

AN

# ORATION,

*PRONOUNCED AT WORCESTER, (Mass.)*

ON THE

THIRTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY

OF

## AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1812.

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By FRANCIS BLAKE.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF A NUMEROUS ASSEMBLY  
OF CITIZENS FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTY, AND  
THE MEMBERS OF THE WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT  
SOCIETY, WHO JOINED IN THE CELEBRATION.

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# ORATION.

ANOTHER anniversary of our national nativity has returned,—has found us in possession of our liberties,—and—God be praised—not yet completely robbed of our INDEPENDENCE!—That our liberty has hitherto lingered through the shock, which has convulsed the nations of Europe, and desolated the fairest portion of the civilized world, demands our fervent gratitude to HIM, who rules over kingdoms and empires, and who holds in his hand the destinies of men. It would be matter of cordial congratulation, if we could mingle with these emotions, the proud recollection that, while our freedom and sovereignty have yet been preserved, the essential principles of our Independence had, in no instance, been forgotten.

The return of this anniversary calls for a recurrence to these principles; and naturally conducts us to the enquiry, how far we have followed in the footsteps, and how far we have wandered from the landmarks, of our political fathers. Such is the task I have assigned to myself, in yielding to your request, and contributing my humble aid to the purposes of this joyous celebration. The few moments of leisure I have been able to devote to this task, amid the pressure of numerous other avocations, will present an obvious, and, I trust, an ample apology for the imperfect manner of its execution.

Are there any in this assembly, who bring with them an implacable remembrance of the *wrongs*, which led to a successful vindication of our *rights*; and who look for aliment, to nurture and cherish their prejudices against the nation with which we contend.

ed?—Let them depart, and find at some other banquet, a feast of vengeance, which I disdain to spread before them! I appear not in the spirit of WAR, but of PEACE. I stand not here to administer to the vindictive and malevolent passions of the human heart. Nearly twenty-nine years have elapsed, since, in the preamble of a definitive treaty, “in the name of the Most Holy and undivided TRINITY,” we united in returning thanks, that “it had pleased the Divine  
“ Providence to dispose the hearts of the contending  
“ parties to forget all past misunderstandings and dif-  
“ ferences, that had unhappily interrupted the good cor-  
“ respondence and friendship, which they mutually  
“ wished to restore; and to establish such beneficial  
“ and satisfactory intercourse between the two coun-  
“ tries, upon the ground of reciprocal advantage and  
“ mutual convenience, as might secure to both, per-  
“ petual harmony and peace.”

After this solemn pledge of conciliation, though the trumpet of war summons us again to the field, is it not impious to tear open wounds, which Christianity itself has healed and cicatrized? Even when girding our loins for another bloody sacrifice, is it not sacrilege to approach the altar, upon which we have once offered up all our resentments, in search of the torch of discord, that we may enkindle again the angry passions, that were once so happily and so cordially extinguished?

I am aware, my fellow-citizens, it has been, on former occasions, a part of the pageantry of this day, to exhibit a panorama of the battles we fought, the disasters we endured, and the victories we won, in our perilous struggle for emancipation and independence.—To this custom—“a custom more honored in the breach than th’ observance”—may well be attributed much of that rancorous temper of hostility to Britain, which has engendered the spirit of faction, poisoned our domestic tranquillity, and has, at length, plunged us headlong into the unfathomable horrors of war!

Those among us who have cherished an eternal hatred to England, as essential to the permanent success of their party, have endeavored to monopolize this anniversary, as the season for renewing the pledge of their enmity; and have denounced all who would not join in their war feast, as enemies to our independence, and as languishing for a return to our former state of colonial subjection. By a portion of the citizens of our metropolis, the very field of blood has been selected, as the scene of their annual rejoicings, and all those who would not march under their banners to the heights of Bunker, to fight over, in imagination, the battle which a lapse of thirty-seven years has almost obliterated from our calendar, have been traduced as royalists, reviled as tories, and stigmatized as enemies to their country!

In this protracted and unchristian remembrance of wrongs, which ought long since to have been forgotten, we have palpably violated the pledge in our declaration of independence, by which we solemnly announced to the world, that “we would hold the people of Great-Britain, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war—in peace, friends.”

By fostering, as coincident with an illiberal jealousy of ENGLAND, a spirit of blind, indiscriminating and overweening partiality for FRANCE, we have wandered yet farther from the primary objects of our INDEPENDENCE. A factitious principle of gratitude, for services rendered by their ancient monarchy, from no other motive, than to annoy a natural enemy and to discomfit a successful rival, has been conjured up to palliate all the enormities of revolutionary France, and to atone for all the atrocities of the bloody usurper, who now directs the destinies of that ill-fated nation! The tone of gratitude has been made to chime on all the changes of their numberless revolutions; and has passed, in rapid succession, from their murdered monarch, to a nation regicides—a nation of infidel philosophers—a nation of monsters—and, last of all, to a nation of slaves!!

Are there any that hear me, who are eager to contrast these sentiments, with the enthusiastic expressions of joy at the revolutionary successes of France, which they may have heard from me, on any former occasion? They are welcome to all the triumph, which they may derive from such a contrast! It is now sixteen years, since, in common with the great mass of my fellow-citizens, in common with the friends of liberty throughout the world, I was dazzled with the delusive glare of a baleful meteor, which had arisen in another hemisphere, and which appeared as the harbinger of a new æra of happiness, to a brave and generous people. In the language of our American *Tacitus*—there “was something infectious in the example of a powerful and enlightened nation, verging toward democracy, which imposed on the human mind and led human reason in fetters.”—“It presented the semblance of being the sense of mankind, breaking loose from the shackles which had been imposed by artifice, and asserting the freedom and dignity of his nature,”\* With men, the fervor of whose imaginations had yielded to the sedateness of maturer years, I had partaken of civic feasts, in commemoration of their wonderful achievements. At the commencement of the same year, when the national colors of France were deposited in our archives, as the symbol of perpetual union, the voice of our sainted Washington, in language of enthusiasm which he seldom indulged, had electrified the whole continent with admiration of the exploits and the successes of their revolution. With such an example of fervent rejoicing, with such predictions of the permanent good, which would result from this conflict, not only to the people of France, but to the cause of liberty throughout the world, shall any of us be reproached with inconsistency, because we were deceived in the ultimate issue of events, which were then without parallel in the history of man?

\* Marshall's Life of Washington, Vol. 5, page 390.

Beguiled by a sort of intellectual delusion, we gazed with delight at this treacherous *ignis fatuus*, till we saw it had conducted its followers, through rivers of blood, over hideous precipices, and deep and dreadful morasses, and at length left them bewildered in mazes of anarchy, from whence there was no return ! Did I say there was *no* return ? Alas ! The iron hand of despotism seized them, at the moment when their blood was curdling with horror, at the frightful scenes by which they were surrounded. They yielded to its chilling grasp !—They followed, in fearful silence, wherever the foul fiend led the way ! They were at length bound in fetters of steel ; and, at this moment, thirty millions of our fellow-beings, who once vainly imagined they were free, are immured in the dungeons and caverns of the monster, perhaps never again to be ransomed, by the redeeming spirit of freedom !

In revolting from the meretricious philosophy, by which a gallant and magnanimous nation had been decoyed into scenes of such unparalleled horror, I have turned, with equal disgust, from the contagion it had communicated to our own political system. In a blind and servile devotion to France, I have traced the “root of bitterness,” from which sprang the tree of our political evil ; and, in abjuring her visionary and destructive theories, it was easy to shake off the shackles of a wild democracy, which has poisoned the peace, and jeopardized the best interests of our country.

For whatever may savour of egotism in this personal vindication, I throw myself upon your indulgence, and ask you to return with me to subjects of a more interesting nature.

I have spoken of an illiberal jealousy of England, and an undue attachment to France, as a departure from the essential principles of our independence, by which we “assumed a separate and equal station among the nations of the earth.” To these causes may also be principally ascribed, the interruption of

our prosperity, the distresses we have endured, the degradation we have suffered, the recent calamity, which, even on this accustomed jubilee, has shrouded our country in sackcloth, with every impending evil, the extent of which no human foresight can fathom.

Shall I be required to furnish proof that the policy of our rulers has been guided by these motives?—Your patience would be exhausted, by a minute analysis of this evidence; but will permit me, I trust, to touch briefly on the more prominent topics.

The symptoms of this prejudice and this partiality, coeval with the adoption of our federal constitution, were displayed in the earliest deliberations of our national councils. Our political *Palinurus*, who now stands at the helm of state, who has conducted us to the present most perilous crisis, and who is designated to guide the Nation through the storms and tempests that are now lowering around us, was the first to propose a line of demarcation between our former enemies and our former allies, in the management of our foreign relations. His project of discriminating duties, by which a decided preference was to be given, at our own expence, to a commercial intercourse with France, was founded upon an open and avowed partiality for that nation, and a disposition to retaliate for the injuries we had formerly received from Britain.—This proposal unfolded the germ of political contention; and the ardor with which it was advocated by the partizans of France, indicated a propensity among those, who have since controuled the administration of our government, to surrender our character as an independent nation, and to embark with her in any future contest in which she might be engaged.—It was strenuously urged that France had strong claims on the gratitude of the American people; and that a proper sense of the obligations she had imposed on us, demanded a commercial arrangement which might tend to divert our trade from its accustomed channels; and, as far as possible, confine its benefits to her,



to the exclusion of Great Britain. This project was warmly supported, not only in the National Legislature, but by the man who was then at the head of our foreign department; who soon afterwards became the head of a faction, erected a French standard on American ground, and artfully seduced a majority of the people, to receive his bounty and enlist under his banners. The friend and disciple of *Mirabeau* and *Condorcet*, he had just received his diploma from the school of French philosophy, and had become a zealous propagandist, for this then unilluminated section of the globe. Our American husbandmen had "sowed good seed in their field, but an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." The soil was, unfortunately, found too well adapted to the growth of the poisonous exotics, which he had carefully transplanted from the botanic garden of Paris; and although, thanks to a merciful God! they have not, here, as there, been watered with the most precious blood of our country, yet they have taken deep root, have produced, in regular succession, a plentiful crop of calamities, and are, perhaps, only to be extirpated, by the toils and sufferings of ages!

A spirit of honest impartiality, which then preponderated in the councils of the nation, defeated this project for widening the breach with England, and promoting a more intimate union with France. It did not, however, stifle the growth of the principles, which had been so industriously propagated, and which were to be again summoned into action, whenever a more propitious occasion should occur.

When the sanguinary progress of the French revolution had at length drawn into a tremendous conflict the two great nations of Europe, a proclamation of neutrality, dictated by the soundest wisdom and the purest patriotism, declared it to be "the duty and interest of the United States, with sincerity and good faith, to adopt and pursue a conduct, alike friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers."

This just and magnanimous policy was condemned in terms of the bitterest reproach, by the party who had been affiliated by the regicides of France, and who were prepared to march on a crusade against all the crowned potentates of Europe. It was triumphantly demanded “whether the people of America were a. “like friendly to republicanism and to monarchy; to “liberty and to despotism.”—“With infectious en- “thusiasm it was contended, that there was a natur- “al and inveterate hostility between monarchies and “republics; that the combination against France was “a combination against liberty in every party of the “world; and that the destinies of America were inseparably linked with those of the French republic.”\*

Nor were the pupils of the *Parisian School* satisfied with mere professions of friendship. *Genet*, that itinerant apostle of sedition, after having, from the moment of his arrival, prostituted his public functions, by the most outrageous usurpation of our rights of sovereignty, was received with open arms, and welcomed with a triumphal entry to the seat of government, by the party who had determined to precipitate us into a war with England. When he threatened to appeal from the constituted authorities to the people—these exclusive friends of the people were ready to sustain the appeal, and to reverse the sentence of an inferior tribunal. When, in a stile of insolence, rivalled only by the minister of the present Despot of France, (who has recently reviled us as “a nation without honor, without “energy, and without just notions of policy”) he dared to proclaim to the government and the world, that “our “political rights were counted for nothing—that the “thirst of riches preponderated over honour, in the political balance of America;—and that the French “People were justly punished for their credulity, in “believing that the American Nation had a Flag—that “they had some respect for their laws—some conviction of their strength, and entertained some just sen-

\* Marshall's Life of Washington, Vol. 5, page 424.

“timents of their dignity,”\*—will it be credited that the very men, who, in the tone of affected chivalry, are now vaunting about national honor, and are so “tremblingly alive” to the slightest indignity from *another* foreign power, were so cringing and servile as to countenance this opprobrious language, and to support him, in all his subsequent outrages upon our character as an independent nation ?

For this temper of meek submission to the abuses of France, for this fraternizing spirit, which sought to interweave our destinies with hers, and to mingle us in the conflict, which has since drenched the world in blood, we were indebted, more than to any other cause, to the philanthropic labors of the then Secretary of State ; who, by the confession of *Genet* himself, had “initiated *him* into mysteries, which had “inflamed his hatred against all who were charged “with aspiring to absolute power.”†

The second officer of the government, who has since attempted to perpetuate his fame, not, indeed, like the philosopher of *Agrigentum*, by leaping into the burning crater of *Ætna*, [a] but by plunging into the abyss of democratic pollution, was, at this time, denounced as a monarchist, because, in his political speculations, he had maintained that a balance in government was essential to the preservation of liberty, and had presumed to doubt the perpetual durability of the French republic.

To add to our increasing stock of resentments against Great-Britain, insidious efforts were made to inculcate a belief, that she had prompted the Barbary Powers to their piratical depredations upon our commerce ; and (almost in the very language of the recent presidential manifesto) that she had instigated the savages to their hostile incursions upon our western borders ; and, as a just measure of retaliation, the government was strenuously urged to an act of direct hostility, in seizing upon their military posts.

\* Marshall's Life of Washington, vol. v. page 437.

†Ibid. 445.

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