

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED IN THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL MEETING-HOUSE

IN
ROCHESTER;

ON THE
FOURTH DAY OF JULY,

1803.

BY OLIVER COBB, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN ROCHESTER.

NEW-BEDFORD:
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1803.

*At a Meeting of the People assembled at the town of Rochester,
July 4, 1803, for the purpose of celebrating the National
Birth of the United States.*

VOTED,

That ABRAHAM HOLMES and ELISHA RUGGLES, Esqrs.
and Deacon ELIJAH DEXTER, be a Committee to wait on
the Rev. OLIVER COBB, and thank him for the elegant and
patriotic Oration, by him, this day pronounced ; and to re-
quest him to deliver them a copy for the Press.

A. G. CUSHMAN, *Clerk.*

Rochester, July 4, 1803.

GENTLEMEN,

Sensible of the honour done me by the respectable class
of citizens, whom you represent, and by the polite manner,
in which their request has been communicated, I consent
to deliver the copy, which, they have solicited.

OLIVER COBB.

THE GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE.



AN

ORATION.



THE eras of important events have been celebrated by all civilized nations. That there is propriety in this, we have not only natural proof, but proof of Holy Writ. To this enlightened assembly we need not mention particular instances.

BUT if there ever was propriety in keeping the Anniversary of any event, there is propriety in keeping that of our Father's landing on Columbia's shore, and that of our National Independence.

ONLY about two centuries have elapsed since the seeds of this great, this rapidly rising Empire, were sown. Yes, Fellow Citizens, about two hundred years ago, this now extensively settled, populous, flourishing country was the haunt only of wild beasts and savage men.

AND, without mortification, with complacency, with gratitude, with wonder, with triumph, we revert to the birth-day of our Country, and recognize our Ancestors. This is particularly, the happiness of the descendants of the Old Colony settlers. We can not only contemplate the benefits resulting to us and to the world, from the settlement effected by our

Fathers ; but with honest exultation we can revert to the principles, in which this astonishing event originated. Of these, at this day you cannot be too frequently reminded.

RELIGIOUS principles, were those, which actuated our Fathers. Rather than relinquish their God, they relinquished their dearest connections ; and in a far distant, inhospitable, savage wilderness, fought that freedom, which was denied them in their native country.

AND, as we can revert to the origin of our country, without a blush, so we can to that of our National Independence. Our present respectable rank among the nations was not gained by fraud, injustice, or barbarity. Independence was not declared, because we had the *power* to be free ; but, because we had the *right* to be free. America, when she had to contend with her unnatural parent, was in her infancy. Her sons, though hardy and intrepid, were few and undisciplined : In addition to this, they had a warm attachment to the mother country. They tried every reasonable expedient to conciliate her affection, and to obtain a redress of their grievances, that they might consistently with their sacred rights, continue their allegiance. Their expedients failing, that Declaration was made which separated Columbians from their parent ; which separation, had not those expedients been first tried, would have been painful as the dislocation of bones, or the amputation of limbs.

BUT if, when *life* demands, a right hand or a right eye must be sacrificed ; *every thing* must be sacrificed, when Liberty demands.

LIBERTY did demand the separation of America from Britain. Many privileges, to

which, as British subjects, we were clearly intitled, were infringed, and many things were imposed on us without the shadow of a right. These things roused the spirits of men fully acquainted with British Freedom, and ardently desirous of Freedom on a broader basis.—Here we find the origin of Columbian Independence : and, to this, as to the origin of our country, we can revert with honest triumph. The Declaration of Independence had its source in principles as upright as uncontaminated justice.

HAD our political existence been ushered in like that of far the greater part of nations, we should either be lost in ignorance respecting it, or, which is worse, should find baseness in it of which we should *wish* to be ignorant. Nations, in general, are obliged to plunge into the abyss of antiquity to find something splendid in their original ; but if they find the truth, too many of them will find that they are descendants of lawless banditti, and that their present greatness originated in rapine, plunder, and barbarity. It is not so with Columbians. They can look back to their political birth with a placid countenance. No corroding reflections *prevent* or *alloy* the joys of this Anniversary.

BUT why do we revert to the origin of our Country's settlement ? Why do we celebrate our political birth-day ?—Not *filily* or *principally* to eulogize the Actors on those stages ; but, to imbibe their principles and emulate their conduct. It is not enough that America *was settled*—that she *was declared* free and independent—that she *is*, at present prosperous and happy. No, Fellow Citizens ; it is our duty to preserve inviolate and transmit to posterity those blef-

sings, which, under God, have resulted from the wisdom, toil, treasure and blood of our fathers and brethren.

VIGILANCE, activity and zeal should be exerted to keep alive those principles which led to the Declaration of Independence—which animated our armies—and which gave us the best constitution of civil government in the world.

BELIEVE not every one sincere, who chants the song of Liberty—Believe not every one, who professes engagedness to *secure* your rights and *enlarge* your freedom. Among the loudest declaimers for Liberty are those who never knew what rational Liberty is—those who would involve the country in licentiousness—and those, who, if they could lull you asleep with their fascinating sounds, would deprive you of your most sacred rights. “*By their fruits ye shall know them.*”

PUT no confidence in professions unless they are attended by correspondent practice. The most is to be feared from those, who profess to be most disinterested. Some of the worst tyrants, that stain the page of history, acquired their rank by pretended friendship and zeal for the rights of the people. Man is ever aspiring, and he has *inverse* as well as *direct* methods to attain his end. Those who have not merit to obtain the suffrages of the people will dig, or beg or bribe for them; even will stoop to take them by the whining cant of dissimulation.

PASSING over many instances of more ancient date; I would refer you to one about a century and half ago. Then the aspiring Cromwell left us a subject worthy of contemplation. Though by birth poor—in literature

low—in manners unpolished, this man had an extraordinary genius, particularly adapted to read the character of others, inspire them with his own sentiments, and make them subserve his own purposes. A violent opponent of royalty—warmly engaged to support the rights of the people, he became the oracle and leader of those, who beheaded Charles I. and overthrew the monarchy of England. Having the command of the army, he soon began to display the full vigour of his character. In a short time he was declared Protector, and invested with powers *equal*, if not *superior* to those of the kings. Thus this modest man, the friend of the people, the champion of democracy, about two, or three years after he had imbrued his hands in the blood of the king, had all the authority of an absolute monarch *himself*; and, which is as bad as hereditary monarchy, had the power to name his successor.

DIRECT your attention to a revolution of more recent date—that of France. What hosts of pretended democrats have been intriguing, struggling and fighting for that eminence, from which, they had precipitated the unfortunate Louis. Finally, Bonaparte is the happy man. He is declared Consul for life, and has almost unlimited authority. That he is an extraordinary man—that he fills his station with dignity and usefulness is not, *here*, controverted; but, we deny that the French Government is democratic.

It may be said, that Cromwell refused the title of King when it was offered him—that Bonaparte would, undoubtedly, do the same.—What then? Does this prove them Republicans. No: The Devil would refuse the title

of King, if he could have the dominion of the Universe without it. What are *mere* titles? Empty.—What are the *names* of King, Emperor, Monarch? Bubbles. And equally empty, are the names of democrat, republican, friend to the People. The wolf may be clad with a sheep-skin, and Satan may appear an angel of light. Absolute authority when couched under the specious names of Dictator, Protector, Consul, &c. is ten fold more to be dreaded, because it is concealed. From the *conduct*, not the *professions*, or titles of men we are to judge.

BUT, in this age of illumination the scene is reversed. The hardy sons of New-England, who were first in the contest for Freedom, who prize it as the apple of their eye, who are equally entitled to the fruit of their industry and are contented to have it so—*these* are branded with the epithets of old Tories, Aristocrats, Monarchists.—In some of our sister States, democracy and republicanism flourish like rice, cotton and indigo—and the footy Africans feel their *benignity*.

SUCH specimens may convince us how little can be known by names and professions.—The man, who follows the plow with his *hired* labourers—who socially spends the evening with them—who bows as low to the poor cottager, as to the man in affluence, I will believe a *real* republican, though he tells me that government ought to be *energetic*—that there are different grades of men—that FRANKLIN was not a Hottentot, and that WASHINGTON was not a monkey!—I will not believe *him* a republican, who “binds heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lays them on men’s shoulders, but will not touch them with one of his fingers”—

who scorns to associate with his neighbours—who is oppressive wherever he has power to oppress—such a person I will not believe a republican, though he spend his last breath in declaiming *Liberty, Equality, Rights of Man*.

THESE observations are not made with a view to soften and give currency to royal titles; but that they may be placed where there proper powers are exerted; and that *new* names with *equal* powers may not deceive. Nor is it our intention by any thing which has been said to cast contempt on the sacred names of Liberty and Republicanism; *this* has been, already, too successfully done by the base prostitution of them.—These names while they retain their legitimate powers will be dear to every true American.—But, may we never like the fabled dog, loose the *substance* through greediness for the *shadow*.

IN the Federal Constitution a foundation is laid for Liberty superior to what any nation on the globe ever enjoyed—as refined as any may ever expect. We have participated its blessings; and, *as largely*, to say the least, under the *former* as under the *present* administration. Washington and Adams, in our political firmament, have been stars of the first magnitude.

We are, however, frequently told of *former extravagance* and *present economy* in the public expences. This is a popular topic, and deserves some attention. *How*, we would enquire, have the public expences been lessened? The officers of government have not relinquished any part of their salary. Savings have been made, if made at all, by reducing the number of civil officers. The *expediency* of this measure may be doubted. As great *disadvantage* may be ex-

perienced from reducing the number of officers, as *advantage* from the pecuniary saving. It can hardly be believed, that, in a country, whose population has doubled in about twenty seven years, a reduction of public officers should be expedient. However this may be, if the pillars of the Constitution have been shaken by any of those removals from office, money cannot answer the demand. Whether this has been the case individuals have no constitutional right to judge ; but they have reason to be alarmed, when the judiciary department, in which, *that right* is deposited, has been levelled at.

BUT what is to be done? This : If you are satisfied with the official conduct of your rulers continue to give them your suffrages ; but, if you have misplaced your confidence, try to place it right, when the Constitution shall give you another opportunity.

ONE thing more, and indeed a thing absolutely necessary to the support of a free government is Religion. We are told by the demoralizers of Europe and their successful imitators in this country, that Religion is nothing but a whim of the imagination, and that it is destructive of Freedom. This is aiming a blow at the root of civil government. Efface the idea of a God—of accountability—of a future state of retribution, and you, in effect break the strongest bands of social union. Aside from religious principles, there is no security against perjury and other political evils too numerous and too horrid to mention. Remove Religion and you not only remove restraints from vice ; but you remove those exalted motives, those sublime virtues, which have distinguished and ornamented the most illustrious men. You

cannot contemplate the first settlement of our country, and the declaration of Independence, without perceiving that the leading characters on those important stages were influenced by moral and religious principles. They were not ashamed to acknowledge the superintending Providence of God—they were not ashamed of a crucified Saviour—they were not ashamed to look to Heaven for the Divine Benediction. In their distress, they *did look*—they prayed. They were heard—they were answered. God was in the cabinet with those Sages who dared to proclaim these States *free and independent*—God was in the field with those Heroes, who opposed their breasts to British thunder—and God crowned the arduous contest with victory. Never pretend that you are actuated by the principles of the revolution, if you discard morality and religion. These were the brightest traits in the characters of our political Fathers. Veneration for them—our own present and future happiness—love for our posterity—above all, duty to God, solemnly enjoin on us to imbibe and cultivate Christianity. Not the mere form, as is too often the case, to answer political purposes; but, the *spirit* and the *power*. This would lead to a right series of conduct, and would excite the rational hope, that the God of our Fathers will be our God. Then would Freedom's temple continue to rise—the sons of infidelity would hide their heads, and, NONE WOULD BE CONSIDERED THE FRIENDS OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM, WHO ARE THE ENEMIES OF AMERICA'S GOD.

TOASTS.

☞ *The following TOASTS were drank on the occasion, at the House of ELISHA RUGGLES, Esq.*

1. *The Institution of civil Government.*—May this only protection of personal right never be choaked by anarchy, or swallowed up by despotism.

2. *The Constitution of the UNITED STATES.*—May it never be overthrown by those who are out of, or subverted by those who are in the administration of government.

3. *The Constitution of Massachusetts.*—May it never want such a supporter as GOVERNOR STRONG.

4. *The Judiciary Department.*—May the *Legislative and Executive* departments never attempt to intermeddle with its rights.

5. *Agriculture, the seeds of life of our country.*—May it flourish under the fostering hand of government.

6. *Commerce and trade.*—May they never more be impeded by the piratical intrusion of open enemies or false friends.

7. *The American Eagle.*—May the hawks and the vultures of Europe be taught to pay it a suitable respect, and keep at a proper distance.

8. *The Memory of WASHINGTON.*—May the hand which would overthrow the beautiful structure he has raised, wither in the impious attempt.

9. *The illustrious Congress of 1776.*—May their virtues be emulated till imperfection is extinct.

10. *The HEROES who fell in the Revolutionary War.*—May their blood never cry to heaven for vengeance against our citizens for neglecting the dear bought purchase of their blood.

11. *The DAY we celebrate.*—May it be an everlasting monument of the success which attends the virtuous efforts of free men.

12. *The Clergy.*—May their precepts and their examples equally enforce the principles and the practice of morality.

13. *The Militia.*—May their alacrity forever supersede the necessity of a standing army.

14. *The Seminaries of Learning.*—From these fountains may streams of knowledge pervade every part of the nation, and prevent the shades of barbarism from darkening the prospects of America.

15. *THE OLD COLONY.*—May that piety so conspicuous in its first settlers ever shine in their posterity.

16. *UNITY.*—May the voice of discord be heard no more in our Land.

17. *LIBERTY, PEACE AND LEGITIMATE-GOVERNMENT TO ALL THE WORLD.*