An oration delivered at Charlestown, Massachusetts, on the 17th of June, 1841, in commemoration of the battle of Bunker-Hill

Ellis George Edward
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AN

ORATION

DELIVERED AT

CHARLESTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS,

ON THE 17TH OF JUNE, 1841,

IN CONMEMORATION OF

THE BATTLE OF BUNKER-HILL.

BY GEORGE E. ELLIS.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

This Oration was prepared and delivered at the request of the Officers and Members of the "Warren Phalanx," who celebrated this interesting anniversary in an appropriate manner, in conjunction with the citizens of Charlestown, whose participation they invited. In compliance with their wish, kindly and politely expressed, these pages are now published. Large portions, here printed, were necessarily omitted in the delivery. The author aimed to present a fair and minute account of the memorable action in this town which opened the American Revolution. He could find no nearer beginning for the details of the day, than in a statement of the preliminary measures of British aggression and Colonial resistance, and the appropriate conclusion of the narrative seemed to require an exhibition of some of the results of the bloody conflict. We are probably now in possession of all that ever will be known concerning it. One who searches deeply into its history, is led to ask some questions to which no living voice or written record can give an answer. The author has availed himself of all the known existing means for affording information and ensuring accuracy. The History of the Battle, by Col. Samuel Swett, is the most valuable of all the documents which relate to it. For a few particulars mentioned in the following pages, which are not derived from any public documents, it is to be understood that the author is indebted to some private sources of information.
ORATION.

Soldiers and Fellow Citizens,—

By thus addressing the united and mingled throng before me, I can best declare the occasion and the result which we have assembled gratefully to commemorate. We have cause to congratulate ourselves that we live day after day upon a spot which is known over the world, to history and to fame. It is our privilege to behold, at our pleasure, the morning glories of a summer's sun from the beautiful summit which rises behind us, and thence to trace the land-marks and the water-lines signalized through all time, and for all people, by the action which we now celebrate. The name of that green eminence has already become familiar over the civilized world, and, saving the unchristian passions and sins which war necessarily involves, it has no association, record or story, which we may not remember and repeat with pride.

How beautiful, how sublime is the prospect which from that eminence greets our eyes! We occupy the central point of a circle over which nature and art, war and peace, the history of the past, the happiness of the present, and the hope of the future, spread an inexhaustible interest. The great features of a battle scene, which yields in importance to no other on the surface of the earth, scarred as it is all over its circumference with such
melancholy memorials, are before our eyes. Across those calm blue waves is the land of the ancient enemy; the land where a misguided and tyrannical Monarch, a proud and heartless Ministry, and a subservient Parliament devised their fruitless measures for the subjugation of a people who owed them nothing for debt or favor; the land whence had come the hired soldiery then quartered upon the forced hospitality, and riotously disturbing the peace of the town of Boston. In that secure and beautiful harbor floated the ships of war, and the transports just arrived from Britain, which sent their military crew upon this shore, only to die upon the first spot of American soil which their feet should touch. Then we survey the fair and diversified peninsula upon which we stand, comprehending with its summits and its levels, but a square mile of earth. The south-eastern slope of Breed's Hill divides the waters of the bay into two broad rivers, which indent the shore, and just beyond the western base of Bunker's Hill, approach so near each other as to allow scarcely four hundred feet of breadth to the neck of land which unites the peninsula to the neighboring country. The Mystic on the north, washes with its double channel the farther shore. On the south, the opposite side of the mouth of the Charles, which in its narrowest span is about three hundred yards across, we see the now crowded peninsula of Boston, similarly environed by the waters of the sea, and united to the main land by a narrow neck. Upon a sloping eminence of that peninsula where it approaches nearest to us, we discern a place of graves, amid which was planted the battery whence came the missiles that reduced this flourishing town to a desolation. Around us is a glorious amphitheatre of hill tops, which sixty-six years ago on this hour were alive with anxious crowds, now covered over with flourishing villages, intersected and bordered by the highest achievements of modern art and science. Nowhere else upon the face of the earth is there such a congeries of striking objects, written over
with such moving narratives of virtue, and courage, and prosperity. The battle fields of ancient times, of the four ancient empires, have lost their landmarks—most of them now depend upon conjecture; but very few of them can be accurately defined, and more than all, the results of their awful carnage do not now appear in the free and vigorous life of either of those four proud empires of the ancient world. The plains and hill tops of later strife cannot all connect themselves with the religious cause and the blessed result, which have made that eminence so full of glory. Ours is the battle field of valor vindicating only the right, and made subservient to justice—of chivalry led on to self-sacrifice by christian prayers and the affections of a fire-side life—of a determination to do nothing for blood, but every thing for the free birthright, for the lawful possession of the labor of the hands, for the full privileges which every human being may and should enjoy without doing a wrong to any other of his race. Here are the fruits of that day's carnage,—the ocean traversed by ships freighted with the means of happiness, not with the instruments of woe, from that most renowned of nations from which we are proud to trace our origin,—the hill tops smiling with the blessings which God gives to labor, and which man may enjoy, when he has earned them by labor,—the temples of religion reared and reverenced by the consciences of the worshippers,—the homes and the families where the privileges of freedom confer the highest authority upon civil laws, and social duties, and religious charities. Not in vain were the death-dealing engines of war discharged upon that summit.

Amid the scenes, and upon the day thus consecrated to proud and grateful recollections, we are met in peace, with the blessings of peace all around us. We come together as the citizens of a town, which, though it takes its name from a king, bears inscribed upon the brightest, yet most melancholy page of its annals, the bold resist-
ance here made to a tyrant. We come as citizens of our common republic, to commemorate the deeds of our fathers, as they in their trials and death-struggles hoped and believed that we should recal their memories amid joyful and grateful observances.

This day has its appointed theme, its appropriate subject. After the lapse of so many years, and after so much research, information and eloquence, brought to the delineation of that battle—while tradition yet keeps the story fresh, and living witnesses, venerable with their hoary locks and bowed frames, still survive—the subject for this day can have but little of novelty. The theme itself, familiar as it is, must furnish its own interest. As from time to time this day shall be celebrated upon this spot, it will be the aim of the orator to bring to the illustration of his subject all the historical facts which throw light upon the story;—to clear it from all confusion in its details, that it may descend to posterity distinctly and fairly told;—to expound those eternal principles of right and justice, the violation of which by one party, and the defence of which by another party, have made this day forever memorable;—to trace down the influence of that righteous war, and of this its opening conflict;—and last of all to enforce its lessons of gratitude and duty.

The American Revolution occurred at such an era of the intellectual and moral progress of civil and social life, that even the school-boy might thoroughly understand and estimate the reasons which justified that long and dreadful struggle. That struggle was brought to its issue only by many successive and increasing wrongs inflicted upon our fathers.

Among all the factitious and theoretical systems which relate to the connection which ought to be maintained between a colony and the mother country, I can recognise but one principle or condition that is founded upon the essential laws of justice and order, and that is, that those who voluntarily emigrate from their native land, and