majesty and harmony, or might hurry forward to its own destruction. We at this time have no such dangers to apprehend. The experiment has been tried, and we

can look back over its undeviating track for more than half a century, and find spreading away from its course only the evidences of increasing comfort and prosperity. Their views were confined solely to the future, and

Shadows, clouds and darkness
Hung above it.

We look to the past, and with humble reverence draw lessons for our own guidance from its history; to the present and find strengthening around us, the usages which have descended to us hallowed by the experience of our fathers; and to the time which is to come, with the knowledge that our inheritance is indeed a noble one; based upon the only sure foundation—the union of a respected system of laws, a revered religion, and a protected liberty. With such a knowledge, our responsibility is great; if we fail, the world may mourn, for the noblest example which time has ever held up, will have perished—and *if* we fail—our fathers have done all that they could, and have transmitted to us an almost unlimited territory, and matchless characters; Equal laws have been handed down to us, acknowledging us to be a community of freemen; the mild influence of religion has been poured around us, and her voice has been heard crying aloud—"If we *now* fail, our blood will be upon our own heads."

Situated as we are upon the very point of time in which the distrust hitherto entertained respecting republican forms of government, seems gradually giving way before successful experiment, permit me to ask your attention to a very few of the peculiari-

ties which distinguish us from that part of the world called in comparison with our own, "the old"; and of which we were for so long a time, an appendage and part.

Within the last few years no small portion of Europe has been distracted by wars or civil commotions. The vast territory of Russia has been convulsed by the noble and fierce strivings of a portion of its subjugated inhabitants to obtain freedom for themselves, and a rank for their country among the other nations of the earth. Here, from our own peaceful shores, we watched the contest, and so long as there was one doubt as to the result, continued such contributions as were in our power;—contributions which, though small in actual amount, yet went forth to them in their struggle with the assurance of our sympathy, like a voice from the land of freedom, bidding them God speed. I need not detail to you the result. Our best wishes, our hopes, our prayers were for Poland. All were in vain—she fell! Yet Russia rose from her victory, after the loss of immense treasures and the bravest of her sons; only to know that her laurels were viewed with detestation by the freemen of every country, and that the most bitter of all lessons had been scourged into her—respect for an enemy she had hitherto despised.

France has witnessed another revolution, in which the streets of her capital have been deluged with blood; her monarch exiled, and a new dynasty established; and the three glorious days which were hailed as opening to her a bright prospect of future tranquillity, were intended to create a monarchical republic.

Alas! for France. The storm which had poured upon it in its wrath, has but just passed away, and already the murmuring of a new tempest is heard upon her shores.

Portugal is at this moment shaken to her centre by parties striving to place each their own candidate upon her contested throne. Greece has had her wars; and the arms of France have planted the cross upon the towers of Algiers. The starving population too of Ireland, have risen to outrage those laws, which have failed to give them relief, and have marked their own course with conflagration and death; and England, "Merry England," seeking as her leaders think her long lost rights, has had her borders rent by infuriated citizens, and has been mournfully occupied within her own bounds in quelling riots which have wasted her property, and almost shaken her throne.

Amidst this confusion, America has been at peace.

Some of these distinctions between parts of the old country and ourselves, I am aware, are not permanent, but will pass away with the causes which created them; and yet though perhaps in some instances they may be traced to local situation, or incidental circumstances, a majority are the result of abuses which have been engendered by their forms of government, but which will not be likely soon to invade ours.

Another fundamental and important peculiarity which marks our country, is the early age at which our young men are brought forward into life and take an active and influential interest in public affairs.

That this is a peculiarity under our form of government, no one who looks around him can doubt. In the nations of Europe, a great majority of those who have supported a prominent part in public concerns, or indeed are in any way connected with them, have passed into mature life. Occasionally it is true, there is a brilliant exception. Such for instance as is afforded by the history of the Younger Pitt; but these are miracles which do not occur once in a century, and only show of how much a gigantic mind is capable, by the very success with which it stems the current of common prejudice. In point of fact, in England, the system of education can hardly be said to be completed, until after the season of youth is gone by.

Such is not the case with us. Turn where we will, it is the strong arm of the young man which greets us in action, and his bold, unshrinking plans which are discussed in council. There is no path which does not lie open to his footsteps—for the first, the imperishable words of *our* Bill of Rights; words which are practically recognized in all branches of our government, and which were traced by those patriots, whose spirits almost like that of Moses, amid the "Thunder and the lightning and the thick cloud" held communion with the God of Liberty, are that "All men are born free and equal." Before that sublime declaration, made for the first time, in America, the distinctions of birth have fallen. The mind, which constitutes the immortal part of man, has at last been permitted to distribute its own badges of nobility; and reason, which had pa-

tiently waited for the discovery of a new world before she asserted her rights, has at length proclaimed upon our shores the natural freedom and equality of all.—Yet though the fact undoubtedly is, that our young men are brought forward at an earlier age than those of any other country, it is not through the means of any encouragement specially applied for them. You can place your finger upon no single line in our Constitution or the laws of either of our States, having such an end in view. It is rather because this protection is so interwoven with their very spirit, that they have become one and indivisible. The necessities of the times in which our charter was drafted made this imperative. Foreign and domestic foes were then alike to be dreaded. It was not the fire which was fast fading upon the time worn heart, that could flash up and warm the feeble veteran into his youthful strength and powers of resistance. No! When the whoop of the red man broke the stillness of midnight upon a frontier settlement, and his dusky form was seen gliding among the embers of the burning cottage, it was the vigorous bosom of youth which was to meet, and his unshaking nerve which was to repel the invasion—and when the land for a new settlement was to be cleared, and a foundation hewn out of the solid forest for the future city, the axe could only be laid to the root of the tree, by an arm which years had not withered.

A class of men by the mere circumstances of the times made of such importance to the immediate welfare of the whole, could not fail of being recognized and encouraged by the laws which they them-

selves protected—and the necessary consequence was, that an early and easily obtained right of suffrage, admitted men to a participation in the direction of affairs of National and State Governments in our country, at a much earlier period than that in which they would be thought capable of holding such offices elsewhere. This very fact constituted no inconsiderable portion of the political experiment destined to be tried upon our shores. I have alluded to an easily obtained right of suffrage; in a land where the natural equality of all is recognized as the basis of its institutions, and where in its earlier stages the price of the soil was little more than the mere labor of clearing, not only was there nothing to prevent every man from obtaining an interest in it, but every inducement was held out to persuade him to do so. A strange people settling down in the midst of suspicious allies, or treacherous enemies, every increase to the number composing any settlement, was a strengthening of its hands, and an additional pledge for the safety of the whole. Once a citizen, once having claimed a right, or discharged the smallest duties belonging to that station, and the door was thrown open to all its privileges.

The most valuable of these, under an elective government, I need not say, is the right of voting.

Changing a majority of our officers annually, each qualified citizen may aim at an election, and every interest be represented; and in the free and manly discussion of principles which our policy encourages, a field is open in which even the youthful laborer may render himself conspicuous, and through which the

honest exertion of talents is at all times encouraged to shape its course.

The effect of this is visible upon our institutions. Both in our State and National Councils, and in all our deliberative assemblies, the voices of our young men are heard mingling, and often taking a leading part; and with the exception of the chief magistracy of our country, there is no class of office which may not be, and in fact has not been occupied by them.

Another reason resulting directly from the principle which I have before mentioned, is the encouragement given by our laws to each individual to select such occupation, whether profession or active business, as he may deem best adapted to promote his own interest and welfare. It is a well known fact, that in Europe, certain classes of men hold office by birth, and others have practically obtained possession of the whole of certain branches of business, which they may, and do exercise, to the exclusion of all others. This constitutes a system of monopoly, and is in fact the building up of some few, upon the rights of the many. Of such systems we know nothing. It is open to every parent to educate his child according to his means and inclination, and when that child has come to years of maturity, the whole field lies before him to take such course as he may prefer. The consequence of this state of things is, that there is in every direction a healthy competition, and of course that all the necessaries of life on the one hand, will be afforded at their lowest possible value, and on the other, that talents in whatever way applied

and without regard to age, will command that encouragement which is their due. Thus far we have shown no tendency to any thing like this destructive practice. We have corporations it is true, though with us they are confined to no set of men, but on the contrary, are open to all, and every man who knows any thing of their organization, is aware that they are by special clauses in their charters, placed under the stern supervision of our Legislatures, and are liable to have those charters withdrawn, the moment that they abuse the purposes for which they were granted. So long as this continues, our young men need no special encouragement to bring them forward. Cheapness of living, and a comparatively sparse population, are bounties upon an early settlement; and the right of being heard for themselves—of coming forward if they can,—of struggling on amidst others striving for a similar purpose, while it insures to the country that her sons must toil, insures to them, early success.

After all, however, perhaps the most operative reason is to be found in the extent of the country itself. At this very moment much of it is almost in the same state of infancy, as was Plymouth, when the May-flower having landed her little band of Pilgrims upon the corner-stone of our nation, swung slowly round from it on her homeward passage. There are still wildernesses to be settled, where beneath our own skies the smoke curls over the wigwam of the savage, and his hunting-ground is yet sacred to himself—but the progress of civilization is felt there, and it rolls on burying beneath its waters the lingering

traces of the native of our soil—Alas, for the savage! his blood could not mingle with ours, and our "name was Legion." He has slowly retired before us, and left to us his pleasant home, his cherished graves. Far away, where the sun sets, he has sought another home, but the foot-step of the white man has fallen there too, and after his last desperate struggle for his new altars, his territory will have passed away from him—forever. For ages yet to come, new settlers will be demanded, and our emigrants will be met with "on their winding way," to build up cities in the deserts and the prairies. A young man who goes there now, soon finds a population gathering about him; and growing with his part of the country, he assumes and holds a high rank, and in a few years is heard of as a wealthy citizen, projecting or executing plans of enterprize and improvement; or vindicating the rights of his constituents in the halls of Congress.

But it is not only by the industrious emigrant himself that the effect of his removal is felt. We acknowledge its influence here, both because his example inspires those who remain, and because a larger space is left open by it to their exertions,—and while we see what the youth of one part of our land have done, we more readily listen to the promises of what others can do.

It is in consequence of our comparatively thin population every where, and its perpetual increase both in numbers and in wealth, that a continued demand is kept up for the services of all classes of our citizens; and resulting from this is the fact which I have

before noticed, that education is completed, and the responsibilities of life assumed here, at an earlier period than in any other portion of our globe. Another consequence of the infant state of our country, and one which tends to bring forward certain of her citizens early, is that almost the whole field of her literature is to this day left unexplored. Our previous situation, and the times themselves have heretofore rendered this necessary. Our inhabitants for a long period struggling for freedom, afterwards found themselves impoverished and obliged to contend for existence. It was not until of late years that we have found leisure to become a literary nation, or the power to encourage native talent. Both are now ours, and a territory lies before us such as has never yet been wandered over; fraught even in our brief history with deeds of daring and endurance which far outstrip the bright colouring of fiction, and scenes of romantic and sublime interest which may challenge the world.

These are the newly opened quarries, out of which native genius has already begun to hew for itself immortality; and from which such men as Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Percival, Sprague, and a host of other of our young countrymen have drawn the materials of their early fame.

I have endeavored briefly to state a few of the reasons which have given the youth of America such an early prominence. Many other causes might have been adduced, but not within the limits which I propose to myself in addressing you.

That under proper restrictions its effect is useful there can be no doubt; and under those restrictions it must continue as it already has so far done, to diffuse an energy which has been witnessed in no other government, and which has led to a growth of our country, unparalleled thus far in the annals of the world.

The abuses by which it is to be feared that these good effects may at some future day be destroyed, arise from two causes:—the neglect of a sufficient education, and the vesting too great a proportion of the power in the hands of the young men.

One of the means already alluded to by which this class of our citizens are brought forward, is the comparatively short time allotted by us to perfecting education. This, to the extent to which we have thus far carried it, is well, for time enough has been taken to lay the foundation of that knowledge which will be necessary in the future. The great danger is, that having once entered upon active business, further attention to mental improvement will be abandoned—or that the means hereafter may not keep pace with the population, and our youth be forced into life without having had the requisite opportunities of qualifying themselves. The only safeguard against such a calamity, is to pay the strictest attention to the state of our schools, and to be sure that their number increases with the demand.

For the other danger, the good sense of the community alone can guard against it. All parties have an equal right to be represented—not alone the young, but also the old; and experience of the habits of each season demands that one should be permitted

to temper the other. The activity of youth will carry into rapid effect the plans of age, and the caution of riper life, can direct that fire to useful purposes, which might otherwise only consume. With these two periods united, our Republic is comparatively safe, for the best wisdom and strength will be exerted for its protection. Separate them, and it will either lag slowly along in a doubtful course—or dash forward, regardless of the obstacles which will ere long shake it into ruin.

Another peculiarity which has produced no small effect upon our institutions, is the absence of a protected, national religion.

This anomaly in the general history of governments, sprung naturally from the circumstances under which so great a part of our country was settled. Persecutions had raged in England against the dissenters from the established church, with almost as much fury as had formerly marked the course of the bloody Claverhouse, when tracking the Covenanters from cavern to hill-side. The tide which had risen with Cromwell, had fallen with him. The reaction was more than in proportion, and the waves rolled back again with a madness, greater than that which had piled them up. There was but one watch-word, the union of Church and King, and wo! to those who refused to utter it.

A deep religious conviction is the most operative of all sentiments. Basing itself upon what are considered the secured privileges of eternity, arguments or sufferings of a temporal nature are disregarded;

and the nearer its subject comes to being a martyr, the stronger is his claim to put his sickle in to the harvest of future happiness. It was this which drove the stern and uncompromising Puritans from the homes around which their earliest affections had clustered, to the unknown wilds of our own land; which led them freely to barter not only the luxuries, but almost the necessaries of life, for "freedom to worship God."

Through the fault of the pilot, the colonists were landed in Plymouth, instead of on the Hudson, as they had intended; and here in New England, the founders of our system of worship, breathed their first thanksgiving for a safe guidance, with the deep wilderness closing above their heads, and without an *earthly* witness, except perhaps a few groups of wondering savages.

That a class of men so situated should not have established a National religion, can be a matter of no surprise. This, and this alone, was the cause of their own wanderings, and they were conscious that they were only sustained under their severe sufferings by feeling that at last they had obtained, to use the language of their historian, "for themselves and their posterity, the liberty of worshipping God in such manner as appeared to them to be most agreeable to the sacred scriptures."

This, however, was not only made necessary by their own fresh recollections of the burdens which an established religion imposed, but by the situation in which they were placed. The connexion between them and the parent country was weakened, but not

severed. They were still Colonists, and though seceding from the established church of home; they might not interweave another set of doctrines with the laws which still originated there. The best that could be said of the view which was taken of their tenets on the opposite side of the Atlantic was, that not being forced into the sight, they were connived at, as belonging to a class too powerless, and too distant to make it an object to crush them; but our fathers well knew that the moment their peculiar doctrines were brought into actual collision with those of the mother-land, by establishing them as the tenets of the country, that moment they were not only to be ready, but in reality be obliged to support them with their lives. There was too much at that time pressing upon them—disturbing their harmony and interrupting their peace, to permit them willingly to provoke the wrath of England; and though they would not prostitute their consciences at the bidding of any man,—both self-preservation and the welfare of the good cause which they had so much at heart, taught them that it was better for a season to worship in the secrecy of their own closets, than on the housetop. This was the course of wisdom, and it has made for us a system of religious worship which entirely harmonizes with our beautiful theory of government, and recognizes the principle to which I have before alluded—the equal rights of all.

A part of the policy of our general government, is to restrict the patronage, as far as possible, of our principal executive officer. There are at this time more offices in the gift of the President of the United

States than were originally contemplated, and the number of these must continually increase, with the increase of our population. An officer who is willing to abuse this high trust for party purposes, will already find but too powerful an engine in his hands; and the people from whom according to our theory all offices should flow, may at some future day be obliged to bow their necks to despots, whose appointment they have blindly delegated to others. But in addition to this, had a National Religion existed, the appointment to a majority of whose high trusts must have been vested in the executive of the nation, the prospect of our country would have been indeed gloomy, and there could have been no pledge given of our existence as a Republic, beyond the term of a single Presidency.

The course adopted by our ancestors of recognising the right of all to worship according to the dictates of their own consciences, is the only course which agrees with the pure spirit of our religion. The clergy form a large and important class of our citizens, and in proportion to their character and influence, will be the state of morals in the community in which they reside. Under a National Religion the offices of the church would either have been confined to a certain class, or those who sought them would have been mere intriguing politicians, caring for no interests but their own, and making even the holy altar of God a stepping-stone to power. The effect of our present system, upon our clergy, is apparent and most healthy. Selected by those to whom they are to minister, no man dare present

himself for this holy office whose life and spirit are not in accordance with its high duties; and owing to this, even at the present day, we almost alone possess the privilege of having the bread of life broken to us by "clean hands."

The last peculiarity of which I shall speak is, that our country has thus far not been burdened with a standing army.

Owing to its youth, it is comparatively an easy task to go back to the origin of its institutions. They will be found to have grown out of the mere situation in which our ancestors were placed;—or the circumstances under which their peculiar habits of thinking were imbibed; or in some instances, under a union of both. The first settlers had neither spare population, nor a redundancy of means;—a mercenary army with them therefore, whether to be formed from their own citizens or foreigners, was entirely out of the question.

Instead of treating with the savages as with a civilized people, it was the fashion of that day to consider them as mere incumbrances, and the whole territory was claimed as belonging, by the right of settling, to his Britannic majesty. The natives themselves encouraged this, by the passive ease with which they yielded to the claims of their white neighbors, until goaded into acts of madness, they rose from time to time, to harass those who had come among them bearing the exterminating sword.

The uncertain, yet deadly mode, of warfare, practiced by the Indians, made it necessary for each man

to keep his arms by him, and to be always ready, whether in the field, or in the church,—standing before the altar, or by the grave, to defend himself and his possessions. The savages fought to regain the homes of their fathers. The colonists,—to secure the holy land for which they had sought as the resting-place of the "Tabernacle of the Testimony." The first settlers therefore were a nation of soldiers; trained perhaps not so much to act in concert, as to effect the most deadly execution through an unshrinking dependence upon their own courage and resources, and an unlimited reliance upon the protection of the God of battles.

In the subsequent periods of our history, our local position, as well as the acquired habits of relying upon ourselves, made the formation of a standing army, a useless and dangerous experiment.

From their mere situation, the different nations of Europe could at no time have disbanded their regular troops. The safety of each, and the mutual safety of all require that they should be continued—Norway, Sweden and Russia on her north and west, and Turkey, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Prussia, England and Ireland on her south and east, form a collection of powerful nations, adjoining each other, or at most only divided by rivers or by narrow channels. In such a cluster of jealous communities, each guaranteeing protection to its own citizens, and watching against the infringements of its neighbor, perpetual causes of dispute are liable to occur, and no one can tell how soon the adjoining territory may be reddened by the beacon of war.

All that either can do is to guard as far as possible against these chances, and to keep itself in a strong state to enable it to resist—and this can only be done speedily and effectually by means of a regular army. The accidental situation of these countries has thus imposed upon them this burden, from which they can never escape.

The situation of the United States, on the contrary, is such as should of all others have been selected for an experiment in government. She stands almost alone, without any other great power to press upon her, or bring their inhabitants into collision with hers. On her north, there are a few British colonies, and on her south a small cluster of Spanish states, but separated from the immediate protection of their own governments, they are far too powerless to injure her even if they became hostile; while between us and Europe, which alone could place us in peril, the waves of the broad Atlantic roll up their natural barrier.

The only foreign enemies who could at any time have annoyed us, were, on the one hand, the powers of Europe;—and their course must have been so slow as to have given us the means of preparation, before any attack could be made;—and on the other, the tribes of hostile savages. To guard against these, it was early the policy of our country, to place strong fortifications along the outposts, and to keep just force enough to garrison them; and then by a distribution of arms among our citizens, whose right to possess them is acknowledged in our Constitution, to be able to use these forces as the centre around

which they may all gather in times of commotion. If there ever was a system beneath which the people might rest secure, it is this.—We cannot, to be sure, point out to any one who asks us for our means of defence, an hired army who will sell their blood to the highest bidder—but we can point him to our whole land as one great fortification, and to every inhabitant as a soldier—and though we bind none of our troops to us by their interest in their monthly pay, there are few so poor that they have not a hearth to defend, and objects of affection beneath their own roof-tree, for whom they will give their lives when the times demand them.

That, however, we might derive all the advantages of which this system was capable, it was not enough that each man should possess arms, and be willing to use them, but also necessary that he should know how to do it with the greatest speed and efficiency. If a sudden alarm arose, and the inhabitants were rallied, they could gain but little by possessing individually, the means of defence, if there was no plan of organization established, by which they might act in concert. To perfect, therefore, our scheme, and enable us to dispense with a standing army, and be at the same time ready to meet any invasion with a prompt resistance, it was necessary that the citizens should be divided into distinct portions, under the command of their own officers; and that for a few times during each year, they should be brought together, and have the benefit of acting collectively, and the means of learning the general outline of their duties. It was never pretended that these short and

occasional drillings, would make men thorough soldiers; nor was this contemplated by the framers of the system. It was never imagined that a long war could be advantageously carried on with them alone, but they can suppress domestic tumult, and repel invasions which may be made upon our extensive coast and frontier, and keep the enemy in check, till regular troops are formed out of their ranks.

During our long peace, in which the services of our militia have not been needed, and its strong arm has been kept out of sight, those upon whom its exactions have fallen, directly or indirectly, have accustomed themselves to speak lightly of its merits, and with sarcasms of the necessity for its continuance. When the services of the tried ally have been rendered, we are ready enough to underrate them, and to murmur at the pittance which his support requires. If proof that such is but too much the case, as it regards individuals as well as institutions were needed, I should mournfully point your attention to the paths by which the soldiers themselves who gained for us all our privileges in the war of our Revolution, with the exception of a small remnant for whom Congress has at length made a scanty provision, have passed through their last years of life, in the midst of sorrows for which we have shewn no sympathy—Sufferings which we have not alleviated,—and impoverished age, which we have refused to shelter,—until worn out with fruitless prayers for our aid, they have one by one laid down, "unknown, unhonored, and unwept,"—to die.

The two great arguments brought against a militia system, are, that it is of no use in time of peace, and that its support is a heavy burden upon the people.

We are ready to allow that it is of no apparent utility to the superficial observer, and therefore that it is very likely to become unpopular with the great mass of the people. But that such is in fact the case, we cannot so easily admit. If I were to draw an argument from the present state of the world, I should say that it presented exactly such an appearance as it has never before shown. The general diffusion of knowledge has thrown a light over the obscure abuses which have been suffered to grow up with the governments of Europe, and those, who so long as they did not see them had become reconciled by long habit to patient endurance, are now convulsed with unaccustomed efforts to throw off the burden.

The civilized world has felt the shock, and if there is any spirit abroad, it is that of excitement, and a readiness to subvert the existing order of things. But not to make use of an argument which will apply solely to the present, let us look for a moment at the comparative state of Europe and America. In the old country the population is too much for the soil, or in other words, the amount of proffered labor exceeds the demand The consequence is that vast numbers are out of employ, and without the means of earning their daily bread. Hence the last few years have brought us perpetual accounts, particularly from England and Ireland, of riots—of the turning out of the people for higher wages than the produce

would allow—of a horrible state of starvation and the most dreadful sufferings induced by poverty.

The markets have been overstocked, and of course there could be no encouragement to produce; and the land being overburdened, the poor laborer had no means of obtaining a living.

America, on the other hand, is thinly peopled in proportion to the extent of her territory. Labor is high with us, and produce cheap. No man here, having health and strength, need be poor, or at least his exertions will at all times command an adequate support. This acts as a premium upon emigration, and the effect is that the surplus population of Europe is fast flowing into our land, and becoming a part of ourselves. The class of citizens most liable to be affected by the pressure of the times abroad, and of course to come here, as a class, is the worst educated, and least likely to know the boundary which divides liberty from licentiousness; and when they are once removed from the restraints imposed by regular forces, not unfrequently brought into action at home, they can only be restrained here by feeling that the whole people forms an army, and that a militia can be called out at a moment's warning, promptly and resolutely to enforce the laws.

The internal improvements which are taking place in our country, are perpetually bringing our great cities nearer to each other, and finding employment in masses for thousands of our own citizens and foreigners. To say that with bodies thus situated riots and disturbances are kept down, or if they were once excited, that they could be quelled by the mere ab-

stract fear of the laws, is to make an assertion unsupported by any knowledge of human nature, or the experience of other countries;—and where that is insufficient, and the civil force which could be arrayed, necessarily too weak to oppose any obstacle, the only security which can be offered to a country, is an organized militia, and it is precisely in times of general peace that this protection is needed.

As to the second objection;—if the militia exerts this healthy influence, then the burden of supporting it cannot be weighed against the protection which it actually affords.

The magnitude of these burdens however, is much overrated—and they are in fact less oppressive than the requisitions made in many other branches for the general welfare—undoubtedly the loss of a day's labor is felt by individuals; but it is a selfish spirit covetting the shelter of the tree, which its own toil has not raised, which leads them to murmur at such a trifling inconvenience.

It has been said, in the fashionable language of the day; that the militia could not be depended upon even in case of a sudden invasion. Washington said that New-England might be defended by her militia alone; and have her sons degenerated, or are their interests less dear to them now? Look at the transactions in our sister State a few months since, and I ask you what would have become of the fair town of Providence, if the spirit of her young men had perished beneath the abuse lavished upon the system. Had the arm of her militia been paralysed—before the rage of her rioters

could have been quelled, she would have lain a heap of ruins—and among those whose voices have been loudest in mockery at the system, there might have been wailing for the massacre of those they were loth to lose.

The history of the past, teems with records of what the American militia have done—surrounded as all of our countrymen are by objects of affection, and the comforts of life, there are noble motives to nerve their arms when summoned into battle.—Hitherto they have never forgotten them; it depends upon us, not upon our system, to say if they will neglect them in the future. Look at the services which they have in former years rendered to the country. While we were struggling forward into existence, they were the ramparts drawn around the homes of our fathers. Can they not indeed be depended upon! In our former wars, with their bayonets they have traced their own eulogy, in the best blood of their enemies. The plains of Lexington bear witness for them. When the alarm bell gave notice in 1775, of the approach of the British, it was a little band of militia who gathered before the church as their "ark of the Covenant," and offered the first resistance to their progress; and it is above their grave, on the field where they fell, that the simple monument now rises, which will long bear record of them as the first martyrs to liberty.

Let me call to your remembrance the battle at the bridge of Concord, where the enemy were repelled by a militia infinitely worse armed and worse organized, than any we in our time have ever seen—not

only repelled by these men, but driven back to Boston, and there besieged by our gathering countrymen, until a regular army was formed out of their numbers. And so it will always be; when danger is near our citizens will not sit patiently, and trust their dearest rights to the protection of a hired force; but buckling on their armor will go forth to the struggle, in the name of God, for victory and freedom.

During the infancy of America her feeble colonies were at all times surrounded by the tribes of hostile savages; yet those colonies prospered, for the militia were their defenders, and their confidence in it was unshaken. But why need I dwell upon the various services which they have rendered. The French wars, and the surrender of Burgoyne alike bear witness for them: and the defence of New Orleans against the best troops of Great Britain—troops, some of which shortly after gathered immortal lauels on the plains of Waterloo—is no inglorious tribute.

But above all, if I wanted an argument in their favor, which could not be controverted; and a record of deeds which had traced their names upon the brightest page of fame, I should point to that well known height, which rises in our own neighborhood and which we can almost see from this very spot—BUNKER'S HILL.

The remnant of the breastwork which the militia of Massachusetts had piled up in one night, yet remains to mark the spot where our fathers stood shoulder to shoulder, without flinching, beneath the deadly assault of their opponents; obeying the stern order of their officers, "not to fire until the enemy

were so near that they could distinguish the whites of their eyes;" and traces of the old rail fence are yet pointed out, behind which they stood when at last they did return the discharge, with an aim so close and deadly while their ammunition lasted, that another such victory over the militia, would have cost England all the bravest of her forces.

It may be that in our day, her services will not be needed; God grant it. But the history of the last few years is full of mournful import, and a voice has more than once come to us from the South, calculating the value of our Union. Once sever the compact by which we were united by Washington and his brothers in arms, and the jealousies of each sovereign state, will rise in judgment against its neighbor. The price of the Union will be weighed against blood—and after the bold spirit of independence which our harmonious coalition has created, has gone forth and shaken the thrones of Europe, it will return again to perish on our own shores, and make the land of its birth, its dishonored grave.

Let us turn to brighter prospects. Our destiny is in our own hands, and we will not prove false to ourselves;—the only representative government in existence entirely elective, is ours; and should we neglect it, the other nations of the earth will be without hope. At this day our territory extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to Mexico, and within its vast limits every variety of climate tempers its different soil, and calls forth its own produce. The necessaries and the luxuries of life are alike ours, and our situation encourages the exertions

of the manufacturer, and pours wealth into the coffers of the merchant and the mechanic. Our resources are abundant within ourselves. Lands, which generations to come cannot occupy spread out from our shores, and as our population increases, new institutions continually rise and "do us honor."

If we continue as we have thus far done, in half a century we shall be a nation of fifty millions of freemen, governing ourselves by the will of the majority.

It becomes us often to recur to the principles upon which our government is based; to cherish deep impressions of the benefits flowing around us from our harmonious union, and an habitual reverence for our laws and our religion, if we would secure the best means of making our government lasting.

Our Republic with such efforts cannot but be safe. The very peculiarities which distinguish her, will form her greatest ornaments; and should an hour of peril ever overshadow her, like the Roman mother she may offer up her children to the public need, as her brightest jewels.