

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT BELCHERTOWN

ON THE 4th OF JULY 1811.

BY J. MANSFIELD, ESQ.,

OF WESTERN.

It is substantially true that virtue and morality is a necessary spring of popular government—against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly aware.

WASHINGTON. a J

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THIS glorious anniversary of American's Independence was celebrated at Belchertown, with the highest hilarity of republican and christian triumph, under the auspices of an heavenly Father most munificent to our political and religious inalienable rights, where the splendid order of the day was unrivaled in the pleasures of the board spread under the bower of fruitful trees of joyous native groves, and the decorious unanimous order of republican SALVATION.

ORATION &c.

WE have assembled for the exhilarating purpose of commemorating the birthday of our national Independence. The annals of time cannot exhibit an era of superior or equal importance. It is the birthday not of a single man, not of a prince or a tyrant, but of a republic; at present the only republic existing. Duty, gratitude and patriotism prompt us to distinguish this illustrious day with more than ordinary respect. If private persons view the days of their nativity with gratitude and joy, with greater reason ought we to commemorate with more distinguished ceremonies, the day which gave birth to our national Independence and civil freedom; for life is not always a blessing, but liberty is essential to happiness. No nation can boast of a more important anniversary than this—it is founded on the purest principles it is exhilarated by the noblest prospects. With what heartfelt joy can we meet its present revolution, blessed as we are with political and civil enjoyments, above all other nations—our beloved country reposing in the arms of liberty and peace, surrounded with public prosperity and individual happiness—while other nations are oppressed with despotism, torn by factions and discord, or distressed by all the calamities of war. Let Europeans celebrate the birth of a despotic prince, and Britons stilt themselves upon the bubbles of national antiquity and naval renown—Americans will exult in the acquisition of their dearest rights, in their own superior privileges, and in the happiness and liberty of their children.

On this interesting occasion, my friends, let us look for a moment, with a mixture of pleasure and regret, on the memorable scenes of that revolution, which is emphatically and justly styled the “period which tried men’s souls.” This day is sacred to the remembrance of that immortal period, and to the commemoration of its virtues and events. Here we behold models of the highest worth,

a patriotism which overbore every suggestion of private interest---uncorrupted virtue---a courage superior to disaster, and political skill and energy which baffled the efforts of jointed armies and the intrigues of domestic traitors. It is to recall our attention to these illustrious examples of public and private virtue; to instill into the ingenuous minds of youth a love of country, a knowledge of their rights and spirit to support them—to impress us with gratitude and contentment, while we contemplate the incomparative excellence of our political system and enjoyments, that we have consecrated this auspicious day. We will not devote it to mere festivity and sensual joy. Let the slaves of tyrants consecrate their anniversaries to frivolous amusements and base adulation, but these are unworthy of freemen. Their pleasures are rational, inspired by the liberty they enjoy, and moderated by the reflection that virtue and reason alone can preserve it. What a constellation of Heroes and Patriots have sacrificed their fortunes and lives, to acquire this inestimable liberty. Many of those fell in the commencement or in the midst of their career, without an anticipation of our present happiness, and without enjoying the only sufficient reward of their patriotism and valor, the applause of this grateful country. Vain would be the attempt to recount their numbers or their sufferings; and much more vain would be any attempt to estimate their merits. They knew that our future fortunes depended on their efforts. What disinterested exertions! what astonishing patience and perseverance, under every disaster and privation did they discover in the sacred cause of freedom! what magnanimous examples they have left for our imitation. To these venerable patriots, and to those who survived that arduous conflict, some of whom are now present, witnessing with paternal emotions of joy, the felicity of their children, we are indebted under the smiles of Heaven, for that inestimable freedom, whose beneficent influence diffuses, satisfaction contentment and wealth to every citizen. This day shall be devoted to the remembrance of their virtues. A day sanctified by the blood and toils of so many brave men, it would be ungrateful, it would be almost impious to neglect. What man can look back upon those models of

virtue, of patriotism, of courage, and political wisdom, exemplified by the worthies of our revolution without a glow of national pride : Does not his bosom swell with an ardent love of his country ? Is not every private interest absorbed in a consideration of the public good ? Is he not inspired with a noble ambition to copy those simple-manners—to imitate and display those exalted virtues which shone so conspicuously in their characters ? Can he contemplate without emotions of gratitude, and regret their long and unrewarded services ? No revolution, was ever begun under so great disadvantages and privations—was ever conducted with more energy, unanimity and prudence, or ended with greater glory and advantage. The more we reflect on the circumstances of the revolution, the more we admire the elevation and greatness of soul, conspicuous in its actors. By the policy of Britain we had been left without fortifications—we were small in number—destitute of arms and ammunition—of military discipline and experience—of public money and revenues—and what was more important of a general government. In this situation our fathers, undismayed by the prospect, relying upon the inspirations of freedom and the resources of their own minds, raised the standard of opposition and threw the gauntlet at the tyrant. Happy for our beloved country, that Washington was appointed to preside over her destinies. In the midst of every difficulty he was the same undaunted hero—and the same ardent patriot. With the caution and circumspection of Fabius, he united the perseverance of Hanibal, the coolness and courage of Caesar, the simplicity and patriotism of Cincinnatus, and the magnanimity of Aristides. Virtue and patriotism embalm him in our hearts. His inflexible and disinterested devotion to the public good, excites our highest veneration. No man was ever better entitled to the appellation of great. He was indeed great in principle and in action. Compare him with the illustrious men of antiquity and his worth shines unrivaled. Compare Washington with Napoleon—stay. I am villifying his character. No, I will not degrade this distinguished defender of equal rights, this incomparable patriot, who was a generous and magnanimous soldier, and a friend to humanity, by comparing him with a cruel and successful despot, who has waded to empire, through the

blood of millions, over the prostrated rights of man. Nor ought we to pass unnoticed many of his worthy compatriots. The illustrious Jefferson, peace and freedom's chosen patriot, has erected a monument to his own glory, "in his own great actions" "more durable than brass." The venerable Adams too ingenious for intrigue and corruption shall participate in a nation's gratitude and sympathy. Can Hancock, Green, Gates, Mercer, Wooster, Fayette, and Lincoln be ever forgotten—in the page of sacred history, in the tender hearts of the rising generation, we will record their virtues and achievements. Here let me quit the memory of our venerable fathers, with a remark, that is verified by all history and experience, that the same private virtue and patriotism, the same disinterested sacrifice of every private and selfish consideration to the public good, are as absolutely indispensable to *preserve* as they were to acquire and establish our inestimable rights. It is another incumbent duty of this day to reflect with contentment and gratitude, upon the superior privileges of our country. That we may place a right estimation upon them, we ought to compare them with those of other nations. A principal fault with our countrymen is, that in forming an opinion of their rights, they compare them with some imaginary standard of perfection of their own, not with the common lot and condition of man. It is with freedom as with wealth—we are never satisfied with a just proportion of either. While they view the state of Europe, the misery and servitude of its inhabitants, shall Americans complain of their favoured condition. This discontent generates discord and sedition in republics. Peace and liberty, still render this land the abode of rational happiness, and an assylum for their persecuted friends.

The unfortunate condition of Spain, and Portugal is familiar to all. The deluded inhabitants of this section of the globe have been long degraded by the worst of despotism, by the power of an inquisition, and the superstition of Popery. Private industry and private security are destroyed. Their public treasures and resources are equally the plunder of Great-Britain and France. The effeminacy, pride and vanity of Spaniards are proverbial. They are now struggling for national existence. A revolution in the minds and feelings of the Spaniards, as well

as in their political system seems approaching its crisis. Whether they will be compelled to submit to some French usurper or secured in the establishment and maintenance of some new and equal constitution of government, are questions that remain to be decided by future events. Much more depends on their own unanimity and patriotism than upon the number of their enemies. Some sparks of Castilian heroism appear still to exist. A people determined to be free, who fight for themselves, and are animated by an indignant sense of the wrongs done to their country, must trample over the mercenary legions of tyrants, who fight from the mere sordid and temporary motives of interest & fear. But whatever may be the issue of the Spanish revolution, their efforts will ever be attended by the best wishes of every American, who can feel a sympathy for the sufferings of humanity, or a respect for the rights of independent nations. One fortunate event resulting from their revolution and which has been long ardently wished by the friends of freedom seems now reduced to a certainty—I mean the separation of the Spanish colonies from the mother country. Such has been the progressive diffusion there of correct information on the just rights of men, and the present spirit in that quarter, that we may with confidence look forward to the total annihilation of that political dependence, superstition and civil servitude in which the cruel policy of Spain has kept her American colonies. It is not in the nature of things, that such an unfortunate connection should much longer continue. May we soon be able to hail these long deluded provinces as sister republics, and as independent members in the community of nations.

In the view of France we have less to console us than in that of Spain. We have something from the latter, but I fear nothing from the former. The unmeaning parade and vain splendor of royalty, are congenial to the habits and affections of Frenchmen. In France the will of one man is *TVM*. His ambition and pleasure solely must be gratified. Parents behold their children and their fortunes torn from them with relentless hands and sacrificed on the bloody altar of his insatiable ambition. Every interest, person and consideration is made subservient to his capacious temper. Even the thoughts and

words of men are subjected to his controul. O degraded France! "How has the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed." The result of the French revolution is what might have been expected from a knowledge of the manners and dispositions of that volatile people. The laws of gravitation will cease to operate, when a democratical republic is firmly established in France. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots," then may Frenchmen become real lovers of equal rights, who have been so long and so fondly accustomed to arrogant distinctions. Our revolution eventuated in the establishment of a new, but the most perfect system of government hitherto known. The French on the contrary has resulted in a despotism more absolute, if possible, than that of the Turkish Sultan. Nothing can be of more use to us, my friends, than to contemplate these two different results as connected with their different causes. While both revolutions were begun for one and the same object to what important and powerful cause shall we attribute it, that one ended in the acquisition of a rational system of liberty and of individual happiness—the other in the establishment of political despotism and civil bondage? We need only ask the question, the cause is too obvious. In vain did the real French patriot struggle against the prejudice and views of his countrymen. As sure as every effect must follow its proximate cause, so sure we might have expected that the present despotism would result from the torpor of dreams, and the rage and atheism of French philosophy. Liberty with vice, folly and ignorance is an unnatural alliance. Nor was there a greater difference in the principles and results of the two different revolutions, than there has been between the situations of the two nations. It is a difference founded in the opposite and eternal principles of republican and monarchial government. War with its whole train of calamities has long afflicted the French people: and what is the condition of our republic? Does it exhibit as some would endeavor to persuade us a mournful picture of wretchedness, oppression and want? Do not our own feelings on the contrary convince us that we are the freest, the happiest and most prosperous people on earth? Can a person convince one that he is wretched, while he feels perfectly happy; or that he is oppressed

by tyrants, when his own experience, the best instructor teaches him that he is free? It is a common observation of tyrants, that the greatest discontent and unhappiness is to be found in republican governments. May this be never verified by the history of our own COUNTRY. We have every necessary of life in abundance. Our time, and the products of our labor are at our own disposal. Habits of industry and virtue will secure to every man respectability and wealth.

Nor does England offer any thing more cheering to the minds of freemen, than the other Uropean powers. It is true she boasts of free principles and laws—but unfortunately their opperation has been long extinct. It is our liberation from a colonial subjection to this nation, that we celebrate this day. It is not, however, my object to excite national prejudice, but a rational love of country. It may seem to some paradoxical to assert that the English nation has lost those rights and privileges which it once possessed. But whatever may be the appearances, it is a notorious fact, that the condition of the generality of the English people is deplorable. They may be taken at any time from their homes, carried on board the British navy, or to the army, and there compelled for life to support wars engendered by royal folly, and ministerial madness. This may be done without any regard to the situation of their business, or their families. What more do we want to give as a just idea of English liberty; About one seventh part of the English people are paupers. Perhaps we have not one to a thousand. It is an established fact that in Great Britain, a man cannot by his common labor support a wife and two children with the necessaries of life. Here a man may not only provide his family with daily luxuries, but gradually grow rich. War has been attended in Great Britain with even more fatal and desolating effects than in France. Look at the numberless bankruptcies, the depreciation of her paper, and the destruction of her commerce, on which the revenue of her government and the happiness of her people depend.

But enough has been said of our comparative situation with foreign nations; let us examine for a moment their conduct towards us. While the military powers of France

and her vassal states, overthrows upon the continent of Europe all resistance to its encroachments; the naval thunders of Britain spread terror and dismay upon the ocean: there she arrogantly claims prerogatives over the lawful commerce of all other nations. The English cabinet has now what it possessed in our revolution, the same haughty and unyielding temper; the same pride and arrogance, the same contemptuous disregard of the rights of other powers. Whatever may be their professions, I think we must be thoroughly convinced, that neither Great Britain nor France have any other object in view than their own exclusive aggrandizement. We have nothing to expect from the justice or rather the injustice of these two belligerents. On the one hand France has violated the treaty of 1800—has confiscated and burnt our ships and merchandize, contrary to the established principles of the laws of nations. Humanity and law has been banished from her territory, and their place usurped by an insatiate thirst for lawless dominion. England on the other hand, has infringed with more than public perfidy the solemn compact of her accredited and authorised ministers which was calculated to create peace and harmony between the two nations. It is true she has denied the authority of her minister—but had he no power to make compacts founded in amity and justice. Can any one suppose that the real object of Great Britain or France is an honourable adjustment with our nation? Has not the hand of friendship been always held out to them by our wise and pacific rulers? The prosperity of our commerce and the unparalleled increase of our power has created the envy jealousy and fear of our enemies. To check the growth of our power and to involve us in the common conflict, their real purposes. War is the element of tyrants, and the constant scourge of Monarchical Government. It has been always found one of the most successful expedients to keep a people in subjection and divert their attention from the tyrannical abuses, and lawless ambition of their rulers. Tyrants always dread the investigation of their subjects. Let us throw off my friends all attachment to foreign nations. While the French were struggling and perhaps sincerely for the establishment of equal and just systems of government, as Americans we applauded their efforts. Our feelings are

naturally interested in the cause of a people struggling under oppression. The sympathy and friendship of freemen extends beyond the contracted limits of their own country—they wish liberty and happiness to the human race. But what sincere friendship can we who advocate for the equal distribution of rights, have for the government of Napoleon, which is one of the most audacious and sacrilegious usurpations upon the rights, which nature and nature's God has given us that can be found in the whole compass of history. I mean not to insinuate that my political friends can entertain any attachment to French politics. Far from it. I know the contrary. Those who unjustly charge us with this attachment, misrepresent our opinions. When we speak of the comparative injuries done us by Great Britain and France, and their respective dispositions to trample down the laws of nature and of nations, we generally and very justly express a favourable opinion of France. The contrast however is becoming every day less striking. But this opinion shows no fondness in Republicans for despotic principles; much less a preference of French politics, to our own inestimable constitution. The charge against us of a partiality to democracy is directly inconsistent. One of these charges must be unfounded. Is there any similarity between a despotism, where the whole power is vested in one man, and a democracy, where the whole people personally govern? Can a person at one and the same time be partial to two systems of government, so diametrically opposite? The thing is unnatural and impossible. That the outrages committed against us by France are less numerous and less aggravated than those of Great Britain no candid man will deny. The power of the former to injure us is trifling in comparison to that of the latter. And perhaps this is the only reason of the difference. The constant kidnapping and enthrallment of our seamen by the British is alone sufficient to counterbalance every outrage on the part of France. An injury done to one citizen is an injury done to the whole. This is the first principle in our constitution. And what injury can equal the deprivation of personal liberty. It was for this that our fathers fought and bled.—It was for this, the most precious of all rights, that they bravely hazarded their fortunes and their lives.

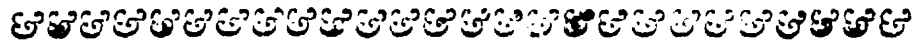
Both Great Britain and France have been guilty of the most malicious outrages towards this country. All confidence in their engagements and respect for their interests are lost. We cannot expect to see a magnanimous sense of justice and honor in their cabinets. What cordial friendship can exist between Republics and Monarchical government. None but what is founded upon interest. Selfish interest & ambition are the ruling motives in the policy of kings. When therefore we cannot expect justice from the hands of our enemies, let us at least be just to ourselves. We are not only politically independent, but we are independent in our resources both of war and peace. Our attention my friends ought to be more confined to ourselves, to the vigilant preservation of our own national liberties and the active employment of our own means and energies. *The blood of our fathers may soon cry to us from the ground* "my sons vindicate with your swords the sacred rights which are left you." Shall we then at this critical juncture, when union in council and action is all important to our country and its government, be puzzling ourselves about questions of relative injury, which we have received from the belligerents? Negotiation has been long tried by our rulers and in vain. Force alone can compel tyrants to do us justice. Those who rely upon the friendship of foreign nations will be woefully deceived. The love we owe to ourselves and to posterity, the memory of our ancestors, that sacred liberty which is intrusted to our care and preservation, ought to unite us in favor of our common country. While we are ardently attached to the land, which contains the tombs of our illustrious fathers—while we are vigilant in protecting and preserving those invaluable rights we possess, and are impressed with the solemn responsibility we are under to transmit them unsullied and unimpaired to posterity, foreign enemies and domestic traitors may threaten in vain the citadel of our freedom. It is not merely the character of our rulers, but that of the people in general, upon which we depend for the support of our present government. Vice and ignorance are the worst enemies of our country and constitution. All other enemies are comparatively impotent and harmless. A free and virtuous people, who know and feel the value of their rights, are not invaded, at least with impunity by

foreign foes. So long as we continue to inculcate and practice the principles which animated the worthies of our revolution to brave the power of tyrants, and to defend with their lives and fortunes, their sacred altars and friends, so long we shall remain an independent nation and a free people. Never did real liberty witness a more universal and virulent combination against her existence. Despotism, discord, aristocracy and atheism have long plotted her destruction. From every corner of Europe she has been hunted with the most execrable fury. Time was, when she delighted to wander amongst the luxuriant vales and upon the snow-capped mountains of Switzerland—when, there, encircled by the domestic virtues and the smiles of contentment, she taught even poverty to please; enamoured with her charms, the humble peasant preferred his low thatched cottage and barren cliffs, to lordly wealth and grandeur. Even these who once, so loudly trumpeted her praises, who avowed so strenuous a determination to foster and protect their Heaven-descended goddess, have now become her enemies. Here alone she now finds an assylum. Here she has fixed her residence. And even here she finds her foes, who, however disguised under specious names and professions are equally inplacable. There are those, who would persuade us that our constitutions are destroyed—that our independence is lost—whose proud aristocratic feelings are grated by the appearance of that civil equality which is the boast of our country and the salvation of our rights, who have attempted to overturn our constitution by resolving boldly and publicly to resist constitutional laws. Is such language and conduct as this calculated to preserve or destroy our liberties. In fact is it not the deep and nefarious design of those men to wink our constitution out of sight—to dissipate every idea of those sacred oracles which, we ought to reverence as the sheet anchor of our liberties, and which we are bound by the most solemn obligations to preserve and transmit inviolate to future generations? They boast of their exclusive virtue and patriotism—that they are the only disciples of Washington. What incredible audacity; what shameless affrontery! It is remarkable that the French demagogues and tyrants adopted the very same method to establish their present despotism. They first persuaded the peo-

ple that they had no constitutional rights and that they themselves were rudely qualified to manage their public affairs. Their delusive show of patriotism, and their artful insinuations triumphed over their popular and unsuspecting credulity. So it will fare with us my friends, unless we see and judge for ourselves. Let us not be deluded—we have constitutions, which we ought with guardian care, vigilance and jealousy to protect. We are told likewise by those exclusive lovers of truth and virtue, that England has done us no essential injury. Is then the loss of personal freedom no essential injury? And is not an injury done to one citizen an injury to us all? Are we not bound by our constitution to protect each other's rights? If England has not essentially injured us by her orders in council, which outrage every neutral principle, by enslaving thousands of our countrymen, by murdering our fellow citizens within our own jurisdiction, by capturing and condemning our property; than no other nation by pursuing the same career, would give us any substantial cause of complaint. The Berlin and Milan decrees, the burning and confiscation of our property, and impressment of our seamen by France can give us no cause of war. It is evident that all the noise and clamour we hear against our own government and in favor of foreign nations, originates from a few unprincipled ambitious men, and from commercial speculators, who determine the policy and justice of our laws by calculation of pecuniary loss and gain. If we have received no essential injury from foreign nations, which would inevitably follow from their reasoning—then we have no sufficient cause of war, nor can they impute pusillanimity to our government for they have no outrages to resent or revenge. But they would have us unfurl the republican banner against the imperial standard. These men are clamorous for a war with some nation at all events. They imagine it would further their designs of wealth and distinction—that it would lead to an alliance fatal to the equal liberties of our country. And this is their ultimate project. what may be the interest of the whole is not a question with them. Altho' we have indisputably a sufficient cause of war, against both Great Britain and France, yet it may be wise for the present to delay a vindication of our wrongs. It is not the genius of a republic to rush

rashly into hostilities with any nation. It may be expedient to deliberate first, whether any part of our enemy is vulnerable; for if we cannot effect her, what prospect have we of vindicating our wrongs or bringing our enemy to terms, or in fact of gaining any thing but loss, chagrin and disappointment by war? Let us not be told by trembling cowards and designing traitors, that the power of France will soon be irresistible; and that we must immediately denounce war against her and form an alliance with Britian, in order to save ourselves from impending ruin. For besides that we cannot by any practicable method check at present the growth of the French power, and therefore any attempt for that purpose would be useless: success does not so much depend on numbers, as upon the principles with which enemies are actuated. Men were found in our revolution, who considered the idea of resisting the apparently irresistible power of Great Britian as the most extravagant chimera. But a provident Chatham easily foresaw the result of that contest. He knew that men fired with a love of freedom, and their country, who fought not for tyranny and aristocracy, but for themselves, their property and their children, who were assembled, like Scythians around their fathers' tombs, were not to be conquered. Those who would inspire us with a constant dread of our enemies, who would persuade us that we must eventually submit reasonably excited our suspicions. In the revolution those who harbored the idea of submission or compromise, who endeavored to persuade us that it was in vain to contend, were apprehended as traitors. Our fathers justly reasoned, that if a man could be so base, as to entertain even a thought of surrendering the rights of his country, he was guilty of a species of treason. And we may say with truth, that where a man can harbor the idea of surrendering his own liberties and the sacred rights of his children, of consigning them to a perpetual bondage, he is fit only for treason and murder. If we are ever capable of relinquishing our freedom, our bondage will be just. Let us pause for a moment, fellow citizens, and reflect on the destinies of our rising republic. Let the departed liberties of Greece, of Carthage, of Rome, of Switzerland, Spain, Holland and even of Great Britian be an admonition to our countrymen. Let us be aware of the rock up

on which they dashed. The corruption of commerce, the effeminacy of wealth, aristocracy and vice have proved fatal to all ancient republics. Yes my friends, the solemn reflection ought to be deeply and indelibly impressed upon our hearts, when vice, luxury and ignorance prevail, we shall deserve and wear those chains of slavery and despotism, which will be reserved for that period by an unalterable destiny.



Hail! freemen, hail! th' eternal King above,
The only Monarch freemen e'er can love,
With his imperial nod, and direful frown
Invades our foes and hurls them headlong down.

Hail! freemen, hail! this joyous natal day
Expands the heart, and with celestial sway
Wafts the "choice spirits" of Americans
To temples graced by heroes potent bands.

There festive mirth and dec'orious triumph fire,
As tyrants' pomp and thrones can ne'er inspire:
Rejoice and shout, ye heroes' sons, aloud,
Thy cause is heav'n's, and thy defender's GOD.

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