

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT DRACUTT, MASS.

JULY 4th 1810.

BY WILLIAM NICHOLS, JUN.

HAVERHILL, Mass.
PRINTED BY WILLIAM B. ALLEN.
1810.

E
623.1
1810

[Handwritten signature]

DRACUTT, JULY 4, 1810.

SIR,

The Committee of Arrangements for the day, have instructed me to request a Copy of your Oration Delivered at Dracutt this day, for the Press.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

Your Obedient Servant,

J. B. VARNUM.

WESTFORD, JULY, 1810.

Agreeably to your request, I transmit a copy for the press with diffidence; please to peruse it with candor.

Your's &c.

WM. NICHOLS, jr.

An O R A T I O N.

INDEPENDENCE is dear to man. To be master of his own actions—to do whatever will promote his own happiness, constitutes individual Independence—it constitutes Liberty. A desire to possess these is implanted deep in the human breast—it is engrafted on ambition, the first principle of human action. To render these blessings beneficial to all, the passions of men must be restrained by salutary laws. The weak must be protected against the strong in an equal enjoyment of their rights; and justice must be meted alike to the indigent cottager and his wealthier neighbor. The absolute rights, given us by the God of Nature, must be firmly guaranteed, and never suffered to be infringed.

In a state of Society however, an absolute independence can never exist. A mutual dependence, created by mutual wants, pervades the whole community. The wealthiest Citizen is dependent on the manufacturers for his wearing apparel, and the articles of luxury, that support his pride; and these again depend on the Agriculturist for their food, and the raw materials they use. Thus a chain of mutual dependence is formed, one link of which being broken, the whole is dissolved. Hence arises a variety of relations to be recognized by the laws of a well regulated Society, and guaranteed to each member for the preservation of the whole. This alone is that kind of individual independence, which may be deemed rational; and is infinitely to be preferred to that savage independence, which exists only in a state of native barbarism.

The Independence and rights of nations depend on similar principles. There is this difference, however, that among nations there is no universal law, whose sanction is sufficiently coercive to compel the acquiescence of a vicious power to its decrees, when they militate with her interest. Whilst the world beheld a number of powerful and independent nations, whose rival views formed a check upon each other, minor states felt tolerably secure; but in the present state of Europe, when two powers have

broken down the barriers of ancient dominions, and have risen supreme above others, there is no such security. Appeals to the laws of nature and nations have now become useless ; for the modern maxim is, *power makes right*.

This being the case, let us inquire what chance of success remains. To the minor states of the eastern world we can see none. The mountains and defiles of Spain may for a moment baffle the arms of her invaders ; but the contest is unequal, and she must finally submit. All Europe is *in fact* prostrate, and exists only at the will of her conqueror. But to those, whom the Atlantic places remote from the mighty belligerents, there are still the most sanguine hopes. Our distance and the native bastion between us render the fortress of our Independence impregnable to the direct assaults of their arms. Let us see then in what other parts we are vulnerable—what other points of contact exist between us—and in what way we can diminish them.

Since the moral honesty and public faith of nations at present is *perfidy itself*, and connections with them are so dangerous, the most obvious policy for an independent state appears to be, to have as little commercial dependence on them as possible. States, possessing a sterile soil, or one yielding but few of the necessaries of life, are necessitated to exchange the surplus of those articles, the produce of their forests, or the proceeds of their fisheries, for other of the necessaries and conveniences of life. To them commerce is indispensable. They must be wretched without it. But with a nation like ours the case is different, whose extensive territory embraces all the variety of soil and climate in the world, and is capable of raising nearly all its productions ; whose large and navigable streams intersect this territory in every direction, and proffer to our cupidity an ample internal commerce, easily exchanging the sugars of Louisiana for the more hardy products of the north ; and whose population is nearly sufficient to manufacture the growth of our lands into all the forms necessary to our comfort. Thus happily situated, we need not despair. When foreign nations forbid our intercourse with them, we have only to withdraw from their grasp within our own resources.

Commerce, surely, on many accounts is desirable. The cheapness of our land and the high value of labor render many articles of our manufacture not capable of being afforded so cheap, as we can import them in a free trade. Our surplus produce has heretofore been converted into a floating capital, or bartered for articles of luxury; a portion of it will be lost without a place to vend it. And commerce has been the object, whence our revenue has been collected. For these reasons it would be very convenient; but is not quite indispensable; and, when put in competition with a particle of our Independence, we shall not hesitate which must suffer.

Switzerland was for a long time destitute of commerce. Her lands were barren—her inhabitants were poor—but they were free. They now enjoy commerce—but at the expense of their freedom—They are slaves. Holland affords an example of another kind. Unrivalled in commerce she was rich; but riches could not defend her. They are wrested from her; and she dares not resist. She patiently receives one blow—and cringing awaits the next. Our policy is to have commerce, while we can obtain it; but, when that is not in our power, to attend to something else, and wait for happier days.

Nations, like individuals have their days of prosperity and adversity. We have had ours. That was an *adverse* day, when our fathers, persecuted and driven from their homes, were forced to seek a peaceful abode in the howling wilderness. But the God of the righteous supported them under their trials, and failed on their undertakings. Their savage neighbors became friendly, or were subdued; the forest yielded to the hatchet; and industry afforded a competency. Commerce flourished; and they soon became a people of wealth and importance. Thus were they blessed; but our country soon saw another *inauspicious* day. Our parent Britain had long viewed her child with a jealous eye; she had secretly envied our growing greatness; and had now determined to crush the blossom ere yet it had bloomed. We humbly addressed her—we supplicated—we remonstrated—we rebelled—and we fought. Our elders guided the helm of state. On the 4th of July, 1776,

they declared us independent; and to support it pledged "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors." That day ushered in a nation's birth. It has ever since been devoted to festivity; and kept as a national jubilee; and we are now assembled to celebrate its 34th anniversary.

To recount the deeds, by which our Independence was acquired, would be superfluous. They live in the memory of our fathers; to us, their offspring, are they rehearsed in the traditionary tale; they are recorded on the Historian's page; by the Orator are portrayed; and are mingled in the columns of our annual calenders. Infants learn to lisp them; and our youth imbibe the spirit, which animated our fathers, from their common school-books. "It grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength." Suffice it to say, a Washington held the sword—we fought—and we conquered.

Our state and national constitutions were soon established; and placed in the "full tide of successful experiment." The olive branch was again bound round our temples; industry flourished anew; and happiness was all our own. Commerce received a new spring. The contentions of the European powers, leaving us in undisturbed peace, gave us the emoluments of their trade. We not only carried our own produce, and received theirs in return; but we became the carriers for mankind. All Europe was engaged in war, and dared not trust their goods in their own vessels. We therefore carried their produce from one nation to another, from the colonies to the mother country, and vice versa. Our flag was found in every port, and whitened every sea; and wealth poured in upon us from every quarter, 'till our cities almost vied with the capital of Croesus. But this was a state of unparalled prosperity—a state, upon which we had no right to calculate; and which will probably never return. It arose from a number of coincident events, equally above our power, as their sad reverse is beyond our control. It was a state too propitious to last; and we, too much elated with prosperity, were dashed down the precipice; and another day of *adversity* hovers over us.

The rival belligerents had long seen us reaping the fruits

of their toils; and they determined to unclench the prey from our talons. They seized our defenceless commerce; plundered and murdered our seamen; insulted our flag; confiscated and burned our vessels. They have rivalled each other in adding insult to insult, and injury to injury; and have almost exhausted themselves in striving, who should give us the last blow. Our government have with dignity repelled their insults; but their policy was perhaps too pacific. Perhaps they should have declared war, when the Chesapeake was attacked, when every honest heart would have applauded the measure, and have vibrated in unison. But our government, pursuing our well known Republican policy, resorted to the power of reason, before that of arms. And since that time insults from both aggressors have been heaped upon us in such measure, that we could hardly select our foe. We have been reduced to these three alternatives; to fight a world in arms; or by fighting one aggressor to throw ourselves into the arms, and thus to pocket the insults of the other; or by fighting neither to withdraw ourselves entirely from both. Our government pursued the latter course; they laid an embargo; and thus intended to preserve our property from ruin, and to convince foreign nations, we were truly Independent. But that measure received an unexpected opposition at home. Many a well meaning man felt its pressure, and could not perceive its necessity; and some of our too *patriotic* citizens cut their vessels through ice, and dragged loads of potash over the highlands of Canada, to show government their vigilance in eluding its laws. Finding this measure gave so much umbrage, it was repealed, and milder expedients tried; and perhaps the only measure, that Congress could take, was adopted last winter, to restore to disaffected citizens what little commerce, they can carry on, upon their own risk, and to wait for a better opportunity to avenge our injuries.

It has been the misfortune of our government, never to escape censure. Is it the effusion of honest minds; or the guilty whisper of disappointed ambition, that condemns them?

That ingratitude is the peculiar sin of Republics, is a favorite position of political dogmatists. That it is frequent-

ly found among them, is too true; but, that it lurks not as often in monarchies is equally false. An honest man as often falls a victim in the latter to the arts of frowning parasites, as in the former to the rage of party sectaries. A Seneca, as well as a Socrates, have unjustly died. That Republics, however, are not exempt from this sin, ours is an impressive instance. Even Washington, the great—the good, did not escape. There was a time, when but one vote in Congress determined the command in favor of him against one, who proved a traitor to his Country; and in the latter part of his Presidential term, the serpent, ingratitude, audibly hissed. Adams has shared a worse fate. Forsaken by friends, and assailed by foes, the impartial Patriot was hurled from the executive chair. But he still lives to develop the wily machinations of party; and may the Almighty Being long preserve a life, which deserves the eternal gratitude of his Country. Against Jefferson and Madison the shafts of malice have constantly bent their force. The former has proved himself a disinterested patriot by his generously declining the honors of his country; and the amiable character and unassuming manners of the latter seemed to defy envy itself. But on what will not the tooth of malice fasten?

We have not the least shadow of suspicion, that the present measures of Government have been produced by intentional error. They may be wrong; but, if so, they are wrong, where good men mistook the right. They were brought forth in times, equally novel and perilous; where the path was thorny and untrodden. We may have depended too much upon the justice of foreign nations, which has proved “a broken reed at best,” if not “a spear, on which” our Country “bleeds.” Our only hope of a liberated commerce rests on some revolution in Europe, which may change the system of our foreign relations. How near this may be, is uncertain; but it may not be far off.

The marriage of Napoleon to Maria Louisa forms a new epoch in politics. Many see in this event a consolidation of his empire, & an hereditary descent of his crown for ages yet to come. But I think otherwise. His charming spouse is said to excel in loveliness, and the winning graces. When once a great mind condescends to unnerve itself in the lap

of pleasure, its natural vigor cannot easily be resumed. In the arms of his Delilah we see him lost ; and the conqueror of Europe is now conquered. Alexander, who overcame the arms, was overcome by the pleasures of the Persians ; and the daughter of Austria will now avenge the blood-stained waves of the Danube. I think we shall not come far from the truth, when we declare, the Hero's sun of glory has set forever. His mind once unstrung, his self-created empire falls ; the main-spring giving way, the machine is in confusion ; and it will be rare indeed, if a female mind should be able to sway the scepter, which none but a Bonaparte's, could wield in safety. The world will then be released from the tyrant's iron grasp ; and devastated Europe will have great cause to rejoice.

But should this event happen, still there is another scourge to afflict us. And indeed the transitory power, hanging on the brittle life of one mortal, is not so much to be dreaded, as that, which is founded on system, and exists in the navy of Great Britain. But here too are sown the seeds of dissolution. An enormous debt, a corrupted ministry, and an oppressed people will soon produce a collision, that will break the ties of executive patronage. And, though the nation will not thereby be ruined, still the paralytic fit will last so long, that the world will have time to awake from their lethargy, and recover their rights.

These may be the dreams of fancy ; they may never be realised—but, would to God, they might, and that their period might soon arrive. We might then look back upon the present scenes of tumult with tranquillity ; we might view the storm at a distance, see its lightnings play, and hear its thunders roll, without emotion. The benefits, to be derived to humanity, would compensate for the thousands, that have been sacrificed. We should see the tortures of the inquisition abolished, the rights of man better understood, and a spirit of Liberty and catholicism prevailing.

South America opens scenes, where the eye delights to dwell. The convulsions of the east have taught her sons their power and their duty ; Portugal is transferred to the Brazils ; and new states and empires are rising to our view. Already has the extensive province of the Caraccas declared herself independent. Sister Republic, we hail the dawn.

of thy empire. On this day of *our* nativity we will greet *thy* birth ; and would embrace thee with fraternal affection. Emulate our deeds ; and may *our* success be *thine*. Read in the page of our History the feats of glory ; “ go, and do likewise.” Spirit of Guatimozin, Shade of Rolla, lean from Heaven, and guide your children in the paths of glory. Teach them to avenge the wrongs of your Country, the mangled bodies of the slain, the perfidies and barbarities of Cortez and Pizarro. Inspire them with a fearless spirit of Independence, majestic as their Amazon, and lofty as their Andes.

The misfortunes of the world have not been entirely without profit to ourselves. Nations, long dwelling in peace, and carrying on a lucrative commerce, are apt to contract habits of luxury. This was the case with ours. A spirit of luxury and extravagance had become prevalent that was unknown to our simple ancestors. Where luxury and dissipation prevail, the mind of man becomes effeminate, and Liberty degenerates into licentiousness. They are the grave of genuine freedom. History evinces this truth. Athens, Carthage and Rome are so many warning examples to posterity. Sparta was virtuous, while she held no intercourse with foreign nations, and rigidly obeyed the laws of Lycurgus. She disobeyed—and a vestige of her does not remain. We suffer privations ; but we shall be no less virtuous—no less free.

We must patiently wait till the present troubled waters subside ; and when any great change of system shall restore our commerce to the world, we will reap the golden harvest. Again shall our barks plough old Ocean ; again shall our flag astonish the remote corners of the globe. The ports of South America, unshackled by narrow prejudices, will extend our commercial relations ; and riches shall again be thrown profusely into our lap. Till then, we must be content to employ the capital, already amassed, beyond what is necessary to carry on the little trade that still exists, in establishing and encouraging manufactures ; in promoting internal commerce by cutting roads and canals ; & in thus rendering ourselves completely Independent. Effectually to secure our Independence we must cultivate a spirit of Union. The bickerings of party draw the

life-blood of the body politic ; they sap the vitals of Liberty. It is to be regretted, that honest and good men, who aim at one common end, should so differ about the means, as to become enemies to each other. There are good men in both parties—and undoubtedly some bad. Let us draw the veil of candour over unintentional errors ; let us pardon trivial mistakes ; and cheerfully embrace each other. We are at heart “ all Republicans—all Federalists.” We cannot so soon have forgotten the injunctions of Washington, as to wish to paralyse the energies of government, and to excite commotions in the Union. No ; let us bury our local prejudices and party strifes, and forget, that they ever existed. Should one or two States recede from the Union, or should an individual in a political body by his single vote be able to hold the Legislative arm, unless we could soon purge the evil, our Constitution would become a nullity.

Is any one so rash, as to wish to subvert our Liberties, and to array one section of our country against another ? Let him look at the fate of Burr, and there read his own. He will see a houseless wanderer, a vagabond, strolling from place to place “ seeking rest, and finding none,” still bent on mischief, but without power to accomplish it. If Burr with all his abilities, arts, and address, was unsuccessful, what hope remains to another ?

Religion should always be countenanced. Never converted into a state engine, it should ever be recognized by government, and revered by all. It is the fountain, whence morals flow ; and a people without morals will never be governed. Hence morals, and consequently Religion are necessary to good government. France tried the experiment without it ; and attempted to constitute a nation of Atheists ; but their plans lasted no longer than they were digesting. It is peculiarly the province of Ministers of Religion to support its dignity. By a practical adherence to its divine precepts they must enforce what they can never do by empty speculation.

Science sheds her genial influence on our land. No other nation can boast the advantages, that we possess in this respect. They may have more overgrown literati, who by their wise drawn theories have astonished the

world, and puzzled themselves; but in that useful learning, which is adapted to the genius of a whole community, they are far inferior to us. The means of education are placed within the reach of all; the poor, as well as rich, share its bounties. Let us continue to cherish our institutions of Learning, and aid the cause of Science and information generally; for a people well informed can never be enslaved.

By the genius of our Constitution the poorest individual can rise by merit to the first offices of State. Abilities, information, and integrity are the only requisites. A noble field is opened to excite a laudable emulation. All should aspire to serve the public; for all in some way have it in their power. We have but little to fear of encroachments upon our rights, when our rulers are chosen by ourselves, and taken from among us; when they are amenable to us for their trust; and are liable to be removed, if guilty of a breach of it. What have we to fear, when instances are so frequent of men of trust and ornaments to their country, springing up around us; when we can so easily point out a Statesman, who has risen to some of the first honors of his Country, and, covered with its laurels, and blessed with the gratitude of his constituents, returns, like Cincinnatus, to his home.

Fellow Citizens, there is one other thing necessary to maintain your Independence—an effective militia. This you in part possess; but it may be much improved. The system of modern tactics should be introduced, and a more martial spirit excited. To keep arms is an Englishman's birth-right—it is yours; and pray, do not dispose of it. Furnish yourselves with good ones; keep them in perfect order; and accustom yourselves to their exercise. You may then bid defiance to the world. Fathers, you, who fought at Saratoga and York-town, inspire your sons with your courage; relate to them the scenes, you witnessed; shoulder your musket, and shew them how you conquered. My fair Sisters, you too will perform your duty; and your maiden hands will dress them for fight. Should a ruthless foe invade us, your tears will urge them to battle, and, when they have conquered, you will again receive them with your smiles.