

AN

ORATION,

PROMOUNCED AT NEWBURYPORT

JULY 4, 1808,

On the anniversary Celebration

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE;

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLICANS.

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BY EBENEZER MOSELEY, ESQ.
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NEWBURYPORT:

FROM THE PRESS OF E. W. ALLEN.

Sold at the Book-Store of THOMAS & WHIPPLE,
No. 2, State-Street.
1808.

AT A MEETING OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLICANS HELD AT THE HALL OF
THE NEWBURYPORT ACADEMY, JULY 4, 1808.

VOTED unanimously, that THOMAS MARC.: CLARK, Esq. Hon.
ENOCH TITCOMB and Hon. EDWARD ST. LOE LIVERMORE, Esq's
be a committee to present the thanks of the Federal Republicans, to
EBENEZER MOSELEY, Esq. for the *Choice and Patriotic Address*,
delivered by him this Day, in commemoration of American Independ-
ence, and to request a Copy for the press.

ATTEST,

W. M. WOART, Sec'y. of Com. of Arrangements.
Newburyport, July 4, 1808.

GENTLEMEN,

The Copy, which you request, is submitted to your disposal.

Yours with sentiments of respect,

E. MOSELEY.

O R A T I O N, &c.

MOST nations have had some event in their history, which posterity has fondly commemorated. The birth of a great benefactor, eminent deliverances from danger, and the establishment of free systems of government have been the principal subjects of national festivity.

The event which we are now convened to celebrate brings with it a degree of melancholy pleasure. At the moment of rejoicing for our present blessings, the mind instinctively recurs to those afflictive scenes which produced them. Perhaps the revolutionary soldier, grown old in poverty and bending with the weight of years, will this day recount the battles he has fought, the sufferings he has endured, and show his scars, the reward of his bravery. Perhaps to others it will call to recollection, a father, a brother or a friend, who has fallen in the field of glory. Yet it is often the wisdom

of Providence to discover his favours to us more strikingly by their contrast. The enjoyments of health would scarcely be valued, without the pains of sickness ; and the blessings of peace would be soon forgotten without the calamities of war.

The history of the American revolution is one of the most interesting on record. It exhibits a people, small in numbers, weak in resources, but of unyielding virtue, successfully contending with a nation, inexhaustible in wealth and invincible in arms. It was not the sudden impulse of passion, violent, tumultuous, and momentary ; but it was the result of cool and deliberate reason, united with patient and persevering courage. This great exploit, this glorious achievement will form a splendid era in the annals of our Country, and cover the names of those by whose valor it was accomplished with unfading honors. Yes, Warren, Mercer, Wooster and Montgomery ; though time shall crumble the monuments which cover you, and though the cypress and the willow, which shade your ashes, shall fade, yet your heroic virtues shall be faithfully recorded on our memories ; and as long as the changing seasons shall return us this anniversary, so long will we cherish that freedom for which you fell.

Nations, like individuals, seldom profit by

the lessons of experience. This remark may be justly applied to the United States. Though we have had the benefit of all history to warn and to instruct us, and though more than thirty years have now rolled away since our Independence, yet we have made no new discoveries in the art of government, nor found any new principle, which will perpetuate a republic. The question is triumphantly asked by our enemies, can a republic long exist? and the answer is still returned, as long as there is sufficient virtue among the people.

The enquiry of wise and learned legislators has been directed, rather, to the establishment of national freedom on a permanent foundation, than to the manner in which it can be merely attained. Easy, indeed, would it be to give a people liberty. It is only to give them the reins, without check and without controul, and leave them to their own guidance. But to form a free system of government, to give it firmness and energy, to guard its constitution by a brazen wall, which neither ambition can overleap nor corruption undermine, would require much thought and deep reflection. Whether our own government has these durable qualities is an enquiry which deeply concerns us all. Permit me then upon this occasion to enquire into the principle of our government, its abuses and the means of preserving it.

Most politicians have considered virtue as the first principle and main support of a republican government. Virtue as applied to government is defined the love of the laws and our country. The ancient Greeks and Romans supposed that virtue consisted merely in personal bravery, an ardent desire for military glory and a contempt of death in the service of the country. But with us it comprises every thing which can exalt and dignify the human character. It defines and marks out our duties to ourselves, to others and to our country. It operates with a silent, steady and universal influence like the air we breathe, turning the wide waste of despotism into perpetual bloom. It subdues the fierceness of pride and power, deadens the blow aimed at national freedom, and confines authority within the pale of social esteem. Such is the great pillar which must support our Constitution and our liberties.

Another principle of equal importance to a free government, but which, unfortunately, seems not to be the fashion of the day, is religion. Not that enthusiastic zeal which led Mahomet to bind the East in fetters; not that moping melancholy, which cloisters its votaries from usefulness and society; not that persecution, which sprinkles the altar and the God with blood; but that milder religion, which breathes "peace on earth and

good will to men." It was this religion, which led our forefathers from the persecutions experienced in the old world, and planted them in the new. It was this religion, which supported them under all their trials and distresses, among savages and in desolate places. It was this religion, which nerved their arm in the revolutionary conflict, and procured us that rich inheritance, which we now enjoy. Strange indeed that infidelity and vain philosophy should make perpetual war upon that religion and those maxims which alone can give and perpetuate national freedom and individual happiness.

It has been a very popular opinion with a certain class of people among us, dictated probably, more by vanity, than prudence, that frequent rotation in office is the life of a republick. Those who have no hopes and no wishes of succeeding to these offices, are of a different opinion. Every office of importance has certain forms and duties, which requires experience to execute them with correctness and dispatch. This experience can be acquired only by practice. Frequency of elections is a fruitful source of rivalry, discontent, animosity, and mutual recrimination. It calls into exercise the worst of passions in the worst of men. It encourages idleness and neglect of business in the poor, and leads to flattery, sycophancy and bribery

to the rich. The man who wishes for an office, either to gratify his ambition or to protect him from poverty, will court the sovereign people, as the parasite courts the minions of the throne. But it may be said that the natural consequence of the long continuance of men in office is the abuse of their trust. In answer to this it may be said, that the laws have provided against every abuse of trust from the Executive to his lowest dependant, and it is only to execute the laws, and the evil is removed.

These are some of the speculations, which result from the *principle* of our government.

The abuses, to which our government is exposed, are of two kinds. Those which are intrinsic and common to all republics, and those which arise from local causes. A republic, more than any other form of government, is founded in the opinions of the people. These opinions should be governed by influence and persuasion, not by persecution. In despotic governments the laws are few, simple, and easily administered. Fix the seat of power, teach the people obedience, and the work is done. But to form a free government, to temper together the opposite elements of liberty and restraint, to adapt the laws to the various mutations and modifications of property, to limit the extent of power in the ruler, and submission in the citizen, is a work laborious and difficult.

In a government where opinions are free and spontaneous as the light which surrounds us, it is impossible that we should all agree in the means to produce a given end. Hence, in all free governments differences of opinion have occasioned associations and parties, which have been governed by a spirit too violent and vindictive for the protection of freedom. The spirit of party, to a certain extent, may perhaps be beneficial, in as much as it may guard the liberties of the people, by imposing a salutary check upon power. But when this spirit, instead of diffusing a gentle warmth, calculated to nourish and invigorate the growth of freedom, is by conflicting passions blown into a flame, all that we hold dear and valuable in society, is consumed by the general conflagration.

Another evil, to which republics are exposed, arises from a blind attachment and confidence in the supreme magistrate. Power, wherever it can be found, is the idol of man ; and wherever placed, unless enclosed by an impenetrable wall, will be abused. To make a tyrant, it is not necessary to encircle his brow with a diadem, nor to place a sceptre in his hand, but let the gale of popularity blow upon him, and whether he be Emperor or President he can be equally a tyrant. Let it not be understood, that distrust and jealousy, is to be encouraged in the people to-

wards a chief magistrate. Let his authority be defined, and let the laws, thus made, be cheerfully obeyed. But the danger lies in another quarter. It is that this confidence will enter the other branches of the legislature. The moment this happens, and laws are made, merely, because recommended by the executive, all those checks and balances, which were designed to prevent the encroachments of power, are lost. Then commences a tyranny, which no art can elude, no force resist.

Perhaps one of the greatest errors, adopted by our government, has been the too easy and frequent admission of foreigners to the rights and privileges of native citizens. It was undoubtedly designed, by their easy admission, to encourage the immigration of wealthy and respectable persons, who when our funds were exhausted by the expences of the revolution, would circulate their property among us, and give us all their experience, in the agricultural and mechanical improvements in their own countries. But it is often difficult to stop at the precise point desired. The greater part of those, who have come among us, have neither added to our wealth, by their property, nor corrected our morals, by their example. Too often, indeed, have they been driven from their own countries, by their poverty, or their crimes, and have

fled to our own shores, as the "sanctuary for distressed humanity." If in their own governments, their minds have been bowed down by a rigorous tyranny, they have here received an elastic spring, and passed to the other extreme. But the evil has not been confined to their example. The moment they touch the American soil, their minds seem instinctively turned to the affairs of government. Stealing, perhaps, from pillories and docks, those emblems of tyranny, a transatlantic voyage cleanses them from all their impurities, and by some magic influence, they are transformed into genuine republicans. At Athens, a stranger, who intermeddled in the assemblies of the people, was punished with death; but with us, they not only frequently decide an important election, but are raised to high executive honours, in the cabinet councils of the nation. In New York, where hundreds daily arrive, it is not unfrequent that a cargo of these patriots is discharged one day, and found at the polls the next. I mean not to censure foreigners, indiscriminately. There are those among us who would be an honour to any nation.

Extension of territory, whether obtained by purchase or conquest, is always dangerous to the liberties of a country. The influence of laws, diffused over widely extended dominions, like rays of light, proceeding from

a centre, operate with less force, in proportion to the distance through which they pass. In the larger kingdoms of Europe and Asia it will be found, that the people most remote from the seat of power, have been the most impatient of controul, and have eagerly flocked to the standard of faction or revolt, whenever their interests or passions have guided them. If this be true of people, under all the terrors and apprehensions of exasperated despotism, how much more is it likely to happen to the United States, whose territories are more extensive than the continent of Europe, and the influence of whose laws to the most remote inhabitants, is lost in the immeasurable distance.

But the enquiry, which more immediately claims our attention, is the means of preserving the privileges transmitted to us by our ancestors. In order to preserve a free government it is necessary that its foundation should be laid in the education, habits, and manners of the people. The excellence of a government consists more in its adaptation to the character of the people governed, than in any intrinsic merit of its own. A mild and limited monarchy would be as unfit for the inhabitants of Turkey, as a republican government would for France. On the other hand, the United States, with their present habits, and manners, would never submit to any other government, than a republic.

One of the first means of preserving a republican government is a liberal system of education, extended to every class of the people. Our early ancestors and their descendants, fully realizing this great truth, with a spirit worthy their exalted virtues, opened those innumerable sources, from whence have flowed perennial streams of knowledge, which have enriched both church and state. Can there be found a people, in the great map of the world, among whom the means of knowledge have been extended to the poor, as in New-England. Where, but a few years since, forests echoed to the yell of the savage, where tygers roamed and raged, academies and colleges are now erected.

But the danger to which all republics are most exposed, is that they will relax the laws and weaken the energies of government. He who should assert, that republics have been destroyed by too much energy, has not yet learned the first letters of his political alphabet. View their history from the earliest period of time to the present, and it will be found, that, without a single exception, they have moved on, steady as time, and sure as fate to anarchy. The republics of Greece and Rome began with the exercise of the most rigid virtues, trained their youth to the most severe discipline, and inured them to

hardships and dangers. While these republics thus continued they were happy ; but, at length they began to relax, and were lost. Hence, it necessarily follows, that that administration, which is the most energetic, consistent with the principles of the government, is the best.

It is a political maxim, the truth of which is established by the melancholy history of subverted governments, that for a nation to preserve peace, she must be prepared for war. The passing events in Europe teach us this instructive lesson, that treaties and the laws of nations have no binding force, when opposed to interest. The bonds of national gratitude and obligation are immediately sundered by the least breath of national resentment. Where has weakness or submission protected a nation from the power of the strong ? Switzerland seemed designed by Heaven for the enjoyment of freedom. Too weak to be feared as a rival, and too poor to tempt avarice, she had continued, for a long course of years, in the enjoyment of freedom. Nature had formed her walls and her bulwarks. For centuries she had continued virtuous, industrious, and brave, her citizens, constitutionally, attached to her customs and laws. Yet these were unable to preserve her. France, with her invading armies, rushed upon her, and produced dis-

tresses, compared with which, the ordinary calamities of war are pleasures.

Although the United States may never engage in an offensive war, yet we ought always to be prepared for a defensive. This must be done in one or all of three ways ; by a navy, fortifications, or the militia of our Country.

Every commercial nation, hitherto, has provided for the protection of its commerce by a maritime defence ; but it was left for the wisdom of the United States to discover the cheaper expedient of leaving it to protect itself. From the wars in Europe, the native enterprize of our citizens, with many local advantages, we have increased in wealth, population, and national importance beyond any former example. There is not a sea so small where a sail can be unfurled, but our vessels have entered it ; not a mart so obscure, where traffic could be found, but it has been improved. From the equatorial heat, to the frozen regions of the poles, the ocean has been white with our canvass ; and commerce, with a steady and unceasing flow, in ten thousand channels, has emptied her wealth on our shores and in the treasury. With a few inconsiderable exceptions the whole expences of our government, directed to so many objects in a country so widely extended, has been derived from this source.

Yet felicity, how transient! Our commerce is now swept from the ocean, in a moment of successful industry, by our own voluntary act. The hum of business and the smile of content is changed to the murmur of disappointment and the gloom of sorrow. Is this to be the end of our boasted Independence? Could we in our infancy, without arms and without resources, oppose the mighty power of Britain, and shall we now meanly shrink at her frown, or become the submissive instruments of any other power? Have we not forests, have we not mechanics, have we not wealth, and freemen, to render ourselves powerful by sea or land? Yet like a corrupted body, our vessels are now the food of worms, and our Navy-Yards are silent as the grave.

The United States must expect to support themselves by their own strength and resources. If we lean upon any foreign power, whether England or France, it will prove a broken reed. Self interest, that great spring of action, governs nations as well as individuals; and to remain friends, we must show the power of being no inconsiderable enemies.

From the great extent of our sea coast and the expence of fortifications, it cannot be expected that this mode of defence will guard us in every part. There are, however, points

in which it may be necessary. Our cities, from a long course of industry have arisen to a high degree of wealth, and unless defended, are only lures to plunderers and robbers. In case of war, they are exposed to all the calamities, which avarice can invent, or resentment impose. As these cities have contributed most to the support of government, they have a right, nay, they should demand protection.

We, Fellow Citizens, are now living in a period of time, to which there has been no parallel. Probably posterity, as they turn over the pages of history, will pause with astonishment at that, which records the events of the present day. When France struggled to free herself from those oppressions, imposed upon her by a long and arbitrary monarchy, the United States, secured in their independence, hailed the twilight which announced the approaching day of rational freedom. But our time of rejoicing was short. The rage of reform was not to be controuled. A malignant and pestilential philosophy spread over the whole French nation; The sabbaths were by a national decree annihilated; her temples of religion plundered and razed to the ground; her priests, condemned to butchery, or escaping from slaughter, fled to the four corners of the earth, with no protection but the blast which howled a-

round them. Her armies, holding in one hand the sword and in the other a commission for universal extermination, traversed through Holland, Switzerland, Venice, the Italian States, through every country where liberty could be hunted. Amid this confused scene of butchery and conquest, appeared a genius "nurtured in the clouds and cradled in the storm," who commanded her armies and reduced misery to a system. "With an eye that never winks and a wing that never tires," he aims at universal dominion. Scarce has thought been more rapid than his victories. Nations have fallen before him in a day. What people has he promised to protect, which he has not destroyed? What treaties has he not violated? "Cursed be his anger for it is fierce, and his wrath for it is cruel." Brave sons of Sweden! hardy as the soil which rears you; you will defend your King and Country while you have a drop of blood in your veins, or an inch of ground for your sepulchres.

Since the American Revolution the United States have not seen a day of more gloom than the present. For many years past we have been cropping the rich harvest of neutrality, industry, and enterprize. Our neutrality is now endangered, our industry left without an object, and our enterprize has no field for action. At this time of gloom and

doubt, anxiety and distress, we must look to the militia of our country, to you, *soldiers, for protection. Born as you are in a land of freedom, and estimating the high value of liberty by real enjoyment, should any foreign enemy invade our Country, your breasts must be our shield, your arm our strength. The spirit of honourable emulation in this independent corps, united with the zeal, patriotism, and distinguished liberality of those officers of this Regiment, now in command, as well as those who have retired, if extended through the Country, would present an effectual barrier against an invading enemy. What a support must it be to the drooping spirits of our country, what a smile of joy will it light up on every countenance to behold such a soldiery and such a defence.

Intimately connected with this subject and this occasion, is the name of that illustrious hero who led our armies to victory, and presided over our national councils. Let us recall the deep anguish which he felt, when with an army, dispirited, deserting, half clothed, exposed to the severities of cold and hunger, he was defending our liberties, and securing our independence. Let us catch a portion of that rapturous joy, which he must have felt, when he had borne the toils of the rev-

* The commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Newburyport Regiment, with the "Washington Light Infantry" were present.

olution, and had hung up his arms in the hall of his ancestors, he was called to preside over a people, who with one united voice exclaimed, "our peace, our safety, our freedom, we owe first to God and next to you."

Let us treasure up in fond remembrance that kind benediction which he left us in his legacy. "May heaven continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence. May your union and brotherly affection be perpetual. May the free constitution, which is the work of your hands, be sacredly maintained, and its administration, in every department, be stamped with wisdom and virtue."

Let that little *band of youthful soldiers, which has united with us in this celebration, remember, that honour and virtue is that crown of real glory, for which they should contend. May they go on in their patriotic exertions; share their country's love, and in riper years prove her defence. And when we have all renewed our vows of union, patriotism, and independence, on the Altar of freedom, and invoked the spirit of Washington for our guidance; let us return. And should peace bless our borders, we will be the happiest of nations; or should we be doomed to experience the horrors of war, we will meet it with an impenetrable front—the breasts of a free people.

* A company of lads, from fifteen to eighteen years of age, appeared in complete uniform, with their arms.