

Ch. John ...
From his ...
Dear ...

O R A T I O N .

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT PORTLAND,

JULY 4th, 1796.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY DANIEL DAVIS.

*Who's here so base that he would be a bondman?
If any, speak; for him have I offended.*

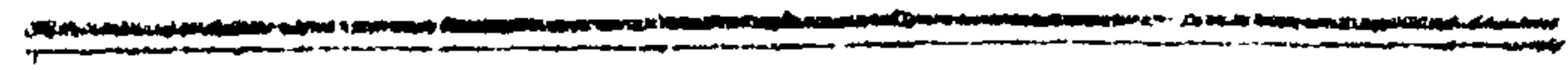
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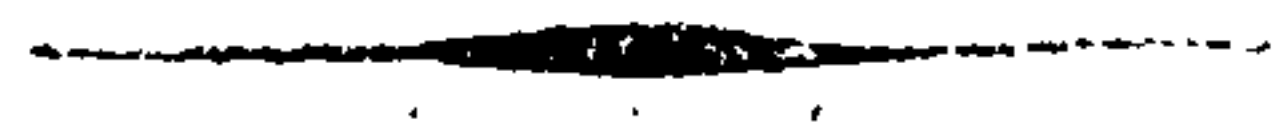
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AN

O R A T I O N.



If should be the employment of this day, citizens, to acknowledge the blessings which mark our country as under the peculiar favour of the deity. But the powers of ancient and modern eloquence, are incompetent to the full display of these blessings. I will, therefore, claim your candour, while I briefly speak of their origin, and glance at the most effectual means for their preservation.

The connection between America, and its unnatural parent, had neither reason nor policy for its basis. Our ancestors were not only the discarded children of their country, but they were expatriated with the load of evils which are always the companions of intollerance and persecution. They were reduced to the hard alternative of abjuring, either their country or their religion. But transported beyond the fears of man, or the frowns of adverse fate, they preferred the dangers of the tempestuous ocean, and the enmity of barbarous sav-

ages, to a sacrifice of the rights of conscience. Here, under the auspices of approving heaven, they ended their dangerous and melancholy voyage, and here, in the virgin soil of civil and religious freedom, they planted the seeds of a mighty empire.

Thus, by absurd and wicked policy, driven from their native country into a trackless wilderness, and the jaws of a barbarous enemy, nature demanded of them, no returns of gratitude or affection; for of all the mischiefs which the iron hand of tyranny can fabricate, that which obstructs a free and pious intercourse between a man and his God, is the most to be execrated.

Many years had elapsed, after the arrival of our pious fore-fathers, before the government of England extended either assistance or protection to their infant settlements. Immediate and pressing wants were in some measure supplied by individuals or private companies of adventurers; but these were stimulated either by a thirst of freedom, or a thirst of gain. Had the exertions of the original founders of New England, depended upon the munificence of the crown, for success, America had still presented us with scenes of savage nature, unpolished by the hand of art or industry.

Natural justice and policy, were equally averse to the continuence of this connection, longer than mere necessity dictated. Planted in a new world, by an enterprize as daring as the object of it was

great and important, our renowned fathers had purchased unlimited freedom, by the fairest and most sacred title. Had their condition been such, as to have rendered a dissolution of this unnatural union either prudent or safe, there is no principle in nature or reason, that would not have justified the deed. The subject of a despotic prince, finds himself born a slave. He escapes from the lengthened chain of miseries which this disgraceful situation creates; and seeks for happiness in a country unexplored, and unpossessed. He there becomes a monarch; and possesses the right, if not the power, to trample upon the insolent invaders of his repose.

When Great Britain perceived the rising importance of her colonies, instead of viewing them with an eye of contempt, as she did in the first steps of their infancy, she then beheld the prospect of a profitable commerce. Ever ready to seize upon occasions of this kind, she anticipated the advantages of uniting herself to those children, whom she had unnaturally expelled from her family, and abandoned to the miseries of poverty and wretchedness. It is true she invited them to render her the profits of their industry; but when did she invite them to receive her parental blessing?—If she at any time sent them succour, they returned her an an hundred fold. When she requested aid, in such a manner as freemen should always be treated, it was granted without a murmur. They fought her battles, and filled her coffers by the fruits of their labour.

Thus stood the connection, when England, by a wicked and defastorous policy, attempted to manacle her loyal sons!—The stamp-act was the first foul edict, which stained the records of her parliament. But its almost instantaneous death, was the triumph of justice, and the disgrace of its mercenary projectors. This was succeeded by demands compounded of the pure essences of tyranny and oppression; for a country which submits to the doctrines of “passive obedience & non-resistance,” or, unrepresented, “to be bound in all cases whatsoever,” is in a state of unqualified slavery.

We now behold America preparing for scenes, in which mankind will continue to be interested till time shall be no more. Struggling from her infancy against a stubborn soil, inclement skies, and enemies, savage and civilized, she now presents herself to the world in the full pride and vigour of youth. She saw that the authority of Great Britain over her, must sooner or later have an end; and that if her friendship continued, it could only be the source of enmity with other nations. Their principles, and habits of life and manners, were different; an intercourse with their government, tedious and almost impracticable. She saw the fruits of her industry, prostituted to the support of useless placemen and a debauched ministry. Necessitated to sue for that justice, which ought to have been administered “promptly and without delay,” at the distance of three thousand miles, her nominal privileges, became an intollerable burden.

Nothing but the despotism of the east, can inure mankind to the evils of a government administered in a foreign clime. The weight of the mischief is in proportion to the distance to which it is transported; and from a government thus foreign, we could expect to feel nothing but the pressure of its miseries, and its vices.

Equally desirous of living in amity with our king, and abhorrent at the dreadful necessity of defending ourselves against the unwarrantable encroachments of his authority, America stood erect at the alarm-gun of her insulted freedom. Too patient under the unmerited lashes of his power, she called heaven and earth to witness the humble fortitude, with which she pleaded for her birth right. When she was answered only by insults and reproaches, she kneeled again, and again, at the feet of her inexorable sovereign!—Till, by the madness and corruption of his desperate ministers—by the wanton violation of our most sacred privileges—by the mischiefs of standing armies in time of peace—by the massacre of our peaceful citizens in the capital—by the devastations of his mercenary soldiers—by the slaughters of his remorseless savage allies—by the flames of our conflagrated towns, ascending in loud and awful complaints to heaven—by our duty to posterity—our love of life and liberty—and by the blood of our friends and fathers, slain in the fields of battle—we were compelled to break the chains of an ignominious dependence!

This day, citizens, completes twenty years since the representatives of the people, appealing to the sovereign judge of heaven and earth, for the rectitude of their intentions, decreed the birth of empire! For this great and magnanimous act, generations yet unborn, "shall rise up and call them blessed." The names of Hancock, Franklin, the elder and younger Adams, with an honoured band of their compatriots, are here transmitted to posterity as immortal. It is a noble fabric, founded upon the rock of reason, liberty and justice; its superstructure, is a compound of gratitude and heroism; its ornaments, are the splendid pillars of republican virtue.—Its aspect displays, the highest touches of the sublime, and the exalted majesty of the people.

On that day, our climate was purified from the polluted breath of tyranny;—our country, was then consecrated, as the favourite abode of liberty. Destitute of the weapons necessary for self defence, their want was supplied by that enthusiasm, which the love of freedom inspires. It was this which inspired your hardy brothers in the field, to endure the pains of hunger, cold and nakedness. It was this which supported them, till their footsteps in the paths of glorious danger, were marked by their precious blood;—and it was this, which compelled the veteran soldiers, of the old hemisphere, to lay down their arms to the husbandmen of the new!—The faithful pen of history records, that under God, and the magnanimous Washington, we hum-

bled the pride, and chastised the insolence of haughty Britain!—that we confounded her councils—captivated her armies—wrested the sceptre from the tyrant, and sat down under the banners of victory and independence!

But the list of worthies who have been slain in defence of their country's rights—where are they!—where are the industrious, and peaceful citizens of Lexington, the first martyrs of American liberty—where is the illustrious band of heroes, who, “amidst the clangor of arms and garments rolled in blood,” were led on to death and glory, by the intrepid Warren, upon the crimsoned heights of Charlestown!—Where was your “hidden vengeance and chosen thunder” when the hallowed limbs of Montgomery, were stretched upon the walls of Quebec, and his heroic blood flowed upon their flinty sides!—But why do we repine at their untimely fate? Their immortal spirits, soon winged their way to the mansions of the blessed—they are now seated among the stars—and with departed heroes of ancient and modern time, form a new constellation in the vaulted arch of heaven, and thence, with divine extacy, survey the joys of this auspicious day.

We had acquired independence, but the most arduous task remained unfinished. Having triumphed in war, it remained for us to triumph in peace. The states were confederated by a shattered and sickly frame, approaching by slow degrees to

certain dissolution. The enlightened Americans perceive the necessity of an efficient and vigorous union. Again are assembled her liberal sons and hoary patriots. The genius of America presides in the counsels of the federal convention. Commerce, agriculture, science and the arts of industry are here represented. The various political and local interests of united America are here developed with wisdom and candour; and a Constitution, with public happiness for its end, and the rights of man for its basis, comes forth to the embraces of the people.

From the establishment of this sacred barrier of liberty and law, our country has prospered beyond the calculation of her most ardent friends. If there be any of the temporal gifts of heaven, which should engross the admiration and affections of man, it is this constitution. Compare it with those of other countries.—An Englishman boasts of his constitution—and his liberty: But the former is invisible—and the latter, less than the “baseless fabrick of a vision.”* His great charter was writ.

* Should it be thought, that this is speaking too freely of the liberty of an Englishman, the following anecdote may perhaps justify the expression.

It is said a gentleman who formerly resided in, and was well known at Boston, went to England, and became a favourite among the princes and noblemen of the realm. By this good company, he was very soon introduced to the gaming table. He was here remarkably fortunate; and with the winnings of one night, purchased an estate in the country,

ten in the language of the dead, and projected in the age of benighted ignorance. That and the collection of acts and precedents, which he exultingly calls his birth right, may be abrogated for the convenience of a corrupt minister, or an idiot king—But the constitution of America, sprung from the hearts, and intelligence of the people; and by them only can one “jot or tittle” be added or diminished.—To its wise and faithful administration are we indebted, for that immense increase of wealth and prosperity, unequalled in the history of nations. Before the period of its establishment, our government wanted all the sinews of an energetic body; but an admiring world, now turn their eyes upon us, as the distinguished favorites of heaven.

Our station on the globe, affords us security against foreign invasion;—our country is extensive, and by its variety of productions, sufficient for the purposes, not only of complete defence, but for all the conveniences of life. Part of our soil is uncommonly prolific, and much of that which was

to which was attached the privilege of electing a member of parliament.—He was accordingly elected by his own tenants, and thus became one of the legislators of the nation.—To this anecdote, so disgraceful to the constitutional right of an English subject, it may be added, that the towns of Manchester and Birmingham, two of the most flourishing manufacturing towns in the kingdom, either of which contains more inhabitants than the largest city of the United States, have no right even to vote for a member of parliament.

not so, is reduced to cultivation, by the hand of patient industry ;—the vigorous and manly countenance of the citizen, declares the excellence of our climate ;—we are yet uncorrupted by the debasing luxuries of Europe ;—the division of our property, is as equal, as the condition of a wealthy nation will admit ;—our citizens, athletic, and “brown with meridian toil,” are in the habits of republican virtue ;—the sacred rights of the people, are so clearly defined, that “he who runs may read” them ;—our government is administered, by men, proved in the day “that tried men’s souls ;” —we have peace with Europe ; and we have buried the hatchet with our savage neighbours ;—our brethren are returning from their dungeons in Algiers, to the embraces of their friends and families ;—our industrious mechanicks, are treasuring up riches for the repose of age ;—our yeomenry, never saw their present prosperity equalled ;—agriculture, with her horn of plenty, walks majestically in our fields ;—while the American stripes are waving in the remotest regions of the globe.

Citizens ! is this a just, or is it a delusive picture of your country ? Is there one ungrateful American who will say the colouring is too high ?—What then should be our gratitude to the bountiful giver of these blessings ?—And how infatuated must be those, who would risque their loss, by retarding the operations of the government ?—Strange as it may seem, our country’s prosperity has its enemies ;—and stranger still, that some of these, are cherished

in the very bosom of the republic!—In the language of a free republican, let us probe this defat-
terous wound;—let us use the “incision knife
and the caustick,” and thereby attempt an effectual
and radical cure.

Its origin, was either in an unquenchable thirst
for popularity, or a deep-rooted prejudice against
the federal government.—The devotees of the first,
are generally men, without stability of character,
and totally unworthy of the publick confidence.
Aping the sentiments of European demagogues,
our mock-patriots adopt the absurd, and dangerous
idea, that to serve the people, they must be eternally
contending with their government.—This, in coun-
tries of despotic sway, may indicate true patriotism :
but in ours, where the constitution is sanctioned
by the voluntary consent of the people, it wears
the genuine features of sedition and treason. The
people collectively, cannot judge for themselves, so
accurately as an intelligent legislature, selected par-
ticularly for that purpose. Hence the advantages
of a representative republick, over the infuriate de-
mocracies of Greece and Rome. A man with
nothing but popularity for his helm, will steer the
people wherever they blindly direct, even to the
abyss of certain destruction. It is therefore an im-
portant duty of every good citizen to trace out
and expose the hypocrisy of these men. Most of
them, are at heart the worst of tyrants; and this
very sin, “which so easily besets them,” originates
in a lust of power. ●

It is a mortifying and disgraceful truth that we also have men, who cherish an implacable enmity to Washington and the Constitution. Thanks to New England, but few of these are numbered among her enlightened and patriotic sons. Whence is it, that the sublime virtues of the one, or the superlative excellence of the other, are forgotten or despised?—But who are these men, that stain the bright annals of their country—who hate its peace—who hold nothing sacred but anarchy?—You may see the most of them in the DOMINION of the south, strutting from their domains, with a declaration of the equal rights of man, in their hands; and the image of their maker, bound in the accursed chains of slavery, at their feet!!! These are the men, who impiously kneel at the shrine of liberty, the more effectually to profane her holy rites.—For instead of the delicious draught, which her golden cup should contain, we may expect to meet a deadly poison, when the libation is presented by a sacriligious hand!*

Others (but thank God a few only) are stationed at the publick presses, and converting that, which should be the life of liberty, into a vehicle of sedition. Here, we may expect to meet with few

* These observations are applicable only to those members of Congress, who have uniformly led, and sometimes drove the opposition to the federal government. We are well assured that the great body of citizens in Virginia, are substantial federalists.

impressions, but such as are made by impidus falsehood, or the black froth of democracy. In these we encounter a most dangerous enemy; for the people have been accustomed to give credit to a newspaper; but they know little of the arts of a designing printer. A press truly impartial, and ably conducted, is indeed the very soul of a free government: but what man whose heart was ever warmed by a genuine love of his country, can behold with indifference, their scandalous prostitutions. By some of them we find the best men, and the best government vilified, virtue insulted, and the people infamously debauched! But they are like all other great privileges; if we rightly improve them, they secure to us the enjoyment of rich blessings; but if we abuse and prostitute them, they plunge us into ruin and disgrace.

The two great duties of a good citizen are to know his privileges, and the means of preserving them. He may acquire the first by observations upon the condition of man, and an accurate knowledge of the state of his country. But would you learn the best means of national security, behold there, an interesting and an honourable specimen! — Is there an object in nature more grateful to the eye, or animating to the heart, than the youth of our country, arrayed in the elegance of their uni-

* Addressed to the officers and soldiers of Capt. Weeks' artillery company, who were present, and performed the military honours of the day.

form, and the splendour of their arms?—Honour them, ye fathers; for by their toils, may your dearest right, be defended. Cherish them ye fair; it is for you that a soldier's heart inspires him to deeds of valour.—Citizens! would you excel in the accomplishments of a soldier or a statesman—WASHINGTON, the friend of the people, and the idol of the world, is your illustrious pattern. Let his examples in the cabinet and the field, animate you to the duties of a civil and military life. And should the unhappy fate of America, hereafter call for the test of your bravery, like him may you trample upon the enemies of your country, and triumph in the hearts of a grateful people.

The military establishments of the government, call for the aid of every good citizen. By these alone can we expect to be defended against a foreign enemy. But other means must be pursued for the preservation of that immense fund of publick prosperity, which distinguishes our happy country. The task is not only easy but delightful. It consists in teaching our children the rudiments and principles of true republicanism; in our habits and examples of obedience to the laws—and in disseminating knowledge among the people. While for want of these, unhappy France has been rent with factions—curled by the treachery of her pretended friends, and stabbed to the vitals, by the poignards of terror; we have been enjoying the felicities of an excellent government, in the retreats of peace. May she soon find a period to her un-

paralleled toils ; and repose, in the bosom of an efficient and free constitution ;—but may God protect us, from the excess of her errors.

In the course of human events, the citizens of America are called upon to make one of the greatest experiments that can occupy the minds or affections of man. They are now to decide whether it be possible for a free government to exist upon the face of the earth. For independent of a partiality which every man feels for his country, it must be admitted, that the degree of information, and the good habits of the people, will give the experiment the fairest opportunity of success. The intrinsic excellence of the constitution, has been fully demonstrated in its operation. If, therefore, it should be lost, either by the follies or the vices of the people, we shall be reduced to the melancholy conclusion, that there is not virtue enough in man, to guard the possession of his own liberty. In this disgraceful condition, we may expect soon to be visited by the pestilence of kings, or the scourges of Robespierre. But let us remember, that the oppressed of all nations, are viewing our conduct with anxious solicitude ; and that our triumphs of reason, will strengthen their exertions in the glorious cause of freedom.

Discord is our fatal foe—its birth, was in the regions of deadly mischief—it was expelled the cabinet of Belzebub, and

“ Hell grew lighter as the monster fled.”

May we never become its devoted victims. May the spirit of genuine freedom continue to spread, till all tyranny and despotism, shall be consumed by its noble fires. And may the pillars of liberty, and the constitution, be as permanent as those of creation itself.

