

AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
CITIZENS OF NEW-YORK,
WHO ASSEMBLED IN THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
TO CELEBRATE THE
TWENTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY
OF
American Independence.

By SAMUEL L. MITCHILL.

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New-York, 15th July, 1799.

CITIZEN;

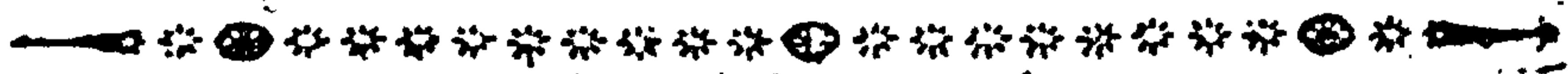
WE are deputed in behalf of the *General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen*; the *Tammany Society*; or *Columbian Order*; the *Democratic*, and *New-York Coopers' Society*, to present you their united thanks for your *Oration*, delivered before them on the 4th inst. the *Anniversary of American Independence*, and to request of you a copy of the same for publication.

With respect,

We are your friends
and fellow citizens,

<i>William King,</i>	Mechanic Society.
<i>John P. Pearfs,</i>	} Tam. Society, or Columb: Order.
<i>Corns. C. Van-Alen,</i>	
<i>John Mersereau,</i>	Democrat. Society.
<i>John Utt,</i>	Coopers' Society.

To Dr. SAMUEL L. MITCHILL.



ADDRESS.

Citizens! Republicans! Friends!

It is a laudable custom, which some part of the human race has adopted, of setting apart anniversary days for the commemoration of great or interesting events. It has been believed or found, that there is some exercise of the understanding, some association of ideas, favorable on the celebration of such times and seasons, to the happiness of those who engage in it. This disposition to increase pleasurable emotion, has accordingly been frequently indulged in private life. For this reason it seems to be, that some individuals, who conceive their birth to be an event worth rejoicing at, devote the anniversary of the day on which it happened, to feasting and mirth. And some of those who consider their *nuptial union* as a subject of lasting joy, are fond of bringing to recollection, once at least in a twelve-month, the transactions of their *wedding day*. —The annual observance of appointed days, has, for a similar reason, been enjoined by synods and churches. And thus it is that the *nativity*, the death and the *resurrection* of *Christ*, are, among some of the professors of his religion, brought occasionally to mind, and made the theme of particular contemplation. A larger number of human beings employ something more than common salutation and greeting on the first day of January, when, according to the generally received computation of time, they enter the threshold of the

new year. Nor have governments and legislatures been wanting in their attention to the setting apart and keeping of particular days,

Thus, in England, the celebration of the 5th of November in a particular manner was calculated to foster the aversion of the nation to popery, and to strengthen what was called the protestant interest. The observance, and with particular ceremonies too, of the day when the first Charles, named Stuart, though since dignified with the titles of saint and martyr, was put to death, is calculated to inspire a hatred of political revolutions, and to cherish a reverence for monarchy. And the devoting the birth day of their sovereign to the feast, the song and the dance, has a powerful effect in conciliating their tempers to his person and family, and opposing the machinations of any pretender to the throne.

For the purpose of *commemorating* and *celebrating* what is deemed in this land a great, an interesting event, is this body of citizens now assembled; to withdraw themselves a little from the ordinary concerns of life, and reflect upon that *declaration of their representatives in the continental Congress, whereby they asserted and finally obtained their Independence*. You are all agreed that the acquirement of this *Independence*, is a blessing. Then it becomes you to be thankful for it; and it is equally incumbent on you to preserve it, and to permit no one to take it away from you or even to encroach upon it.

INDEPENDENCE!—This is a high-sounding word; and to one who considers what a feeble, oftentimes what a miserable, and always what a dependent creature man is, it is curious, and it will be useful to in-

quire what sort of *Independence* this is which the people of these States declare that they possess, and which they boast of so loudly.

As to the general influence of light, heat, and the physical elements, which compose and actuate the universe and every part of it, these citizens are as dependent on them, as any other denomination of mortal men.

In like manner are they dependent upon that intellectual, designing and organizing power, which gave law to the atoms of which natural beings are composed, and assigned to each its sphere of action, its relations and affinities. This power they ought always to acknowledge, and not affect in the wantonness or the folly of their limited intellects, to doubt of its superintending providence, or to deny, with the modern epicureans, the existence of its influence. It is a sign of great weakness, and I suspect of depravity, for a people to declare themselves independent of the great governing principle in nature.

BUT you have declared that you possess *Political Independence*; and that your confederacy consists of *free, sovereign, and independent States*. But your bare declaration did not make the thing so. Still, as the government of that country on which you were dependent as provinces and colonies, at length agreed to your declaration, you were emancipated from your civil bondage, and were gradually acknowledged by the sovereigns of different countries on the globe, as fit to be classed among their number.

THE meaning, then, of the term *Independence*, is, that you are not, any longer, dependent on Great-Britain.

It does not refer to other countries, because you never were dependent on them. Thirteen subordinate governments, situated along the Atlantic coast of North America, and forming parts of the British Empire, were thus severed from the political power which claimed them, and put in a condition to undertake the arduous business of self-government.

As the slave, who, after years of wrangling and contention with his master, at length obtains a manumission, is watched by his neighbors to learn how he behaves himself in his new situation; or, as the minor, escaping from the tutelage of parents and guardians, is looked at by his acquaintances, that they may judge how his lately acquired freedom influences his moral and religious conduct; so was the attention of the civilized world fixed on this land, in which thirteen discontented servants of the British household, were discharged from their obligations and connections at once, and turned out together to provide for themselves.

THEY had at a very early day discovered that *absolute Independence* was neither desirable nor to be obtained. Unless therefore, they could depend upon each other, they found they never could become independent of Great-Britain. They of course came to an agreement, expressed in very vague and general terms, to stand by each other in the quarrel, and be friends forever after. Although the articles of this confederation were put together in a hurry, and in a time of danger too, they answered tolerably well the purpose for which they were intended, until an accommodation with the common enemy, loosened the bonds

of their compact with each other, and left every member at leisure to consult his own private views and interest. This will appear from a view of the state of society between the peace of Paris in 1783, and the adoption of the federal constitution of 1787.

At first, a greater part of the States conducted themselves in such a manner as to make it evident, they meant to be as much as possible independent of their own late friends and immediate neighbors. And the old articles of association had been so far violated, that they possessed really very little of obligatory power. A system of jealous and illiberal policy, was forming in different parts of the American territory, which threatened dissolution to the little government there was, and anarchy throughout society. The same temper which one State manifested toward another, was exhibited by the citizens respectively towards the governments under which they dwelt. There was a backwardness to pay debts, to perform contracts, and to do public spirited and generous acts. Individuality and selfishness had taken hold of so many members of society, that a refusal to furnish quotas for the public service, and a stamping upon paper the real value of gold and silver, and the passing of laws for the immediate and personal benefit of the representatives, to the almost total disregard of the interests of their constituents, had become transactions of frequent occurrence; — such was the progress of these dissocial notions of independence. Our country would first be independent of Great-Britain; then, each State would be independent of each other; next, every inhabitant would be as independent as possible of his government; and lastly, the members of society be equally independent

of each other. Sentiments of distrust and malevolence had gone so far as to disfigure society with somewhat of the ferocious air of barbarism. Had these ideas been carried further, they must have terminated in the lawless and capricious liberty prevalent among savages, or the fullen, worthless and perfect independence enjoyed by hermits in their caves.

BUT before practical independence had been carried to these lengths, the inconveniences endured in society, had taught our people, that *human happiness was of a social quality, and best promoted and secured by an attention to the relation arising from the mutual wants and dependences of men.*

SUCH were the first essays of this liberated people, in government. The history of legislative proceedings in every State in the Union, evinces numerous regulations of a local and partial kind, inadequate to the great purposes of general good, and frequently defective or erroneous, from a want of knowledge and experience in the citizens, what it best behoved them to do:

IT had been expected by many benevolent and speculative men, that these American governments were to exhibit a beautiful, instructive and successful example of republican principles operating upon a great scale. They seem to have believed a new reign of *virtue and justice* about to be established on earth. Their imaginations becoming enthusiastic on a favorite subject, had presented to them several millions of men, separated by an ocean from all connection with Europe, and surrounded on the land side by a country still in a state of nature, growing up peaceably and

by themselves, in the practice of every *private and public virtue*. Here, they fondly believed, proof demonstrative would be afforded, to the confusion of all doubting aristocrats and unbelieving monarchists, that representative and democratic governments were the best in the world. On this continent, in short, the people of the Eastern Hemisphere were to behold as from a vast amphitheatre, the inhabitants of the West, constructing their governments by plans as they constructed their houses, realizing the projects and schemes of the *Philosophers*, and reducing to practice the theories and visions of the *Sages*.

THERE is something so agreeable to the mind in all this, that perhaps every person who has not been taught otherwise by observation and experience, dwells with delight on the contemplation of human excellence and perfectibility. He pictures new *Edens*, blooming in the deserts, modern *Paradises* overspreading whole islands and continents, and their inhabitants occupied solely in the works of *innocence and peace*. Even HE who addressed you, in *his* days of youth and inexperience, looked with as much ardor as any of them all, for the fulfilment of some of these expectations. Judge then, with what reluctance, what repugnance, what anguish, *his* own acquaintance with mankind forced him to abandon one fine and glittering notion after another, until almost the whole, after having been detected to be delusions, were discarded from *his* stock of *practical knowledge*.

FOR, he became fully satisfied, that man was a very different being from that *pure, upright, disinterested and virtuous* creature, which the framers of hypotheses

upon his nature and government had supposed him to be; but, on the contrary, as his sense of real *wants* and *necessities* made him in "some degree" dependent on his neighbors, so a misinterpretation or abuse of the relations thence proceeding, led him to the commission of *wrongs* and *injuries*, by depending "too much" upon them.

MAN thus becomes a rapacious and overbearing animal, prone to take to himself the property of another; fond of subjecting to his own controul the will of another. This temper is moulded up with the clay of which he consists; it is nourished by the breath which he draws; it sticks to him until the sand of his hour-glass is run out. In saying this, I am not peevishly calling him a *Centaur*, or by any other monstrous appellation. The simple denomination of the animal I am describing, is MAN.

A COLLECTION of such creatures as these, discover that, with all the imperfections and vices of their nature, they can live better in *society* than in *solitude*. But knowing that each member of the association has a portion of the devil in the flesh, they find it necessary to lay down rules for preventing the injustice, and redressing the wrong, which every person is liable and likely to receive from those who may choose to molest him. This constitutes the business of *legislation*; and the carrying legislative regulations in effect, may be termed *government*. When a people have little or nothing to do in forming the governmental regulations under which they live, they are said to be governed by others; when, on the other hand, their laws are enacted and enforced by their own body or their representatives,

they are said to *govern themselves*. The former are *despotic*, the latter *free* governments.

GREAT disputes have arisen, which of the two forms is preferable. Both sides of the controversy have had their advocates and champions. The weight of reason and argument is undoubtedly in favor of the right of men to govern themselves; and yet the practice of a major part of the human species at all times, has been directly the contrary; surrendering the reins and putting them into the hand of another.

THERE is one case, indeed, in which a despotic government will by every one be conceded to be the best. And this is where the governing power is incomparably more wise and virtuous than the beings to whom rule is given. A sovereignty, therefore, in which *perfect goodness* was blended with *irresistible strength*, would quell the turbulence of human dispositions, repress unjustifiable attempts of each upon the other, and effect a heavenly establishment upon earth.

BUT man either refuses such a government, if offered him, and rebels against it; or declares that he knows of no such sovereign, to take the management and administration of civil and criminal affairs. He therefore spurns at all pretensions set up by beings, call them Kings, Princes, or what you please, not *less imperfect*, and to the full as vicious as himself, and treats their authority as an *usurpation* of the privileges of their fellow men, and as founded in *violence* and in *fraud*. What right has my more strong or crafty neighbor to lord it over me?

SINCE, then, it is the lot of man to live in society, and since the strong will oppress the weak, and the cunning take advantage of the simple, it has been found deducible from experience, that the great object for which legislative government is founded, *was to provide for the protection of all, against the physical force and beguiling stratagems of all.*

IN adjusting the mode of carrying this provision into effect, there has been a display of the whole corporeal and intellectual force of man. And in proportion as the governing power has acquired more or less ascendancy over the body of the people, have they been subjected to an *absolute* sway, where all they had to do, was to obey, or to a *mixed* authority, in which some influence of their own tempered the will of their masters.—In settling the question, who should *dictate* and who *submit*, the greater part of the wars which have distracted society, have been undertaken, in every period of history. In the greater part, the body of inhabitants have either *surrendered their privileges* in a considerable degree to the few, or the few have been successful in *wresting them away*. This change has, however, in many instances, been progressive and gradual; human beings frequently require a great while to be taught; they are fitter to be governed by others than to govern themselves.

THE forms of government you have adopted, on the setting up of *Independence*, was that of *Representative* or *Democratic Republics*. And these, it was said by political philanthropists, were to exhibit more talents, more virtue, more justice, more every thing that was good, than had ever been brought into operation

before. And this, I fondly hope, the experience of this country will realize.

YET, I apprehend there have been some mistakes generally entertained concerning republics and republicans. By the latter term, I mean not this or that party among them, but the collective body of their citizens.

THUCIDYDES, who wrote with the fidelity of an oracle of truth, has given such a description of popular rage and fury, in the republics of ancient Greece, as almost makes one weep to read it. The energy of the Greek language, directed by the mind of such an historian, was scarcely adequate to convey an idea of the unbridled licence and enormity of their conduct. And this man did not compile from ancient records, or from fancy; he noted the manners of his own times, and described his own countrymen, acute indeed and intelligent, but unruly, perfidious and ungovernable, as they were.

THIS character given by Thucydides has been very little regarded. It contains too much truth and candor to tickle the ears; and I came not here to tickle the ears of any man. But a sophism or false maxim of Montesquieu has been much dwelt upon, and quoted as a high authority on the subject. Because the writer had expressed in his book, that *Virtue was the governing principle of a democratic or popular government*, it has been taken for granted by that class of his readers, that really republicans were a more virtuous class of beings than other folks.—He had been nearer the mark, had he said the principle of a republic was suspicion or distrust, bottomed upon high notions of personal importance.

FROM this idea of self-importance proceed several traits of republican character, which are verified by all history and observation.

1st. *It is prone to pride.* The man who possesses great personal independence, and attaches a high value to the enjoyment of it, naturally enough feels proud of his privileges, and considers himself as a being of much consequence. Republicans, therefore, easily persuade themselves they, as *free citizens*, are of a better order than the subjects of monarchies. Such a sentiment is the natural consequence of the doctrine that every individual is a *sovereign*, or at least possesses a *portion of the sovereignty*.—This should be counteracted by inculcating habits of moderation and respect for others, in the education of youth.

2d. It is given exceedingly to perversion and misrepresentation. That freedom of speech and of the press so much contended for in republican governments, is employed more than half the time in uttering and disseminating falsehoods of various sorts. Fabrications constantly mislead and perplex the mind. Misstatements beguile and lead astray even those who are serious seekers after truth. The contriving and spreading false news, grows to be a considerable branch of business. Satire and invective, on account of their poignancy, are relished better than any other sort of composition. And this depraved habit of mind gives to many the highest gratification, when meditating the destruction of a *private* or a *public* character. What adds to the mass of misrepresentation is, that to defeat the object of one set of lies, there must be an equal quantity of counter-lies put in circulation. The conse-

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