

AN
ORATION

DELIVERED AT WILLIAMSTOWN,

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence,

JULY 4th, 1801.

BY EZEKIEL BACON.

“ Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this matter.”

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An Oration, &c.

A COUNTRY whose first settlement was almost within the memory of the oldest of her inhabitants, and a generation who were the first cultivators of the soil which they occupied, towards the close of the eighteenth Century, were the authors of deeds which excited the admiration of a polished age, and gave birth to a Band of Sages, who by their sentiments and their achievements eclipsed the heroes of antiquity. From the pen of *one* of these Sages, and from the hearts of all his Copatriots, issued that memorable instrument which has just been read, known by the name of "*The Declaration of American Independence.*" A composition which with admirable precision, exhibits an Epitome of the incontestible rights of MAN in every age, and a faithful picture of the *wrongs of insulted America* at that trying period of her affairs. It was for the maintenance of these rights, and for the vindication of herself against these wrongs, that our Country at length assumed the attitude of Sovereignty and Independence: And it is to commemorate the natal day of this most interesting event, that we, my friends, have once more assembled ourselves together. And while the flame of FREEDOM continues to animate our bosoms, and the Genius of Liberty claims a habitation in our hearts, so long, oh! auspicious day, will we hail thine annual return, and offer upon thine altar, the tribute of thanksgiving and joy!

BUT of all former Anniversaries which have

attracted the attention of Americans, that of the present year furnishes perhaps the most abundant sources of congratulation and reflection. Since our last, we have seen the completion of a *Century*, which for the importance of its events, the magnitude of its *Revolutions*, and the splendor of the scenes, which it has exhibited, stands entirely without a parallel in the history of Man ; and we have now entered upon another, which as far as human foresight can discover, opens upon us, pregnant with events equally interesting and crowded with scenes equally splendid. Since our last too, we have witnessed the close of an Administration in our national affairs, upon whose merits, the great body of their countrymen have already made up their final awards ;—and we have lived to see the commencement of another, which we fondly hope will heal the wounds of a bleeding Country, and be marked by future ages, as an era peculiarly propitious to the cause of civil Liberty.

A BRIEF retrospect of the past, a summary view of the present, and a conjectural sketch of the future prospects of civil society, more especially as it regards the fortunes of our own Country, invites therefore at this time a few moments of your attention.

THE annals of the world certainly do not afford a more eventful and instructive period, than that which has been presented to the view of those, who have lived to see the close of the eighteenth, and the commencement of the nineteenth Centuries. It is true that those who have for a long time partaken in the busy and momentous transactions which this epoch has exhibited, become gradually unconscious of the magnificent events which are passing in quick succession before them, and in a manner dead to those great sensations which they are calculated to inspire. When the ardent and patriotic mind reviews in his closet the annals of anti-

quity, how often does he fallen upon events, in which he longs to have had an opportunity to partake, and upon scenes in which he fancies he should have gloried to participate. And under the influence of these sensations, he is almost inclined to regret, that his lot had not been cast in a different state of the World, and that he had not been a contemporary with those illustrious Sages, whose exploits exalt and enrapture his imagination. But the fact certainly is, "*that they do not enquire wisely; who ask, Why were the former days better than these?*" For at no period of time have events so instructive occurred, or exploits and characters, so exalted and momentous been exhibited on the stage of human action. Revolutions in the policy, the Government, and the manners of great and powerful Nations, have by their frequency almost ceased to excite surprise, or any considerable degree of astonishment at the almost miraculous means by which they are accomplished.

During this period, we have seen the monstrous system of *papal hierarchy*, soaring in the full tide of her prerogatives and her powers, revelling in the immense profusion of her ill-gotten wealth, and decked in all the gaudy trappings of her pampered pride;—by an arrogant assumption of the powers of this world, and a blasphemous pretension to the exclusive rights of another, she had subjected the conscience and the persons of men, to a state of thralldom and wretchedness, truly abject and afflictive. After filling up the full measure of her iniquities, and compleating in an emphatical manner the character of "*the Man of Sin*," we have seen her stripped of her arrogant prerogatives, her proud Sceptre broken in the dust, and the emblems of her authority transferred to a foreign land. We have seen the Man, who had once assumed the authority of sitting upon the neck of Princes, and of making the Kings of the Earth his footstool, wan-

dering as a vagrant thro' his former dominions, and seeking an inglorious grave in a distant Country. An unexampled instance of the instability of human glory, and the precariousness of all earthly power!

AND is not this an event upon which the philanthropist may reflect with gladness, and the pious with gratitude and adoration?—Is it not a subject of the highest congratulation to the Christian Patriot, the object of whose wishes is at length accomplished, and whose unceasing prayers for the destruction of this anti-christian hierarchy have been answered by the Ruler of the Universe, in infinite Wisdom and Benevolence?

DURING this period too, we have seen the Countries once inhabited by free and enlightened Nations, and adorned by the first embellishments of Genius and of Art, reduced to a ruin the most disastrous and to a degeneracy the most abject and debasing. Over the fertile plains of *Egypt*, that ancient paradise of the earth, the Emporium of Commerce and of Industry, and the favorite seat of Science and Philosophy, had been seen to spread a stupid and degenerate race, who unconscious of the beauties of nature or the magnificent attractions of art, could with a rude hand demolish those immense structures of antiquity, which had for ages defied the assaults of time and of accident, and could bow the willing knee to a wandering herd of Savage Marauders. And we have within a few years, seen this dishonored country, rescued from the hands of its unworthy occupiers, and subdued by the arms of a distant nation, more capable of realizing the advantages of its situation, and of reviving the knowledge of its former sciences and improvements.

DURING this period, has the land once blessed by the institutions of a *SOLON* and a *LYCURGUS*, been seen contaminated by the impure habitation

of birds of prey, and of a people more savage and impure than they. The regions once animated by the fire of a BRUTUS, had sunk into a state of abject slavery, under the power of effeminate Pontiffs; and the temples once animated by the eloquence of a TULLY, had been defiled by the unhallowed revellings of debauched Ecclesiastics. And as before observed, we have of late seen the downfall of the cruel and unnatural power by which this state of shameful corruption was supported, by means wonderful and unexpected. We have seen it effected by the arms of a nation, who were once the firmest supporters of this scene of impollure, and upon whose zeal and credulity the unholy successors of Saint Peter had made the most liberal draughts for the supply of their voracious lusts. We have seen this nation led on to their vast enterprises and achievements, by a foreigner of obscure birth, the native of an obscure Island, and placed at the head of a mighty people, to accomplish no doubt the great designs of him, "*who raiseth up one, and pulleth down another, and exalteth whomsoever he will.*"

Such is a faint picture of some of those interesting scenes, which within the view of the present generation have been acted on the theatre of the ancient World, and which furnish such abundant matter of contemplation to the reflecting, and of congratulation to the patriotic mind. But in the language of the poet—

"Our Country claims our active aid,
 "There let us rosin, and where we find
 "A Spark of Public Virtue, blow it into Flame."

AND since the fortunes of our own country are by far the most interesting to us as Americans, and the events which the vicissitude of her affairs have afforded within the last Century are marked by features peculiarly instructive. A review of those scenes thro' which she has pass'd, within the eventful

period of a few generations to her present state of happiness and improvement, might naturally occupy the lengthy attention of an audience, convened to celebrate her good fortunes, and to rejoice on one of her most auspicious days. The time however allowed either to the preparation or the hearing, will suffer but a transitory mention of the progressive changes through which we have travelled in the road of improvement, or of the means which have enabled us to outstrip all our cotemporaries in an age of light and reformation. During the period in question, it is however pleasing to observe, that the greater part of that territory which now composes the United States of America, has by the hand of labor and enterprise, been transformed from an uncultivated wilderness, to a fertile and productive soil;—from the habitation of Savages and noxious animals, to the abodes of civilization, refinement and hospitality. Within this time the sacred spot which we now occupy, has probably been appropriated to the celebration of Barbarian Orgies, and the unnatural sacrifice of the victims of conquest.

IMPELLED uniformly by a spirit of civil and political Liberty, and guided by sentiments of religion for the most part tolerant and mild, the enterprising genius of our ancestors burst from the restraints of domestic tyranny at home, and forced their passage through the accumulated difficulties which embittered their pilgrimage abroad. With all their discouragements and embarrassments, such was their rapid march in national greatness, that their unnatural Mother soon viewed them with an eye of avarice for their increasing wealth, and perhaps of jealousy for their future fortunes.

PURSUING their progress for a Century and an half, through a course of unexampled prosperity and successful enterprise, we arrive at that memorable crisis of her affairs which more particularly

relates to the concerns of this day, and to an event by far more interesting to us than any other of the last eventful Century. I mean the Revolution of the United States, and their consequent transition from the abject condition of dependent Colonies, to the elevated station of an opulent and independent Nation. An occurrence of infinitely more consequence to society than any other Revolution which had preceded it, from the superior importance of the principles on which it was predicated. In other Countries those changes in Government which had borne the name of Revolutions, had been generally but a transition from the Yoke of one Tyrant to that of another. The Tyrant himself might indeed fall under the just indignation of his subjects, but his principles still survived, and his mantle descended to an equally rapacious successor. But in this Country, it was not the personal power of the Despot which alarmed us, but the dreadful principles on which that Despotism was founded. And it was accordingly at the latter alone at which our blows were aimed. To escape from that state of unqualified Vassalage, in which the unwarrantable claims of Great-Britain must involve us, we embarked in the contest which issued in our Revolution and Independence, and stood forth the practical asserters of doctrines which the hand of Tyranny had at that time nearly obliterated from the Earth, or had confined to the breasts of a few scattering Votaries of Liberty and philosophy in Europe and America.

WHAT those doctrines were, and wherein consisted their violation, a feeble attempt to shew was once made in this place on a former occasion. And late occurrences in our Country have encouraged us to hope, that with the present generation at least, all attempts to efface their remembrance will be vain and futile.

IT cannot now be necessary to revive in the

minds of this audience; a recollection of the sufferings, the dangers and the toils, thro' which the Revolution which we commemorate was at length accomplished ; or of the means which were afterwards wisely taken to render that Revolution an event truly promotive of our happiness and security, by the establishment of a Government which should unite "*Liberty with order,*" and the individual freedom of the Citizen with his preservation from injury and annoyance.

How far these great objects have been kept in view by the Administration which has for some years past conducted our national affairs, has already been decided by the will of the Nation Constitutionally and fairly declared. And if from that Administration have proceeded any measures conducive to the happiness of their constituents, accordant with the unbiassed will of the Country, and correspondent with the chief ends of our political institutions, *so far* they have merited the tribute of our gratitude and applause, and will undoubtedly receive the approbation of an approving conscience. *So far* on the other hand, as their leading measures may have been founded on a departure from the declared principles of these institutions, or in any degree adverse to those important interests, which it is the design of all good Governments to cherish and protect, *so far* is the early check which has been given to their improper designs and unwarrantable measures a matter of congratulation and rejoicing at the present day.

BUT it is frequently demanded, why all this exultation about the change of Administration ; and what are the peculiar benefits which are about to accrue to the Country from the measures of the present above that which has preceded it ? And we are sometimes told of late, that no material alterations will occur in the general systems of policy by which we have heretofore been governed,

but that the *old order* of things will still be substantially maintained. And we are told this too in some instances by men, who but a few months since had openly proclaimed, that the *new order* would inevitably bring with it, a prostration of all the principles which had heretofore been esteemed sacred, or which secure the Country from the horrors of Anarchy and Wretchedness. I will not stop here to comment upon the unblushing inconsistency, which could dictate positions so diametrically opposite, or hazard assertions so totally irreconcilable both with each and with probability. But in direct answer to the questions which are thus boldly proposed, and to the predictions which are thus confidently stated would proceed to suggest; That under the present Administration we have *every reason to expect*, that our national debt during ten years of peace and prosperity, will not hereafter suffer an increase of more than *Nine Millions of Dollars*, while the people are paying annually during the same period an average tax of *more than Five Millions*. We have *some reason to apprehend*, that the hand of taxation will not hereafter be laid so heavy upon us as to enhance very considerably the price of many of the imported necessaries of life; or the expenditures of the civil list so enormous as to require the levy of a *direct tax*, after the other sources of taxation have been drained to their very dregs. We have *some authority to conjecture* that a *standing army* will not soon be seen again in our streets, with no employment but the consumption of their rations; or that a *Corps of foreign Ambassadors* will not be sent to make the tour of Europe at the expence of the nation; and we know, that *Mr. Jefferson* has not yet suffered any of his fellow Citizens to take their abode in the place appointed for convicts and malefactors, for treating his character and Administration with distrust and disrespect. Such are some

few of the objects which we think we have reason to hope that the present Administration will not take *much pains* to accomplish, and by a comparison of the *certainties* which we know to have been past, with the *probabilities* in which we hope for the future, Republicans may give to them that ask it, a tolerable "*reason for the faith that is in them.*" and the ground of the exputations which they are led to entertain respecting the future destinies of their country.

BUT it would perhaps be productive of no very beneficial purposes, to draw at this time many invidious discriminations between past and present Administrations, or unnecessarily to open wounds under which we have already smarted sufficiently: It may perhaps be more adviseable, in some measure to draw a veil over Errors that are past and cannot be recalled, and to let the evil which may have been done lie buried with its Authors; except only so far, as it may sometimes be necessary to improve past examples for present instruction, and to point out former Errors for future avoidance. It will probably be a more profitable employment to direct our views to such systems of policy, as may render the present crisis truly beneficial to us as a Nation, and to the adoption of such rules of action as Men and as Citizens, as may hereafter have a tendency to secure to us the continued blessings of a wise administration and the uninterrupted flow of social enjoyment.

HAVING experienced that *mere Constitutional forms*, however excellent in theory, are no absolute security against the prosecution of dangerous designs or the introduction of heretical principles, it is hoped that we have learnt not to trust altogether to the efficacy of written intrenchments as sufficient to secure us against the subtle invasions of foreign and domestic foes. That a certain and defined rule of action be prescribed to those to whom

the concerns of a Nation are entrusted, is not only highly expedient and proper, but is so absolutely essential to the existence of civil Liberty, that without it no political system however specious in appearance, or apparently beneficent in its operations, deserves the name of a free and well ordered Government. But after all the real utility of every civil institution, depends for its permanent security upon the knowledge respecting its defined principles which is entertained by the great body of the people, and the habits of vigilance which they are accustomed to exercise, respecting its open violation or gradual infringement. The ingenuity of mechanical invention has long been able to construct machines so justly proportioned, with parts so nicely adjusted, that with occasional correction, and frequent winding up, they will perform their designed operations with considerable accuracy and correctness. So the skill of politicians has of late succeeded in so constructing the machinery of civil Government, and in so justly balancing its various branches, that with a proper attention to its movements, and a reasonable correction of its errors and deviations, the great objects for which it is calculated, can with considerable safety be ensured. But when the powers of the Mechanic shall have discovered the secret of *the perpetual and perfect motion*, then and not before will political wisdom have found the secret of a Government, which without any attention to its operations, or rectification of its wayward motions by the hand of its great Architect the people, will move on thro' perpetual ages, a *Model of perfect regularity order and correctness*. Let us then always look with a steady and unvarying eye upon the great and essential principles of our political compacts, and to the test of those principles, let the measures of those who may at this or any fu-

ture time be selected to administer them be uniformly brought.

CONNECTED with the foregoing consideration, highly dangerous to the cause of Freedom, and inconsistent with every attribute of a real Republican, is the habit of imposing in any man or class of men, an implicit confidence, or unqualified faith, for the regulation of our beliefs, or the rule of our political conduct. To this evil has Liberty frequently been indebted for her subversion, and the pure principles of Christianity for her lamentable corruptions. However wise and honorable, however highly distinguished for great and important services to their Country, all men are at last *fallible*, and when under the guidance of the *best of motives* are liable at least to *err*. But alas! all experience hath shewn, that the motives of the best, are not always to be trusted, and that uniform perseverance in the true interells of their constituents, is too rarely the characteristic of those whom the people delight to honor. For the great body of the people therefore, to set up one of their brethren "above all that is exalted," to call the *1001 Republicanism*, and to govern their principles and their actions, by the ever-varying needle of his prejudices and passions, and never to compare them with the standards of justice and the Constitution, is equally as absurd and deceptive, as the attempting to regulate the equable motions of the heavenly bodies by the fluctuations of a disordered time-piece. Whether in or out of office, let us confer upon a man an undue weight of personal influence, and make him sensible of his possessing an unbounded control over our understandings and our conduct, and we have created an instrument for the destruction of our Liberties more dangerous than *the Seditious Law*, and more operative than the physical force of a *Standing*

Army. It is of little consequence whether in the present distinction of parties, we call such a man a *Republican* or an *Aristocrat*, a friend to the Administration of JEFFERSON, or a well-wisher to the Election of PINCKNEY. Men may sometimes take different sides on this question, from personal attachments to the one Character or personal aversions to the other;—or, they may cover themselves with the mantle of some popular name the more securely to accomplish their designs or to augment their influence.

ON great national subjects, wherein they have no private interests to gratify, or personal antipathies to revenge, they may pursue the plain path of *Republican* sincerity, and “*as much as in them lies deal justly with all men.*” But view them in the circles of their immediate influence and interest, and we may frequently and plainly discover, that motives very diverse from the true Love of Country, often obtrude themselves upon the actions of the best, and make heavy drawbacks upon the general Stock of their Patriotism.

As it is thus at times within the smaller circles of our observation, so it undoubtedly must be with men of stations more exalted, and influence more widely extensive. It may hereafter be the case with those, in whose patriotism and virtue the nation has now every human reason to confide, and to whom in preference to the great multitude of their Brethren they have seen occasion to entrust their dearest interests. And should even *the Illustrious Character*, who now occupies the first station in his Country's gift, disregard the principles upon which he was elected, and thro' the false intoxication of power, cast a shade over the virtues of a well spent life; it is fervently to be hoped, that by the United Voice of his constituents, he will, to use his own expressions, be suffered to retire from his elevated Office, “without the reputation and the favor which brought him into it.”

*Moderation in the exercise of power, and the avoidance of measures which answer no great purpose but that of afflicting and retaliating upon a fallen adversary, is equally a dictate of justice and policy, and indicates a spirit truly worthy of a Republican and a Man. For as the most imperious masters are generally upon a change of conditions the most abject slaves, so those who in prosperity are the most violent and intolerant to their political adversaries, will generally be found to be those, who under different circumstances have been the most cowardly and submissive. We have lately seen the fatal effects of an *overstrained system of policy*; we have seen that by governing too much, the power of governing at all has been totally lost, and transferred to other hands. We have felt the effects of *needless provocations, and unauthorised insinuations*; and we felt confident that such a system could not long be permanent.—Let us then,*

“ *Learn to be wise by others’ harm*

“ *And we shall do full well.*”

*A general System of Candor, fairness and ingenuities towards all men who have an interest in the common concerns of our Country, whether they agree with us or not in the expediency of particular measures, seems essential to creating a confidence in the cause we espouse, and necessary to convince the World that we are really actuated in our views by an honest and patriotic zeal. “The Minority,” says our President, “have likewise their equal rights, which to violate would be oppressive.” They have also some-times, *certain feelings to be gratified or prejudices to be consulted*, which may easily be done, without any sacrifice of the great and essential principles upon which we differ.*

BUT with all our moderation, all our candor, and all our forbearance, let us still stand girt about with the *full armor of Republicanism*, and yield nothing which can expose the sacred Ark of our Liberties to the intrigues or assaults of her enemies.

IT is upon a well founded confidence, that *the present Administration* of our National Government will be guided by these just and equitable views; that the fundamental principles of our glorious Revolution will be cherished, and the wise provisions of our excellent Constitution sacredly regarded;—it is because the dangers into which we have been drawn by designing men have been happily avoided, and the schemes of artful ambition timely defeated;—it is because the inordinate passions of party are gradually subsiding, and the malignity of political zeal evidently abating amongst the great body of the people, that we are led to view this Anniversary as a day of exceeding joy to the great family of America. And it is upon a fervent and increasing anticipation, that the Century before us, opens with prospects more favorable to the happiness of society, and propitious to the Cause of Freedom through the World than any which has preceded it, that we are led to view it as a period of great hope and expectation to the universal family of Man.

WHILE therefore we unite in festive congratulations, upon our deliverance from the Land of Britain, and “out of the house of political Bondage,” let us encircle in the arms of our sympathetic wishes the oppressed of every Nation; and let our aspirations ascend to the great Author of Liberty and of Life, that the principles to which this joyful occasion is consecrated, may be made as extensive as his Infinite Benevolence;—and that **THE FOURTH OF JULY SEVENTY-SIX** may be hailed by Generations to come, as **THE MORNING STAR OF A CLOUDLESS AND UNIVERSAL DAY.**