

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT NEWBURYPORT,

ON THE

FOURTH DAY OF JULY

1810.

By SAMUEL L. KNAPP.

*"Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mentè quatit solida."*—————

NEWBURYPORT:

FROM THE PRESS OF EPHRAIM W. ALLEN,

THE Selectmen of Newburyport, in behalf of their fellow-citizens, present their thanks to SAMUEL L. KNAPP, Esq. for the excellent Oration delivered by him this day, in commemoration of American Independence, and request a Copy for the prefs.

STEPHEN HOLLAND, *Chairman.*

Newburyport, July 4, 1810.

GENTLEMEN,

FROM a respectful regard to your request; and in compliance to custom, I submit the copy to your disposal.

STEPHEN HOLLAND, *Esq. Chairman* }
of the Selectmen of Newburyport. }

SAMUEL L. KNAPP.

AN ORATION.

ON this day we should come forward with open hearts and independent minds to discuss principles of government ; to expatiate with sincerity and justice upon national affairs ; scrupulously to examine the conduct of Rulers and to see that no strange fire is offered by unhallowed hands on the altar of our liberties ; to animate and enlighten each other in republican feelings and duties, to cherish in our breasts the love of distinction and to awaken our minds to a virtuous desire of national greatness.

While on this day we indulge a noble pride in contemplating our exertions for Independence, and feed our imaginations with rapturous views of future years, let us moderate our joy by calling to mind the fate of all republican institutions. Where once the super-human Spartan, the courtly Athenian, and the lordly Roman were found, is now seen the idle Turk and the effeminate Italian. The laws of Lycurgus and Solon, the Senatus-Consultum are changed for the imperial mandates of a tyrant to his slaves. We delight to dwell on the youth and manhood of republican States, as we do on the youth and beauty of Alcibiades, or the iron muscle and godlike mein of Hercules ; but pass in silence the loathsomeness and decrepitude of their old



age, when they exhibited all that is mean in suffering and base in action. History faithfully records their steps to wretchedness and extinction ; but we turn from the melancholly downfall of Republics unwilling too closely to inspect their sullied brightness and diminished glory.

Switzerland is the only exception among the Republics of all ages to national suicide. She alone is worthy the tears of time and the lamentations of the world. The echo of her hills repeated the dying accents of liberty on the eastern Continent.

Knowledge and virtue are the soul of a Republic. Without them no free government can exist. If men are intelligent, moral and religious the laws are permanent and the people happy ; but unenlightened man has no stability of character. In possession of power he is a merciless despot, in the power of others he is a tame and pliant slave. In a free government and under mild laws he is a violent opposer of just restraint and wholesome obedience. With obscure views, strong passions and vicious propensities he is the enemy of his own happiness and the author of his own misery. From a deep knowledge of human nature the wise men of antient Republics seized the moments of peace and reason to fix some mound against popular phrenzy ; to save the people from their own infatuation and folly. They appealed to the understandings of the people in their calmest moments, and to the best feelings of their hearts, and made them seal the checks to themselves

by all the influences of superstition and religion. But in vain did the wise and virtuous attempt to save them; for in the first paroxysm the labors of wisdom were torn away and became as bands of straw on the hands of a maniac. The infuriated multitude drove their sages into banishment, or compelled them to drink the poisonous cup. Honorable services were no safeguard from their fury; and an illustrious name only excited envy and hatred.

Other things were expected of our Republic; for we did not, like them, begin in a state of barbarian ignorance and wait the lapse of ages for knowledge and experience; but in the moments succeeding the struggle for our Independence, when we were quiet from weakness, and peaceful because exhausted by contending, the talent of our country was collected to deliberate upon a constitution of government. Every fountain of knowledge was open; all the maxims of philosophy at hand; and "all the spoils of time" were before them to be examined, selected, modified and combined.

The Constitution from their hands was theoretically beautiful and grand. The principles were simple; built on the everlasting foundations of justice. Barriers were raised against the encroachments of wealth and power, and the weak and defenceless were protected in their rights. The widest field for political distinction was open to all. We received this Constitution. Would to Heaven we had been wise enough for its full and continual operation. We were not sufficiently virtuous for this system of gov-

ernment ; for while we were feeling its most beneficial effects, disappointed demagogues were scattering ambiguous voices, which were caught by the insolent and vicious. The serpent was seen lurking in this paradise the morning after its creation. This party at first, were hardly noticed. They shrunk from the splendid blaze of talents in our national Councils, from the immaculate purity and renowned virtue of our first magistrate ; but in secret they were gaining strength and rancour. The disaffected part of the community joined them to vent their malice, and the weak man, who was ambitious, they ensnared by dreams of honor. From the confines of darkness these opposers of the Administration of Washington, came forth to censure every action and attack every measure, regardless of decency or justice. Every act of the Administration, however mild and salutary, was by this faction called oppressive and tyrannical. The cry of danger was so loud and so frequently reiterated that the timid were alarmed, and the weak became suspicious. At length, after twelve years uniform and vindictive opposition from this party, to the genuine principles of republicanism, Mr. Jefferson its head came into office. Washington for eight years, had led us by a direct road and rapid marches to a high eminence among nations ; but at this period he was no longer numbered with the living. His immediate successor, Mr. Adams, during his term of office, with few deviations, wisely followed his steps. At the name of this man my bosom labours with mingled emotions of reverence, pity

and contempt. Had he never apostatised from the principles of his great prototype, we should on this anniversary have been wreathing garlands of flowers for his venerable head ; for he was an early and able advocate for the Independence of his country. If he had died before his vanity and wounded pride had overcome his reason, we should on this day have been strewing his grave with cassia and defending the laurels of his tomb from the pestilential breath of his present friends.

Mr. Jefferson's Administration deserves from every one the strictest scrutiny and freest remark ; for in his Administration the world witnessed the most novel spectacle it had ever seen ; a people by the bare suggestion of a chief magistrate cut off from a pursuit in which they were ardently and successfully engaged, and on which their dearest interests depended. Themistocles is immortal on the page of history for prevailing on the Athenians in a time of difficulty to quit their city and trust themselves to the sea. Mr. Jefferson by a simple dictum has done more to an immense country, than this great man did to a single city, by incessant labour, matchless eloquence and profound art. But here all resemblance vanishes. The act of one saved and established the liberties of Greece, the act of the other impoverished and degraded his country. Mr. Jefferson, fed by the philosophers of France, with visionary plans for the improvement of human nature, unfortunately for us was clothed with power to put some of these schemes in experiment. He continued

the same speculative zealot, although the school in which he was taught, with all their fanciful theories and wild calculations to give unalloyed happiness to the world, perpetuity to life, and to elevate men to gods, had long since been swept from the earth and the remembrance of their existence almost forgotten. The seed sown in this country by France, during her revolution, has produced a plentiful and poisonous harvest. At the thoughts of France our old wounds bleed afresh, and no hand is able to staunch those recently made. From France for many years we have suffered violence, outrage and robbery with a cringing spirit and dastardly dread. When she has treated us with the most contempt, we have courted her with the most servility; and have kissed the foot of Bonaparte, when it has been lifted to crush our heads in the dust. Our citizens have expired in the dungeons of France, and our property has gone to replenish her exhausted treasury. It is true our government have remonstrated; but so feebly, that the mighty master of our destinies has told us he had not leisure to listen to our complaints.

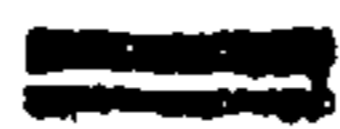
The historian of a future age will be unable to account for this moral and political phenomenon that a nation, which had so nobly contended for Independence, so lately evinced such fortitude and patriotism, should in so few years become totally insensible to the prostration of her honor, and regardless of the lives and liberties of her citizens. Instead of asserting our rights and defending our property, we have been gazing in stupid wonder at the gigantic strides

of the destroyer, and at times have so far forgotten our fate, that we have found pleasure in describing his power, ambition and success. We have seen the dews of death fall on the nations around him with scarcely an emotion of pity. Great God ! How long shall this desolater of nations wear his crown stained with tears and dripping with gore ? How long shall he bid fierce defiance to eternal justice, and yet prosper, as never-man prospered ? If Americans possessed the proud spirit, for which they were once distinguished, the storms which have shaken Europe, would have rolled at a harmless distance. Had our government risen in the majesty of her strength, the star which has shed its baleful influence on Europe, would not have darted a malignant ray on us. What are the armies of France to America ! An immense ocean rolls between us, “ and the thousand ships of England ” ride on its waves. Had we preserved our little navy, and made proper additions to it yearly, we should have been able at this period to protect our commerce from French depredations ; nor should we now be burning with shame and indignation, that our property and rights have been adjudged by a paltry Danish Court. Is it not enough to fire freemen with madness that such a petty power should treat us so villainously ? And what is worst of all, that we should so tamely submit to it ! Our rulers have seen this insult and degradation with perfect indifference. They will not enter into our feelings or alleviate our distress. But their

office is not perpetual. Other times are coming, and the government will pass to other men. Already some of these political "glow worms" begin to pale their ineffectual fires." Though the darkness is still great, the morning may be near; and when the day again shines upon us, the people will be convinced of what has often been told them; that by commerce only this country can grow populous, opulent and distinguished. Deprive us of our commerce and we shall be stationary or retrograde. Commerce is the sacred Palladium of our rights; and as long as it is extensive and prosperous, this country will increase in numbers and power. Some politicians have exclaimed against a nation of merchants, as they are pleased to stile commercial countries, and asserted that no true patriotism could exist among men, who were in pursuit of riches. But we know these opinions to be incorrect. To prove that true national dignity and glory have been attained by commerce, we have only to glance at the history of commercial nations. The people of Tyre, while their trade flourished, were the most enlightened and invincible of any nation on earth. The arts and sciences were found among them in greater perfection, than among other nations. In accumulating property, they did not forget the necessity of defence. Though not very numerous they presented a warlike and formidable front, to the great nations around them. Carthage whose character we have through the suspected medium of Roman historians, their constant enemies, was a small country, wealthy by com-

merce and consequently powerful. At the mention of Carthage the Roman warrior's cheek was blanched with fear, and the name of Hannibal carried terror within the walls of Rome. In the days of the Medici, who were princes and merchants, learning revived, and liberty took deep root and flourished. Commerce showered her Gold on literature and the arts and learning in return consecrated the genius of Commerce by binding his brow with the richest offerings of the Florentine muse. Holland has ever found her weight in the scale of nations exactly in proportion to the prosperity of her trade. Look back to the days of the De Witts, and compare them with the reign of Louis.

If any one doubts the beneficial effects of commerce on the civil and political liberties of a people, point him to Great-Britain, and he will find that her strength and influence has increased with her revenue. Examine her history for a century past and you will find she has increased in spirit and knowledge, as she has grown in wealth. The independence and wisdom of her House of Commons have risen in the same ratio of her exports. Is there any man among us, my fellow-citizens, who thinks it inexpedient for us to continue a commercial people? If there lives such a man, ask him to view our navigable rivers, our mountain-oaks and all our resources for building and equipping ships. Bid him think of the enkindled spirit of enterprize in our countrymen, who meet danger with delight, and smile at fear. Shall this vigor waste? Shall the manly sinew relax? Shall this restless and adventurous spirit, which pants for



something to contend with and conquer, turn into indolence and vice for want of action? Shall these men who would gladly "brave the battle and the breeze," be condemned to cultivate the bleak mountains or barren heaths of our country? Forbid it genius of New-England; and never let it be said that our nerve and fortitude are changed to feebleness and timidity. New-England must find her safety, her happiness and her fame in commerce, and must at all events have it. The convulsions of the world have stopped some of the usual channels of trade; but the same convulsions will open other channels and give room for industry and enterprize. We must not expect an uninterrupted course of prosperity in trade, and that the world will see us defenceless without taking advantage of such a state. Every thing intimately connected with commerce deserves our highest attention. This impression will lead me to venture a few remarks on the maxim in the mouths of our political opponents,—“that great cities are a great evil.” Perhaps this may be said of cities in countries altogether agricultural, where the hard earnings of the peasant are dissipated by his master in luxurious idleness in the city. Commercial cities are mostly filled with industrious inhabitants, who instead of preying on the vitals of the country lavish their wealth on it, which, like the overflowings of Helicon, produces all around perennial flowers and eternal verdure. In cities the asperities of character are smoothed and softened, and the manners receive a polish from the business and intercourse of life. In cities the reputation of men for virtues or tal-



ents is weighed in the balance and marked with proper notice and regard. Associations are formed for alleviating the miseries of humanity ; for collecting stores of information from all parts of the world, and for extending the empire of the human mind.

As patriots we cannot but feel an interest in all the changes of the world. So intimately are nations connected at the present day, that circumstances effecting one nation are almost always felt by others. But as lovers of freedom, we must rejoice at the recent events in Spanish America. A country formed by the God of nature on the most extensive scale, with mountains whose lofty summits seem to prop the starry Heavens ; with rivers in magnitude like seas, enjoying the most salubrious air and the richest soil ; with a population as large as the United States. This people have declared themselves independent. They have long been oppressed by the miserable policy of the mother country. Without commerce, without civil liberty, confined and restrained in their own domestic affairs, they have never reached any dignity of character ; avaricious viceroys have plundered them with impunity, and kept them ignorant and dependent. The power of Bonaparte, which has made Spain “the skin of an immolated victim,” has unriveted *their* chains. They seized a fortunate moment, and declared themselves independent. We hail them as a new born nation ; and offer our prayers for their success. From justice and policy our government ought to be the first to acknowledge their independence. We



hope they may experience the mild reign of national liberty, without passing through confusion and anarchy, and learn from the fate of other nations not to indulge in eccentric experiments in forming a government. This revolution will open an extensive trade ; and if rightly improved, repay us in some measure what we have lost in Europe. Whatever path our government may pursue in this affair, or in any other ; in whatever hands our destinies may be placed, may we honestly avow our sentiments, and fearlessly execute our just determinations, keep close to those politics which have been adopted by the wise and good, and consecrated by the immortal Washington. Politics, which are a combination of intelligence, social affection and religious belief ; a love of government founded on efficient principles and administered with firmness and impartiality ; a sacred regard to equal rights, and a just hatred of oppression from the many or the few ; a union of ability and virtue, against loose principles and violent passions. This is federalism and its professors have magnanimously strove against the torrent, and maintained dignity and influence when the power had passed from their hands. The federal Legislature of our Commonwealth, last year, risked their political existence in the cause of their country. They saw the gulf was open and the plague was raging ; and like Curtius, they boldly leaped in as a sacrifice for the general good. The federalists are now a minority, but a powerful minority, which are yet to save us. The party is now winnowed of its wretched

chaff. The little souls, who longed for the rattles of office, have deserted our standard. Some of them are flattered and promoted ; but we do not envy them the fruits of their apostacy. It was a pitiful ambition, and most pitifully are they rewarded. What honor is there in office, when honorable men are proscribed ? Who is desirous of a seat in that Council, where wittlings lead in the deliberations.

The hour is mournful and the prospect gloomy ; but do not grow impatient. We have much to thank Heaven for, and much to rejoice in. Most of our civil rights yet remain. The Temple of Justice has been shaken by the warring winds of faction ; but it stands as yet unprofaned and its sacred fires are burning. The spirit, which gained our Independence, rightly directed, will preserve it. The generation to come will grow wise by our misfortunes, and shun the evils we have borne. This strong delusion is but for a season ; the return of reason is certain. To the rising race will soon be committed the guidance of the Country. Life is but a short and feverish dream ; and those who are now “ clothed in a little brief authority,” will soon be gone.

Much we owe you, venerable fathers, who fought our battles and secured our independence, when the veins of hope were chilled and dismay and despair hovered around you. Much we owe you honored Matrons, mothers of the fair and the brave, you partook of their dangers, cherished the flame of liberty, and shall share in their renown.

Every day is thinning the ranks of the heroes

and Statesmen, who have been conspicuous in our infant republic. The illustrious Green just tasted of liberty and died. Washington lived to raise us to the zenith of prosperity ; but was opportunely called to Heaven. Death alone could shield his cheek from blushing at his country's disgrace. Hamilton the pride of eloquence, and boast of genius, moulders in an untimely grave. He was mild as the spirit of love, and immoveable as the rock of adamant. Had he lived America would have had a Palinurus for every storm, who could have safely led the way in a starless night and through tempestuous seas. Within a few months Lincoln full of honors and years has descended to the tomb. Such was his purity in private life and his fame in war, that his friends loved him with ardor, and his political enemies revered him for his virtues. My fathers, coadjutors of these great men, in the cause of American freedom, "may your last days be your best days, or ever the silver cord of life is loosed ;" see your children's children rise up to call you blessed, and your country flourishing in republican virtues and increasing in wealth, fame and power.