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AN ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE

The Harmony Society,

IN NEW-HAVEN,

ON THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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AN ORATION, &c.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE day we celebrate will never pass, without kindling in the heart of every patriot, emotions of gratitude and admiration.

The resolution which you have adopted of commemorating in a serious, respectful manner, this auspicious era, reflects the highest credit on your characters, as men, as citizens, and as christians.

It has been customary on occasions like the present, to dwell on the incidents of our revolution; to recapitulate the causes which induced it, or to review the lives and characters of those departed heroes, who purchased with their blood and treasure the blessings which we enjoy.

These themes are common. The history of our revolution, is well known. The fame of its heroes, needs not the ephemeral support of anniversary declamations. Their services can be rewarded only in another and a better world.

Americans glory in the act which gave life and liberty and independence to their country. They revere their sires. But some among them are not content with the constitution which was sealed with the blood of their fathers.

Many* believe even now, that the English government would be preferable. Dangerous credulity! It reflects treason on the founders of the republic.

No matter in what it originates, whether depravity of heart or weakness of intellect, it deeply interests all who love their country. Under the guidance of an enemy, it would be more effectual in destroying our freedom than all Europe collected in arms against us.

By what evidence is this belief supported? By that derived from the constitution of England?

Then the British government is better adapted for the enjoyment of those rights which form the basis of society, than ours?

Examine it.

Its constituent parts are three, the King, Lords, and Commons. These collectively form the national legislature.

As a branch of this body, the king has a negative power. No law can pass without his consent.

He is the sole executive authority. As such, he is the head of the church. Commander in chief of the army and navy. The fountain of honour. He can at pleasure make peace or war, prorogue or dissolve parliament, and call a new one. To imagine his death is high treason.

Whence does he derive his claim to power, or his title to distinction? From superior endowments of

* This assertion is not applied to federalists or democrats: but there are men in our country whose minds are tinctured with the love of monarchy, whom neither party is willing to claim, but some of whom disgrace both by a professed alliance.

mind or body?—Read the history of John.—From moral excellence?—Contemplate the character of Charles the 2d, Henry the 8th, or Richard the 3d.—From military renown?—During the reign of her present king, England has been engaged in many long and bloody wars; her very existence has been at stake. She has in this time astonished the world with the glories of a Nelson and a Wellington; but what victorious wreath has graced the diadem of George?

Perhaps he is called to the throne by the voice of an enlightened nation. The dangerous doctrine of elective monarchy has long since been exploded.

Man is not less subject to the frailties of his nature in one state than in another. Grandeur and wealth, can neither mend the heart or enlighten the understanding. Some have thought that power and elevation of rank, tend to intoxicate the mind, corrupt virtue and deprave the moral faculty. History and experience sufficiently evince the truth of this opinion. Few exceptions can be cited in favor of kings. The king of England is a man. What if he be a villain?—Is he responsible for his conduct? No.—He is amenable to no earthly tribunal. A fundamental principle of the British government is, the king can do no wrong.

The next branch, is the house of lords. This is composed of all the peers of the realm, by whatever title of nobility distinguished.

They claim their seats by descent or creation. The power of creating lords, is vested in the king. The number which he may create is unlimited. The persons of this nobility are inviolable. Their very reputation and their feelings, are considered sacred. Scan-

dal against a peer, is an heinous offence. They are distinguished from their fellow men, by dress as well as title.

Their legislative powers are great. No law can be made without their sanction. All laws concerning the right of the peerage must originate with them. On this subject the other house cannot interfere for the purpose of alteration or amendment.

The House of Commons, is composed of the representatives of the people chosen once in seven years.

This is the only branch of the legislature in which the people, for whose benefit society was instituted and laws *should* be made, have a voice.

All bills that supplies originate in this house.

It is said that parliament thus constituted, is the most perfect model of government in existence.

The three branches, we are told, have different interests, which operate as reciprocal checks on the abuse of power by either. "The nobility serving as a check upon the commons; and the commons as a check upon the nobility, by the mutual power of rejecting the resolves of each, while the king is a check upon both." This is supposed to create a balance of power, which is the chief excellence of government.

If indeed this barrier, opposed to the encroachment of popular power on the one side, and of prerogative on the other, be as perfect as the advocates of this system would make us believe, then, the extravagant encomiums, the daily panegyrics lavished upon it, are not without foundation.

But is this the fact ?

In addition to the dangerous prerogatives of the

crown, the influence of the peerage is alarming. Men habituated from infancy to regard the insignia of nobility as the surest passports to honour, will ever be aiming to obtain them. Ambition is common to all. Those who possess the baubles of state, will be anxious to transmit them to their posterity. Those who are in quest of them, when they obtain their object, will be operated upon by the same desire. The evils hence arising are endless.

As to the jealousy existing between the lords and commons, it is here ineffectual. The same motives which ordinarily induce a commoner to obtain his seat as such, will prompt him to aspire to a higher station; any act therefore which affects the rights of the peerage will, by the commons, be regarded as operating upon themselves: For the king can make nobles.

What a field is here for corruption! How easy is it, by the promise of a star or a garter, to command the first talents in the house of commons! to turn popular power against the people!

But would the king dare exercise this prerogative improperly? Would not the representatives of the people, the guardians of national and individual liberty, resist an attempt of this nature? But one solitary effort has ever been made even to abridge this prerogative.—“In the reign of Queen Ann, there was an instance of creating no less than twelve nobles together; in contemplation of which, in the reign of George the 1st, a bill passed the house of *lords* for limiting the number of the peerage, and was thought by some to promise a great acquisition to the constitution, by restraining the prerogative from gaining the ascend-

“ant in that august assembly, by pouring in at pleasure an unlimited number of new created lords.—
 “But the bill was ill relished and miscarried in the
 “house of *commons*, whose *leading* members were then
 “desirous to keep the avenue to the other house as
 “open as possible.”

This check to innovation, of which we hear so much—this redeeming spirit, which is represented as a *vesta*, watching the sacred flame of freedom, can sometimes sleep.—Nay, she will “let the flame for hire,” and if it should be extinguished, leave it to be relumed by the sun of power.

“The mutual controul, the well poised balance of the British legislature, are the visions of theoretical, or the pretext of practical politicians. It is a government not of check, but of conspiracy.”

Political liberty, or that right of governing which rulers possess, if we look at the power of parliament, is enjoyed in England in no small degree. This liberty however, when extended beyond certain limits, becomes a curse. When it is not conferred by the people, it is not a right, but an usurpation.

Man submits to the coercion of law—not merely to obtain a government, but such an one as will best protect him in the enjoyment of his rights. Not to pamper the pride and insolence of a few, to obey rulers whom he does not know, whom he cannot love, and of whose ability to govern he is not allowed to judge.

But—Is not the British government of this description? What man in England can vote for a member of the house of lords?

But the right of electing our rulers and of being our-

selves eligible to office, are civil rights of the first importance. The investigation of the conduct of those who govern is another. Who can impeach the king, or to whom is he responsible? He can indeed do no wrong! The man whose right to rule is founded in chance, and whose claim to sovereignty is derived from the blood of his ancestors,—is perfect!

But the people can elect members to the house of commons.—

That you may duly enjoy this invaluable privilege, good and loyal Britons, is the earnest prayer of every man who was not born with the heart of a tyrant.

But is this right enjoyed to that extent which the good of community requires, or which the safety of the *government* would admit? The question must be answered by facts.

“ *Two hundred and fifty* members of parliament are
 “ *elect*ed by *five thousand seven hundred and twenty-*
 “ *three* votes; the whole number of members being
 “ *five hundred and fifty-eight*. In *twenty-eight* boroughs,
 “ which send *fifty-six* members to parliament, the ma-
 “ jority of electors comes below *twenty*! The boroughs
 “ of Newton and Old Sarum have *each one* elector and
 “ *two* representatives, and the borough of Marlborough
 “ *two* of each.”

Hence it appears that even the pitiful permission of electing members to the lowest branch of the legislature is not only partial, but oppressive.

But if civil liberty, the *equal* enjoyment of which in its full extent is an inherent right of citizenship, is thus curtailed and trampled upon by a government

which is certainly the best in Europe, let us not rashly imagine that all other rights share the same fate.

Perhaps *social man* may here live as happily in the endearing relations of father, brother, husband, as he can in our own country. True, the people have not prescribed a line of conduct for their rulers. Because they may never have trespassed upon those social rights for the better protection of which, many rights which man claims in a civil capacity may have been willingly though tacitly relinquished. There may have been a mutual concession in this respect between the governors and the governed. True the power of parliament is unbounded ; but it will not be abused. Private rights will be held sacred.

No.

The personal security and personal liberty of the best subjects in England, the sinews of the state, the nation's pride, are held at the *mercy* of a *merciless* press gang !

You, sir, are an English subject. Fortune has placed you in that middle rank of life which is best calculated for domestic comfort. You are not rich—but blessed with the love of an amiable wife and blooming offspring, you covet not the wealth of Cræsus.

When the toils and cares of day are over, you sit down in contentment to a frugal meal. The idea that it is obtained by your own exertion adds a zest to appetite. Your heart swells with gratitude, while in christian sincerity you return thanks to the Almighty !
—Your door flies open ! A band of armed men enter :
—Under the sanction of law you are commanded to follow them. Your little ones terrified, gather round

you. They raise their supplicating hands for mercy. Your wife in a paroxysm of agony, clings to your embrace.—You cast a despairing look at your weeping, helpless children. The fond hope which you have indulged of educating them to usefulness and respectability—is blasted. You see them for the last time ! —What will become of them when you are gone ? They have no property—They are too young to work. In imagination, you behold them roving beggars. They are finally immured in a poor-house. Their wretched mother cannot save them. She sinks beneath the weight of her affliction,—and is gone forever !—The view distracts you. Your heart is bursting with grief and indignation. You resolve to resist the blood-hounds of tyranny, and defend to the last, that freedom which God bestowed. Poor, hapless man !—Against such odds resistance is in vain. They seize ; they bind you. The agonies of your family afford a subject of merriment. You are conducted to one of his Majesty's ships.—“ Alas ! Nor wife, nor children more “ shall you behold, nor friends nor sacred home !”

What think you of the government which *legalizes* such a deed ? A deed,—would make a jubilee in Hell !

On what principle can this governmental proscription be *excused*. Justify it you cannot.—Necessity ? It is the *tyrant's* plea.

The man who would thus immolate domestic happiness, on the altar of cold blooded policy, is a wretch who would on the same principle sanctify robbery and assassination.

By this oppression government may maintain a

false dignity, a *degrading* honor, but under its influence the people cannot be happy. The navy of Great Britain is her glory ! But the " meteor cross of England," which beams terror to the world, is the death-light of freedom.

I have endeavored to give a short but faithful sketch of the English government. The limits assigned me would not admit of an extensive view of the subject. This would require volumes. Enough however I trust has been said to convince every candid mind, that not *one* of those rights for the security of which society was formed, is enjoyed in England to that extent which the good of community demands.

Do you wonder that our fathers did not approve of this government. That they were unwilling to entail on their posterity the evils which arise from it. That they would not return to a parent who feeds on the vitals of her children ?

But what is the national government which they adopted ?—That prescribed by the constitution of the United States. It was founded by the *people*. It exists by their consent. It secures all men alike in the enjoyment of social, civil, and political liberty. Like that of England it is composed of three branches. But the duty of each is defined. The people have set bounds to the conduct of their rulers. Their powers are described in a written instrument which can never be altered by them.

The President of the United States is the chief executive authority of the nation. The same law which governs the lowest citizen binds him. As a chief magistrate he is responsible to the people, An investiga-

tion of his character is no crime. His motives may be questioned ; his conduct reprobated or his administration anathematised, without any danger of incurring the pains and penalties of a *premunire*, or of being hanged for compassing and *imagining* his death.

He claims his station,—not from descent,—not from the merit of his ancestors,—but from the unbiassed votes of a free people.

The members of the Senate and House of Representatives claim their seats also by election. In connection with the President, they can do all that the welfare of the nation may require in peace or war. Of this the history of our country affords conclusive evidence. An imbecile administration may degrade *themselves*, but they cannot infringe our rights. Such rulers however can, whenever the interest of the nation demands it, be legally and *peaceably* deposed. We can accomplish by our votes, what in England can be done only by the sword.

The principal objections to our government are,
1st, It cannot last as long as a monarchy.

On what is this objection founded ? On this single ground ; the example of other republics that have destroyed themselves. No form of government like our own ever existed.

2d, The national arm is not strong enough for war. For the prosecution of a war of conquest, perhaps it is not sufficiently powerful. The constitution will not enable an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Bonaparte to run the mad career of ambition. But it is competent for the defence of our soil, and the support of our national honour.

We cannot be driven into a war which is not for the interests of the people. For the *will* of the nation must in this as well as every other act of government be consulted, and obeyed.

In such a contest every arm strikes, not for an ambitious leader,—but for our country: Not for the protection of a nobility—but of our wives and children: Not for a *king*—but for *freedom*!

In whatever light we view this palladium of our rights, we cannot but admire the wisdom that framed it, and adore the power that permits us to enjoy it.

But like all other human institutions it must have an end. As it was created by the people so its existence depends upon the people. It is founded in good sense. It must be supported by good sense. So long as we shall continue to exercise in our civil and political capacities, that reason with which God has blessed us, uninfluenced by faction, unbiassed by party prejudice; so long as we shall possess independence of mind and integrity of heart, we shall be free.

Regard the man who would induce you to enlist under the banners of *any* party, as an enemy. Suffer no man to dictate your vote. Look at *principles*, not *names*. Read the constitution. Engrave it on your hearts. Obey it. Preserve it. Defend it.

FINIS.