

# ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

AT WESTFORD,

ON

THE ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence,

JULY 4, 1804.

---

---

By EDMUND FOSTER, A. M.

Pastor of the Church in Littleton.

---

---

DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI.

---

---



BOSTON:

PRINTED FOR

ADAMS AND RHOADES.

1804.

MISSING  
PAGES

---

---

## Oration.

---

---

**AMONG** the variety of subjects which present themselves to our consideration, that of rational and social man justly claims the pre-eminence, and is peculiarly appropriate to the duties of this day. When called into being by the voice of the Creator, Liberty was his inherent and essential right, and Independence his charter from Heaven.

These were not however the exclusive privileges of the first man : his posterity were rightful heirs to these glorious possessions : and on the personal exercise of these rights, civil government is founded, and social order maintained.

The first authority exercised by one human being over another was parental. It resulted from the affection and duty which man feels and owes to his natural and dependent offspring. But a government thus founded must necessarily be limited both in its extent and duration. For as men multiplied and spread over the earth, their social relations changed : and they were early found existing in distinct tribes and nations. An increased population has, in every



instance, furnished the means and the occasion for a new and distinct nation of men. If this is contrary to the ambitious views and designs of a *few*, from whose government many hereby become emancipated, yet it is necessary to the interest and happiness of the whole : and such events proceed so naturally from their causes, and are so intimately connected with the scheme of Providence, that neither the power nor policy of man has been able to prevent them.

The project of forming a perpetual union in a people and preventing their dispersion early entered the minds of some. It discovered itself in the bold attempt to build the tower of Babel. The professed design of that stupendous work was to prevent tribes and families from dispersing and settling abroad, by which means they would soon become distinct nations, whose government would be of themselves.

To guard against such probable events, and get to themselves a *name*, the descendants of Noah proposed building a place of fixed and permanent residence, which should be the metropolis of all nations. A mean to perpetuate also one form of government, and hereby make the world *one nation*, and *Babel* the royal *palace* thereof. To frustrate this vain and hurtful project is the best reason that can be given for the confusion of languages. By this miraculous event a foundation was effectually laid for mankind's becoming what they have since been found to be—a people of different nations and languages scattered over the face of the whole earth.

Emigrations have proceeded sometimes from natural and moral causes ; at others from civil and religious. In either case the causes and effects have proved the general happiness promoted thereby, and that they were perfectly agreeable to the will of heaven. The truth of these remarks will more fully appear if we bring them down to more modern times, and apply them to the history of our own nation.

In contemplating this subject it will be difficult to say which we ought most to admire—the spirit and conduct of our worthy ancestors who first settled this country ; or that of their descendants who achieved its independence.

The first English adventurers to this country were men of piety and fortitude, who felt and manifested an unconquerable spirit of civil and religious liberty. In their native country these rights were abridged, and the latter totally denied. Bigotry and zeal had gotten an hold of almost every mind, and an intolerant spirit characterised more or less every religious sect. Each denied to others the rights which they claimed for themselves. The predominant party possessed no less the means than the inclination to molest and punish *hereticks*, so called. Non-conformists were continually exposed to the most fiery persecutions. To dissent in what they deemed to be truth and duty ; or resign the rights of conscience they could not : to enjoy them peaceably was impracticable. Amidst these straits and difficulties they contemplated a retreat from persecuting power, and determined to

seek and obtain, at every hazard, a peaceful abode for themselves and posterity, beyond the reach of ecclesiastic and civil tyranny. They turned their eyes to the wilds of America. If the prospect of such a distant settlement was dark and dangerous; the duty and necessity of attempting it were urgent. At home they felt oppressions and were continually under the frowns of power. Abroad was a wilderness which had nothing inviting. In retreating from evils of one kind they were sure to meet those of another. A forest must be cleared and a stubborn soil broken before they could obtain the means of support. The friendship of the savage also must be conciliated; or his power resisted and subdued. But the hope of enjoying the rights of conscience in the worship of God, and of finding a security against the shackles of despotism, reconciled them to the prospect, and determined them on the enterprize. They obtained leave to depart, and even brought with them, or soon obtained, patent and charter rights under the signature of the crown. They commenced the colonization of America under many and great embarrassments; but surmounted them all. They were never broken by hardships, nor even once subdued by their enemies. Amidst surrounding poverty and distress, a dignity of character appeared. In every humble cottage was seen one, exercising kingly and priestly authority therein, who directed the rest in the duties of life, and led them in their solemn devotions. Temperance and labour gave them a hardy race of sons;

---

whom religion and morals rendered honourable to their parents and useful to the community.

Such were the sentiments and habits which early formed the American character, and led to all her after prosperity and greatness. Considering the character and condition of Americans at this time, they seem not only entitled to the sympathies, but they even deserved the protecting and nursing power of the mother country : and *never* ought they to have been *shackled* and *burdened* by her. Yet several times were their charter rights taken from them, and several times renewed.

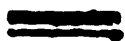
As the Colonies increased in numbers and opulence, Britain viewed them with a jealous and covetous eye. Though she had expended nothing upon them, and in nothing were the Colonies indebted to her, yet to begin the work of subjugation while we were supposed to be weak, and to increase her own wealth and aggrandisement, at the expense and injury of others, she, in the face of all our natural and charter liberties, claimed the right of taxing us at her pleasure, and by several Parliamentary acts endeavoured to carry this power into effect. To this demand on their property, Americans had too much *wisdom* to give their assent, and too much *spirit* to yield obedience. Taxes are the result of compact. They flow from the obligations which the members of a civil community are under to support and defend themselves in their social state. In the Parliament of Britain, Americans had no representation ;

and therefore could have no voice in raising of money, nor in its appropriation. We had a government among ourselves to support. To their wants we contributed cheerfully. This was an institution of our own appointment, and where we taxed ourselves we felt a readiness to discharge the debt. To any government foreign to this we neither felt nor acknowledged any such obligation. Britain however had taken a step which she was unwilling to retract. She had asserted her right in our persons and property, and it would have been wounding to her *pride* to relinquish it. As to us, it would have proved the death of our liberties, and opened wide the door to bondage for ourselves and posterity to have admitted it. As often as she urged her claims on us, they were resisted; and, in her attempts to force obedience by the sword, commenced that bloody contest between Great-Britain and her Colonies, which led to their separation and independence.

That power abused justifies resistance, was our creed. By this correct principle we regulated our conduct. And we can confidently appeal to the whole world of man, and to the perfect intelligences of heaven, for the righteousness of our cause. If ever human blood was innocently shed by man, it was done by the hand of America in the defence of her invaded rights.

We had used every expedient within our knowledge and power before we appealed to the sword; and to this we were driven at last, by painful necessity. Nearly ten successive years had been spent in





supplicating the throne, and presenting the most humble petitions for a redress of grievances. These were received as *affrontive*, read with *indignation*, and treated with every mark of *contempt*. Repulsed in every such attempt, and despairing of any favour or relief by a parliamentary reform, we presumed at last to say to our oppressors, that we would not be hewers of wood nor drawers of water for any nation under heaven. We put ourselves in a posture of defence, weak and contemptible indeed in the view of our enemies, but strengthened by our union, and by a *determined* spirit, which no threats could intimidate, and which nothing but death could conquer. Our enemies were ever the *aggressors*. They were first in provocation, and first in attack. In the metropolis of this commonwealth they had massacred our citizens. On the plains of Lexington also they shed the first blood; and not till then was the sword of America turned against them. Here our purposes were realized by our enemies, and our courage brought to the test. If we were deficient in military skill we abounded in bravery; and evinced to the admiring world, that to Americans *liberty* was dearer than *life*. On the heights of Bunker-hill we gave a fresh proof of American prowess, and made an impression on the minds of an invading foe which can never be forgotten.—But still our evils were only in train, and the issue of events distant and unknown. What a dark cloud now hung over our land! Comparing circumstances, and calculating on human probabilities, the event of

succeeding conflicts was dubious. What agonies must be felt, and what perils endured, before we could indulge a hope of victory and success!

Between a well disciplined and experienced army, and a raw militia, there was a striking disparity. Happy for us, that this circumstance created few fears in our own minds, compared with the many secret exultations they afforded our enemies. They would naturally say, What is bravery, without proportionate skill? What is an army huddled together, without discipline? What can the powers of individuals do, unless they are arranged, combined, and brought to a point? With all our numbers, we appeared only as a stripling with his sling in his hand. But with all these disadvantages on our side our courage was not appalled, nor our spirits disheartened. A good cause is seldom lost for want of means to support it. A star appeared of peculiar magnitude and lustre. It proved a WASHINGTON. He was as an angel of light in our camp; the guide of our strength, and a guardian power to our liberties. *Could* I display the images of things as they then really appeared to every spectator, I should perform a delightful service indeed!

Our Commander in chief saw the weakness and wants of his army, and he applied a remedy. His daily public orders were to them a light in the midst of darkness. On being announced, they produced conviction in every heart. As soon as carried into effect the whole army were properly regenerated thereby. Discipline appeared where ignorance and

awkwardness had been characteristic. Order sprang out of confusion ; yea, at his single command, where the torpid and almost useless carcases of men lay, there lived and stood up a *great* and *formidable* army. Inspired with the true knowledge and spirit of discipline it assumed a new and proper shape ; felt and displayed the principles of a new life. It quickly acquired a dignity and strength equal to its duties, and to the complete defence and deliverance of its oppressed country. Succeeding events ripened us fast for making a more explicit declaration in behalf of ourselves.

Finding our enemies making new and vigorous exertions to enslave us, and having lost all hope of an accommodation with the mother country, our patriots in our cabinet assumed a higher tone. Aided by the pen of a Jefferson, with other most able statesmen, they drew up a formal declaration of our right to freedom and independence ; and, on the Fourth of July, 1776, they announced to the world that the states of America *were*, and of right *ought* to be, Free and Independent States.

This nation had before asserted her right to existence and was seen struggling into life ; but now a nation was born. She appeared in strength to support her existence, and to provide for her own defence. One invading army after another surrendered themselves prisoners into her hands. At York-Town, when the British commander resigned his sword to the American chief, her contest for liberty

==

was brought to a close, and America stood triumphant. The Independence, which she had before *claimed* as her right, Great Britain herself was soon obliged to acknowledge.

This day, fellow-citizens, is the anniversary of American Independence, and is deserving of everlasting remembrance. It is proper to observe it, annually, as the day of redemption to this nation from political bondage and slavery. To make it a festival to the whole American family, and by proper testimonials of joy and rejoicing, to hand it down as a memorial to their latest posterity. Let us equally reflect on our happy deliverance from evils, and on the glorious privileges we possess and enjoy. How different are our situation and feelings this day, from what they must have been, had we tamely submitted ourselves to the unrighteous demands that were made upon us ; or been forced into subjection to a despotic power ? Instead of cringing before a foreign monarch ; or being tributaries to his will, we are FREE MEN ! and hold a distinguished rank among the nations of the earth.

It will add to the joys and exultations of this day, to cause the names and talents, the eminent virtues and services of all our distinguished patriots and warriors to pass in review before us. To *blot them* and their *immortal deeds* from our remembrance would be base ingratitude. They laboured not only for themselves, but for posterity. They were tried as silver in the furnace and were found pure from any mixture

of alloy. They could neither be corrupted with gold, intimidated by threats, nor conquered by power. They braved and surmounted every difficulty and danger, in the cabinet and in the field. They bore with patience and fortitude the heat and burden of perilous days. A mortal blow was fixedly aimed at some of them, which was intended to reach them in any event of war or peace. This is evident from their being personally excepted in a general pardon offered as a *lure* to American citizens. The names and services of Hancock and Adams, with other distinguished patriots of their day, too numerous to be recited, shall never be forgotten while a *spark* of gratitude remains in American breasts. Look over this nation and land, and the most pleasing objects we behold are the remote effects of the principles and labors of *their* day : and have resulted from the liberties then purchased for us. They are a prize which as yet we have had wisdom to improve. Constitutions of civil government have been formed and ratified by our own hands, which bear the marks of wisdom and stand the test of experience. We invest our magistrates with their authority, so that obedience to them is in nothing distinct from obedience to our own will. By thus organizing the body politic we fit it for action. Its energies have been successfully applied to every object which could merit its attention. The American nation has long since recovered herself from the ravages and spoils of the revolutionary war. She has raised public credit from

its sunken debility. Our laws are respected for the protection they afford, and the justice they administer to us. Religious toleration is freely enjoyed by all the denominations of christians. Every person is secured of his rights and privileges. The labours of his head and hands are encouraged and rewarded. Individuals are advancing to wealth and ease. Our territories are enlarged and agriculture prospers. Every year begins a new settlement, and every day witnesses its rapid progress. We build goodly houses and fill them with plenty. Arts and sciences flourish. New inventions are easing us of manual labour. Commerce pours in her wealth from every quarter of the globe: and when other nations are harassed and impoverished with wars, we have peace at home and abroad. Happy art thou, America, in every thing, but in a just and impressive sense of your distinguished blessings. Yet amidst our unrivalled prosperity it is whispered by some, that we cannot support our independence, nor much longer keep in being our republican government.

What voice is *this*! Sounds it the American? Is it from a true son of our ancestors? Is it the language of a friend to the honour and happiness of our nation? Or of one who first secretly wishes destruction to the American republic, and then predicts it? In the spirit of that day and hour which boldly asserted our Independence and then obtained it, we say, we can support it.

The reasons urged against our government, and which are supposed to threaten its annihilation, are summarily these. It is said that a republican form of government is only ideal—a mere vision of the fancy; and however desirable it may appear, is after all impracticable, being unsuited to the nature and character of man. That it is too popular to acquire sufficient energy, and being always exposed to tumult and faction, will by these means sooner or later work its own dissolution. The objections amount to this declaration, that there is not wisdom and virtue enough in this people and nation to take care of their own interests.

Where then is the remedy for this evil? Shall we invite men from other nations to rule us, who are better skilled in the science of government and laws than any existing in our own? How indignant is this thought to the feelings of every true American! Moreover, if the objection is true, what a misfortune that we did not realize it, before we engaged seriously in the revolution: and either contented ourselves under the government of Great Britain with all its hauteur and tyranny; or immediately on the close of the contest with her, instituted a government for ourselves, in form and substance the same as that from which we revolted?

But experience will furnish the best answers to the above objections. Ever since our independence the government of every state in America, and that of the Union, have been elective and such as we call re-

publican. They have given ample protection to our persons and property. Under them we have professed to the admiration and envy of the nations abroad: and our past experience of their wisdom and efficiency furnish a presumptive evidence of their future utility and permanence. On what then is this unfriendly surmise founded? And ought it in the least to weaken our confidence in our own governments, or relax our exertions in support of them? To imagine evils, and then give them the effects of real ones—To suffer fully by anticipation what may never happen,—is as injudicious as for a man to terminate his existence by a violent act, to-day, through fear, that as he is mortal, he may meet an incidental death to-morrow. Those who predict the death of our government on the foregoing principles, will probably not only withhold from it their support; but encourage principles and measures in opposition to it. They will be tempted more than any others to use their influence for its premature destruction, to verify their predictions, and promote some sinister views. Who will labour zealously and constantly to preserve in existence *that*, which he has given over as lost? Such prophets of destruction to our nation are too pusillanimous, or too inimical to be safely entrusted with affairs of state.

It is true, that in a peculiar crisis of affairs we have felt the evils of two insurrections, since our Independence. But these did not arise merely from the genius of *our* government. They might and probably would



have arisen, in similar circumstances, under any other form of government whatever. No nation on earth has been entirely exempted from these evils : or less disturbed with them than our own. The strongest monarchies have been infested with them. Great Britain has been frequently alarmed by them. Her citizens have been attacked, and her villages put in flames. Not long since a large portion of her navy was completely in the hands and at the disposal of insurgents. They could have turned it against their country, or conveyed it over to her enemies. As they did neither, it is probable, (however unjustifiable their conduct was) that *their* disorderly and lawless exertions were not made with a view to destroy their government, but to release themselves from its oppressions, and obtain a redress of grievances. If government in the hands of kings and nobles are as frequently infested with these evils, as are others, it ought to teach Americans not only to be contented with, but to give a preference to their own. It is evident that by altering our form of government we should not at all change the nature of man ; nor effectually secure ourselves from popular disturbances. If any thing could be gained hereby it must be an increased ability to meet and repel those injuries. But how can this ability be increased without hazarding and losing infinitely more on the one hand than we could possibly gain on the other ? Or where is the evidence of our present weakness in this point ?

As to our past disturbances they are known to have

been short lived. We suppressed them with promptness and care. No nation on earth could have done more. And when we consider what a ready support our chief magistrates found in their faithful citizens—with what energy they supported our laws in the suppression of these tumults, and the clemency they shewed in pardoning treason ; we have reason to hope that these evils have vanished, to appear no more ; and that every citizen of this favoured land will hereafter be led by the principles of fear and love to venerate our political fathers, and pay a voluntary obedience to legal authority.

That republican governments are exposed to factions is a truth verified by experience. The follies and fates of Greece and Rome are a solemn lecture to us on this subject. Knowing where our greatest danger lies, we ought vigilantly to guard against it. But if, after being fully premonished of these evils, we suffer ourselves to be injured and ruined by them, we shall be left without excuse.

These evils may always be looked for in our electioneering struggles. Shall I arm you against them by the following remarks ?

At the approach of these seasons court will be made to popularity by various persons ; but by all of them under professions of the most disinterested motives and patriotism. Rival candidates will have their warm adherents and supporters. They will be held up, by the parties, to public notice in quite different characters. The one will be charged with holding

principles which he entirely disavows; and with crimes of which he was never guilty. The other will be extolled for abilities and virtues which perhaps he never possessed. Encaniums will be lavished on the one side, and denunciations poured forth on the other. The fate of a whole nation will be represented as suspended on the transactions of a single day. Such paintings are commonly too high to agree with their originals, and therefore will be read by sober and thoughtful men with some abatement. In proportion as we are accustomed to these scenes and become acquainted with the tricks and frauds which are then usually played off among us, we shall be the less disturbed by them, and the better prepared to act judiciously amidst them.

We have frequently passed successfully and unhurt through these scenes and have ever been able to provide for the safety and happiness of our nation. Who then would wish to exchange an elective government merely because it is subject to some little unpleasantries and momentary troubles, for an hereditary one, which might fix upon us evils not to be remedied but by the death of a weak and wicked monarch? and even his death might only prepare the way for the reign of a successor more intolerable than that of his predecessor. Let us then stand fast in our liberties: and never abuse them ourselves, nor suffer them to be corrupted and destroyed by others.

What is there (party spirit excepted) to embitter our present comforts, or cloud our future prof-

prosperity? Is not our nation in the full tide of prosperity? Are we burdened with public taxes, or threatened with national debts? Has not the present administration freed us from expences and burdens which, if thought necessary in past time, experience has proved we can do well without? But we are not assembled, this day, as a tribunal to try the political tenets, or decide on the measures, of any of our rulers. Even to make comparisons between them would be implicitly to censure some of them.

We are disposed to give to all the last fraction of honour due to their wisdom, talents and faithful services. And when the public mind shall be more calm and candid, and experience has reached her proper boundary, then let America say for herself, under whose administration she has enjoyed the greatest prosperity.

I think it however a piece of justice due to the existing president of the United States, to say, that he has rested his administration on its own intrinsic merits, and that he has never borrowed the popular names of any to strengthen and support it.

The glory of America is not departed from her. She is exhibiting, and will continue to exhibit, her increasing greatness. Her government is both mild and energetic. It remains republican and secures to us the privileges for which we fought and bled. It gives to us that portion of liberty which raises us above the degrading rank of slaves, and stimulates us to manly exertions. Every thing is secured to us

which can render citizenship in America perfect, and the honour attached to it permanent.

What nation on earth can boast such privileges and blessings as we now possess! Our country, irksome possibly to some, would be a paradise of quietude and joy to thousands of the oppressed and afflicted of other nations.

Whence the cause of any murmur or division among us? Proceeds it not from those passions in men which ought neither to be indulged by themselves, nor gratified by others? That we abound with able statesmen, competent to fill any office in the gift of the people, should be to us a matter of universal joy; but never become the occasion of strife and angry contentions. The first honours of a state or nation can never be conferred on more than one person at the same time. If all were the head where would be the members? And when the public will has been fairly and legally expressed on this subject, others should quietly take their subordinate stations, and zealously promote the public order and happiness. On this principle depends the existence and prosperity of a republican government.

But because every aspiring individual cannot soar to the heights of his ambition, shall the public mind be distempered, and the whole body thrown into convulsions? In the struggle of parties for ascendancy and final triumph, shall the people forget their duty, and lose their privileges? When our noble ancestors braved every danger in this glorious cause,

restored our liberties from the grasping hand of tyranny, and committed them safely to our possession, shall we like a degenerate and puny offspring confess our inability to keep and enjoy them; and begin to think that we must give them up? Ye ghosts of our departed patriots and warriors! whisper to every apostate his folly and delusion, and animate us all with your noble spirits.

While watching and guarding our personal rights against the encroachments and usurpations of power, we will remember that those in authority have rights as well as we: and that in order to secure the possession and peaceful enjoyment of our own, we must support them in the constitutional exercise of theirs. However various the rank and stations of men in a civil community may be, their temper and behaviour should be such as that rulers and subjects may have mutual comfort and rejoicing in each other.

The gentlemen officers and soldiers who compose the military corps on this anniversary occasion merit our attention.

While the armies of despotic governments are made to assist a few in enslaving the many; and become mere deputy agents in the most unjustifiable wars; you have the honour to bear the standard of a free nation. We shall feel ourselves secure and happy so long as we see our vigorous young men, the rising glory and strength of our country, trained to arms. In stead of viewing our military force with a

jealous eye and a trembling heart, we gratefully see only the citizen a soldier and the soldier a citizen. We witness with pleasure your martial appearance and spirit—your zeal to improve in discipline and military tactics—and your readiness to bear the sword of defence ; but we ardently wish you may never have occasion to unsheath it.

So long as our nation shall act on this wise and prudent maxim, “ Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none,” we shall have the best possible security against the scourges and desolations of war. But should any nation or people unprovoked presume to encroach on our rights and liberties, we will give to them and to the world another proof that America has still the spirit and power to punish aggressors.

As our country has confided her strength in arms to you ; you will ever cheerfully obey her voice. By the sword we obtained our liberties and independence ; and with the sword we *will* defend them. In a union of our civil and military powers we will preserve to ourselves all the rights and honours of a free and independent nation. We will commit them to our children in charge that they hand them down to their posterity—that our constitution and form of government may never perish—but “ in the final wreck of elements and crush of worlds !”

FINIS.

Printed by *Sturges & Francis*