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THE MORNING PÆAN AT SALAMIS

FIVE years ago the first Freshman class of the Rice Institute went from the Faculty chamber to the tasks and opportunities of the new University under an old Homeric line that I have already quoted earlier in this address. From year to year their successors have gone out under similar charges. The present Freshman class enters Rice on the anniversary of the Battle of Salamis, which was fought on or about September 20th, B.C. 480.

It was a battle for freedom in a great struggle for Western liberty. The history of patriotism records no pæan of a people more stirring than that which the Greek combatants raised when the morning sun lit up Salamis and the ships of the Persians. That morning pæan has been preserved by the Athenian poet Æschylus in "The Persians," the earliest known historical play of Europe. Æschylus himself was in the battle. He had been at Marathon on September 12th, ten years before. His younger brother, Ameinias, led the crashing charge of brazen beaks on that decisive Salamis morning. His own comrades-in-arms were in the audience when, in the eighth year after the battle, the initial performance of "The Persians" was enacted in Athens.

The drama is placed in the royal palace at Susa, where Atossa, the queen-mother, is impatiently awaiting news of the triumph of Xerxes, her son, king of a countless host. Harassed by ill-omened dreams, she comes in a chariot of state to consult the Persian counsellors, who constitute the chorus of the drama. "Where," she asks—

"Where is this city, Athens, in the world?"

What shepherd rules and lords it o'er her people?"

312 Matriculation Address, Autumn of 1917

And to this day we can hear the cheer from that intent Athenian audience when for answer the chorus chanted:

*“Far in the West, where sinks the sovereign sun;
Slave to no man, and subject to no lord.”*

Nor in four and twenty centuries has silence overtaken the mighty shout that rose from the theater when the messenger, describing Salamis to the queen, first spoke the lines:¹

*“The squadron on the right began the fight,
And then their whole fleet came, and from the decks
One cry was heard, ‘O sons of Hellas, rise!
Your home-land free, your children free, your wives,
The sacred altars of your fathers’ gods,
And your ancestral graves! Now all’s at stake!”*²

From the decks of Salamis to the halls of Rice, from the men of Hellas to the youth of Texas, from the sons of freedom to the souls of freemen, comes that conquering cheer. Ringing down the years to this anniversary season, strong as on that daybreak comes the battle-cry. It calls to courage. On a hundred fronts Western liberty is again challenged by a thousand ships and men beyond all numbering. It calls to consecration. Brave men in blood, brave women in tears,

¹ τὸ δεξιὸν μὲν πρῶτον εὐτάκτως κέρας
ἤγειτο κόσμῳ, δεύτερον δ’ ὁ πᾶς στόλος
ἐπεξεχώρει, καὶ παρῆν ὁμοῦ κλύειν
πολλὴν βοήν, ὧ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων ἴτε,
ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ’, ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ
παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τε πατρώων ἔδη,
θήκας τε προγόνων· νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών.’

ÆSCHYLUS, *Persians*, 399-405.

(From the Oxford text edited and revised by Arthur Sidgwick.)

² In the above English renderings of five quotations from “The Persians” free use has been made of translations by Blackie, Morshead, Nevinson, Plumpton, Potter, and Way.

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are again writing the drama of freedom. In the spirit and in the letter of that call,

ὦ παῖδες Ὀρυζαίων ἴτε,
νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών.

*(Rise, O sons of Rice,
All is now at stake!)*

The making of your life is at stake: the building of your University is at stake: the saving of your country is at stake: the winning of the only noble kind of war is at stake: the conquest of the globe in freedom's cause is at stake!