

ORATION

DELIVERED

IN AMESBURY,

JULY 4, 1817,

COMMEMORATIVE

OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY SAMUEL BARLOW MEAD,

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AMESBURY, JULY 5th, 1817.

SIR,

In compliance with a vote of a large number of Gentlemen, present yesterday at the Celebration of American Independence, we as a committee, have the honour to express to you, with our thanks, the high degree of pleasure we all received from your Oration, and in their behalf request the favour of a copy for publication.

With assurance of high respect, we remain

Sir, your humble servants,

THOMAS HOYT.
STEPHEN BAYLEY.
ROBERT SARGENT.
EDMUND WHITTIER. } *Committed.*

Mr. SAMUEL B. MEAD.

AMESBURY, JULY 6th, 1817.

GENTLEMEN,

A youth of nineteen cannot but feel a diffidence in submitting his hasty production to public inspection. With a desire to gratify his partial friends alone, he complies with your request.

In reciprocation of respect and esteem,

your obedient servant,

S. B. MEAD.

THOMAS HOYT, Esq.
Jr. STEPHEN BAYLEY.
Mr. ROBERT SARGENT.
Mr. EDMUND WHITTIER.

ORATION.

TO rise amidst this crowded assembly, conscious of little ability to please, to instruct, or adapt the expression of my sentiments to the occasion, would lay me under unspeakable embarrassment, were I not inspired by the hope, that the condescension that has invited me to this place, would still retain its influence while the speaker shall occupy your time for a few moments.

In selecting such a subject as should suggest some interesting train of thought to your minds, a new difficulty occurred, still embarrassing. From your own perusal of the history of the revolution, and from its events having been reiterated on occasions like this, the story of other times, the deeds of our ancestors, have past often in splendid review before you. The question respecting the glory, the disgrace, the justice or the injustice of the late war has been echoed in your ears, till it excites nothing but disgust. The bickerings of parties are silent. Party zeal has given place to dispassionate enquiry, and

political violence and animosity are lulled to sleep in the embraces of fraternal love. We can now pursue, with the solicitude of patriotic zeal, the important enquiry, what constitutes the glory and happiness of a nation, or what renders its character disrespected abroad, and finally plunges it into a state of anarchy and confusion? While engaged on this subject we have little to fear from the intemperance of passion. The coolness of reflection will not bias our opinions, or warp our judgment. Let us then review the history of those states that have preceded us in the march of time, and moralize on the condition of man. As Americans, as citizens of a free Republic, they deeply interest our attention from the advantages we may derive from contemplating those causes by which they rose to proud pre-eminence, and those by which they glided, from the pinnacle of greatness, into the grave of oblivion. If, in the ages of their prosperity they have arisen to that height which no human ken of vision could foresee, they have, in their decline, fallen to that depth of degradation, which no human knowledge could fathom. They have in turn, become the terror and the contempt, the spoiler and the prey of surrounding nations. In reviewing the history of ancient states and nations, who shone as luminaries in

the ages of intellectual night, and among whom Science and the Arts had chosen her favorite seat, the classical admirer cannot but feel the liveliest emotions. In the language of another, "Imagination calls up the venerable shades of those Heroes, Philosophers, Poets and Orators, whose names are so celebrated, and presents to the mental eye an interesting picture of the scenes of history, the discoveries of science, and the effects of art."

Causes similar to those that effected our American revolution, first brought the States of Greece into notice. An instinctive love of liberty, the tyranny of their government, and the danger of invasions from abroad cemented the ties of union at home. They were led on to victory, to freedom, by heroes nurtured in the school of fortune. The straits of Thermopylae, the plains of Marathon witnessed the success of a handful of brave men against the millions of effeminate Persia. Virtue then was the prop of their institutions, and merit a recommendation to public confidence. Political wisdom, not political intrigue, characterized their statesmen. They were not too ambitious to rise by the mere force of merit to places of trust. Their virtue was not dazzled by the insignia of office, and men were not led to their own ruin or that of the government which offered its rewards to

every deserving citizen. Science and the arts attracted the undivided attention of the scholars of Greece, and the Gods themselves, condescended to endue them with all those qualifications that form, with all those accomplishments that embellish the character of the Hero, the Philosopher, the Poet and the Orator. In vain have modern Literati sighed to equal their inimitable specimens of composition. Stimulated by noble emulation, they have transmitted to posterity the rich legacy of their learning, and the memory of their valour. Even when corruption and luxury had degraded the spirit of the people and depraved their morals, the eloquence of Demosthenes was more terrible to the invaders of Grecian Liberty than the combined forces of Lacedemon and Attica. Freedom, apprehensive for the fate of her favourite seat, seems to have placed him as centinel on the walls of her Capitol. But the contrary of all those virtues that raised her from obscurity, were combined for her ruin. Wealth and selfish pleasure were the sole incitements to exertion. Luxury had produced imbecility, and depraved the inclinations of her citizens. The fire of patriotism was extinguished by the pressure of dependence, and justice gave place to mean obsequiousness and vanity. Athens slept the sleep of political death,

and though tossed on the wreck of her liberties, she frequently displayed signs of returning life, yet she never attained her former celebrity. Do you enquire where now is Athens? Ask the few miserable fishermen that inhabit her rocky shores; ask one of the millions that formerly crowded her splendid palaces, he will point with a sigh, to the fallen monuments of her glory and weep with indignation, at the depredations of the contemptible antiquary. Amidst the ruins of time, we search in vain for the histories of Tyre, Sydon, Troy and Palmyra. Scarce one enlivening ray breaks thro' the mists of antiquity to tell how they rose, and how they fell. In the words of the poet,

“ Their bards
Sing in a language that hath perish'd ;
And their wild harps suspended o'er their graves,
Sigh to the desert winds a dying strain.”

Carthage almost surrounded by the deserts of Lybia, but enjoying a commodious harbour, rose to fame and greatness by commerce. But exorbitant wealth introduced into a country by commercial pursuits, never fails to produce luxury and effeminacy. Abandoning her interests to foreign mercenaries, she became the prey of those she despised as ignorant barbarians. Amidst however, the ruin of her power, we behold the transcendent genius of one man, uniting by his skill and address these

mercenary troops into a brave veteran army, disputing, for a time, the mastery of the world with Rome, and spreading ruin and desolation to her very gates. But Carthage has shared the fate of states that preceded her and has left not one to bear her name or trace where stood her Capitols.

Bravery, in its ancient signification, synonymous with virtue, formed the basis of Roman greatness. In the early ages of the republic, virtue was the stability of her times, unanimity the bond of fraternal love, patriotism that raised every sword against the common foe. No obstacle impeded the progress of their valour, the love of country warmed her heroes amidst polar snows and carried them over the towering Alps. Personal interest was forgotten while the noble mind will'd the public good. "The state was every thing, the individual nothing." A virtuous warlike nation was not made splendidly wretched by conquest, nor had it much to dread from the encroachments of its neighbours. The regular habits of the citizen, were combined with the generous patriotism of the soldier. By the combination of these two characters, Rome became great and powerful. Desirous to be renowned in the arts and sciences, as well as in military exploits, her youth issuing from the Philosophic schools of Socrates, Plato and Zeno,

smoothed the rough Roman verse with the honied accents of the Greek. Their villas were transformed into the retreats for the muses. Their groves emulated the sacred shades of Academus, and the setting sun of Grecian Literature, burnished, with his golden effulgence, the rising columns of Roman greatness.

But how sad to reverse the picture.

Luxury soon insinuated its poison into the vitals of their government and disseminated corruption among the mass of the people. A revolutionary mania ensued. The Forum of the eloquent Cicero, in which formerly the great interests of the state were discussed, became the place of contention, it was disgraced by the intemperate broils of parties, where every regard for the public good was buried in the chaos of the passions, and every thing but the claims of demagogues was forgotten. The army became corrupted, and their blood flowed not for their country. The people enlisted under leaders of different parties, who rocked in the cradle of liberty, to the leaden slumbers of despotism. By extensive conquests, the force of one part of the community was wielded to subvert the rights of the other and the Roman standing armies when the way had been paved by corruption, were the retinue with which Caesar

narched to a throne, erected on the ruins of the state.

Do we need any thing more to confirm the inferences that may be drawn from this sketch of the history of ancient nations? Look at Holland, once the land of freedom, despoiled of her rich India possessions, overwhelmed in the revolutionary vortex. She is now recovered in some measure from her languid slumbers, but her former fame and glory have passed away "like the dream of a shadow."

The Swiss, though surrounded by restless ambitious neighbours, reposed in peaceful security beneath the vines planted by their brave Tell, while every rude commotion without rooted still deeper their affection for their country. But Switzerland has drank deep of the dregs of misery. The cottager still views his Alpine rocks blackened by the smoke of his ruined home, and his once fruitful vales white with the bones of a brother who expired on the altar of freedom.—France lies tortured under the proscriptions of her Allied Physicians, her sceptre wielded by a degenerate Bourbon.

Spain groans under the weight of an inquisition that feeds on the blood and fattens on the estates of her murdered patriots.

Thus it is that states and empires, like the little atoms that float on the ocean, overwhelmed by the impetuous wave of time, rise on its towering height and again precipitate into the opening gulph. Fatality seems stamped on every human institution. The scenes on the grand theatre of the world are rapidly shifting. The Martyr patriot may grieve at the execrations of a fallen, degenerate nation, to whom his labours have given Freedom, yet, viewing the future through the past, can die with the cheering expectation, that when her glories have laid low in the dust, they may revive and flourish in succeeding ages.

Amidst however, all the irregularity that seems to govern the world, the calm observer may learn that causes produce their like effects. Ruin to a nation is as certainly communicated by pride and luxury, as the pestilence by contagion.

But let us not, by meditating among the tombs of departed greatness, make our hearts sad on this joyous occasion. Let us not add poignancy to the seriousness of reflection. We have a country, which is yet to act her part among the nations of the earth. Her morning of existence has but just began. Her day has been ushered in by a blaze of glory. May we not prove insensible to the advantages that surround us. Our country

possesses all the variety of a rich soil, whose climate is favourable for the exertion of intellect, commanding the means of carrying on extensive commerce and manufactures and of perfecting the agricultural art. Insulated by our situation from the corruption of the old world, let us not be too free to naturalize every indigenous plant that may offer itself to our protection, lest like the Upas it diffuse its poisonous qualities around. We can now behold, as the Israelite of old, through the vista of futurity, the happiness and prosperity of our beloved republick, only that we now live in the land that shall hereafter emblazon the annals of the world. When Europe shall be buried in the obscurity of barbarism, by the revolutions of time, our country shall shine a star of the first magnitude among many other American Republics that shall then be formed. Let us then not loiter on the road to national glory, but pursue that path that shall conduct us, united hand in hand, to the temple of immortality.

Permit me to congratulate you, fellow-citizens, on the unanimity that prevails on this interesting occasion, on this birth-day of our national existence. Friendship can lighten the cares of life and cover with flowers its thorny path. In the misfortunes and pleasures of manhood, it will

dispense the joy of grief as well as the mirth of gladness. On the decrepitude of our age it will shed the balm of memory. It will cause the evening sun to illumine the eastern sky and tinge with its glories those clouds that sometimes obscured the sunshine of our happiness and constitute the light and shade that diversify the lot of man.

But while we utter thanksgivings to heaven for the blessings of freedom, let us not forget those who died on the field of battle to attain them. Forbid it, that we should walk irreverently over the graves of those who achieved our glorious independence, lest the stones of their tombs pronounce us degenerate children. Let us consecrate the memory of those that are incapable of celebrating this anniversary, and whose eyes were closed in the shades of death before the dawn of our national existence. We live in the time which many, who embarked their all in our revolution, desired to see, but have not seen it. The separation of these states from their mother country, excited the admiration, commanded the respect and raised the expectations of Europe. She was surprised to behold our little bands collecting to resist the oppression of a nation old and strong in war. But the battles of Lexington, of Bunker Hill; the sieges of Saratoga, of Yorktown, convinced the world that

we were not without our heroes, that our undisciplined militia could successfully encounter the veterans of Europe and that the ejaculations of hearts panting for liberty and hands not to be bound by the shackles of despotism, were invincible. A war of almost eight years opened an ample theatre for the display of those eminent qualities that characterised both nations. Our heroes brightened in the fire of adversity and amidst all the distresses we endured, from the feeble means we possessed and from the smallness of the numbers composing the army, they were determined not to give up the contest.

Liberty at length was pleased to unbind our chains and we breathed the pure air of freedom. American bravery had secured renown. Our citizens were respected abroad, our flag proudly waved in foreign capitols and every wind wafted the profusions of every clime to our shores. Our form of government was suited to the genius of the people. Industry was encouraged and the hardy husbandry received the reward of its toil. Every citizen reposed in security under his own vine and fig-tree, "while peace, innocence, and tranquility shed their delights around him, and the benignant smiles of approving heaven crowned the enchantment of the scene."

Let us then, contemplating these manifold resources of enjoyment be ever ready to celebrate the meritorious of our ancestors and instil into the minds of posterity those lessons of heroism, that disinterested love of country displayed in the character of Washington, those Philosophic precepts taught by Franklin, and may we imitate those virtues that adorned many eminent characters who have gone before us.

May we never sacrifice the boon of freedom to foreign subserviency or domestic tyranny, never exchange liberty for slavery, independence for submission, but preserve the rich legacy of our forefathers and transmit it inviolable to future generations. Let not the laurels of the hoary veteran be the marks of his disgrace. Are there any that have grown grey in their country's service, who assisted in laying the foundation of her independence, suffer them not to add this to the number of ungrateful republics.

Watch those who would by the influence of the publications, blast the fame of the hero and characterize those actions as disgraceful, that are the pride and boast of any nation.

Finally let us so conduct as citizens of an enlightened state, as freeborn sons, as patriots, that the Genius of Liberty, weeping over the strange

fatality of human institutions, shall not lament
the fate of her only existing republic, and with in-
dignant scorn, pronounce us the degenerate plants
of Eden's vine.