

AN

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# ORATION,

DELIVERED AT THE REQUEST OF

THE

*Chairman of the*  
**Selectmen of Portland,**

*July 4th, 1808.*

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BY WILLIAM FREEMAN.  
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1808.

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## AN ORATION.

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ON this joyful Anniversary we are assembled to celebrate a day, consecrated to National Independence.

Numerous, as are the nations of the Earth, and though unbounded in wealth, and unlimited in power, no one can boast of that sublime enjoyment, which exalts America, above kingdoms and empires. Europe has seen her last temples of liberty demolished and mingled with the dust. In our favored land the noble edifice yet stands unmoved, and, to the astonishment of the world, amid the general wreck, still "lifts its awful form."—Never may its grandeur be diminished; never may its foundation be shaken; never may its altar be profaned by pretended worshippers; never may a spark be kindled, which is not felt.

No instance in foreign history can be adduced of that rapidity towards population and improvement, which has marked the progress of this country. But a few years have passed, since the friends of Independence, the founders of our Nation, sought a refuge from tyranny, in a wilderness. The howling of wild beasts, and the war-whoop of savages, were less terrible to them, than the violence of *civilized* man. The earth for a bed, and a rock for a pillow, bread from the field, and water from the spring, were more sweet and refreshing

Calvin G. Hamer

in a land, where "the oppressed go free," than all the luxuries of art, where persecution, like a serpent, lurked to betray "That liberty of soul, derived from Heaven." Soon, however, were the comforts of life bountifully supplied by the sweat of the brow. The wilderness began to blossom; the veil by degrees was removed from the face of nature, and features more beautiful and lovely were never unfolded.—Advancing so rapidly towards wealth and respectability, no wonder, that our prosperity should excite the jealousy of Europe, and awaken that animosity, which for a time impeded our rising greatness, but eventually was the means of laying a foundation, on which the finest fabric, the world has ever witnessed, was raised to perpetuate our glory. On this occasion, while we rejoice, while we triumph in the success, which crowned our sacred cause, although the spirit of our fathers still animates our souls, let us not cherish old resentments. This is a day of social congratulation, not of bitter reproach. The hatchet is buried, the wound is healed, and let us never withdraw the hand of reconciliation. Let us preserve the magnanimity of that character, we have so dearly acquired, and cherish, as we have solemnly professed, an equal attachment to all nations. Let us consider them "enemies in war, in peace friends."

Gratitude demands a tribute of praise to the memory of those, who sacrificed their lives, and all, that was dear to them, for the good of their country. Too often does the turf, which covers the remains of men, who died as patriots, hide in its bosom the remembrance of their worth. The living, though indebted for all, that makes life desirable, to those, who sleep in the dust, too seldom reflect on the cause of their welfare. They pluck the flower, regardless of the root, that gives its beauty. But shall the heroes of our revolution, the protectors of our freedom sleep forgotten? Shall the grass, that springs on their tombs, be trodden under foot, and the stones, which distinguish their lowly beds, be cast

away, "and the sons of the feeble pass over them, and know not the mighty lie there." Thousands have moistened with their blood the spot, which now covers their bones. For us, for liberty, they braved each toil and danger. For us, for liberty, they fell! They "fought a good fight;" and though on earth they received no reward, "henceforward is laid up for them a crown of glory, that shall never fade away."

Among so many, who deserve applause for the service they have rendered their country, shall we not select *one*, whose memory should be cherished with peculiar veneration and regard; whose name, like the sun, shines with such splendor, the eye is lost in the effulgence, and at whose presence inferior planets "hide themselves in the sky?" If gratitude, if love and respect belonged exclusively to one; if adoration should be paid to any, but the Governor of the world, who would have refused to offer the incense of these feelings to the greatest and best of men, our beloved and illustrious WASHINGTON? Other nations have had their idols, but what nation has ever possessed an object, so deserving of worship, as the Saviour of our Country? "Men would be angels;"—but if all men were like Washington, is it impious to say, *angels would be men?* To mark the events, which distinguished his career, would be to exhibit a picture of exploits, an assemblage of virtues, as great and glorious, as human nature can display. If we examine the annals of the past, we may behold the lives of many, who have risen to the summit of earthly grandeur, and astonished the world by their achievements; but have the actions of such men been prompted by necessity, and guided by the honor of their country? How few of the heroes of ancient days, could they begin their career again, with hearts devoted to justice and virtue, would pursue their former steps, though followed by equal triumph, and though crowned by equal fame! It has been the fortune of America, to supply the defect of greatness; to add a page to

the records of history, where vice has never breathed a stain, and where virtue has impressed characters of gold, which the hand of time will brighten, as it unfolds. To emancipate his country from the grasp of oppression ; to give to Columbia a name among the nations of the earth, and to convince the world, the blood, that flows in American veins, is too rapid to be checked in its circulation by the freezing influence of foreign aggression, was the object, that called into activity the mighty exertions of Washington. The exertions of a warrior, so valiant, of a statesman, so wise, of a *man, so good*, could not be frustrated ; and to one who was “ in peace the gale of spring ; in war the mountain storm ; who was the support of the injured, and behind the lightning of whose sword the weak rested,” are millions indebted for life, liberty and happiness. Having established our Independence, it was the task of Washington to secure its foundation against future assailants. The pillars of Government were reared by his hands. The infancy of our Republic was confided to his care. He cherished it with paternal solicitude and fondness ; and under his skilful protection, it aros. from the promising beauty of youth, to the vigor and dignity of manhood. While danger loitered round our shores, he stood, as a shield, to guard the offspring of his glory ; but when the tocsin of alarm had reverberated its last note, and the song of “ peace, and glad tidings of great joy,” were only heard in our land ; or in the elegance of his own language, “ the liberties of our country being fully acknowledged, and firmly secured,” he resigned his charge, and retired to the vale of enjoyment, where the applause of the world, the blessings of his country, and the smiles of his conscience, sweetened the remainder of his life, and spread a beam of everlasting glory round his grave. Who would not say, “ Oh let me die as *Washington* died. Renown clothed him, like a robe, and the light of his fame is great. The oaks of the mountains fall ; the mountains themselves decay with years ; the ocean shrinks and grows again ; the moon herself is

lost in heaven, but the memory of WASHINGTON shall never have an end."

The successor of Washington profited by the example, which had been set before him. He pursued those measures, which had been so faithfully and successfully tried ; and under his administration, the prosperity of our country continued undiminished. The capacious mind of ADAMS was not content with providing means to answer the emergency of the moment. His eagle eye penetrated the future, and foresaw, that in a republic, like ours, though for the present its horizon was unclouded, it might soon be overcast, and if precaution was not taken, to meet the bursting of the storm, it might overwhelm us. Directed by prudence, and urged by patriotism, he prepared our shores for danger, that if alarms *should* reach our ears, conscious of our strength, we might regard them as "the idle wind." Under his protection, our commerce whitened every ocean, and lined our harbors with wealth ; the productions of our soil waved in every field, and enriched foreign climes. The voice of our cannon proclaimed our Independence, on distant seas, and *compelled* the pirates of the world to respect our flag. The hum of Industry was heard in our cities, and the tidings of plenty were sung in our villages. "Our renown grew in the song, and our steps were stately in the eyes of the brave." The integrity of our character would have awed the political regicide of Europe, and, like polished steel, would have repelled the foul breath of treachery, and spurned every impression, that could stain its splendor. The firmness of our conduct would have checked the insults of lawless depredation, and, like the sword of the Cherubims, would have turned every way to guard the tree of our rights. The majesty of our strength, would have burst the cords, prepared by modern Philistines, and, like the Nazarite of old, if doomed to perish, would have buried itself in the ruins of our enemies. But unfortunately, the even tide of prosperity, though full and

strong in its current, will not always flow, without exciting indifference, and at length disquietude: Man is "studious of change, and pleased with novelty." The richest blessings will in time cloy on his appetite; and like the bee, he will sometimes forsake the sweetest flower, to light upon the most noxious plant.

"Were man

"But constant, he were perfect: that one error

"Fills him with faults."

But for this disposition, how can we account for that departure from the sound principles of Washington, to those, which, to speak in gentle terms, were directly the reverse. Whatever be the reason, the change, alas! is certain. The names of those, who advocated and supported those noble principles; who fought and bled to establish them, were erased from the roll of *popular* distinction, and their instructions, like the leaves of the sibyl, were dispersed by the breath of ingratitude. The illustrious *Adams*, became a private citizen. He surrendered the honors of his office unsullied, but the talents and virtues, which supported them, followed him to retirement, and, like the sun, set in their own effulgence.

At this period, when our Government fell into the hands of him, who now stands at the head of our nation, what was the situation of our affairs? Were our foreign and domestic concerns embarrassed, and exposed to danger? Was our glory become so tarnished, that it required the skilful hand of Jefferson, to restore its brightness? Never was our public welfare more flourishing, our private interests more secure. Never, as a nation, were we more respected abroad; as individuals more envied at home. To preserve our rights, not increase our privileges, was the most, that could be expected. Eight times has the sun risen on the Anniversary of our Independence, since the commencement of the present Ad-

ministration ; and although, on this day, his beams have not lost their power, do they sparkle with so much lustre on the gems, that encircled the crown of our fame ? No one can pretend to say, that our prosperity has maintained it's former splendor. It is indeed melancholy to reflect how much within so short a period it has faded and declined ; how much “ the gold has become dim, and the most fine gold changed.” If possible, let us not impute the cause of our declension to dishonorable motives in our rulers. Charity would believe, if their measures have not been dictated by sound policy, it is rather owing to errors in judgment, than corruption in principle. At this time however it is matter of astonishment of what little consequence the defence of our country has been regarded ; with what little attention that prudent maxim has been treated : “ In peace prepare for war.” Why have our seaports been left unguarded ? Why has our navy, which, but a few years since, represented our rising greatness on the ocean, been recalled ; stripped of its increasing honors, and suffered to decay in disgrace ? while the respectability of our flag is entrusted to other powers of the element, which indeed may be styled the *elements* of power. Thus are they qualified to be the nurseries of our heroes ; to inspire that enterprize, and improve that skill, which will in time enable them, having learnt

“ In little boats to keep ashore,

“ In great boats to venture more.”

To be enured to the privations of life is considered necessary to complete the character of a hero. What can be more suitable, than these schools of our navy to promote this habit ! It is often found expedient “ to stoop to conquer,” and if *victory* cannot always be thus obtained, the recollection of Carter's mountain will afford *authority* to prove, that *danger* may sometimes be avoided, by drawing, like a snail, the body into a small compass. We do not reflect on the Officers of our Na-



vy—we honor and respect their character, and are proud to believe, *they* lament, as much as others, that feeble policy, that delights in building vessels, which, like the boats of children, can only be used for amusement. We believe, they are ambitious for a situation, worthy of men of spirit, and would exult at the opportunity of signaling themselves, and maintaining the *dignity* of their country. We believe, they had rather see our oaks waving triumphant in the forest, than humbled by the axe, to become more degraded in the hands of the Carpenter !

From that spirit, which left our harbors and our commerce defenceless, may we not trace, as the principal cause, the present situation of our affairs ? Can we believe, that others will hold sacred, what we do not respect ourselves ? The man, who discards his own offspring, cannot suppose, it will be protected by a stranger. If we have thrown away our weapons of defence, shall we applaud our prudence for shunning the contest, and flying the approach of invaders ? Shall we rejoice, that we have deprived them of plunder, by robbing ourselves of subsistence ? What has become of our boasted Independence, that we should be *compelled* to abandon our favorite pursuits, to gratify the ambition, or avoid the insults of foreign powers ? What has become of that sense of honor, which was once alive to injury, that we should tamely behold our dearest rights invaded; and give them no protection, but what “the wolf gives the lamb, a covering and devouring ?” Why should we cultivate our soil, when our enemies *may* reap the harvest ? Let us break down our walls ; let our fields and our gardens become waste, and suffer not the earth “to give forth her increase,” and we may be convinced, that, altho we shall starve ourselves, our *enemies* will not be fed on the fruits of our labor. But it may be said, we can defend our *soil* : why not our *commerce* ? Is the answer plain ? we are not able to protect it ; or will it be said, it is not worth protection ? Our sea coast

is extensive beyond parallel. Majestic rivers intersect every part of our country. The spirit of enterprize is congenial to our climate. The gale from the mountain, and the breeze from the wave give it health. It was found in our wilderness, and has "grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength." With these advantages; with this inclination must we be stripped of our natural employments, and be dressed in Chinese garbs to pay homage to a Chinese philosopher; or, do our rulers believe, that, like the Jews of old, we can enter this furnace of experiment, and escape the burning of the flames.—Well, may we exclaim in the language of the Celtic bard, "we wither away without our fame, for the valiant have fallen, and the feeble remain on the hills."

Since the adoption of our Constitution, since the landing of our forefathers, the embarrassments of private interest were never so pressing and severe; the prospect of industrious exertion so gloomy and despondent. "All joy is darkened; the mirth of the land is gone. The earth mourneth and languisheth. Lebanon is ashamed and hewed down. Sharon is like a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits." A few, who in better times treasured up affluence, may now live on their capital, and enjoy the comforts and luxuries of life; but how many, whose expectations were bright, are now checked in their enterprize, and their hopes defeated; the labors of the past rendered fruitless, and the prospect of the future forlorn. But when we consider the situation of thousands, who lived upon the sweat of their brow, and who depended for subsistence upon their daily earnings, the aspect of public calamity is melancholy almost to despair. Deprived of employment, and destitute of other means of support, they are compelled to look to charity for the crumbs, that fall from her table, or pick up a scanty meal, which, nature in her providence furnishes "without money and without price." The cravings of hunger are not the only evils, which at-

tend their indigence. The peace of families is sometimes destroyed. The hardness of the times, makes a sacrifice of the poor man's all, and numbers are hurried to prison, to drag a lengthening chain to their misfortunes.

It *must* be acknowledged by every candid mind, that nothing has yet transpired, which renders the restriction on our trade satisfactory or expedient ; and can it be supposed, the people of a free, enlightened republic, who value their rights above their existence, can patiently and without a murmur, submit to the miseries, which are the consequence of this measure. While secrecy, as a veil, hangs over our national councils, and conjecture is on the wing to learn the causes, which give birth to the most disastrous and important effects, *it is not* strange, that suspicion should sometimes be alive, and attribute to corrupt motives, what *cannot* be accounted for on fair principles. Our country has not yet become so hateful, but what her sons would *cheerfully* expose their lives to preserve her existence in a righteous cause. Let justice call, and the festivity of this day would be forgotten. One emotion would pervade these walls ; one spirit inspire this veteran band, and each sword, that now lies in peace, would leap from its scabbard to rekindle with its point the spark of '75.\* It is *possible* under present circumstances, which *might* have been avoided, that the embargo is the only rock of our safety ; but tho' *some* may cherish this blind credulity, and rely with unbounded confidence, on the wisdom of our Executive, *others* may be found, as willing to contribute to any sacrifice, the *public good* requires, who are not disposed to surrender, like cowards, their judgment without a contest ; and, who do not feel bound to pay implicit obedience to the opinion of *one*, where the rights of *all* are at risk, and when nothing but the hand

\* We think this compliment too justly due to be omitted *here* ; and tho' *intended* for a particular company, will, we believe, apply to the whole military establishment of our country.

on the wall is seen to convince them of its truth. They do not require "confirmations, strong as proofs of holy writ"—but they will not be deceived by *apparitions*, which fly at the approach of light.

However dissatisfied with the measures, that have characterized our present government, it is honorable to those, who feel this displeasure, to manifest no opposition, but what the constitution will justify. Laws, however oppressive, should be obeyed; and it is the pride of Federalism, not only to inculcate, but to practise this obedience.—The remedy, though frequently slow, is always sure. The public mind may, for a time, like the needle, be withdrawn from the pole; but the attraction will soon wear away, and it will return to its natural point. That such has been the fate of political opinion in our country, experience has fully proved. We may wonder, that any power could *so far* allure the judgment of a people, so enlightened, and withhold it *so long* from their true interest; but, while we study the cause for future good, let us rejoice, the period has now arrived, when the sun of truth has arisen to dispel the illusion, and already beamed its effulgence on the minds of thousands. For this happy influence we are proud to acknowledge our gratitude to a few, who, amid the triumphs of party and the persecution of foes, have had firmness and independence to vindicate the cause of liberty and justice, and to expose to the people the alarming situation of their rights.

“ O, what a world is this, when what is comely,

“ Envenoms him, that bears it.”

While such men as Pickering, Gardenier and other patriots without reproach are watchmen on the towers of our freedom, we may rest in confidence, the approach of a foe, either by artifice, or under the cover of darkness, will always be discovered, and the alarm given in season to avoid the danger. While such men remain

to counsel and direct, the light, which has now dawned, will continue to increase in lustre, till it has reached the meridian, and sound wisdom shall irradiate our cabinets, and *all* shall rejoice to behold the light, which guides to political salvation.

While we congratulate each other on the prospect, which, like the twilight of morn, brightens round our national horizon, we cannot neglect to reciprocate our pleasure, that the spirit of truth, which for a time has slumbered in Massachusetts, is now awakened, and, like Sampson, is again restored to its accustomed strength. Tho' at the *head* we behold a "degenerate plant of a strange vine," happily, like a tree, the branches, that bear the fruit, do not derive their nourishment from the top; and though other prophets have proved false, may we not venture to predict, that under the guidance of her *councils* the political Mellen-ium of our State is not far distant. However joyful we may feel in our success, let us not *exult*. Federalism disdains that proud and overbearing spirit, which "feels power and forgets right." In every contest we profess to enlist the best affections on our part; and we are proud to believe, the *best part of our affections* will always give their fairest smiles to grace our triumph; but while beauty prepares chaplets to decorate the brow of our fame, she will never forget to bear the olive in her hand, and to entwine the myrtle with the laurel.

Although we are apparently returning to a state, when the prosperity of our Country will again revive; when the Phoenix of our glory will arise from its ashes, above all things, it should never be forgotten, that no human exertion can be crowned with success, without the sanction of that Almighty Being, whose "throne is in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all."

To obtain this divine approbation, let us show our gratitude for the favors we have already received, and

prove ourselves worthy of future blessings, by employing the talents, committed to our care, to the promotion of morality and religion, the only safeguards of our public and private welfare, the only treasures, that can escape the revolutions of time. We can not expect, our *rulers* will be men of piety and virtue, unless the *people* manifest them in their own conduct, and make them indispensable requisites in the characters of those, who are candidates for their honors. The tree will never flourish, when its root is unsound. The fate of Europe should warn us of what may be our own. Behold Countries, once as free as ours—their freedom is destroyed ; their rights sacrificed on the altar of ambition ;

“ And tyrant blood, o'er many a region wide,

“ Rolls to a thousand thrones its execrable tide.”

Perhaps their fall may be a punishment due to their sins ; and he, who grasps at universal dominion, may be a scourge to execute the wrath of an offended being. Let us then not only believe these solemn truths—“ Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people ;” but let us, by a faithful discharge of our duties as men, and as christians, be resolved to become that “ happy people, whose God is the Lord.”

However fair and honorable the professions of other nations may appear, the experience of all ages will prove, their sincerity is seldom evinced, when a violation of their faith will advance their aggrandizement. This truth should teach us to place the chief dependence of our liberties on our own resources.

When we consider our Independence was not the growth of a day, sown in the clear sunshine of joy, and watered by the gentle dews of peace ; but, like the oak, required years to give it strength, and, amid storms and tempests rose to grandeur, its preservation will be held more sacred, and important. Let us then, not only on

this Anniversary, but at all times, keep it in remembrance ; and, while we endeavor to deserve the blessing, be prepared to protect it. Never may the birthday of our nation return without that proud enjoyment, which makes it welcome ; and, while we feast on the banquet, prepared by the toil and blood of our fathers, may the fire, which warmed *their* bosoms, glow in *ours* ; and, in the fervor of honest emotion, may we join in the exclamation of the poet.:

“ Thy spirit, Independence, let me share,

“ Lord of the Lion heart, and Eagle eye ;

“ Thy steps I’ll follow with my bosom bare,

“ Nor heed the blast, that howls along the sky.”



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