

Stand alarm'd, O ye Americans!

An
ORATION
upon the
BEAUTIES of LIBERTY;
Or, The
Essential RIGHTS
of the
AMERICANS

____ Rev. John Allen ____
delivered in the Second Baptist Church, Boston
3 December 1772
Published 1773 ____ EXCERPTS

After 1770, as the shock of the Boston Massacre eased and most of the Townshend duties had been repealed, Great Britain and the

American colonies maintained an uneasy peace for two years. That relative tranquility came to an end on June 10, 1772, when Sons of Liberty boarded and burned the British schooner *HMS Gaspée*, which was enforcing customs and patrolling for smugglers off Warwick, Rhode Island. None of the culprits was ever identified, but the British threat to transport the perpetrators to England to stand trial for treason so alarmed the colonists that committees of correspondence were formed in Boston and Virginia. The event inspired John Allen—a businessman, teacher, political satirist, and eventually a preacher — to deliver a sermon that became one of the most popular in the colonies, published in numerous editions as *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty, Or, The Essential Rights of the Americans*.

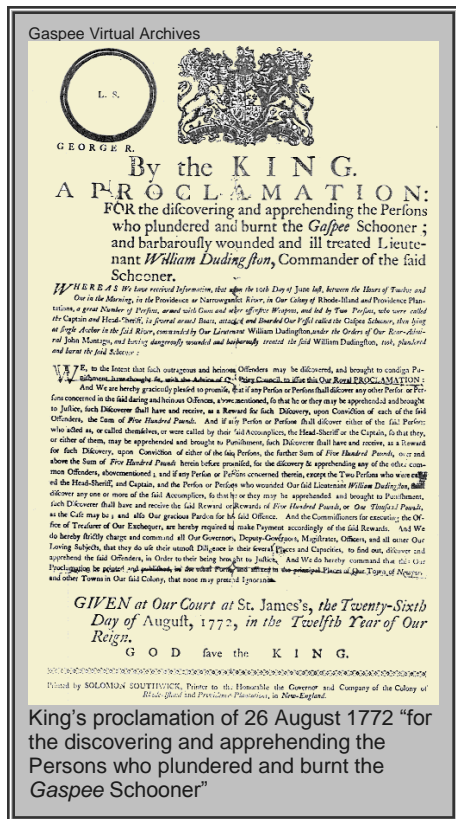
In the published editions, Allen included as a “dedication” a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth—the British Secretary of State for the Colonies—who had ordered the royal governor of Rhode Island to identify and arrest the attackers of the *Gaspée*. Quoting the Golden Rule, Allen challenges Dartmouth—would *he* “like to have his Birthright, Liberty and freedom as an Englishman taken away by his King, or by the Ministry, or both? Would not your Lordship immediately say it was Tyranny, Oppression and Destruction by a despotic power?” In conclusion he warns that the grave injustices from the *Gaspée* incident may bring Americans to the brink of armed rebellion.

DEDICATION

To the Right-Honorable the Earl of DARTMOUTH

My LORD,

WHEN I view the original right, power and *Charter* confirm'd, sealed, and ratified to the Province [colony] or Inhabitants of *Rhode-Island*, and its standing in full force, and unrepealed for more than an hundred years; which is as follows: — “Be it enacted that no freeman, shall be taken, or imprisoned, or deprived of his freehold, or liberty, or free custom, or be outlaw'd or exil'd or otherwise destroy'd, nor shall be oppressed, judged or condemned, but by the Law of this Colony. — And that no man of what state or condition soever shall be put out of his lands or Tenements, nor taken, nor imprisoned, nor disinherited, nor BANISHED (observe this, my Lord), nor any ways destroy'd, or MOLESTED, without being, for it, brought to answer by a due course of Law of this COLONY”: Methinks that even your Lordship will not blame them if they stand fast in the Liberty wherein they were made free. . . .



King's proclamation of 26 August 1772 "for the discovering and apprehending the Persons who plundered and burnt the Gaspee Schooner"

I HAVE seen what is said to be an authenticated copy of your Lordship's Letter to the Governor of Rhode-Island, in which there are such DICTATIONS, DIRECTIONS, and positive COMMANDS to oppress, with tyranny, a *free People*, which is inconsistent with a good man or a Christian to have any concern or agency therein. The law of GOD directs us to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. And knowing that your Lordship is well acquainted with the Divine Oracles, having had the honor to dine at your Lordship's Seat in Staffordshire, and was, when in England, personally acquainted with Mr. *Wright*, your Lordship's Steward, and with the good and pious Character your Lordship bears. I therefore take this leave as a fellow Christian, as one that loves, as the highest happiness of his existence, the *Beauties, Spirit, and LIFE of Christianity*, to ask your Lordship how your Lordship would like to have his Birthright, Liberty and freedom, as an Englishman taken away by his King, or by the Ministry, or both? Would not your Lordship immediately say it was Tyranny, Oppression and Destruction by a despotic power? Would not your Lordship be ready to alarm the Nation and point out the STATE upon the brink of destruction?

My LORD,

ARE not the Liberties of the Americans as dear to them as those of Britons? Suppose your Lordship had broke the Laws of his King and Country; would not your Lordship be willing to be fetter'd with irons and drag'd three thousand miles in a hell upon earth? No! But in a HELL upon water* to take your trial? Is not this contrary to the spirit of the law and the rights of an Englishman? Yet thus you have given direction, as the King's Agent, or the agent of the Ministry, to destroy the rights and laws of the Americans. How your Lordship can answer for this agency of injustice before GOD, and Man, will be very difficult. However, if great men, and good men, and Christians can dare to do such things as these (when in power), Heaven grant that I may have no acquaintance with them in this world; or if they have any power in Heaven, not in the world to come; for I think, my Lord, that such men who will take away the Rights of any people are neither fit for Heaven, nor Earth, either fit for the Land or the Dunghill. . . .

. . . Has not your Lordship a right to oppose any power that may assault your Lordship's Person, right or privilege, without its being deemed rebellion against the King and state? — Yes, sure you have! Then surely, my Lord, an American has the same right to oppose every usurping power (let it be from whom it will) that assaults his person, or deprives him of his own law or liberty as an American. Has he *offended*, yes! Is he willing to be tried by his own laws? yes! Then that man, that King, that minister of state, be who he will, is worse than a Nero TYRANT that shall assume to drag him three thousand miles to be tried by his ENEMIES. . . .

Remember, my Lord, the Americans have a privilege to boast of above all the world. They never were in bondage to any man, and therefore it is more for them to give up their RIGHTS, than it is for all Europe to give up their RIGHTS into the hands of the TURKS; consider what English tyranny their forefathers fled from, what seas of distress they met with? What savages they fought with? What blood-bought treasures, as the dear inheritance of their lives, they have left to their children. Without any aid from the King of England; and yet after this, these free-born people must be counted REBELS if they will not lose every right of Liberty which their forefathers bought with their blood, and submit again to English ministerial *tyranny* — O America! O America! . . .

* Through a Man of War's crew. [Allen footnote]

If there is any law broke, it is this, that the *Gaspee* Schooner, by the power of the English ministry and admiralty have broke the laws and taken away the rights of the Americans. And yet the Americans must be punish'd for it, contrary to their own laws. O! Amazing! I would be glad to know, my Lord, what right the King of England has to America. It cannot be an hereditary right that lies in *Hanover*; it cannot be a parliamentary right that lies in Britain, not a victorious right, for the King of England never conquered America. Then he can have no more right to America than what the people have, by compact, invested him with, which is only a power to protect them and defend their rights, civil and religious; and to sign, seal, and confirm as their steward such laws as the people of America shall consent to. If this be the case, my Lord, then judge whether the King of England and the ministry are not the transgressors in this affair in sending *armed Schooners* to America to steal by power and sword the people's

property. And if any are to be try'd for law-breakers, it surely ought, in justice, to be them. But the people of AMERICA act, my Lord, very honest in the affair; they are willing to GIVE and TAKE, to give the English offenders the liberty to be try'd by their own laws, and to take the same liberty wherein they have offended to be tried by their own laws. They surely have as much right to the privileges of their own laws as the King of England has to his Crown, or that the native of Britain has to the rights of an Englishman.

— Consider then, my Lord, how cruel, how UNJUST, how unanswerable before God and Man it must be, by any violence and power to destroy the rights of the Americans. . . .

BUT it may be meet [fitting] to let your Lordship know that if the Americans unite (as there seems a good prospect of it) to stand as a *band of brethren* for their liberties, they have a right, by the law of GOD, of nature, and of nations, to reluct at [find repugnant] and even to resist any military & marine force, surely they must be intended in readiness for the *French*, not for *Americans*, for can it ever enter into the heart of a mother to murder her children? of a King to kill his subjects? of an agent to destroy the rights of the *Colonies* he represents? But, suppose my Lord, that this should be the bloody intent of the ministry, to make the Americans subject to their *slavery*, then let *blood* for *blood*, *life* for *life*, and *death* for *death* decide the contention. This bloody scene can never be executed but at the expense of the destruction of England, and you will find my Lord, that the Americans will not submit *to be* SLAVES; they know the use of the gun and the military art as well as any of his Majesty's troops at St. James's, and where his Majesty has one soldier, who art in general the refuse of the earth, America can produce fifty free men, and all volunteers, and raise a more potent army of men in three weeks than England can in three years. But God forbid that I should be thought to aim at rousing the Americans to arms, without their rights, liberties and oppression call for it. For they are unwilling to beat to Arms, they are loyal subjects; they love their King; they love their Mother-Country; they call it their HOME; and wish nothing more than the prosperity of Britain and the glory of their King.

But they will not give up their rights; they will not be slaves to any power upon Earth. Therefore, my Lord, as a peace-maker, as their agent, as their friend, lay their grievance before their King.

— Let the Americans enjoy their birthright, blessings, and Britain her prosperity; let there be a mutual union between the mother and her children, in all the blessings of life, trade and happiness; then, my Lord, both Britons, and Americans, will call you blessed.

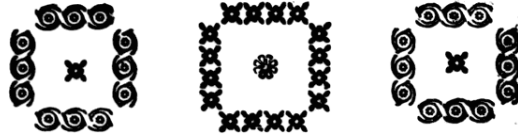
Wishing, from my heart, the inviolable preservation of the RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of the AMERICANS, and the growing happiness of ENGLAND: ———

I am, my LORD, his MAJESTY's Loyal Subject, and your LORDSHIP's DUTIFUL SERVANT,

A BRITISH BOSTONIAN.

**Consider then, my
Lord, how cruel,
how UNJUST,
how unanswerable
before God and
Man it must be, by
any violence and
power to destroy
the rights of the
Americans.**

**the Americans
will not submit
to be SLAVES;
they know the
use of the gun
and the military
art we well as
any of his
Majesty's troops**



The ORATION

MICAH VII. 3. *That they may do evil with both hands, earnestly, the Prince asketh, and the Judge asketh for a Reward; and the great Man he uttereth his mischievous desire: SO THEY WRAP IT UP.*¹

The faithfulness of the prophet *Micah*; the fidelity of his heart, and the zeal of his soul for the liberties of the people, was remarkable. His faithfulness when *tyranny* reigned by authority; when the laws, rights and liberties of the people were at the dispose of the arbitrary power of the wicked king AHAZ, as it is written 2 Chron[icles]. 28. 1.

And Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord; like David his father. (Ver[se]. 19.) For the Lord brought Judah low, because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord (ver. 22). And in the time of this distress did he trespass yet more and more against the Lord—this is that king AHAZ.

And therefore this faithful prophet lays the matter to heart, as one that rever'd the liberties and happiness of the people above the authority of the king and the power of his *senates*. And therefore says, in the verse preceding the text, “The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood, they hunt every man his brother with a net.” . . .

OBSERVE that it was a dark time with the nation, a dark time with the church of the *living God*, and a very distressing time respecting the people, when Micah appeared cotemporary with Isaiah, as a prophet of the Lord, and a SON of LIBERTY, therefore he tells the oppressors of the people, “*The best of them is a brier, and the most upright of them sharper than a thorn hedge — the day of the watchmen, and thy visitation cometh, now shall be their perplexity.*” And is not this the case? Is not the day of the watchmen of America come, who watch for the rights of the people, as the sentinels of the land, to defend them from every invasion of power and destruction? Now their visitation in Providence [Rhode Island] is come — to try the watchmen whether they will stand for God and the people, or not. Now shall be their perplexity of the ministry,² who lie in wait for blood and hunt every man his brother with a net, who utter their mischievous desire, and so *they wrap it up*. — For this faithfulness, in King Ahaz and Hezekiah’s days, the prophet Micah’s name has a singular honor in the annals of Heaven above the rest of the prophets in Israel — Jer[emiah]. 17, 18, 19. because he said — “hear this I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and *Princes* of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment and pervert all equity.”

**Is not the day of
the watchmen of
America come,
who watch for the
rights of the people,
as the sentinels of the
land, to defend them
from every invasion
of power and
destruction?**

THEREFORE, those sayings of that pious prelate of the church of England, bishop *Burnet*,³ in his history of his own time, are noble, valuable and great; especially where he says, “there is not any thing more certain than this: That kings are *made* for the *people*, and not the people for them.” Was not *David* made a king for the people? Was not *Saul*? Was not *Solomon*? Then let not kings think too highly of themselves; for the GOD of heaven never intended they should be any more than the *servants* of the

¹ The scriptural text from the Old Testament (King James version) upon which Allen bases his sermon. The New American Standard version is: “Concerning evil, both hands do it well. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, And a great man speaks the desire of his soul; So they weave it together.”

² I.e., members of the king’s cabinet (not clergymen).

³ Bishop Gilbert Burnet (1632-1715), Scottish clergyman, author of *History of My Own Times* (1723).

people; therefore the bishop adds, “that, perhaps, there is no nation under heaven more sensible of this than the *English* nation; so that, if the *prince* does not govern by this maxim, the *people* will soon grow very unkind to him.” If this be the case, the king of England may immediately see the reason of all his people’s hard speeches and unkindness to him: It is because he has departed, either by inclination or persuasion, from this royal STANDARD. . . . So that if the king of England is not happy, let him thank himself for it: It is not his people’s *fault* — it is his OWN. For that king is not worthy to reign that does not make the RIGHTS of his people the rule of his actions: Knowing this, that HE receives all his *power* and *majesty* from them; and how can he think that he has any right to *rule* over them unless he rules in their *hearts* by inviolably maintaining their RIGHTS?. . .

BUT to proceed to the words of the Text.⁴ “That they may do evil with both hands earnestly; the Prince asketh and the Judge asketh for a reward, and the great man he uttereth his mischievous desire: So they wrap it up.”

Observation the first.

It is then plain that a craving, absolute *Prince* is a great distress to a people.

THE Prince *asketh!* What does he ask for?⁵ Why, the tall pine trees for masts for his great ships. Well, let him have them, not as his right, no, but as your gift to him. Well, but the prince asketh? Well, what does he ask now? Why, that the British streets may be paved with American gold. Well, do not make a word about that? Let him have it, but let it be in the fair way of trade and commerce, not by taxation and oppression. The essence of money lies in what money buys. This, England can furnish you with.

BUT the Prince *asketh?* Well, what is it? Will he never have done asking? What does he *ask* now? Have patience, and you shall hear; well, what is it? Why it is the favor [responsibility] of the government of Rhode-Island to hold a court of *admiralty* to authorize them to confine suspected persons (guilty or not guilty) and drag them away three thousand miles to take their trial by a jury of strangers, if not enemies.⁶ But the granting of this in some measure depends upon the consent of the governor. But all governors (who are worthy the name) are such as the scripture describes (Judges 5:9). “My heart,” says one, nay, every American will say the same, “is towards the governours who offer themselves willingly among the people,” to rule by their laws, to defend the rights of the people, to protect their persons, to secure their liberties. And this is (we hear) the happiness, power and bulwark of Rhode Island government. For its safety lies in this, that the *Governor* of the province, and the judges of the superior court, the representatives of the people, and general *assembly*, are solemnly bound by oath, to rule, govern and decide, and determine ONLY by their own laws; if so, they have a right to tell the *prince* that though he *asketh*, yet he will ask in vain. . . .

⁴ I.e., the scriptural verse: Micah, Ch. 7, verse 3.

⁵ I.e., what does the king of England (George III) ask of the American colonists?

⁶ See headnote on the sinking of the HMS [His Majesty’s Ship] *Gaspée* by Rhode Island colonists on June 9, 1772.

OBSERVATIONS

—1—

It is then plain that a craving, absolute *Prince* is a great distress to a people.

—2—

That when the king, judges, and senates unite to destroy the rights of the people by a despotic power, or as the text expresses it, *that they may do evil with both hands*, then the prosperity of the nation *totters*, the crown shakes, and the des-truction of the people’s rights is near at hand.

—3—

This shows that an arbitrary des-potic power in a prince is the ruin of a nation, of the King, of the crown, and of the subjects; there-fore it is to be feared, *abhorred*, detested and destroyed, because the happiness of the King, and the prosperity of the people are hereby not only in danger but upon the brink of destruction.

—4—

[No fourth observation;
likely a numbering error]

—5—

That it is . . . no rebellion to op-pose any king, ministry, or gover-nor that destroys by any violence or authority whatever the rights of the people.

—6—

That when the rights and liberties of the people are destroyed, it is commonly by the mischievous *design* of some great man.

The second observation is,

THAT when the king, judges, and senates unite to destroy the rights of the people by a despotic power, or as the text expresses it, *that they may do evil with both hands*, then the prosperity of the nation *totters*; the crown shakes, and the destruction of the people's rights is near at hand. For the rights of the people, which is the supreme glory of the crown and kingdom of Britain, is the *Magna Charta* of the king as well as of the people; it is as much his privilege as it is his glory to maintain their rights; and he is as much under a law (I mean the law of the rights of the people) as the people are under the oath of allegiance to him. And therefore whatever power destroys their *rights*, destroys at the same time his right to reign, or any right to his kingdom, crown, or glory; nay, his right to the name of a king among the people. . . .

Observation the third

THIS shows that an arbitrary despotic power in a prince is the ruin of a nation, of the King, of the crown, and of the subjects; therefore it is to be feared, *abhorred*, detested and destroyed, because the happiness of the King, and the prosperity of the people are hereby not only in danger, but upon the brink of destruction. Every age and every history furnishes us with proofs, as clear as the light of the morning, of the truth of this.

BUT it is the singular happiness of the Americans, according to their own laws, not to be in bondage to any power upon the earth. The King of England has no power to enact or put in force any law that may oppress them; his very attempting to do it at once destroys his right to reign over them. For the brightest Gem which the king of England wears in the British crown is that majesty, trust, and confidence which the Americans invest him with as the king and guardian of their rights, and liberties.

THE Parliament of England cannot justly make any laws to oppress or defend the Americans, for they are not the representatives of America, and therefore they have no legislative power either for them or against them.

THE House of Lords cannot do it, for they are Peers of England, not of America; and if neither king, lords, nor commons have any right to oppress or destroy the liberties of the Americans, why is it then that the Americans do not stand upon their own strength and show their power, and importance, when the life of life, and every liberty that is dear to them and their children, is in danger?

THEREFORE, let me address you with all the power of affection, with all the pathos of soul, as one who esteems the full possession of the rights of the Americans as the highest blessing of this life — to stand alarm'd! See your danger — death is near — destruction is at the door — Need I speak? Are not your harbours blockaded from you? Your castle secured by captives — your lives destroyed — revenues imposed upon you — taxation laid — military power oppressing — your CHARTER *violated* — your G ———'s⁷ heart not right — your constitution is declining — your liberties departing, and not content with this, they now attack the *life*, the soul, and *capitol* of all your liberties — to choose your judges and make them independent upon you for office or support, and erect new courts of admiralty to take away by violence the husband from his family, his wife, his home, his friends, and his all, through a scene less joyful than *Pluto's* horrid kingdom.⁸ To be confin'd and tried for his life by the accusation of a negro.⁹

**See your danger—
death is near—
destruction is at the
door—Need I speak?
Are not your harbors
blockaded from you?
Your castle secured by
captives—your lives
destroyed—revenues
imposed upon you
—taxation laid—
military power
oppressing—**

⁷ Governor, perhaps.

⁸ Hades, hell.

⁹ An indentured servant identified as a "mulatto" confessed to participating in the *Gaspée* attack and named other conspirators.

HAS not the voice of your father's blood cry'd yet loud enough in your ears, in your hearts? "Ye sons of America scorn to be slaves"? Have you not heard the voice of blood in your own streets, louder than that which reached to Heaven, that cry'd for vengeance, that was, saith the Lord to Cain, the voice of thy brother's blood, of only one, but this of many brethren. Therefore, if there be any vein, any nerve, any soul, any life or spirit of liberty in the sons of *America*, show your love for it: guard your freedom, prevent your chains, stand up as one man for your liberty, for none but those who set a just value upon this blessing are worthy the enjoyment of it.

Which leads me to the fifth observation,¹⁰ which is,

THAT it is not rebellion, I declare it before GOD, the congregation, and all the world, and I would be glad if it reached the ears of every Briton and every American; That it is no rebellion to oppose any king, ministry, or governor, that destroys by any violence or authority whatever the rights of the people. Shall a man be deem'd a rebel that supports his own rights? It is the first law of nature, and he must be a rebel to GOD, to the laws of nature, and his own conscience, who will not do it. A right to the blessing of freedom we do not receive from Kings, but from Heaven, as the breath of life and essence of our existence, and shall we not preserve it, as the beauty of our being? Do not the birds of the air expand their wings? the fish of the sea their fins? and the worm of the earth turn again when it is trod upon? And shall it be deem'd rebellion? Heaven forbid it! Shall *Naboth's* disputing with King *Ahab* respecting his vineyard be deem'd rebellion?¹¹ Or the people sending home their governor in irons some years ago, be deemed rebellion? It is no more rebellion than it is to breathe.

Sixthly, to observe,

THAT when the rights and liberties of the people are destroyed, it is commonly by the mischievous *design* of some great man. The text says, *the great man uttereth his mischievous desire*: But who this great man is, we do not certainly know, but may shrewdly guess; but whether Lord Bute, Duke of Grafton; or Lord Hillsborough, is not so material, but the *mischievous design* is what we fear, is what we feel, if they instill in the King's mind a divine right of authority to command his subjects; this is *mischievous*. . . .

BUT to return to you, my dear Americans, you think hard to pay duties for *teas*, imports, clearances, *entries*, &c. &c. But what will you farmers and landholders think of paying a fixed tax for every acre of land you enjoy, for every apple tree you rear, for every barrel of cider you make, for every pound of candles you burn, for every pound of soap you use, for every pair of shoes you wear, for the light of the morning and the sun that a kind heaven gives you; what do you think of paying a continual tax for all these? This is contain'd in the mischievous design. Stand alarm'd, O ye Americans.—— But I close with the last remark from the text. *So they wrap it up*. It will do; it will do, say they. The King, say they, has a right to appoint judges, courts of admiralty, impose revenues, lay taxes, send military forces, block up their harbours, command them — compel them by arms — pay their judges — get the key of their laws, rights and liberties into our hands, this will do! *and so they wrap it up*, as fine and smooth as can be: But I think it is better to *unwrap* it again. What do you think, my dear Americans? But I add no more — but advise you, as it is a day of public thanksgiving, to bless GOD for the liberties and mercies we do enjoy, not for those you are deprived of.— My second advice is, love your king, pray for him, pray for your governor, pray for your judges, that all their reign may be easy to themselves, and happy for the people.

A M E N



¹⁰ No fourth observation is named, probably an error of numbering.

¹¹ See Old Testament, Kings.