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DELIVERED IN THE
BENEVOLENT CONGREGATIONAL
MEETING-HOUSE

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IN
P R O V I D E N C E,
ON THE
F O U R T H O F J U L Y,

A. D. 1798,

IN COMMEMORATION OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY SAMUEL W. BRIDGHAM, A. M.

Hic dies verè festus atq[ue]
Eximet Curas.

HORACE.

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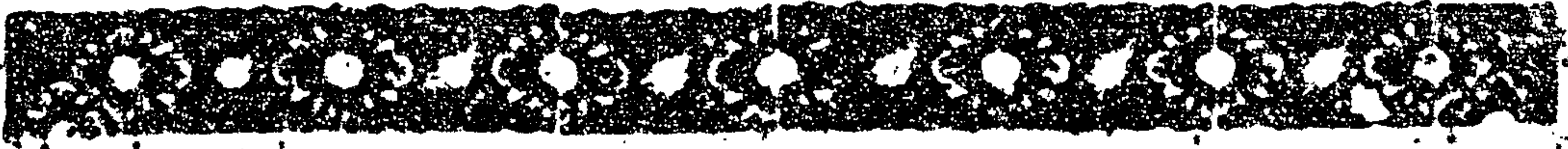
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A N
O R A T I O N.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

WE are now assembled to celebrate the most splendid era that graces the annals of nations : An era, the recollection of which kindles up a laudable and lively ardour in the breasts of patriots. Ever since the memory of man, most nations have distinguished certain epochas commemorative of great events. The object of this assembly is not to celebrate the natal day of a powerful monarch, at whose feet we supine ourselves with base humility ; not to bear in mind the many victims which have been immolated, to satisfy the thirst of regal ambition ; but to water with our tears the laurels that decorate the tombs of our ancestors, to rejoice in liberty, and to hail the birth-day of our national independence. The celebration of this day, like the tattered ensign which has survived the battles of our fathers, brings to our recollection the miseries of foreign subjugation, inspires us with military ardour, unites with a magic power the sons of freedom, and vibrates her energies in the bosoms of Americans. Already, on similar occasions, has the tongue of the orator bestowed all the tropes of eloquence, and the pen of the poet lavished all the flights of fancy upon the splendour of American victories. The heroes who bled in
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our revolutionary war, have been sung by our bards in the highest strains of panegyric. But on this anniversary, new scenes arise in our political hemisphere. Twelve months seldom produce a greater change in the political sentiments of any nation, than that which the events of the same period have produced in America. Let us pass over, but not forget, the deeds of former times, and take a short survey of the causes which produced this great revolution in our bosoms.

Twenty-two revolving years have now elapsed, since the sun of freedom arose in majesty on this western world. When he first appeared above the horizon, his beams, like those of yonder brilliant luminary, at times were encircled with vapour and smoke; but his lustre increased in full proportion to his ascent. We pursued him in his refulgent career, until every cloud was lost in his brightness. We beheld him diffusing life, and splendour, and joy, over four millions of people. Since the termination of the late American war, the United States have attracted the attention of all nations. Our profitable commerce has whitened our coasts with the canvases of the world. The tree of liberty, planted by the hand of GOD himself, cherished by our ancestors, and watered with their blood,—that tree whose branches shade the Union, has invited the oppressed from all quarters of the globe, and with them some turbulent and factious spirits, who never can rest under *any government*, have been admitted. “*Hinc ille mali labes*”—hence part of our misfortunes—they are not only admitted, but join our public councils. Such is the incautious benignity of our laws! No tyrant here sways the iron sceptre of uncontrouled dominion. Our Constitution
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and Government are founded on the immutable principles of justice, and our laws display mildness in their composition, and inflexibility in their execution. Their influence, like the light of Heaven, spreads equally on all distinctions of men. This happy condition of our country has raised her high on the rolls of fame. Her brilliancy lights up the countenance, and her imposing majesty commands veneration.

Nations and individuals are governed by the self-same principles of action. Impartiality, integrity, honour and virtue, have ever been the striking characteristics of the United States, in their intercourse with foreign nations. In no instance can they be charged with a violation of any of these great and fundamental principles of justice and policy. Whenever misunderstandings have prevailed, they have always hitherto, one instance excepted, been adjusted by amicable accommodation. Since the commencement of the wonderful convulsions which at this moment agitate all Europe to its centre, the situation of the United States has been truly alarming. England, that nation from whom we once boasted that our ancestors descended, has committed depredations on our commerce. Jealous of our friendship, from that strong attachment which at the commencement of the French revolution seemed to have bound us to France by an inseparable connexion, and stung with the remembrance of former resentments, she attempted the disturbance of the tranquility and repose of this country. Every action which wore the least appearance of partiality towards France increased her jealousy, and sharpened the dagger of her resentment. But the great event we now celebrate, and the pure
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and unconquerable spirit of united America, have taught her the useful lesson, that we are, and will be, free and independent.

Had France been equally rational and docile, our friendship with her might have still subsisted. But she spurned the olive-branch which we held out to all nations, and which England, Spain, and many other powers, have thought it an honour to accept.

The French revolution, that great system, burst forth so suddenly, and with such a glare of novelty, that the eyes of mankind were dazzled with its beams. America beheld the spectacle with astonishment, and was for a time fascinated with the striking but deceptive colours which glittered in the eyes of a deluded imagination. At this period France solemnly proclaimed to the world that a free Constitution was her object, and that liberty and equality, or the rights of man, were the pole-star of her conduct. Firmly relying on the sincerity of this declaration, American hearts triumphed at the glory of her victories. Blinded with the false glare of her professions, and with a strong sense of obligation to a country whose rulers had been our friends, we implored Heaven that conquest might attend her arms. But these enchanting scenes, these "*baseless fabrics of a vision*," which so enraptured Americans; are dissolved, and, like a beautiful frost-work, melted into nothing. Our fondest expectations, the tender leaves of hope, were blasted by the mildews of faction and anarchy. Fondness for novelty, though in some degree common to all men, is particularly characteristic of the French nation. The merits of that political fabric, by revolutionary demoniacs in France called

called a Constitution, were to be decided, not by the unbiassed determination of the people, but they were compelled to admire and adore it with the bayonet at their breasts. While the people of France were enraptured with this new political prodigy, their iniquities were confined within their own territories. The bloody massacre of their King and Queen, of their men of honour, of genius, of virtue, of science, of morality and of religion, was but the commencement of the awful tragedy of wicked rapacity and legalized murder. The charm of novelty was however soon dissipated; but the thirst for domination and power still remained. Intoxicated with ambition, they viewed the rising interests of their neighbours with suspicion. Their envy excited schemes of innovation, inconsistent with their own pretended Constitution and the rights of the people, contrary to the laws of nations, and repugnant to the eternal principles of humanity, justice and religion. What part of their Constitution, or what rights of the people, authorized them to confine thousands, without even the forms of trials, in dungeons, or to stretch them on the scaffold of judicial murder? Where were the laws of nations, when they invaded Holland, and displaced the Stadtholder? When they penetrated Italy, subjugated her provinces, erected their military governments, and reduced a flourishing country to a heap of ruins? When they assaulted the happy and unoffending Cantons of Switzerland? When they piratically invaded the commerce of America? Where was their humanity, when they countenanced wild and savage tumult to prowl about the streets of their mighty metropolis? When they massacred universally, without distinction

distinction of age or sex? When the smoke of vil-
 lages darkened the face of Heaven? Where was
 their religion, when even the house of GOD was
 polluted by their crimes, and by their sacrilege
 the tomb itself was no refuge from their violence?
 Where was their justice, when, after pillag-
 ing almost to annihilation the trade of the United
 States, they demanded of them upwards of FIF-
 TEEN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, merely for the
 purchase of *common civility*? This is their boast-
 ed liberty and equality! How opposite in its ef-
 fects to American freedom, that emanation from
 Heaven, which sublimates our souls, and which is
 interwoven with the very web of our existence.
 An enthusiastic people, struggling for universal
 empire, and the subjugation of the world, is pour-
 trayed in lively colours in every feature of French
 politics. While France pursued rational liber-
 ty, we rejoiced in the glory of her arms; but
 when she lost sight of her first object, and pur-
 sued a phantom—when she deluged the world with
 blood, we lamented her departure from the paths
 of political integrity. The paroxysm of this
 revolutionary fever in France, has produced atro-
 cities sufficient to *“harrow up our souls”* with
 indignation, and *“to curdle the blood in our veins.”*
 Liberty has been prophaned, humanity has been
 outraged. True liberty, the daughter and best
 gift of Heaven, is inseparable from virtue, from
 science, from morality, and from all the tender-
 ties of social life. To preserve our Constitution
 and government entire, is our united object.—
 Amidst all the violent convulsions produced by the
 French revolution, America has preserved a firm
 and unshaken neutrality. Notwithstanding the
 bold clamours of malevolence, and the sly insinu-
 ations

ations of intrigue, America has never departed from the great principles of national justice, integrity and honour, or violated the solemn faith of national compacts. We have not only suffered great injuries from the hands of France, but we have been treated with the grossest insult, and most supercilious contempt. All this we have borne with calm dignity, and unabated resolution. She was sensible of our attachment to her, and availed herself of it. She let loose her armed vessels, like tygers, to prey upon our defenceless commerce, while she hypocritically courted our friendship. Little did we think that the smile of friendship on the face, veiled the canker of malice at the heart. No pretext has been omitted to plunder our property, and to insult the majesty of the nation. Her ships of war, for robbery and plunder, have approached within the very bodies of our counties. To adjust these injuries, ministers, clothed with full powers for negotiation, were dispatched from the United States to France. The effects of this embassy are too well known to require any comment. Methinks I see indignation flash in your countenances, and the American blood boil in your veins, while I mention the subject. Upwards of FIFTEEN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS have been demanded of us, merely as the price of *an audience* with five execrable tyrants. These are the fruits of French liberty. Will you, my countrymen, ingloriously submit to these base requisitions? Will you tamely surrender your independence into hands polluted with robbery and with murder? Will you bear the yoke and the scourge of foreign usurpation, like beasts of burthen, and basely cringe and fawn for more imposition? Or will you rise and

resent your injuries, with an indignation proportionate, if possible, to the aggravations of the offence? The number and the spirit of the addresses, which, on the disclosure of the base designs of that haughty republic, have been presented to our Executive from all quarters of the Union, declare, with emphasis, the feelings of our citizens upon this great national subject. "Let us," in the bold and energetic language of my immediate predecessor,* "at least receive *one volley*, before we throw down our arms." The very term independence, of which it is our pride to boast, implies an entire separation from dependence on a connexion with any power or nation on earth for protection, when the existence of our country is endangered. Let us neither grovel at the feet of the French republic, nor cringe to the monarchy of England; but firmly repeat, what our great ancestors in the face of Heaven declared, "that we are, and of right ought to be, a free, sovereign and independent people." Weak and timorous debates no longer degrade our national councils. In this common danger, all party contests sink into oblivion; and whilst our unanimity remains firm and decided, I trust our strength will remain irresistible. From St. Croix to St. Mary's, but one voice, the voice of firmness to support our government, and to oppose the vile machinations of an insidious foe, echoes from the people—while the genius of our country cries, "*To arms! to arms!*"

Here let us pause a moment, to indulge that sense of gratitude which we feel towards the great Executive of our nation. The blessings of peace induced him to make every overture, and to comply with all the requisitions which were consist-

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* GEORGE R. BURRILL, Esq;

ent with the honour, the safety and the dignity of his country; but when he discovered an attempt to humiliate and debase us, his bosom glowed with that ardour of resentment which burns in the breast of an undaunted patriot. The philanthropy, the patriotism, and the firmness of our President and his predecessor, command the respects and veneration of Americans. Fame shall escort the names of WASHINGTON and ADAMS down the long range of future ages, and Time shall record them with a name as lasting as his own.

I cannot close my observations on this great occasion, without warning my fellow-citizens of the danger of foreign influence. It strikes at the very root of the Constitution. It secretly cankers the vitals of government, and unnerves the arm of justice. Though its first aspect is as harmless as the light vapours that wantonly play across the summer's sky, yet it bears in its bosom the elements of death. France has employed her secret agents, her private correspondents, and her jacobinic incendiaries, to rouse sedition, and to spread over our land the spirit of disorganization. But by the influence of the genius of freedom, and by the interposition of Heaven, their wicked machinations have all been defeated. Let us then guard against this pestilence that walketh in darkness. In vain will he shelter himself in his cavern from the strong rays of national resentment.

Citizens in Arms,

This day inspires you with the manly sentiments of heroic valour.—Methinks I see you opposing your breasts like a wall of adamant to your enemies, braving death in defence of your country.

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I rejoice that your numbers and your * ~~characters~~ *ters* increase in proportion to the danger of the times. 'Tis a mark of true magnanimity, to cultivate with attention the military art for the defence of your country.—Should she call, gladly obey her summons, in full confidence that should you perish in her cause, patriots will weep over your graves, and flowers of glory will bloom upon your tombs.

Fellow-Citizens,

At this critical moment, when the whole world is in agitation, I call upon you all, in the face of Heaven, and in the house of the GOD of armies, to pledge your lives, your fortunes and your sacred honours, to support the freedom and to maintain the dignity of your government and country. Let France and the world know, that America is neither weak, nor timid; that no panic fear of danger stupifies her sensibility.—Let her tyrants know, that you are animated with the same pure valour and manly intrepidity which marked your characters in your late successful struggle for independence and glory.—Let them know, that while the laurels of former victories shade your brows, you hold in your hands the destruction of tyrants.—Let them know, that the fire of patriotism is still undiminished, and that you have sworn, like Hannibal at the Roman altar, death to the enemies of our independence.—Rally round your great charter of union, the sacred deposit of your liberties.—Enlist under the banners of freedom, and expire in the field of battle—or, amidst the applauses of your fellow-citizens, bear home in triumph the trophies of victory.

* Referring to the company of Cadets.