

# THE NATIONAL FLAG

An Oration

by  
Henry Ward Beecher



## Wetmore Declamation Bureau

Box 2695  
Sioux City, IA 51106

[www.wetmoredeclamation.com](http://www.wetmoredeclamation.com)  
Email: [speeches@wetmoredeclamation.com](mailto:speeches@wetmoredeclamation.com)

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THE NATIONAL FLAG  
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I have seen the glories of art and architecture, and mountain and river; I have seen the sunset on Jungfrau, and the full moon rise over Mount Blanc; but the fairest vision on which these eyes ever looked was the flag of my country in a foreign land. Beautiful as a flower to those who love it, terrible as a meteor to those who hate it, it is the symbol of the power and glory, and the honor of millions of Americans.

A thoughtful mind, when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag but the nation itself. When the French tricolor rolls out to the wind, we see France. When the Italian flag is unfurled, we see a unified Italy. When the united crosses of St. Andrew and St. George, on a fiery ground, set forth the banner of old England, we see not the cloth merely; there rises up before the mind the idea of that great country.

If one asks me the meaning of our flag, I say to him: It means just what Concord and Lexington meant, what Bunker Hill meant. It means the whole glorious Revolutionary War. It means all that the Constitution of our people, organizing for justice, for liberty and for happiness meant. Its stripes of alternate red and white proclaim the original union of thirteen states to maintain the Declaration of Independence. Its stars, white on a field of blue, proclaim that union of states constituting our national constellation. The two together signify union, past and present. The very colors have a language which was officially recognized by our fathers. White is for purity; red for valor; blue for justice; and all together --bunting, stripes, stars and colors, blazing in the sky--make the flag of our country, to be cherished by all our hearts, to be upheld by all our hands.

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