

AN

from Samuel B. Deane
H.C.

ORATION,

DELIVERED

AT THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN

WINCHESTER,

ON THE

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,



BY FRANCIS W. GILMER, ESQ.



J. FOSTER, PRINTER.

Winchester, Va.

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1816.

AN ORATION,

DELIVERED AT WINCHESTER, ON THE FOURTH OF JULY

BY F. W. GILMER, ESQ.

I am afraid, Fellow citizens, from an indisposition by which I am at this moment oppressed, that I may be unable to make myself heard to the full extent of this very large assembly. If, however, I can succeed in doing so, I will felicitate you; I will congratulate the whole American people, on the return of the fortieth Anniversary of our Independence. It has now been just so many years since the Congress of America assembled at Philadelphia; declared these, then, colonies of Great Britain to be **FREE** and **INDEPENDENT** states. We have to thank God for the continuance of his favors, thro' all that period of time; in crowning that perilous struggle with final triumph; and, since its glorious termination, for blessing us with an almost uninterrupted peace, and a prosperity never for a moment checked, even by an untoward circumstance. We now from an eminence of felicity behold ourselves the freest people upon earth; with resources the most rapidly increasing; and with a population spreading itself over an immense and fruitful country; with a vigor never before witnessed since the world was peopled!—Happy in the prosperity of a long peace; happy in the freest institutions which any people, ancient or modern, ever enjoyed; happy in the possession of a wide spread territory; and happy, almost beyond the condition of our species, in the prospect of the continuation of these rare blessings; we are perverse indeed if we are not content

with our condition ; and ungrateful to the author of all good if we do not unfeignedly thank him for this profusion of his bounties. I do thank him—I thank God, that I am an American ; that I am a free citizen of a free country ; that I have lived to see our institutions, which the enemies of all human happiness and the haters of all human glory, have decried as feeble and temporary, stand forty years of the most stormy season that ever agitated the world. In little more than half that period of time, we have seen more than half the thrones of Europe prostrated and re-established by sanguinary revolutions. Tyrants have followed after Tyrants in gloomy procession, without a moment of repose to the distressed and troubled people of those devoted countries. Even now the grim phantoms of departed despotism stalk amid the darkness of this awful scene. Year after year whole nations have been in arms to subdue their fellow creatures, or to be conquered by them. The wave of desolation has rolled from the Mediterranean to the Baltic ; and accumulating force in its reflux over exasperated millions, has swept away armies, and conquerors, and kings ; broken and destroyed the strength of the most powerful military system that has ever existed. Vain deluded mortals ! poor, impious conquerors ! Could not they learn from this infant nation that the happiness of mankind is PEACE ? Could not the example of our WASHINGTON teach them, that the only monument of greatness which can never decay is the love and gratitude of our fellow creatures ? There indeed was an example of true glory. Posterity will remember and reward it, when all the splendid pageantry of conquerors shall have passed away. When all the Cæsars and Bonapartes who have deluged the world with blood, shall be remembered only to be execrated and abhorred, the fame of the IMMORTAL FATHER of this western Republic shall live in the hearts of a grateful people. Well has he been called the *saviour* of his country : well has he deserved all the honors which gratitude and admiration have lavished upon him.

Leaving the just narrative of his achievements, and of those of his illustrious compatriots, to the historians who will hereafter record them ; let us consider for a moment their results.

We may form an accurate idea of the spirit and policy in which the colonies of Great Britain were planted in America, by attending to the early history of our own state. They were settled purely from motives of commercial advantage ; an exclusive right of trading to certain parts of North America, was granted by the crown of G. Britain to incorporated companies. The government looked to these now great and confederated states, which have twice since shaken the mane of the British Lion, only as a mean of increasing its revenue ; the company looked to them only as a commercial monopoly from whence it was to derive a lucrative trade. Neither one nor the other had the sagacity to foresee the advantage of the colonies even in extending the range of British commerce, and increasing the consumption of British manufactures, and much less the enormous accession of power which they might have added to the British Empire. The mother country was not perhaps competent to anticipate these things, it certainly was not disposed to produce them. Sometimes we were oppressed by the exactions of the company, sometimes by the usurpations of the crown but generally by both, until the year 1624, when by a violent stretch of legal prerogative the company was suppressed, and shortly after finally extinguished by the acquiescence of a servile court. The king however, was not animated in these exertions by love to his transatlantic subjects but by hostility to the company. We had now lost one of our masters but were for that very reason more entirely in the power of the other. And that power was never exerted in behalf of the liberties of its subjects at home and much less of those who were three thousand miles distant. We had not only no participation in the councils of G. Britain, we had scarcely any in our own. A British Governor presided over each

Province; called and prorogued its assembly as suited his caprice or the views of his king. We were forbidden to manufacture many, indeed almost every article of the first necessity; a woolen hat could not be exported from one colony to another. Neither could we import these articles of indispensable use from any other country than G. Britain. To this prohibition was added the only outrage which remained. It was accomplished by means of a political cheat as insulting to our understandings as it was severe in its provisions. The act of Parliament which prevented our intercourse with the continent of Europe was curiously contrived. We were forbidden by a statute of Geo. III.* to export any articles whatever to any country north of Cape Finisterre except to G. Britain. While at the same time it was notorious that there was no country south of Cape Finisterre from whence we could import any thing in return for them. It left us only Spain, Portugal, the shores of the mediterranean and Africa from whence we derived nothing but the curse of our country—slaves. In short we were ourselves like the unfortunate beings who were the objects of this inhuman traffic to be converted into a colony of slaves, to cultivate tobacco that our royal masters might forget they were our oppressors in the drunkenness of its smoke. Time which mitigates ordinary affliction, aggravated ours. Here we were, dropped in a desert, the slaves of a company, badly supplied with provisions and means of defence, prohibited manufacturing what we most wanted, prohibited for a long time exporting any thing except to London, forbidden to import any thing except from G. Britain, taxed without representation, fighting for the English constitution without enjoying its protection, thrown foremost in wars which the ill advised councils of our rulers had provoked, and abandoned in the hour of distress by this unnatural parent, who had brought them upon us, with the Port of Boston shut, armies quartered upon us, military law

* 6th Geo. III. c. 52.

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in force, trial by Jury suspended and bowed down by all the accumulated burthens which you have heard enumerated in the able and eloquent declaration of our independence; it was time that despotism should sicken at the abuse of its arrogated power, and that insulted humanity should rise up in vindication of its violated rights. The conquest of the East India possessions of G. Britain was not conceived in a purer spirit of commercial rapine than the settlement of the American colonies. One is a counterpart of the other. By long experience in wars of rapacious speculation in the west, they have unhappily succeeded in establishing a mighty Empire with the spoils of plundered nations in the east. What was remarked by one of the most eloquent speakers who ever adorned the Parliament of England, of India, might with equal truth be applied to the colonies of North America. He observed that the government of India exhibited through every stage of its progress unequivocal evidence of its origin in commercial speculation. "We see," (said he) "auctioneering ambassadors, and trading generals, a city besieged on a note of hand, a revolution brought about by an affidavit, an army employed in executing an arrest, and a Prince dethroned for the balance of an account, an empire exhibiting the mock majesty of a bloody sceptre, and the little traffic of a merchant's counting house; wielding a truncheon with one hand, and picking a pocket with the other."

They know little of human nature, who believe that it will endure such humiliating outrages any longer than it is compelled. To pretend to practise such oppression is not only insulting to our fellow men. it is sacrilege and impiety to God. The author of good can never delegate to man power to do evil, and when he usurps such a power, there is a Providence above, that will send down chastisement upon his iniquities. A day of retribution for centuries of oppression was to come, and a bloody account was to be rendered for these unnatural transgressions upon human rights, this

unkind return for filial love, and this contempt of the order which the author of nature has prescribed for the government of the world. That day has come. That account has been rendered; at Princeton, at Trenton, at Saratoga, and at York. It is sanctioned by our victories, sanctified by the approbation of the father of our country, and hallowed by the blood of the martyrs of the Revolution—an army of Patriots who, prodigal† even of their lives, poured out their blood upon the altar of their country—The incense was grateful to heaven, it has crowned their labours with triumph, their temples with laurels, their fame with immortality. And if it be permitted the shades of the departed great to view what passes in this guilty world, they must feel themselves a thousand times repaid for the few years which the fortune of war lopt from their lives,—and more than compensated for all the cruelties which were practised upon their expiring bodies in the Jersey-ship—worse than the Dartmoor Jail of later times—in beholding the trophies which will perpetuate the glory of their achievements. The happiness, the prosperity, the freedom of this nation, the sentiments which this day inspires are indeed proud monuments to their memories—worth all the obelisks and pyramids which kings and conquerors, long since forgotten, have erected to record their renown. A monument not only more durable than marble or brass—but lasting as the race of man; which time far from defacing will brighten with every succeeding year; which innumerable ages yet unborn are destined to exalt still higher and to spread still wider. Even now Time has made manifest what the fondest of us forty years ago could not have hoped. For who in the sanguine credulity of youth, who in the enthusiasm of his imagination, mounting with a genius of fire to the highest heaven of rapture, if the destiny of his now great nation could have been revealed to him in prophetic vision, on the day of the declaration which

† *Prodiga gens animæ, et properare faciliâ mortem.* [Sil. Ital.]

made us free, could have believed that within a period shorter than the life of man, (for there are persons of twice the age) this country then consisting of thirteendi-vided colonies, composed, apparently, of discordant materials, thrown off by the volcanoes of political violence from the bloody shores of European civilization, and laboring under all the evils which the misguided policy of the mother country could inflict, should by the magic of a patriotic sympathy be all at once united and melted into one people, and breaking the chains of oppression with which tyrants had endeavored to bind them, establishing a free government and laws of their own. And what is still more astonishing, within the memory of almost the youngest of us, spreading its enterprising population beyond the mountains of the west, till then the inhospitable haunts of savage beasts and of more than savage men. Instead of girding the interior country as the Canadian French in alliance with the Indians had done, with a line of distant and feeble forts, covering the whole face of that immense territory with the spoils of peaceful industry; reducing reluctant nations of Barbarians to the empire of civilized dominion; and as we have recently seen waging successful war in every sea with the mistress of the ocean, who in battle had humbled the pride of Spain, and subdued the power of France. This however, was but one of the elements for the display of the strength of this youthful nation. At the same moment it poured from its prolific womb entire armies to repel invasion on the opposite extremities of the Lakes and the Gulph of Mexico. Like a giant stretching forth its arms to the north, and south, and strangling at one grasp the serpents of opposite hemispheres!—Happy people! we could not have hoped for these things yet we have lived to see them. And wonderful as they are, they seem but presages of our future fortune.

In forty years from this day, if Providence should continue its blessings, our people will amount to more than thirty millions. Our population will have spread

from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. embracing an extent of more than three* millions of square miles of territory; including one nation, speaking one language, governed by the same laws, born to inherit the same freedom, the same enterprize, the same valor, the same love of country. Forming another northern nation, not indeed like the Goths and Vandals of Europe destined to sweep with a storm of devastation over the arts and civilization of the earth; but the peaceful and labourous conquerers of the unproductiveness of nature; rolling from the now barren plains of the Missouri thro' the fertile labyrinths of another Nile, a commerce and a wealth richer than the fabled sands of Pactolus. Reaping from innumerable fields, which will wave their golden harvests to the sun, the spoils of Ceres to supply the exhausted granaries of the antipodes in Asia and in Europe. And if occasion require pouring fourth armies more numerous than ever followed any eastern conqueror in the pride of his power: bleaching the azure of every ocean with the sails of a victorious navy,

“Visions of glory spare my aching sight;
Ye unborn ages crowd not on my soul.”

I know, fellow citizens, that there are never wanting prophets of ill, who like Chryses never foretel good; let them indulge in their gloomy vaticinations. They have been so long predicting evils which have never happened that I have as little faith in their inspiration as in their good disposition. They pretend to found their sad presages of the fate of our beloved country, upon the history of others, upon the downfall of Roman greatness, and the destruction of the fairest Empire of Europe, which in our own times we have seen melted away in wars of rapine and ruin. But we are neither Athens nor Rome, nor France; nor in any respect like

* Mr. Gallatin has computed the territory of the U. S. exclusive of Louisiana at 900,000 square miles. Baron Humboldt makes it much larger. Louisiana to the pacific is more than twice the extent, which will make about 1920 millions of square acres. But still less than both the Russias by a small quantity.

any of them except indeed that we are all mortal men. If they deduce their melancholy inference from the mere fact of the fall of these mighty powers without any regard to change of circumstances, they may as well predict any thing however absurd or impious. Do they forget that the Empire of China is older than the religion which we worship, or the birth of its author whom we adore? Yet who will be mad or wicked enough to say that this Empire will endure longer than that of the Prince of the heavens and of the earth? Is there nothing durable but despotism? For one, I do not believe the creator of the universe so hostile to human happiness, as to have made us unfit for any form of political existence but of servitude: that he has made us desire nothing so much as freedom, and yet precluded us forever its enjoyment; that like Tantalus in Pagan fiction we are perpetually to stoop to bathe our parched lips in an ever receding stream. So far from it, I am prompted, as well by the impulse of my heart, as the conviction of my understanding, to believe, that a well ordered government resting upon the pillars of popular liberty, is the best, and as the best, the most durable in the world. Athens, to whose venerable ruins we are referred, was never a government of laws; it had at no time a free constitution. It was a government of temporary shifts and expedients, surrounded by powerful and hostile nations, fighting every year not for its national independence, but for its very existence: inconsiderate in the day of its prosperity, and almost sanctioning the temerity of its conduct by its astonishing courage, address, and resources in every ebb of its fortune. When we resolve to leave our country to the mercy of a besieging enemy; when as a nation we break up house-keeping and encamp upon some Salamis of the ocean; when a Pisistratus with fifty men armed with clubs can awe and subdue eight millions, it may be just to compare that population with 300,000 and this entire continent to a territory smaller than some of the counties of Virginia. Rome was equally unlike us in every essen-

tial character. It was a military republic at one time, a military despotism at another; and whether it was one or the other depended entirely upon the caprice of the army in obeying the consul and senate, or its own commander; which was most likely to be their choice is easily imagined. Sylla and Cæsar were absolutely invited to their usurpations. The day which Jugurtha had foretold, had arrived; the city had found a purchaser. But where will a Cæsar find an army in America to extinguish devotion to Liberty in the breast of so many millions? Yes indeed, he may find an army, but it will be an army composed of such men as Brutus, and Cassius, and Casca; an army of eight millions of free citizens, every one of whom would bear not a dagger in his bosom, but a sword in his hand, not to liberate his country, but to punish even a wish to enslave it. never before was there a nation every man of which was born free; born to respect the laws; educated to know and feel that to pretend to usurp the liberties of eight millions of free citizens, scattered over an extent of 900,000 square miles, without an army, without consular power, without hereditary wealth, without reverence to rank, without hopes from foreign wars, or domestic feuds, is only less mad and preposterous than to affect like Canute to usurp the Empire of the moon, and make the sea ebb at his nod.

There is just as little similitude between our situation and that of France, whose fall from power is an effecting monument of the madness of human presumption, of the vicissitudes of all human greatness, of the instability of fortune but not of Liberty. She too might have been free, but heaven, for wise and good purposes no doubt, has ordered it otherwise. Her late reverses may be designed as a chastisement to guilty ambition: the sun of her glory tho' in eclipse may not have set, and tho' set, may rise with a dawn of purer light, a morning of brighter prospects, and a noon of more dazzling splendor. The darkness which now overshadows her is not owing to any thing inherent in the nature of Liberty. Her fortune might have been far other than it is. Had

the late ruler of France known the true limits to his power, when his banner floated on every battlement from the Kremlin of Moscow to the walls of Cadiz, and the Gulph of Tarentum; the imperial eagle which has now closed his wings forever might still have soared through half of Europe. But had he—Oh! had he—like our WASHINGTON known what constitutes true glory, France might now be free and might be numbered among the benefactors of mankind. He perverted his power to the ruin of his country and he has met his reward in downfall, disgrace and ruin.

France has never yet been free, and her failure under the most auspicious circumstances to make herself so, shews the difference between us. We passed from colonial servitude to independence and freedom at once by the moral energy of a people determined to be free and incapable of being longer enslaved. Indeed so far from thinking these examples sufficient to prove our political institutions frail and temporary I maintain, paradoxical as it may appear, that for the very reasons that the spurious ill formed Republics, which have risen like mushrooms on the decay and corruption of monarchies, have passed away with the ferments which engendered them, ours will be durable. They have had no principle of Republicanism; we thank God have none of royalty, we have no hierarchy, no nobility, no hereditary wealth, no long duration in office. Our Republic was not as has been thought the Utopian dream of some visionary theorist: It arose from the nature of our circumstances, and no other than a free government could have resisted those circumstances a week. So long as they exist, no other than a free government can exist. The people of every country have the physical power to be free, they want only the disposition to exert it: we

have that disposition ; we cherish it as a privilege ; it is at once our security and our pride ; and he who would bribe, or flatter, or force us to relinquish it, may meet with the fate of Catiline, without exciting the sympathy which we feel for his oppressions.

Whatever factions may arise then, whatever divisions may take place among us ; into how many portions soever we may be severed ; tho' every state should form a separate government, that would be a Republic—But let us fellow-citizens in the spirit which this day inspires resolve to remain for ever one people ; let us complete the great work which our ancestors have so auspiciously commenced. It has been unfortunate for the human race that empire has been extended only by arms, and dominion gained only by conquest. Let us be permitted to indulge the fond anticipation, fortified as it is by all which has passed, that this new country never yet profaned by thirst for power or love of rapine, will be unlike the old in nothing, more than in its preference of Peace over all the blood stained trophies of guilty wars. That we shall extend our power, not by the sword and bayonet, but by the precepts inculcated in the gospel of heaven.—That the mighty may here spread the pavilions of his power, as a tabernacle to all who are persecuted and oppressed.—That to accomplish the great objects to which our destiny calls us, he may enlighten our minds with the rays of truth, to pursue in quiet, the paths of virtue, happiness, and glory.