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AN  
ORATION,

DELIVERED

AT GROTON,

ON THE

TWENTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

*JULY FOURTH, 1805.*

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By BENJAMIN HEMSTEAD.

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NORWICH:

PRINTED BY STERRY & PORTER.

1805.

## AN ORATION, &c.



**W**HEN we assemble together to celebrate the natal Anniversary of our Country, let us unite under an impression of becoming solemnity—with undissembled humility—with a serious reflection on its importance—and under a deep sense of the gratitude we owe our common parent.

**W**HEN we reflect how vast is the empire of America—and the extent of her dominion, and how free and happy are its children; when we reflect on the trying scenes our country has witnessed in performing the great work of liberty; when we reflect on these things and the interposition of God in our favor in times of eminent danger; surely we say within ourselves we will rejoice and our rejoicing shall be in the God of our salvation.

**P**LEASED must we be, when recollection reminds us of the horrors we have escaped at different periods—when the sun of America was hung in sable, and the twilight clothed in darkness, that we at this time can assemble without control from the domination of princes and privileged orders of men; and that a due sense of the inestimable blessings of liberty and equality warms the souls of Americans, and promises by experience to promote their future felicity.

**L**ET the influence of the heart-felt emotions and cheering anticipations of this day, call to our remembrance the causes that have occasioned the rise and fall of empires; and the mighty revolutions time has witnessed, and offered on the altar of inhumanity millions of human beings! When we take these things into consideration, it presents to the observer too vast a field to enter upon to distinctly consider at this time; but we must remember that virtue and science are the only means to reach the

pinnacle of national glory ; and vice the great prelude of becoming deserted by prosperity—An emperor or a king with their whole detested train of privileged orders ; their popes, priests, &c. have been the ultimate causes of degeneracy ; of the destruction of empires and millions of human beings !

ON this occasion, when we convene together, we ought remember, that our successors are rising rapidly with time to take their standing on the stage of life. Soon indeed will time with her speediest flight roll her chariot over our allotted space, and we must go the way, the oft trodden way that our ancestors have passed, and add to the innumerable inhabitants of the dust. It becometh you then as christians, as republicans, and as men, to lead their minds to the important events that have taken place in the world ; the destruction that tyrants have created in the overthrow of empires, and admonish them to be prepared to resist a tyrant, who may dare presume to exercise a usurpation ; and to preserve the inestimable blessing of the unalienable rights of man.

WHEN we unfold the volume of history and cast our eyes upon the Roman empire, we say indeed it has been the seat of human depravity. Tho' once raised to the highest summit of glory, yet vice was introduced amongst them ; they degenerated and fell into ruin. Here we may learn the awful lesson of a union of Church and State ; here we may learn the arts of their popes ; their friars, and privileged men, who indeed have exercised the most unrelenting cruelty ; their dry pan and gradual fire ; their repository of snakes and other poisonous reptiles, with their wicked deeds in prostituting the fairest, the most virtuous, and even those who were most tenderly beloved by their parents, of the female character. These things ought forever to be remembered to the latest posterity.

Tho' in a less degree, yet the same spirit was exercised on our venerable ancestors, which compelled them

to leave their native shore and seek on the western borders of the Atlantic some happier clime. But were we to enter upon the black catalogue of crimes committed on them which compelled them to leave their native country, I fear it would take up too much time for the audience. Were we to look back on the misfortunes which attended them, I fear it might weary the patience of the assembly; but you have heard the tragic story, your fathers, and your fathers fathers have looked upon their little children, and while tears of affection stood in their aged eyes, have told to them their painful story.

BUT after a multiplicity of scenes had passed, in which the fathers of our empire had to encounter with the savage indians, with their uplifted tomahawk and the bloody scalping knife; with the beasts of the unexplored forest; with the inclemency of winter; no shelter from the rattling storm; no retreat from the savage indians; from the beasts of the field, nothing to shelter them; no seeming friend but our common parent. But the truth will ever remain sacred in the hearts of faithful Americans, that after a series of distressing events, and the fertile fields of America began to be cultivated, Britain, her proud and haughty mother, claimed the privilege of taxing her without her consent. Altho' this violation of the rights of man was given up in submission, yet the taxes increased till the burthen became grievous, and then she petitioned for redress. However singular and destitute of affection this may appear, yet her petitions were answered in menace. Swarms of British officers were sent into the country; fruitless was her entreaties, and fruitless was her patience. At last troops were conducted across the Atlantic, and began by shedding the blood of Americans.

LIBERTY & the unalienable rights of man, that investiture of nature, now seemed to be but a name; scarcely a pinnacle in the civilized world for the eagle of liberty to rest her foot upon, she soared aloof in the liquid ether, and took her flight toward heaven, to offer her pe-

titions to the throne of mercy ; but soon American Independence was named, and an angel of light (as it were) as a messenger from the most high, bent his way toward the earth, and conducted the genius of liberty to these genial climes.

TWENTY-NINE years has now rolled away in swift succession, since the great assessor of the rights of Americans was signed, and proclaimed to the world. Millions of souls who beheld that eventual morn with the enraptured glow of patriotism, have already been translated to brighter worlds, to the abodes of more than mortal freedom.

BUT while we view our empire, rising like a phoenix from the ashes of ruin that was heaped upon the foundations of our houses, and see the flowing tide of glory with which she is now attended, it opens the imagination to unparalled excellence. To represent to the enquirer the grievances that opened the great drama of war, would be to point to the declaration of our rights. Those who were then advanced to mature years, know by experience the solemn truth of this dedication to American liberty, and our emancipation from slavery, and a foreign king and master. Those indeed whose years could not treasure them in remembrance, and those who have since risen to view, receive the faithful testimony from their fathers. Britania at the reception of this news, determined more vigorously to subdue her by force of arms. She sent her floating batteries across the Atlantic, with their thundering cannon and infuriated troops, and threatened devastation and ruin upon all that fell in their way. They entered our seaports with their horrid engines of ruin, and laid waste the wealth of the inhabitants ; their troops marched into the interior with their artillery, swords and bayonets, and with their other instruments of death ; from which, rivers of blood ensued, and swelled the volume of human woe. How often has the dreadful tragedy been acted, when they have entered our towns and spared nothing that human nature could destroy.

You indeed, some who are here present, may have been spectators of as horrid deeds as ever marked a Gothic tyrant; many indeed of our country's children may have witnessed their fathers, their brothers, and children fall a prey to British inhumanity. When they laid waste our towns, and laid in one common mass of ruin all that opposed them; when their bosoms were fired by malice, and bid defiance to humanity; yet there remains monuments of this sacred truth. When houses were in flames and husbands, fathers, and brothers were fighting in defence of our common country; yea when they were inhumanly butchered, and heaving their last sighs; when their dying groans tortured the ear of humanity; when the blood which flowed from their wounds encrimsoned the ground, and tinged their clothes; their mothers, their wives, their sisters, and little children have sought for refuge in some adjacent forest.

THE tyrants who bore for Britania, her scepter in America, saw in the spirit of her hardy sons, a determination to repel the aggression of their rights, and turned not their bosoms when it was fronting the bayonet, or the sharp pointed sword, they determined to have recourse to more inhuman means. Altho' war raged with all its attending horrors, and the supplies of the necessary productions of nature for the sustenance of man being small, yet they exercised their strongest endeavors to reduce them by the terrifying apprehensions of perishing with hunger. But this was not all. Altho' at this important crisis, the prospect of Americans began to darken; the atmosphere became clouded; the thunders rolled in loud and solemn peals; every mind was agitated; every ear was opened; every eye was fixed with deep attention, till the storm had passed our zenith, and by the direction of an almighty arm, the tempest gradually subsided and we became, to the astonishment of the world, a peculiar people, blessed with the peculiar indulgences of nature.

But in passing through the scenes of the revolution!

fatigue, cold and hunger they endured ; but an emancipation from a state of servility, sweetened all their troubles. But let not the noble mind pass over scenes like these, without calling into consideration, the providential manner in which they were relieved. When the soldiers were in the field, in the defence of our common country and the rights of man, the fairer part of all the lower creation, busied in their domestic pursuits, tho' not enured to the sultry heat of the noon day sun, tho' they were unused to the hardships of tilling the ground ; yet it is an incontestible truth, that they exposed themselves to the burning sun, and to the labor of the field, and contributed to their own and their little children's support, while their faithful father and husband were in the field of battle. With a page in the faithful history of America, marking these things with force, with spirit, and energy, must be an honor to our country, and is without a parallel in the history of civilized nations.

BUT let us consider attentively for a moment, the deeds which inhumanly sacrificed thousands of Americans, to the unrelenting malice of British tyrants, and let them never be forgotten.

REMEMBER how often has their ships and their armies attacked our seaports, and their armies, the interior of our country, and spared nothing that a human being could destroy ; but swept in almost a universal manner the defenders of our country, and the wealth of the people, into the un pitying bosom of destruction ; as tho' the unfeeling breasts of our oppressors thought it not enough to destroy our seaports with the aid of their thundering cannon, and the devouring rage of elemental fire ; to ravage our country, and cut off all resources from its defenders ; to destroy our interior by fire, wherever their armies marched ; to abuse our houses of public worship, dedicated to the living God ; to put the noble defenders of our country to the sword ; to drive from their dwelling, women and little children, and allow them only time sufficient to depart and be specta-

tors of the awful scene of their houses in flames ; not knowing which way to wander for security, but perhaps to some contiguous forest ; yet notwithstanding these things, as tho' they thought the hearts of Americans were shut up in cold and icy fetters, or their senses become destitute of the human feelings ; yet shocking to relate, the American history bears testimony, and I appeal to you for its sacred truth, and to humanity for the inhumanity of the deeds. Remember the manner in which the English treated the honorable American prisoners ; see the awful effects of the prison-ship and sugar-house, where they put them upon a scanty pittance, and that which was not fit to cast to the humble mastiff. See the wretchedness they spread through the country with the small pox, fevers and what is still worse, a deadly poison, a poison which put an end to thousands of patriotic Americans ! Let the shameful story be told to your children, and they to another generation ; let time never efface the impression, and learn them how to appreciate the blessings of a deliverance from such inhuman monsters. Though now freed from oppression and the cruel jaws of the tyrant, yet reflection must awaken our minds to these things ; and when inhumanity presents itself in its most hideous deformity of human nature, points to the prison ship and the bones of the deceased, though now dead, yet their remains are an everlasting monument of the scenes our country has witnessed, and the recourse that was had to bring her to subjection. These noble, these virtuous, and these heroic defenders of our rights, tho' they saw almost inevitable death if they continued faithful to the cause of their country, that if they would enter the field under the command of Britain's proud and venal servants, that it would soon render them objects of freedom from the loathsome prison ; but no ; they determined to die ; death was almost inevitable, or their country should be free.

REPUBLICANS ! remember these things, the fatal schemes you have escaped ; call your imagination to



your deceased brethren, how often have they been witnessed walking in the streets, after exchanged, with their emaciated bodies and tottering limbs, with their haggard eyes and fallen cheeks, and nothing to cheer their minds but the hopes of a future happy existence; yet, tho' they have departed, and their bones lie buried beneath the sand of some contiguous shore, where the seat of human slaughter was contrived; or exposed to the rays of the sun, or the waves which rudely dash against them, or perhaps in some christian grave-yard; yet they live in the mind of a grateful and affectionate people.

WHILE we call to our remembrance, truths which every aged American bears me witness, let us not pass over those in which their ingenious wickedness was executed at fort Griswold, and the destruction of New-London; remember, on that doleful morning, the pangs which seized the hearts of those who heard, when the solemn sound of alarm was given by the sound of the cannon which summoned them together, as the voice of God, to appear before him, to render their accounts, which alarm was given from the summit which witnessed that scene of human woe.

YEA, remember, when the fathers of almost every family, and those indeed who had not arrived at the age of man, were preparing to run and meet the enemy, and stand in defence of their birthright, to rescue their wives, their parents, their brothers and sisters, their little children, and their country; who were watching their motions with anxious solicitude, not knowing they should ever see them again an animate being; till the sound of the arch angel's trumpet!

WHEN reflections, like these, awaken our senses, and we in imagination, behold the vindictive British soldiery, and the causes that has effected means like these, let our hearts bear testimony of our gratitude to God, who has interposed in our favor, and delivered us from the prospects of similar distress; and that we are redeemed from a state of bondage, which now sinks the inhabi-

tants of our ancient oppressors beneath the load of almost insupportable wretchedness and misery. Under these impressions, let us unite and rejoice, and let our rejoicing be in the salvation of our Country.

**AFTER** a noble struggle of about seven years, in which America endured fatigue, cold and hunger almost beyond the human calculation; yet the rights of our country were acknowledged, and stipulations of peace were agreed upon between America and Britain.

**AFTER** the great object of independence was obtained, our country had then but one branch of the great bulwark of national safety, for government was then necessary. The patriotic leaders in the revolution were fearful of the result of experience; various were the opinions with regard to a system; among these, was the famous Alexander Hamilton, who has since fallen in defence of his honor, in a duel, which he declared and confessed, was in violation of his religious sentiments, which ought to remain inviolable to every other; who proposed before the Convention 'a Government in open defiance of the rights of man, and nothing better than our country had been bleeding to oppose; it spake in the voice of the noble, to save the people from their worst enemies, themselves. In this plan of the celebrated Alexander, we find a senate for life, and an abolition of the state governments: What a noble plan! Judicious choice! What a happy invention! And indeed what a pity the wisdom of the ever memorable convention had not adopted it. How much trouble annually should we have saved in elections. How still and peaceable the times; no rivalship; no party spirit; a sedition law to close our lips, a standing army to overawe the multitude of the people. Let this admirable frame of government ever be remembered, and let it also be remembered that his whole life bespoke a conformity to it; that his wishes were never gratified, but always cherished a degree of hope, that his anxious hope, would, before the dawn of immortality, find a little repose. You have witness-

ed with what success he tried his scheme; you have witnessed him as one of the most conspicuous of the federal party; you have witnessed him with the high handed leaders of his party fallen into a state, where they seemingly ought rather to excite our pity than contempt. But the schemes they have exercised ought ever to be held in abhorrance and contempt, and as a solemn warning to guide our steps in future. But Hamilton is dead, and the influence of his principles are soon to follow; and may they both be buried in the peaceful tomb of oblivion.

THE great and mighty sound has reached afar off, and when it reached the shores of proud and lofty Britain, mourning was recommended; but humility was not there. They found indeed that God had taken him away; no restoration to his earthly tabernacle; not a parallel in America, in their estimation. But as God is infinite, that he has interposed in favor of our country, in times of danger, let us again say we will rejoice, and let our rejoicing be in gratitude to God.

AFTER encountering a series of difficulties, the Convention ratified the present *Constitution*; it went into operation with a Washington in the presidential chair. With regard to the principle of this unparalled monument of human wisdom, it is not essential to know whither a Franklin, or a Madison, laid the plan, as both were in that honorable body, and both conspicuous members.

DURING the time which Washington sat in the presidential chair, all was quiet and prosperous, and dissensions crept not among the people, till Washington retired to the rural scenes of private life. His retirement opened the door of necessity for making choice of a man to supply his place. The attention of the people was placed upon Mr. Adams. He was elected; he accepted, but the people pronounced him unworthy their confidence, and they sent him from the office. While he continued in office, government grew uniformly stronger; taxes were raised; the expences of government increased;

in a short time, we found ourselves loaded with a stamp act, a land tax ; with an alien law ; with a sedition law ; with a useless judiciary ; with a standing army ; with a host of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance, and our country sinking into debt, with 8 per cent. loans, &c. In short, the people began to be fearful that they were going to be led to try by experience the truth of this doctrine, that a national debt is a national blessing. I know indeed that all men are fallible, that accidents are incident to the human race ; but indeed these had like to have been mistakes too fatal, and had the appearance of premeditation and design. These things opened the eyes of our countrymen, and prepared a way for our emancipation, and for an opportunity indeed of preparing a legacy of inestimable value to bequeath to our innocent posterity.

THEY pursued their course with too much precipitancy and zeal ; every circumstance was calculated to convince the people that a despotism awaited us. Could the power have been obtained, every evil that sullied the noon-day sun of the Roman empire, might have been witnessed, and indeed a comparative consequence might have ensued, with that of our mother country. But we have once more been delivered, our country preserved from an irremediable consequence ; for Jefferson succeeded in the chair of state, amidst the acclamations of millions.

WHEN we call our attention to a view of the men and measures of the general government, surely we at once conclude the administrators excell as far as the measures.

WHEN we look into the presidential chair and behold a Jefferson, with a Clinton at the head of the senate ; and in the department of state, a Madison, and of the finances, a Gallatin, we indeed feel secure from the whole artillery of federal slander, tho' they have been levelled against them with all their ingenuity. When we call to mind the situation of our country under the administration of Mr. Adams, and see the enormous debts that were daily contracted, and the taxes that were laid, with

our country continually running in debt, and view it at the present day, with the repeal of many oppressive taxes; no sedition law; no alien law; no standing army; with an addition of a valuable extent of territory, and a prospect of the extinction of the national debt in a few years, we at once say Republicans are the only faithful servants of their country, therefore let us rejoice. Let it therefore be a source of joy and gratitude to those who are just advancing to the stage of man, to God for his almighty interposition in our favor, and the common defenders of our country. The broad stone of our temple was laid; the building was reared and dedicated to liberty and ready at our hands to receive. We therefore in one common voice unite, under a due sense of the inestimable blessings of liberty, that we are in possession of the only part of the globe where the rights of man are understood and extended; and like a Lion rejoicing in his strength, open the way for millions yet unborn.

MAY a true sense of the blessings we are in possession of, inspire the breast of Americans; may they unitedly see that virtue and science are the two main pillars of national glory; may these be cultivated, and handed down from generation to generation, till the angel of God shall swear that time shall be no longer.

FINIS.