

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT ALFRED,

IN THE

COUNTY OF YORK,

ON

THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1869,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE BIRTH DAY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY JOHN HOLMES, Esq.

KENNEBUNK.

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1869.

WILLIAM PARSONS, WILLIAM FROST and ABIEL HALL, Esqr's.
were appointed a committee to present the thanks of the auditory to JOHN
HOLMES, Esq. for the ORATION delivered by him, and request a copy
thereof for the press.

Alfred, 4th of July, 1809.

ORATION.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

WE have assembled, for the first time in this place, to celebrate in a public and social manner the birth day of our Nation. A day which while it gladdens the heart, ought to excite the gratitude of every friend of freedom. The causes which led to this glorious event, the distresses which attended its accomplishment, the heroic virtue, and patriotism which it brought into action have been ably and strikingly portrayed by the orator, the poet and the historian. To one of my limited capacity, the subject seems nearly exhausted, its beauties and pleasures have become familiar, and its magnitude seems diminished, by a frequent repetition of its important events.

The opposition to oppressive taxation, the resistance at *Lexington*, the carnage at *Bunker-Hill*, the battles of *Bennington*, *Monmouth* and *Guilford*, the conquests at *Saratoga*, *Trenton*, *Princeton* and *York Town*, were glorious achievements in our revolution, which are familiar to all, and in the relation of which the Schoolboy might anticipate the orator in his ideas and expressions.

Permit me then on this occasion to step aside from this well beaten path to enumerate some of the privileges resulting from the revolution, point out some of the dangers to which they are exposed, and prescribe means by which, in my humble opinion, they may be preserved.

It has been the misfortune of other nations, who boast of privileges similar to ours, that they owe their civil constitutions to accident, treachery, violence or oppression. From the storms and convulsions, which have agitated their Commonwealth, some vestiges of liberty have been preserved ; and while these remain a refuge for the weary and oppressed, tyranny is placed in the vicinity to warn the citizen that his liberty is a delusion. But in the spirit of wisdom and concession, our fathers met and framed the State and Federal constitutions, on the sure foundation of justice and rational freedom.

By these, the lives, liberty and property of the citizens are guarded, with the most anxious solicitude ; *merit* is the passport to honour, and the highest office is accessible to the lowest citizen. Capital punishments are never inflicted but for acts, which evince a total depravity destructive of the society of which the offender is a member. Our Judges are wise, impartial and independent of the executive department. Our Juries are selected by lot of the most virtuous of our neighbours. We have a right to meet our accusers and be heard by ourselves or our counsel in our defence. Our property cannot be taken for public uses, without an equivalent ; nor taxes imposed without the consent of our representatives. The military is always to be in subjection to the civil authority ; and the right to worship the Great Creator and Governor of the Universe, agreeably to the dictates of our own consciences, is sacredly guarded and secured.

An enumeration of these privileges, ought, on this occasion, to warm our hearts with gratitude, to that Being who made and governs us, that he has cast our lot in this age and this country. If we look back but few years, America was a vast and dreary wilderness. Where are now to be heard the sound of industry, joy and plenty, were once the hedious war whoop, and the shrieks of tortured victims. In the place where we are now assembled, dedi-

cated to God and his religion, perhaps, within the memory of man, the relentless savage amused himself with inflicting a lingering death on his captive, and satiated his thirst with human blood. Within the recollection of most of us, our country has been involved in all the horrors of war. A war, unnatural in its origin, distressing in its progress, but glorious in its result. For more than twenty years, we have witnessed in *Europe*, a series of the most cruel, vindictive and exterminating wars. During these sanguinary conflicts, we have stood aloof, scarcely contented with being spectators of the scene. The French Revolution has, in the name of liberty, desolated *Europe* prostrated her prosperity and independence, and well nigh, swept every vestige of freedom from the earth.

While we celebrate this day, and recount the events which gave it birth, while we rejoice that we are so far removed from the tempest of wars, and can hear its thunders roar, and see its lightnings flash at a distance, with so little apprehension of danger to ourselves; it is, nevertheless impossible that we should view these desolations with indifference. It seems as if slavery or death were the fate of man. The tyrant of Europe is satiating his vengeance with the blood of millions. Republics are annihilated, Kingdoms and Empires are torn asunder and parcelled out among relations and favourites with as little ceremony as we should divide a paltry estate. Nations struggling for liberty are crushed in a day and the justice of their cause affords them no protection, against the slaves of power and hirelings of despotism.

But secure as we are from these dangers and distresses, it is questionable, if in our prosperity we have not become proud, insolent and depraved; if peace has not afforded an opportunity for the seeds of *party spirit* to vegetate, until the liberties of our country have been well nigh destroyed.

It has been the misfortune of republics that *prosperity* has proved fatal to liberty. A free nation at peace, prosperous and happy becomes indifferent to her essential rights, gives way to the destructive and poisonous influence of party spirit, until some fortunate chief, grown popular, perhaps, from his *vices*, assumes the supreme command, and enslaves the people in the name of *republicanism*. That such has been the fate of all other republics, the page of history bears ample and melancholy testimony. *America* stands the solitary exception, the sole survivor of this malignant, pestilential and fatal disorder. There was a well grounded hope, that, instructed by the *folly*, as well as *wisdom* of her predecessors, she would have avoided their fate. Situated at a distance from the corruptions of Europe, inured to republican habits and institutions from her first colonization, taught by the most *practical* and illustrious republican, that ever existed, we had much to hope and very little to fear. By establishing the Federal and State Constitutions we seemed to have passed *the crisis*. Every essential liberty was there secured, and the practice appeared easy and safe.

But notwithstanding the result of the revolution; notwithstanding the constitutions which secured to us its blessings; in spite of the precepts and examples of the immortal *Washington*, party spirit has visited our country, intruded itself into our councils, paralyzed the energies and prostrated the honour of the United States. Feuds and animosities have been fostered with success, and party zeal has been the only passport to honour and preferment. These unmeaning, but fatal distinctions, have encouraged the corrupt and ambitious to seek promotion, driven the honest and intelligent into retirement, and placed men in high, important and responsible offices who had nothing but their vices or their stupidity to recommend them.

In a government originating with the people and at

all times subject to their controul, a difference of opinion is a necessary consequence of the "right of free enquiry." If properly exercised, and reasonably restrained it is innocent if not beneficial. But it is, too often converted into an engine of fraud and oppression. Popular and ambitious leaders find it for their interest to excite the heat and virulence of party, to denounce their opponents by approbrious names and delude their followers by promises and flattery, until mounted on their shoulders they can ride into office and secure the emoluments. When this is effected the people are forgotten.

It is for you Fellow Citizens, to guard and protect your privileges acquired by the blood of your ancestors and confirmed by the State and Federal Constitutions. Act with independence and fidelity in the exercise of your elective rights and your liberties will be perpetuated. But if, in giving your suffrages, you are governed by resentment, party spirit, fear, or hope of reward, you are trifling with your rights and forging your own chains.

Never trust your lives and liberties in the hands of a man in whose private dealings you have no confidence. It is absurd and preposterous to suppose, that *the villain in private life, can be the faithful public servant.* Experience has proved that public offices are no situations for reformation; and that there a man often diminishes, but seldom improves his integrity. Removed from the immediate inspection of his constituents, surrounded by temptations, lured by the charms which vice and luxury present, what pledge but virtue can secure his fidelity? In selecting your candidate, therefore, let your first and most important enquiry be "is he honest?" Is he the punctual and honourable dealer, the generous and benevolent neighbour, the kind and faithful friend or relative, and above all, the sincere and *practical* christian? If he is devoid of these qualifications, though he may speak with the tongue of an Angel; though he may *profess* most de-

voutly and *promise* most *fairly*, his republicanism is a counterfeit, and he has no claim to your confidence.

Suffer not yourselves to be deluded by professions. The man who professes the *most*, not unusually performs the *least*; and he who expresses the most solicitude to serve *you* is often the first to serve himself at your expence. Be jealous of the man who boasts much of his love of liberty, who would persuade you that his political opponents are about to enslave you, and that *he* and his partizans are your only friends. This *may* be the patriotic zeal of an honest man; but it is, too often, the canting hypocrisy of a scoundrel. *The man who solicits your suffrages is unworthy of your confidence.* Enquire into the motives of all the office seekers who, at this day infest your country, and see whether they are founded on *real patriotism* or *private emolument*. While you permit the boisterous shallow politician, to gain credit; while you listen to the charms which flattery impose, while virtue and talents are seldom thought of and never required, as qualifications for office; the intelligent and faithful friend to his country retires in disgust. He can never condescend to practice baseness or fraud, to gain promotion, and very properly concludes that *obscurity* is preferable to *fame purchased at the expence of a good conscience and unblemished integrity*. Your beloved *Washington* was no office seeker. Though great, he was modest. With a scrutiny, the effect of his inflexible justice and unbounded patriotism, he sought out *merit* and rewarded it; while the false patriot had no claims on his bounty—vice trembled in his presence—virtue claimed him as her patron and friend. Let his precepts and examples direct you, and your party spirit will cease, your elections be made with wisdom, your rulers entitled to your confidence, and your country be prosperous at home and respected abroad. Let me not be suspected of a wish to excite an undue jealousy of rulers. Your confidence in the *elected*, may bear some

proportion to the caution of the *electors*. If you are faithful to yourselves, the persons you elect will probably be faithful to you. Still a watchful suspicion and decent investigation of the conduct of the best of men, is the right and duty of every republican. To be over jealous is uncharitable, to be over confident is dangerous. Avoid extremes, if you would avoid error.

The people of the United States and of this State have lately exercised their elective rights in the choice of Chief Magistrates. We are about to experience a new federal and State-administration whose characters are scarcely formed and whose line of conduct is scarcely marked out. That their future conduct is a subject of great expectation and that the people are looking to them, with anxious solicitude, for relief from the effects of past errors, and security from future, is certainly true. If we are to judge from *actions* independently of *professions*, we are obliged in candour to acknowledge that, in the commencement of the administration of Mr. *Madison*, there is much to approve and very little to condemn. The adjustment of our differences with *England*, in the spirit of mutual concession and candour, is an event so long and so anxiously wished for, that, while I congratulate my fellow citizens, on its accomplishment, I will heartily join them in an unreserved applause of the man, who, sacrificing prejudices to the good of his country, has so readily, seasonably and manfully stepped forward for our relief, saved our commerce from destruction, and our nation from war. His placing the *useless* part of our navy in a situation, where it will occasion no expence to the public, and no harm to the citizens, and his fitting the *useful* part with such promptness and expedition equally evince his love of oeconomy, and his friendship for commerce. It is presumed, that, should he progress in doing good, he will meet the approbation of all honest men, and that, those who opposed his election, when they find their

fears have not been realized, will, with an honest candour, respect and applaud him as the chief Magistrate of a free people. In the conduct of Mr. Gore, we see nothing that his enemies can condemn. The just, liberal, conciliating and impartial course, marked out as the plan of his administration, fully confirms the predictions of his friends and points him out as the upright, disinterested and intelligent Governor and intitles him to the gratitude and esteem of his fellow citizens. Should his administration tend to allay the heat and assuage the virulence of party, reconcile the discordant passions which have, hitherto, distracted the State, convince the people that he is the leader of no sect, and the Governor of no party, he will richly deserve the unqualified praise of all his constituents. This however he is not to expect—There are men, who owe all their consequence to party spirit, and who being stripped of that, appear naked and deformed and sink into their primitive insignificance. There will be therefore, feuds and animosities in free governments. The restless, ambitious and unprincipled will never be contented while they are *out of office*, and the people will never be happy while they are *in*. These are the storms and tempests to which republics are exposed; which while they gently agitate, the elements are salubrious and necessary, but they often become irresistible and effect the destruction of liberty. Let us then fellow citizens, greet each other in the spirit of candour and forbearance; let us resolve that, if Mr. Madison, and Mr. Gore, *do well*, party names shall never induce us to withhold our approbation; but if they *do ill*, party names shall not screen them from indignation and contempt.

The truth is, we are the authors of most of our misfortunes—The people must be virtuous or they cannot be free. Indifferent and corrupt electors, make indifferent and corrupt rulers; and these seldom become better for continuing in office. If the judgments of hea-

ven are to be inflicted on a nation in proportion to its abuse of invaluable privileges there are many in store for the United States. We have despised the reproofs and warnings of the father of his country, rejected his councils, disregarded his examples, and in the name of liberty, encouraged strife, intolerance and oppression. We have trifled with our elective rights, suffered ourselves to be persuaded or threatened to resign them into the hands of unprincipled partizans. Consequently, our trust has been betrayed, our liberty endangered, and our country exposed to extreme want, hazard and distress. We have permitted foreign polities to find their way into our country, cherished them, until they have pervaded our councils and poisoned the streams which nourish and invigorate our liberties—Instead of that manly and dignified policy which prevents insult by being prepared to meet it, we have been obliged to submit to the mortifying necessity of abandoning our rights to save our *property*; while the success of the experiment has only served to increase the mortification. But we have at length discovered our error, been partially relieved from our embarrassments, and our commerce is seeking its former channels—And I think we have a comfortable and well grounded hope, that Congress will never again attempt to coerce the powers of *Europe*, by a measure so radically defective and inefficient as an embargo.

Yet amidst our hopes of returning prosperity, we have much to humble our national pride, and stain our national character. Thousands of human beings are groaning in *slavery*, in the land of liberty, this “asylum of oppressed humanity”—About *one million* of slaves, within these United States, having senses as susceptible of pleasure and pain, and souls as pure and *white*, in the sight of God, as ours, are bought and sold as beasts of burden, endure privations and fatigue, without hope or pity, and writhe under the task of their inhuman tormentors. Torn from

his native country, his friends, his wife and children, the poor unfortunate wretch is hurried to a distant region, to welter in chains in a land of liberty. Americans! while you celebrate this day, and congratulate each other on your freedom and happiness, let the poor oppressed African come up in remembrance before you for good; let one sigh escape you for his fate—one wish for his relief. Let his situation remind you what yours might have been, and admonish you, that your liberties are not immortal. In this State, thank Heaven! we have no *slaves*—Here the colour of the skin is no badge of infamy. As soon as a man steps his foot on *Massachusetts* ground his chains drop from him, and nothing can deprive him of that liberty which is the gift of his creator, but an attack on the society of which he has become a member. Let us then on every proper occasion unite to wipe off this national stain, lest Heaven, in retribution, should punish us with slavery for the cruelties we have so wantonly inflicted on others.

Another danger, to which our liberty is exposed, is a line of conduct in the people or their rulers, which would tend to a *dissolution of the union*. That there are men, in this country, who would destroy any government, as soon as it fails to gratify their ambition, I have no doubt. Attempts of this kind, however, are to be attributed, only, to “the worst of men in the worst of times.” But that there are rational, deliberate and intelligent men, of any party, who have ever entertained the most distant wish of such an event, is to me perfectly incredible. And in the presence of God I declare, I would hold the advocate of such a measure, as the object of public execration, and denounce him as a traitor to his country. The intelligent politician views, with alarm, *all acts* which bear hard on any particular section of the Union, and *every threat* to compel submission to such acts. And nothing, but a fearful looking for of despotism, would induce him to *think* of a severance of the bond that unites us. But

the people of *New-England* are not in the habit of submitting to tyranny, whether foreign or domestic ; and the latter they deem, by far, the most intolerable. It is, therefore, their most fervent desire to be united, and to participate in all the burdens and benefits, common to their brethren of the *United States*. Further, they will endure *local sacrifices*, when the safety or even interest of their country require it. But they will not consent, that their liberties shall be trifled with, to gratify the pride or caprice of any man or body of men. As the integrity of the Union, is the rock on which our salvation, as a nation rests, it becomes us to discard local and party distinctions, consider ourselves as brethren of the same family, and not be too hasty in believing the charge of an attempt to destroy the government. Some men can throw charges of treason and conspiracy, on their opponents, with as little reserve, as they can assume infallibility to themselves. *The character of the accuser* should be well considered, and his motives inquired into, before we attach much credit to a charge of so gross and heinous a nature. It is cruel and uncharitable to believe a man guilty of treason, from the unsupported declaration, of one whose ostensible object is, to rise into office, even, by the destruction of fair and unblemished characters.

Permit me on this occasion to congratulate my Fellow Citizens on the favourable change that has taken place in our foreign relations, since the last anniversary of our independence, and particularly, for the partial adjustment of our differences with that nation, from whom, in peace, we have so much to expect, and in war, so much to apprehend ; and that there is a fair prospect, that a treaty will be made, which will put our commercial privileges on a just and permanent establishment. It was, perhaps, well judged, by the present executive of the United States, that, exhausted by an *eighteen months* embargo, torn and distracted by party dissensions, with our sea ports

exposed, and our commerce defenceless, it was no time to settle disputable principles *by the sword*. That not much had been done hitherto, to prepare us for the contest, and that, our navy was in no situation to contend for “the empire of the seas.” That, if indeed, “the right of search” (the principal bone of contention,) ought not to be conceded by the United States, still we were, at this time, in no situation to compell England to relinquish it. And it is earnestly, to be wished, that an adjustment or modification of this claim, so justly obnoxious to the Americans, and so liable to abuse by the English, should be made by treaty to the mutual satisfaction of the parties. Should the United States determine to employ no foreign seamen on board their vessels, on England’s relinquishing her right of search, the difficulty would be at an end. We should afford no protection to British deserters, our own sailors would find encouragement, and become expert and useful in their profession, and our commercial rights would be defended by *native citizens*. Every one, who has the pride of an American, must feel a laudible jealousy, at the encouragement given in this country, to foreigners, both by individuals and the government. That foreigners should be protected, and sometimes encouraged, is as well the dictate of policy, as humanity. But charity ought to “begin at home.” If we have offices and employments to bestow, it is neither charitable, nor patriotic to gratify the expectations of strangers, to the exclusion of our own citizens.

But we have a well grounded hope that the parties *now* concerned in this negotiation, are sincerely disposed to adjust all differences in such a manner as our commerce shall in future experience no interruption. To insist, by what means this favourable change has been effected, is scarcely worth the contest. If it can gratify any of our brethren, in believing, that the *embargo* has done *this good thing*, it is an innocent and comfortable delusion, and

they are welcome to it. It will be (in their minds possibly) an offset to some small part of its mischiefs, and afford a satisfaction to its friends, which, on this day, I feel no disposition to disturb. Too often has the day been perverted to purposes of faction. Too often has the temple of liberty been polluted by enthusiasts, invoking imprecations on political opponents. Not unusually, have the heroes and patriots of the revolution been abused and scandalized by political *mad caps*, selected for the purpose and fit for no other.

But it is hoped the time is approaching when party names and trifling disputes will be forgotten; when political strife will, in a measure, cease and the people be permitted to act and think for themselves, in the spirit of candour and friendship. And let us not rest satisfied with *wishing* for such a change, but use our endeavours to effect it. Let us discard unwarantable suspicions and jealousies, denounces, as enemies to their country, the advocates of intolerance and political persecution. And, above all, let us remember that the judgments of Heaven, and the curses of posterity, are reserved for us, if we abuse the privileges, by which we have been so preeminently distinguished. Let us rejoice, that we have become so far detached from European politics, and that *England* has no need of our alliance, nor *France* any reason to expect us to co-operate in her scheme of universal dominion. And, inasmuch as several of our late experiments seem to be abandoned, and a navy for the protection of commerce is beginning to be thought of, we have reason to hope that many of our former errors will be corrected and that we are getting back into the safe and honourable path, marked out and pursued by the great and immortal *Washington*. Let us pay tribute to his memory, by imitating his virtues. Let us remember that we are free born Americans, that he was our father, our counsellor and the founder of our liberties. And finally, let us ren-

der a tribute of gratitude to THE AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for his past innumerable blessings, and earnestly solicit his interposition for the future. Let us ask of him *sincerely*, and he will unquestionably prepare our hearts for those acts of kindness and charity, which will dispell party spirit, perpetuate our union and liberty, and render the nation prosperous, respectable and happy. And, while we enjoin a frequent reverence to the principles of our free constitution, let us not be unmindful of the precepts of the Gospel, as indispensibly necessary to ensure our freedom and happiness, in this and a future life.

FINIS.