



MR. NICHOLS'

ORATION,

JULY 4, 1808.

AN
ORATION

DELIVERED AT

WEST-CAMBRIDGE,

JULY 4, 1808,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

—
By WILLIAM NICHOLS, JUN.
OF WESTFORD.
—

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1808.

WEST-CAMBRIDGE, JULY 5, 1808.

SIR,

In behalf of the inhabitants of West-Cambridge, we, the subscribers, present you our sincere thanks for the elegant and appropriate Discourse, delivered before them on the 4th inst. and request a copy for the press. With sentiments of the highest esteem, we are your most humble servants,

JOHN ADAMS,
ARTEMAS KENNEDY.

MR. WILLIAM NICHOLS, JUN.



WEST-CAMBRIDGE, JULY 6, 1808.

GENTLEMEN SIRS,

Through the medium of your persons I beg leave to express my high sense of gratitude to the inhabitants of West-Cambridge, for the honor conferred on me ; and, requesting the exercise of all the candor and indulgence due to youth and inexperience, I herewith transmit you a copy of my Discourse for your further disposal. With sentiments of the highest consideration and esteem, I am, gentlemen, your most obedient and very humble servant,

WILLIAM NICHOLS, jun.

MESSRS. JOHN ADAMS AND
ARTEMAS KENNEDY. }

AN
ORATION.



WERE it possible for man to attain that perfection of his nature, of which he at times seems capable; were it possible for him entirely to subdue the effervescence of passion, and to divest his character of the veil of dissimulation and cunning; could he cease to devise evil against his neighbor, and to revel on the fruits of others' industry; the necessity of forms of government would be superseded, and the various courts of judicature and volumes of law would be a superfluous incumbrance on society. A political millennium would ensue; the jarring claims of individuals and nations would no longer be agitated, and the mutual relations of friend and brother would embrace the whole family of man. But the practical operation of this system, like the philosopher's stone, is a desideratum, which will never be discovered. However it may have engrossed the minds of visionary theorists, to effectuate its production the constitution of human nature must be radically changed, and the lure of fancied ease and pleasure must cease to charm.

To restrain the evil passions of men within their proper bounds, and to secure the rights of the well disposed part of the community against the depredations of the daring and profligate, established forms of government are found necessary; where known rules of justice point out to the injured a certain

mode of redress, and hang in terrorem over the aggressors a due punishment for their wrongs. The forms of government and the modes of executing justice under them have been almost infinitely various, from that, which vests the sole power of determining right and wrong in the capricious and arbitrary will of one individual, down to the simplest form of democracy, where every member of society is a legislator, executor, and judge. Of this variety, that form, which would seem most conducive to the happiness and prosperity of a people, appears to be one, wherein the laws emanate from that people, and are approved by a majority fairly and clearly expressed by them or their representatives, and whose officers, duly elected, feel their continual amenability to the source, whence they spring; where there are no stipends bestowed on wretched sycophants, and the earnings of honest industry are not amerced “to fatten the wolves of plunder on its spoils;” and where different grades and distinctions of men are not known, which, like the unskillful joining of discordant sounds in music, will produce nothing but confusion.

But to perfect a system of this nature, and to place it in a train of successful experiment, must require deep penetration, sound reasoning, and studious application; nor could it be comprehended and embraced but by an enlightened and civilized community. In the early ages of the world, when human reason was yet in its infancy, and the mind of man was enveloped in almost impenetrable darkness, it is not to be expected, that a form of government so complicate should be devised. A monarchy (the most simple form) was the only one, they were capable of adopting; they received it from necessity—not choice, for they had no conception of any other. At first, but little wiser than their kindred inhabi-

tants of the forest, they might wander through a solitary world without any fixed habitation and subject to no law ; but, to preserve themselves against the invasions of inferior animals, and similar associations of their own kind, experience would soon teach them to unite for common defence. Should their temporary leader be so fortunate as to obtain a victory, or otherwise acquire celebrity, as a grateful tribute of homage to his prowess, he would immediately be selected for their supreme director in peace and war. The title of king would soon be added to distinguish him from his subjects ; and his favorite son through an ill-directed sense of gratitude must be the proper person to inherit his honors. A few generations having succeeded, the origin of this power will be esteemed divine ; and the more effectually to guarantee its continuance, as the state increases in wealth and population, a numerous host of retainers and pensioners will be created to guard the immaculate purity of the throne, and to distribute the imperial mandates of slavery and death. By these and similar means have arisen most of the monarchies, oligarchies, and aristocracies of the world. Virtue mourns their crimes ; and history groans under the load of their enormities. The murmurs of disaffection have been silenced beneath the lash of cruel oppression ; and rivers of blood have flown to glut the ravenous jaws of insatiate ambition. The debased menials of insolent power scarce doubted, that their breath was the personal property of their masters ; and he was esteemed most happy, who could endure with patient forbearance the wrongs of his oppressors, and could wear with indifference the badge of his servitude. True, those royal spoilers would sometimes experience a reverse of fortune, and with their lives in part atone for the miseries inflicted on their fellows ; but it was only to give place

to some more daring and fortunate usurper, and would tend more firmly to rivet the chains of the people. Such revolutions have been effected with the most violent convulsions, and written in legible characters with the blood of the nation.

Before the clouds of prejudice and error were dispelled, and the human mind had attained sufficient strength and firmness to perceive the fallacy of the royal prerogative, and to attempt an alleviation of wretchedness, ages of patient submission to wrong must have rolled quietly away. The rod of persecution must have been inflicted beyond all possibility of human suffering; and some bold and intrepid adventurers, capable of sustaining the shock of royal indignation, and of concentrating the force of popular fury, must have advanced in front, and cut their way to fame.

The states of Greece, inhabited by men of independent and noble feelings, afford the first examples of those glorious deeds, inspired alone by an invincible spirit of liberty, and performed but by men, who are worthy to be called her votaries. But the efforts of a people, just emerging from the shades of barbarism, to establish a permanent and perfect system of government, must necessarily have proved ineffectual; and the frequent collisions of petty independent states situated in the same neighbourhood and rivals to each other, must have destroyed the greater portion of that happiness, which might otherwise have been derived from those institutions. In the polished city of Athens, the seat of the muses and the cradle of science, were too many fruitful sources of contention to conduce to general harmony; and the decisions of law and justice depended too frequently on popular caprice and favoritism. The government being a democracy of the simplest form, the people only required the smooth address

of some popular orator to propel the current of their feelings in any direction ; and decisions made in the ardor of passion because too often the subject of future regret. Justice would now assume the sternest aspect of rigour ; and again sink into the gentle arms of compassion. But with all these imperfections, the arts and sciences, the never failing attendants of Liberty, there found at home ; genius, that might in the adjacent kingdoms have lain buried in the rubbish of ignorance, there shone with conspicuous lustre ; and the characters of their heroes and martyrs in the cause of freedom were handed down to excite the emulation of posterity, while the names of their cotemporary kings and potentates have slept in silence with their ashes. Surrounded, however, by hostile nations and torn by intestine convulsions, the Grecian Commonwealths were doomed to submit. It was in vain, that a small band of Spartan heroes repelled myriads of Persian invaders at the straits of Thermopylæ, in vain they preserved their integrity through a long course of years, the arts and intrigues of a Philip were finally destined to prevail ; and the unhallowed foot of despotism dared to pollute the sacred threshold of Liberty.

Carthage affords another example of the blessings pertaining to a free government ; and adds another proof of the instability of human nature. A wide extended commerce was hers ; and the various products of the earth were received in her harbors. But the mercenary views, growing out of commercial habits, soon engendered the seeds of faction in her councils ; the wonted supplies to a victorious army were imprudently refused ; and the storm, lately threatening the total destruction of her rival, was brought with circumstances of aggravated horror upon her own head.

In Rome the regal authority having been tarnished with the commission of every crime, and having surpassed the utmost bounds of moderation, her citizens, suddenly awakening from their lethargy, boldly assumed their only method of redress, and indignantly hurled the tyrant from his throne. Under the influence of her republican institutions, for more than five hundred years the blood of her sons was never shed by the hand of a brother; her citizens vied with each other in the pursuit of virtue and honest renown; and her empire from the banks of the Tyber extended over the civilized world. The tree is known by its fruits; and that state must be esteemed great, that can boast of having produced a Brutus, a Cato, and a Cincinnatus. But in the vitals of the republic were sown the seeds of its destruction. The constant and embittered altercations of the Patricians and Plebeians for a long time had threatened to undermine the barriers of the state; and at length burst forth with an impetuous torrent, and buried the empire in its ruins. A sudden influx of luxury had accelerated this event, and served to extinguish the faint sparks of former greatness.

The spirit of Liberty, driven from the capitol, hovered lightly over the shores of the Adriatic, and, gently fluttering on the mountains of Switzerland, was about departing from the world. Man seemed fast verging to his primitive state of ignorance and barbarism; and an age of midnight ensued. Literature and taste, that had so long flourished in the genial rays of freedom, were chilled by the rude blast of despotism; and perished in the storm. Tyranny, having as yet only dared to throw chains upon the body, now assumed a more disgusting control over the mind; to think for one's self was a crime; and articles of religious faith, for whose correctness we are alone accountable to the Au-

thor of our being, were imposed by frail man on his fellows, and submission obtained by the convincing arguments of inquisitorial tortures. The pretended vicegerents of God claimed the homage, due to Omnipotence; and by the strong arm of power forced an abject obedience to those, who possessed all the vices, and but few of the virtues, allotted to humanity.

In England, the land of our forefathers, the spirit of persecution and intolerance was no longer supportable; and a people naturally tenacious of their privileges thought of making a serious effort to effect a reform. But the season was inauspicious; the rage of fanaticism quelled the genuine sentiments of freedom; and the struggle to overthrow the regal authority terminated in the usurpation of Cromwell, and the more insupportable reign of military despotism. Sick of a change from what was very bad to a condition still more deplorable, the ancient order of things was restored; the ideas of Liberty were scouted as a visionary scheme; and a Hampden and a Sydney were sacrificed on her altar in vain.

Before these political revolutions occurred in the country of our progenitors, a select band of worthies, determining no longer to endure the whips and scorns of oppression, and preferring death to slavery, boldly formed the resolution of seeking Peace and Liberty in unknown worlds. Brave and resolute, they quitted forever the land, that gave them birth; bid an eternal farewell to the circle of friends and acquaintances; crossed the boisterous waves of the Atlantic; and sought an asylum on the inhospitable shores of America. In the midst of inclement winter the sands of Plymouth first gave them a reception. Poverty stared them in the face; sickness and disease thinned their numbers; hos-

tile and inhuman nations encircled their dwellings ; and a dreary forest howled around them. Still they were happy—for they were *free*. Peace and friendship with their savage neighbours were assiduously cultivated ; integrity and justice were piously revered ; and industry and economy were inflexibly adhered to. The forest smiled beneath their labors ; fields, meadows, and orchards spread before them ; and cities and towns were planted in every quarter. Our nation was indeed founded. Two centuries have not elapsed, and we behold its rapid growth and increase. By habits of perseverance, obstacles almost insuperable may be overcome ; but of the same rise of a nation in so short an interval, without the extrinsic aid of conquest, history affords no previous example.

While we were yet in a premature state, and our poverty offered no bane to the sharks of avarice ; we were permitted quietly to pursue our occupations. But the moment our territory became considerably enlarged, and our state advanced in the acquisition of wealth and population, we attracted the early attention of the mother country. Unrepresented in her councils, we were required to assist in defraying the expenses of her government. Our commerce being already confined to her ports, we were commanded to submit to other taxes and inconveniencies to compensate her for the trouble of protecting us. And what protection did she offer ? Let the event answer ; such protection as tygers give to lambs, or the devouring falcon to the harmless dove. However, we had not quite prepared to relinquish our rights ; we had not so recently fled from the arm of oppression, as to think of submitting without a murmur ; and our people, assisted by the eloquence of a Hancock and an Adams, made a firm stand in defence of our Liberties. But a continued system of aggres-

sion on the part of Britain was not yet to be repelled by force. Every art was tried, calculated to soothe her pride, or flatter her vanity; and every thing was voluntarily consented to be yielded, but an absolute concession of our rights. Beyond these important barriers we could not conscientiously pass; and there were fixed the utmost bounds of moderation and forbearance.

In return for this pacific policy what was granted us? A troop of mercenary hirelings was landed on our shores, and patrolled the streets of our metropolis; and our citizens, pursuing their customary avocations, were massacred in cool blood. Fathers, you, who remember well those scenes, to you I appeal. Say what were your feelings at that eventful moment; tell (for it ought to be engraven on pillars of adamant) what were your sensations on the memorable morn of the 19th of April 1775; when the pale beams of the moon gleamed from the burnished armour of your enemies, silently stealing through *that street* to perpetrate the crime of murder anew at early dawn. The monument erected on the green turf, that covers the reliques of those, who fell at Lexington, can witness; and the precipitate haste, with which your enemy returned from their ravages, will evince the spirit of our countrymen. The die was then cast; war or slavery were our only alternatives; and the swift assemblage of troops from every quarter soon manifested our choice. To repel force by force was our denier resort; and the heights of Bunker exhibited the first efforts of our military prowess.

Although we had fully determined to resist, in consideration of our novel situation and in compliance with the strict rules of decorum, it was incumbent on us to declare the motives that governed us, and to publish a manifesto of our intentions. On the 4th of July, 1776, the Declaration of Independence forci-

bly displayed the reasons, that urged to separation, and pronounced to an astonished world, “that we were, and of right ought to be free.” Our enlightened statesmen, assembled in convention, gave it the validity of their names; the people universally hailed it with exclamations of joy; and the God of armies smiled on its production. Thirty two annual suns have verified the truth of its predictions; and may thrice as many more ever see us enjoying the same blessings, as we can boast on this glorious anniversary of that auspicious day. Ages hence shall behold posterity assembling around the festive board, and, while innocent mirth sparkles in their eyes, joyfully proclaiming, “we have received the inheritance of our Liberties as a rich legacy from our fathers, and we will transmit it untarnished to our children!

The price of obtaining our Freedom is well worth its preservation. Through years of toil and peril it was acquired; by the best blood of our country was it purchased. We had no *common* enemy to oppose. Every treacherous and insidious art was explored to reduce us to obedience; spies were dispersed through our ranks; desertion encouraged; and treason openly purchased with rewards. By the light of cities and towns in conflagration we read their barbarities; the pangs of the aged and infirm, inhumanely butchered in their dwellings, and the shrieks of injured innocence attest their crimes. No age, sex, nor condition could escape a brutal soldierly, intent on murder and pillage, and scattering far and wide the pestiferous breath of disease. At once to damn them, turn your eyes to the Jersey prison ship—that den of infernal horrors; behold the pale and emaciated forms of your countrymen, clustered in filthy confinement, and sinking beneath the weight of their miseries, hastened into eternity by the infusion of poison in their cups. As a reproach to our nation,

their naked bones have ever since lain in sight of the opulent city of New York, exposed to public view, and bleaching by the rays of an arid sun on the shores of Long-island. But her patriotic citizens have recently wiped off the stigma; they have granted them an honourable interment; and erected a monument to their fame. Would to God, it were adequate to the important event, it commemorates; its base, sinking to hell, should add another pang to the torments of the inhuman conquerors; and its summit, reaching the Heavens, should inform the wretched victims, they have gloriously triumphed.

Against an enemy of this description we had to contend. But the spirit and force of our country prevailed; for they were directed by the wisdom and valor of a Washington. Alas he is no more! his dust has mingled with a Warren's, a Montgomery's, and a Mercer's. Weep, my countrymen; but revere his character. In early youth instruct your children in the lessons he taught; and bid them emulate his virtues. Calm and unruffled, as the smooth surface of the lake, defended from the tempests rage by surrounding mountains, he braved the relentless fury of his enemies. Fearless and undaunted, no dangers appalled; no threatenings disarmed; nor perils made him shrink from his duty. Always collected, no trivial accident could disturb his repose; no sooner had he heard of the treason of Arnold, than with dignified composure he rectified the disorder of the camp. In fine, he was destined by Heaven to be the saviour of his country; and his efforts were crowned with victory. In November, '82, with trembling hand Great-Britain signed the acknowledgment of our Independence; and we took no inferior rank among the nations of the earth.

A long and arduous contest was thus successfully

closed. But a more important field was yet to be explored. We had overcome in battle ; but we had yet to reap the fruit of our victories. An Alexander or a Charles 12th could never make a Solon, nor a Lycurgus ; and skill in military tactics does not argue the consummate abilities, necessary for a wise and judicious legislator. There were no laws sufficiently binding on the whole community ; and each individual state possessed a jurisdiction, independent of the control of the nation. We were in fact an assemblage of incongruous materials, connected by the shadow of a confederation ; and, like the states of Greece, threatened to be the engines of our mutual destruction.

For the purpose of framing a great national compact, which should bury in its bosom all local prejudices, and inspire a general confidence, the disinterested fathers of America assembled. The experience of ages was before them ; and the radical defects in the forms of other free governments served as beacons to direct their investigations. After the most patient and mature deliberation, the united wisdom of their councils produced our present constitution. That it is free from faults is what we shall not have the arrogance to presume ; but that it is the most perfect system of government, the world has witnessed, I think we may with safety assert. Knowing no distinctions and orders of men, it contemplates all upon the level of equality ; for, happily for our country, grades of nobility have here never been recognized. No compensations are made but for services actually performed ; and the barriers against the various doors of corruption are as firmly fixed, as the imperfections of our nature would permit.—Founded on the principles of an equal and exact representation, every portion of the Union has its due weight in her councils ; and our present admirable

system may perhaps with peculiar propriety be termed a Representative Democracy.

To administer the duties of chief magistrate under the new constitution, the political saviour of his country was introduced to the chair. In him the hearts and affections of the nation were concentrated; and for eight years he conducted the helm of state without an imputation of blame, or a murmur of disaffection. Our political bark has since been committed to the wisdom, integrity, and prudence of an Adams, and a Jefferson; who were first to assert our rights; and will be last to surrender them. Happily situated by nature at a distance from the storms and convulsions of the old world, we have looked on, a peaceful spectator of the devastations, that have covered with blood and carnage the fertile plains of Europe. The commerce of every clime has enriched us with its bounties. No unnecessary taxes have imposed heavy burthens on the people; and wrested from the mouth of labor its support. The revolutionary debt has been rapidly diminished; and public credit established on a firm basis. Individuals have been left to pursue the dictates of their own inclinations; and to enjoy in quiet the produce of their honest industry. These are the blest fruits of our toils; these the blessings growing under the shadow of our Republican institutions.

To murmur at a government like this would suppose something more than human depravity. But of what perversion is not our nature capable! Spirit of Washington, weep for thy country's disgrace! Scarce had thy warning valediction escaped thy lips—scarce were thy ashes quietly entombed; when the arts and intrigues of a Burr were preparing to subvert the Republic; and to erect a military despotism on its ruins. God of Heaven, where slept thy thunders; when the peaceful waves of the Ohio

floated on its surface a band of miscreants, intending to raise the standard of rebellion on our borders.— But under the protection of thy divine Providence, their vile schemes were crushed in embryo by the vigilance and energy of government ; and we must lament in this instance the inefficacy of our laws, that permitted a traitor to escape punishment almost without a censure.

By this event we perceive the necessity of a vigilant attention to public characters. Human nature is always the same ; and men of talents, but of no principle, are too frequently dazzled by the trappings and splendor of authority. A man, devoid of patriotism, will ever be its most zealous advocate.— By servile adulation he will court popularity ; small inconveniences through the magic glass of deception will appear insupportable burthens ; at his word brambles should bear figs, and a desert should smile an eden ; but power being once obtained, all would prove false and hollow ; and it would be exercised with as much hauteur and arbitrary rigor, as it was acquired by servility and meanness. The people must always guard the freedom and purity of their elections ; and endeavor to distinguish the false patriot—the fawning sycophant, from the real friend of his country.

An interest of no ordinary moment devolves upon us. To preserve in purity our liberties is not for ourselves alone ; we are contending for our children—for posterity. Must we relinquish our freedom ? Let it be then at the last gasp. Voluntarily to consent to be enslaved, for fear that we *may be*, would be the height of rashness and folly. Let the fate of all other republics warn us to avoid the rocks and quick-sands, on which they were destroyed.

We are naturally a commercial people ; and luxury and dissipation, too nearly allied to habits of traf-

fic and pecuniary speculation, should be early suppressed. They imperceptibly creep into a state, and prey upon its vitals. Having once gained admittance, they break the spirit of Independence, and emasculate every manly feeling.

Science and the arts should be liberally cherished, and information widely diffused. But I would not be understood to mean the information so commonly disseminated. Newspaper alterations and inflammatory addresses will create violent partizans; but will never make profound politicians. Political knowledge is acquired by general and extensive information, aided by calm and dispassionate reasonings from first principles. We may truly say, we are a better informed people, than any other on the globe; but much is still to do. These considerations more peculiarly claim our attention at this important crisis.

Europe, having long strove to crush the rising liberties of a nation, attempting to shake off the manacles of regal power, at length effected their design; but it was at the price of their Independence; and by forging chains for their own necks. From the bloody convulsions of revolutionary struggles they raised a Bonaparte. Quick to conceive, and swift to execute, every thing must yield to his inordinate ambition. Conquest attends his victorious car, and a prostrate world are compelled to know him. He finds no rival, but in England; and there he meets a formidable foe. Supreme mistress of the seas, she exerts her power for her own aggrandizement; and supports a declining monarchy by the pillage of the globe.

Thus situated, it was not to be expected, we should long pass unnoticed. To preserve our peace, repeated violations of our rights were patiently borne; but it was only to invite more flagrant

aggressions and more daring insults. At length, having exhausted the arts of modest encroachment, by the help of blockading decrees and orders of council they determined at once to sweep us from the ocean.

In this dilemma, our government thought it prudent to retain our seamen and property at home. Those unaccustomed restrictions on commerce must necessarily prove vexatious; but, being the measures of authority, they must be obeyed. Perhaps they originated in an error of the head; but we cannot impute them to a defect of the heart. That our President, who has recently refused the almost unanimous wishes of his nation, should intentionally pluck the laurels from his brow, acquired through a life of devotion to his country, would suppose a disposition and inclination, that war with every principle of our nature. But those measures may still have been wrong; and the periodical election is fast approaching, when we shall have it in our power to place others at the helm, who may possibly hit upon more happy expedients. However, at present those measures should be conscientiously observed by each individual; to encroach upon authority, and to trample on its laws, will inevitably terminate in ruin. Publications, tending to expose our vulnerable points to foreign nations, should also be sedulously avoided; they may produce effects, of which the unwary writer is unconscious, and would shudder to believe.

At least, that appearances are ominous of evil, and that dangers thicken around us, are acknowledged by all. Friends, and Fellow Citizens, on this day let us then unite; let us bury the most faint idea of local prejudice and distinction; and consecrate ourselves to our country. Let the magic power of party epithets and distinctive appellations be entirely lost in the broad name of *American*. We have only to

shew the powers of Europe, that we have not so soon degenerated from the worth of our ancestors; let us only evince, that we do not fear their menaces; and our rights will be respected. Do they calculate upon our divisions? Let them once seriously attack us in open and undisguised warfare; and we will soon convince them, that we are still a great nation, one and indivisible.

Are you prepared to surrender your liberties? No; I read a solemn veto in your countenances. The hoary headed patriot would reprove your degeneracy; the sweet partners of your lives would spurn you from their arms; and unborn ages heap curses on your heads. Whether the vile sons of rapine now pillaging the unfortunate Portuguese, or those just enriched with the spoils of Copenhagen, should land on our shores, we will not remain quietly in our homes. No; we will meet them at the water's edge; and at the point of the bayonet will decide their pretensions. While one drop of American blood flows in our veins, we will *scorn to be slaves*. By the blood of heroes, slain in battle, we obtained our Freedom; and we will swear to defend it on the altar of our God.