

AN  
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT

NEWPORT,

IN THE

STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY,

A. D. 1797.

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BY WILLIAM MARCHANT.

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*“ ———— hæc Manus, inimica Tyrannis,  
Ense petit placidam sub Libertate quietem.”*

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NEWPORT: Printed by HENRY BARBER, 1797.

ARTILLERY COMPANY *of the* TOWN *of* NEWPORT,

4th JULY, 1797.

**V**O T E D, That FRANCIS MARRONE, BENJAMIN FRY,  
WALTER CHANNING, and JOSEPH BOSS, jun. be a Com-  
mittee to wait on WILLIAM MARCHANT, Esq; to present him the  
thanks of this COMPANY for his *elegant, pertinent,* and (by them)  
*highly approved* ORATION, and to request a copy for the Press.

HOLMES WEAVER, *Clerk.*

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To the ARTILLERY COMPANY, of the TOWN of NEWPORT.

GENTLEMEN,

**E**V E R obedient to your requests, I have suffered your *unequivocal*  
*Approbation* to overcome a real *diffidence* of *Merit*;—and with a  
hope, that the short time employed to compose, will atone for the  
defects and inaccuracies of this ORATION, I submit it to the candid  
inspection of the PUBLIC;

W. MARCHANT.



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# O R A T I O N.

**A**LL NATIONS, inspired by the spirit of Ambition, actuated by the love of Liberty, or compelled by the influence of Example,—have distinguished *Periods* and *Epochs* in their Histories, commemorative of *happy Events* or *Illustrious Achievements*.

AMERICANS perpetuate the remembrance of a DAY, in which the collected Wisdom of the Nation, defined and asserted those important *Rights*, its combined Efforts and Magnanimity have established.

THIS is elevated above other Days of the Year;—it possesses a majestic dignity which *Freemen* love to serve and reverence—while our national liberty is preserved, its *Remembrance* shall not be obliterated, its *Glory* sullied or its *Observance* interrupted—but the *Planets* which enlighten the FOURTH of JULY, shall ever raise the *spring Tide* of our Joys.

AMID the warrantable festivity of this occasion, it is worthy our employment to recur to those principles which originated and emboldened the efforts of this Country, and to follow their operation in the production of events which ultimately crowned them with success.

COULD the Author of our existence intend that one part of the human race should have an absolute property in, or unlimited authority over the other?—Freedom is the original, unalienable right of Man; a sense of this right is coeval with its existence;

istence; and but for the force of habit, of example and education, it would ever be abhorrent to our feelings to invade the liberties of others, or voluntarily to prostrate our own,—the Throne of Despotism would ever be vacant—its Courts untrodden by the feet of Votaries—its Altars unstained with the blood of Victims.

BUT however accustomed to assume or submit to Power, the spirit of man often despises its exercise and refuses its obedience—He assents to the impositions of constituted Authority, but rejects the burdens of assumed or hereditary Prerogative.—This lively sense of natural right,—deeply implanted in the breasts of our ancestors, was too luxuriant to be restrained by the arbitrary Government and monastic rigour of the Parent Country; and by a removal to this Continent they sought at once, relief from the confining Shackles of political and religious Tyranny.

UNITED by similarity of sentiment and necessity of circumstances;—they formed Constitutions and established Governments, in which as in the origin of all social compacts, certain privileges were submitted to the controul of the community—to secure to individuals the limited use of those, and free exercise of all other rights. Unassisted by England, they established themselves in opposition to numerous and warlike foes.—It would be impertinent on this occasion, to arraign the justice, or plead the necessity of a conduct, which secured to our Fathers the peaceable possession of this Country by the almost total extirpation of its natives;—but while we rejoice in the successful issue to their toilsome and dangerous conflict, We cannot but repine at the means by which it was obtained.

WHILE a friendly intercourse and harmonious connection subsisted between the Colonies and Great-Britain; her Commerce was increased, her revenue yearly augmented and mutual advantages resulted to both Countries. In the last and successful  
War

War with France, the Colonies had borne no inconsiderable part, and the justice and wisdom of Chatham perceived and acknowledged their importance; but when his steady councils were exchanged for the visionary schemes of North, and justice and moderation were displaced by violence and rapacity,—the insatiate avarice of Great-Britain,—not content to imbibe that moderate stream of wealth which constantly flowed into her coffers, sought to drain the source, to gratify the Harpeian appetites of her minions.—The effectual assistance given by the Colonies in the war, discovered to the Ministry their Power and Resources, and excited its ambition and avarice to reduce the one and exhaust the other. The perceptive faculties of the Colonists were not inattentive to those circumstances, and when the Government of Britain, endeavoured by subtle artifice to steal upon our liberties—the wary policy of our wise men, and native bravery of our citizens, were lively to discern, and firm to oppose innovations.

THESE dispositions of the two Countries were the immediate cause of the *American Revolution*. A thirst of Power in one, and love of Liberty in the other, produced a disunion of feeling, and discovered the adversity of their interests.

THE virtues of the English Constitution had long been a favourite subject for praise and encomium to political Panegyrists. The rights of trial by Jury and of representation in the House of Commons, where all Bills for taxation originated, were regarded as the greatest privileges of the People and those to which they had an indisputable claim: But the Parliament and Ministry in their plan for taxing the Colonies, were either unmindful of those privileges, or believed Us insensible to their infraction; and without reflecting that an invasion of our rights was a violation of their Constitution—they passed Acts for taxing these Colonies, and directed trials for delinquents—other than by Juries.

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**THEY** expected that unsuspecting affection or cowardly fear, would induce the Colonists to acquiesce, or oblige them to obey these Laws; but they served to alarm their Jealousy, and at once awakened their apprehensions to a discernment of the policy, and aroused their opposition to the system of taxation — Act after Act, declaring the right, recommending the expediency of taxing this Country, and tending to effect the measure, passed in rapid succession, and the repeal of the “Stamp Act,” the most odious and most vigorously opposed, was the only retrograde step taken from their progress to Tyranny and Oppression.—But even this temporary appearance of conciliatory measures was soon changed, and the former face of affairs renewed. The hopes of the Colonists were scarce raised by the repeal of one act, when another was passed, declaring “that his Majesty in Parliament of Right had Power to bind the People of these Colonies *in ALL cases whatsoever.*”

To a People of different manners and language, this would have been the signal for revolt; but that affection which was originated and increased by a similarity in both, proposed hopeless expedients for reconciliation in preference to the doubtful alternative of arms.

**HAPPILY** for this Country, the pride of Britain disdained to accept such conciliatory proposals, as fear or affection induced us to offer. With petitions, remonstrances, and addresses, we besieged the King, the Parliament, and the People of Great-Britain. Contempt and Contumely were the returns. The only offers short of unconditional submission and a total prostration of our Rights, accompanied the disembarkation of Troops; and artful, delusory proposals calculated to divide, not to satisfy, were presented upon the point of the bayonet by military Plenipotentiaries.—In all respects the conduct of the British Ministry, however well it might be calculated to intimidate the Fearful and alarm the Apprehensive, tended only to excite the  
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indignation of the Brave: When its vindictive rage had singled out the objects for vengeance, and individual Towns and Colonies were unable to withstand the shock of its malice; plans for association were formed.—The dissolution of the Colonial Assemblies was at once to punish and defeat these attempts; but the seeds of Division perished, while those of Union grew stronger with every effort to eradicate them, and arose to a full grown maturity, spite of the baleful blasts of *faction*, and the inclement influence of *venality*.

Excess of irritation was avoided by the British, and a display of determination to resist by the Colonists, till the arrival of fresh troops increased their audacity, and sharpened our necessities. Tho' Congress approved the opposing of force by force, they earnestly recommended forbearance from aggression; and not till many unoffending victims had been immolated, on the unhallowed Altars of despotic Power,—not till the numerous fleets and armies of Britain evinced her immoveable resolution of entirely subjecting us to her arbitrary will, and to her *natural* means of accomplishing this *unnatural* conquest, were added the hireling hosts of Germany, and the cruel hordes of our native foes,—did the Congress of the United Colonies, on the 6th of July, 1775—publish an affecting complaint of *grievances*, with a bold declaration of *rights*, avowing a determination to redress the former and defend the latter. When destruction was threatened by the Court and already executing by her forces,—when Proscription had unveiled its awful terrors to the view of our Patriots; they dared to hold forth at once the Pen and Sword, avowing with one those rights they resolved to obtain by the other.

THEY declared,—“That in a just Cause and with a perfect Union they would employ the arms their enemies had compelled them to assume for the preservation of their liberties,—resolved to die Freemen, rather than to live Slaves:—That they

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had taken arms in their native land, in defence of the freedom which was their birth right, and for the protection of property acquired solely by the honest Industry of themselves and their forefathers,—against violence actually offered ;—and would never lay them down till hostilities should cease on the part of the Aggressors, and all danger of their renewal be removed.

THIS was the result of deliberation, the dictate of necessity. Humble submission or open firmness was necessary to appease or contend with the wrath of our enemies. Yet so studious was Congress to preserve the reality as well as appearance of moderation, and so infatuated were they by a hopeless desire of honorable accommodation ; that subsequent to this an humble petition was presented to the King, and an affectionate address to the People of Great-Britain ; and long after it was apparent that unconditional submission or avowed hostility were our only alternatives, the Heads of these States avoided an open choice of either ; but when it was too demonstratively proved for incredulity itself to doubt, that we had nothing to hope from the clemency, but every thing to fear from the resentment of our foe, We laid open claim to INDEPENDENCE, that great *National Right*, of which, by the energy of Councils, the bravery of Troops, and the assistance of Heaven, we have acquired quiet possession and complete enjoyment.

WHEN the lofty Fleets of England whitened the ocean, her wide-spread Tents covered our fields, and her proud banners waved in triumph over our populous Cities. When the blazing Torch and desolating Tomahawk of savage Barbarity, scattered wide havoc and indiscriminate slaughter thro' our western frontier. Destitute of the necessary impliments of war, fettered with a depreciated currency, depressed by accumulating debt, and unallied to foreign Power,—relying upon God and the Justice of their cause ;—the Representatives of these United States of America in Congress assembled, on the 4th of July,

1776

1776 ;—after premising the natural right of Men and of Nations, to dissolve the political connection which had united them, and stating the aggravations which reduced these Colonies to the necessity, and justified their separation from the Mother Country,—declared, “ That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, *free and independant States* ; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is, and ought to be, totally dissolved ; and that as *free and independant States* they have full power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other things which independant States may of right do.— And for the support of that declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, they mutually pledged each other, their Lives, their Fortunes, and their sacred Honors.”

HITHERTO the objects for which they had contended were undefined. Resentment for injuries and resistance to oppression had excited their natural and involuntary efforts :—But when Freedom became the prize for contention ; when on one side was seen the bright path which lead to honor and liberty, and diverging to the other the dark road to disgraceful servitude, the Inclinations of the brave Americans hesitated not to decide.

It should ever give us pleasure to renew the remembrance of a Deed so productive of good. Which wrought a regeneration in the political sentiments of Men, and has occasioned revolutions in the civil Governments of the World.

THE feelings which actuated, the principles which directed, and the success which crowned the exertions of the American Patriots, should ever excite gratitude and emulation.—Proscription and Death,—Confiscation and Attainder, were to have been their unmerited Punishments ;—But fearless of consequen-

ees to themselves, they regarded only the Interests of their Country, and responded only to the Integrity of their Hearts;— They addressed *Freedom* as a Mistress, they adored her as a Divinity, and as a *Pillar of a Cloud* by Day, and a *Pillar of Fire* by Night, she conducted them thro' a Sea of Blood, and a Wilderness of Despair, to the promised Land of Liberty and Peace.

WHEN Britain was most sanguine in her hopes of subjugation, —when the Courts of Europe beheld with apprehension or dismay, a contest between Powers so apparently unequal;— when the hopes of the Brave were in suspence, and the tears of the Irresolute confirmed;—the *Declaration of Independence* arrested our fleeting expectations of Victory, and recalled us to the onset, armed with hope, or fortified with despair. The sentiments and actions of men were decided and confirmed, and the Friend to his Country designated from the Foe to her Liberties — The exertions of the former were renewed and increased, urged by hope of freedom or by fear of bondage, while the dastardly policy of the latter, cringed to the iron rod of power, and his unnatural rapacity carved out for his own enjoyment, the fairest possessions of Freemen.

THE superior numbers and discipline of our adversaries, long baffled our attempts to expel them, and rendered dubious the fortune of the War;—but when the animated ardour of our Militia had overcome the cooler courage of their numerous army in the North, and the Fabian Generalship of our Washington had defeated their expeditions, and captured their troops in the Jerseys,—our own and the faith of foreign Nations was convinced of the certainty of our eventual success:—and when those and other proofs of our adequacy to the conflict, had overcome doubt and shamed despair, the *Ambition and Policy* of the *Court of France* prompted her to share the glory, and reap the advantage, of humbling her natural and inveterate enemy.

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By an alliance with France, the forces of the English were divided and our own encreased, their partial successes at the southward, served but to desolate that Country and place a wreath of Glory on our GREENE. His signal victories and rapid progress in their expulsion from those States, merited the thanks, honors and gratuities they bestowed, and deservedly ranked *him* the second American General in fortune and ability.

HERE we might enumerate a long list of *Heroes* and of *Sages*, who in the *Cabinet* and the *Field*, devoted their *Lives* and *Fortunes* to the service of their Country;—but they are too *numerous* to repeat,—too *worthy* to admit *discrimination*.

In the progress of hostility, every method which malice and cruelty could devise, was attempted to discourage and dishearten our Soldiers and Seamen; but the thousands massacred in cool blood, or destroyed in prison-ships by pestilence and famine, served but to exasperate the living, and that unbridled rage which dealt indiscriminate carnage, plunder and desolation, en-  
vigorated the opposition of their Enemies and weakened the assistance of their Adherents.

WHEN the bright prospects of conquest had vanished from the deluded view of the most sanguine, predatory and desultory Excursions were substituted for more civilized and regular Warfare, the bayonet of the Soldier was moulded into the dagger of the Assassin, the match of the Matross exchanged for the torch of the Incendiary.

BUT the fainting hopes of the British Ministry were still feebly sustained by a meditated junction of their armies, commanded by Clinton and Cornwallis, till the useless confined situation of the one, and entire capture of the other, at length decided the fate of a war already far from doubtful.

A difficult task still remained ;—to secure by advantageous Treaty with the belligerent Powers, those important rights so strenuously maintained in Battle.

FRANCE, Spain, and England, expected mutual advantages by negotiating with a People unversed in courtly artifice and intrigue.

It was the policy of those Nations to prevent the sudden aggrandizement or complete independance of these States by great commercial advantages or extent of territory. The insinuating address of VERGENNES had a sensible effect upon the accommodating disposition of FRANKLIN ; but the keen sagacity, sound policy and invincible integrity of JAY and of ADAMS, overvied the art and baffled the designs of that Minister ; and on the 3d of September, 1783, a definitive Treaty of Peace—honorable and advantageous, was concluded at Paris with the British Minister.

It is needless to add that the acknowledgement of our Independance was the preliminary article of that Treaty, as it had been of the provisional Articles settled the preceding year.—Ever after its declaration, Congress had refused to treat upon other terms.—In the darkest night of adversity they never lost sight of that Polar Star, by whose guidance they were directed thro' the intricacies and perils of a doubtful revolution, to a harbour of safety and repose.

A lengthy digression is now unnecessary to shew the justice of a cause thus obtained. If there is an original difference between the motives for licentious rebellion and those which influenced the revolt of these States, then we are not indebted to the success of our cause for its justification ; but rely upon that distinction which Justice and candour will ever draw, between the unwarrantable subversion of constituted authority, and a just

just opposition to the exercise of lawless power.—The attainder of the *big commissioned Court* who condemned the first Charles, the reascension of the House of Stuart upon the Throne of England in the person of the second, and the decrees of oblivion to the Acts of the Protectorate, cannot convince the enlightened understandings of this Age, that the People of England exercised an illegal authority in the unprecedented trial and death of a Tyrant.—Neither would Posterity have stigmatized these United States with the opprobrium of Treason, had the Power of Britain reduced their aspiring hopes and humbled *them* to a state of servility and bondage.

SUBSEQUENT to the Peace of '83, the fair prospects of these States were obscured. Instead of that bright sunshine of political happiness, they had expected to cheer their future existence, their views were darkened by thick mists of political error, their hopes assailed by stormy tempests of national adversity.—That union which had subsisted during the war, no longer existed in its first perfection. The powers of Congress in time of peace in but few instances exceeded a recommendatory authority. Those who had counselled in the cabinet and fought in the field were regarded with envy, and to possess the grateful affections of a part of their fellow-citizens, was sufficient to ensure the malicious jealousy of the rest;

THE experience of Ages has taught that Republics are most ungrateful for the services of their Citizens. This truth may be useful to guard against the too great aggrandizement of individuals; but will ever damp their ardour and enterprize:—few serve their Country with so disinterested views as not to regard and claim her thanks as their due reward.

LEGISLATIVE injustice, dissention and rebellion, threatened us with civil war at home and national discredit abroad; but the wisdom of those who had conducted us to what we had regarded.

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garded as the possession of liberty, once more beamed a brighter day upon our prosperity, and gave us the undelusive enjoyment of the boon, by the formation and adoption of our present Constitution of Government.

THE HERO whose arm had rescued us from servitude to Kings was placed at the head of the Nation, and equal wisdom and success guided and followed his conduct in a political as had in a military employment. Our regret for his departure from office, can be alleviated only by our confidence in the abilities and integrity of his Successor.—It is believed, that as the justice, wisdom and magnanimity of WASHINGTON, prevented the calamities of a war, and secured the benefits of an amicable Treaty with Great-Britain;—the like qualities in ADAMS may yet extricate us from our difficulties with FRANCE.

WE acknowledge, the assistance of the Gallic Monarch conduced to a speedier conclusion of the war, and with the change of their Government, transfer our obligations from the King to the People of France:—but while we cherish in our bosoms so noble a virtue as gratitude, we should not so far lose sight of their motives or of our interests, as tamely to suffer from *professional Friends*, *Indignities* unfit to be offered by *avowed Enemies*. To declare war against one Nation from motives of partiality or in obedience to the dictates of another, would be a folly justly punished by the chastisement of Enemies, and perfidy of Allies.

CLOSE adherence to the interests of either belligerent party, would subject us to a share of their disasters.—The impaired state of the finance of England has alarmed the apprehensions of the commercial World, and the unsettled plan of Government in France, with the power she arrogates of influencing the politics of other Nations, threaten political ruin to her, if not to involve others in her Catastrophe. THE

THE want of ability or inclination to distinguish between freedom, as restrained in its exercise tho' not impaired in its excellence by Government, and that lawless indulgence of liberty which involves in anarchy and ends in tyranny, has been a stumbling-block to Republics in all ages, a quick-sand upon which most free States have foundered.

It can be ascribed only to the vanity inherent in our natures that the misfortunes of others cannot deter us from their pursuits; and tho' it is demonstrated by stubborn fact, that Democracy is the most oppressive of all Governments (if a Government it may be called) yet there are not wanting to advocate its excellence and attempt its experiment. Constant agitation is incident to its operation, and like the turgid billows of a troubled ocean, its Individuals rise in uncertain vicissitudes and are overwhelmed by constant opposition. Let it be remembered, that in such a State, we can have no liberty but by the variable sufferance of our neighbours. Are we politically happy because we have the unrestrained power of molestation, when we are also subject to its inconvenience? Nature itself hath Laws, which because they are perfect, are unchangeable,—The happy experience of eight years has taught, that our Constitution well administered approximates that perfection, and should never be changed by party or altered by caprice.

*Fellow-Citizens in Arms,*

UNDER the protecting auspices of a free Government, we are associated to give energy to its laws, and to maintain order in Society. What honor demands and our interests require, we are bound to perform. We should remember that we are to defend not oppress our Country.—Her interests are inseparable from ours, and when we lose sight of duty to her, we become estranged from our dearest rights.

OUR reverence for authority and jealousy for liberty, should be weighed with impartiality, since we must decide between the lawful exercise of power and the unjust oppression of the Citizens, when called to enforce the one, or excited to resist the other.

THE liberties of our Country are entrusted to our care, and consigned to our defence.—They are *our* liberties,—are inestimable treasure,—once lost may never be retrieved;—to guard them is a privilege worthy of emulation, and should be the ambition of every Freeman.

ASSOCIATED by union of sentiments and the bonds of brotherhood,—embracing each other with an affection, the offspring of Nature and dictate of Reason,—our Philanthropy should also be extended to our Fellow-Citizens,—and expanded by those sentiments which spring from Civilization and Refinement, and are nursed by Unanimity and Fraternity, the extensive Benevolence of our Affections should embrace the World of Mankind—hating only *Tyrants*, whether riding in *single majesty* over the prostrate liberties of numerous Subjects, or trampling with *multitudinous violence* upon the rights of the few.

*Fellow Citizens,*

LET not the festivity of this day drown, but enliven the remembrance of those, whose steady councils and intrepid courage obtained the blessings we possess.

IN a fertile country and a healthy climate, under a mild government and a just administration, blessed with the benignant smiles of a gracious Heaven,—*We will neither receive from, nor give Laws to other Nations*; but ever mindful of the Principles which actuated our FATHERS; those invaluable privileges inherited from them, we will transmit undiminished to our Posterity.

