

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT GOSHEN,

JULY 4th, 1817,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE DECLARATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY
BY SELAH NORTH.
BY

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ORATION, &c.

It is with unfeigned diffidence that I presume to address this respectful assembly. Having no pretensions to talents, and but little leisure to acquire information, I have never sought to obtrude myself into public notice. But a willingness to gratify my countrymen, has induced me, in compliance with their solicitation, and regardless of the consequence to myself, to undertake the task now before me.

Through the mercy of Divine Providence we are permitted to witness another anniversary of the declaration of our National Independence.

Time, with its unceasing velocity, has measured forty-one revolving years since this important event took place.—And where shall we now look for those sages, those patriots and heroes by whom it was accomplished? How few of those who declared and achieved our Independence are now alive to participate its blessings! How many fell in the glorious combat and consecrated the altar of liberty with their blood! And how great a part of those who survived and saw their country blest, have since taken their flight from this terrestrial sphere! Some few, indeed, are yet alive, who nobly dared to assert their country's rights—who manfully stood forth in its defence—who witnessed the trying scenes of the revolutionary struggle—who saw their wishes realized—who viewed their country emancipated—who beheld our independence recogniz-

ed—who were instrumental in the establishment of our happy institutions, and in laying the foundation for the glory and happiness of this rising Republic. They have also witnessed the subsequent vicissitudes through which our country has passed. They have enjoyed the calm retreat of peace, and they have seen our rights assailed, and our country resort to war to defend what they had bravely won. They have seen the second struggle for our liberties, and they have seen it terminate in an honourable peace.

But their silver locks bespeak the corrosion of years and of multiplied cares. Their hearts, which once beat strong in their country's cause, and vibrated to its urgent wishes, now, perhaps, can heave but a faint palpitation. Their arms, that were once nerved with steel to wield the weapon of defence, have now become feeble and attenuated; their countenances, that once flushed with invincible ardor, now exhibit a corrugated visage. They have passed their grand climacteric—they are sinking under the weight and infirmities of years—Soon the curtain of life must drop, and we fervently hope their immortal spirits will be ushered into mansions of celestial bliss. The transcendant worth of these illustrious revolutionary heroes will be cherished; their exploits will be held in grateful remembrance so long as one spark of patriotism exists in the sons of Columbia—so long as one vestige of liberty can be traced in her soil. To them, under Providence, it is owing that we at this time are not in a state of vassalage, subjected to all the miseries which tyranny might inflict—when we might be obliged to toil and sweat while others reaped the fruit of our labours—when our aged sires might be doomed to see “want, worldly want, that hungry meagre fiend at their heels, and chasing them in view,” while their debilitated frames were inadequate to the task of labour, and while

their exhausted natures demand repose—when our young and middle aged men might be dragged away to fight the battles of some ambitious tyrant, while they left their near and dear connections drowned in tears and expecting never more to return to their embrace—when the tender females and helpless children might have to experience the chilling blast of bleak adversity, to be exposed to insults and injuries, and to pine away in helpless wretchedness.

Can we reflect on these things and not raise our souls in devout acknowledgment to the God of Heaven, and not have our hearts expanded with gratitude to the benefactors of our country? If we can we are unworthy of the blessings of freedom, we are undeserving the name of Americans. That we may rightly appreciate the heroic deeds of our ancestors, let us take a brief retrospect of events through that momentous crisis which tested their wisdom and their valor.

Prior to the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, in the year 1492, this country was in a wild, uncultivated state, and unknown to all the world except the native savages. The first settlement in New-England was at Plymouth, by emigrants from England, in the year 1620. Persecuted in their native country, they fled to this, to find an assylum where they could enjoy their rights of conscience. They crossed the boisterous ocean—They endured severe distresses on their voyage—They landed in this then howling wilderness, where the roar of wild beasts, and more hideous savage yell pervaded their ears—Dangers and distresses were on every side. At length, their indefatigable industry overcame their wants. Emigrations increased—the sturdy trees were levelled to the ground, and abundant harvests rewarded their labours.—Companies were formed, under charters from the English crown, and they increased in wealth and pop-

ulation with unexampled rapidity. Their flourishing situations drew forth the jealousy of the English government, who feared their rising greatness, lest they should one day abjure their allegiance. In this situation she devised and began to put into execution a system calculated to curtail our rights and privileges ; to cripple us in our infancy ; to increase our dependence upon her ; to render us subservient to their views and interests, and finally to rivet the chains of slavery upon us. But these tyrannical measures, instead of answering the end for which they were designed, had an opposite effect : They accelerated that event which we have now assembled to commemorate. The representatives of the colonies assembled and deliberated. They considered that to acquiesce in the injuries they were receiving, would be to become passive slaves, and to entail upon posterity the yoke of bondage. They therefore resolved to throw off their allegiance and fight for their liberty. Accordingly, on the 4th of July, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. And here let us view the vast disparity between the two countries, now at open war. Our population was yet but small, and thinly scattered over an extensive territory—our habits and dispositions were pacific—our means of opposition, and our munitions of war were next to nothing—While the nation with whom we had to contend was in the zenith of her greatness. With a vast navy at her command, she rode, the proud mistress of the ocean ; an army of veteran troops, well versed in the science of tactics, were at her disposal, and all the means of annoyance she could wish were in her power. Thus circumstanced, America went forth like the stripling of Israel to meet the proud Goliath. We appealed to Heaven for the justness of our cause. The cry of Liberty! to arms! resounded from one end of the country to the other. Our citizens caught the spirit of patri-

otism. The ardor of liberty animated their conduct and extinguished all minor considerations.—They become united in one common band of interest and affection—they rallied round the standard of freedom—they clasped their arms in defence of their country, and resolved to conquer or die. Many were the difficulties and disasters they had to encounter—cold, hunger and fatigue, and the cruel barbarities of the enemy were no uncommon allotment. Guided, however, by the wisdom of WASHINGTON, and under the protection of the GOD OF ARMIES, they surmounted every obstacle, and finally became victorious. After a seven year's conflict, in which hope and fear were alternate as disappointment or success prevailed, the haughty enemy was humbled and obliged to acknowledge our independence.

Peace, with its concomitant blessings, lighted a smile of joy in every countenance. Like the genial rays of the morning sun, it dispelled the gloom of darkness and diffused its exhilarating influence on all around.

But here was another and a momentous duty to be performed. A system of government was to be devised, which should guarantee to every individual his just rights, while it tended to promote the strength, security and happiness of the nation. Fortunately the framers of our constitution acted with cool deliberation, and with a wise reference to the probable effect of the measures they were about to adopt. Happily for us such a system was then adopted, which remains a standing monument of their wisdom, and the admiration of the world.—Under this constitution the United States advanced in their career, and sailed down “the full tide of successful experiment.” But soon that implacable spirit in the British government began to rear its hideous crest—soon it began to assail our rights—soon it began to wreak its vengeance on our un-

offending citizens. Our property was seized and confiscated—our seamen were impressed into her cruel service, and even the waters in our own jurisdiction were stained with our own country's blood. France also, was not wanting in injustice towards us—in committing depredations upon our commerce, and spoils on our property. Unwilling to resort to coercion, so long as one glimpse of hope remained of obtaining redress by negociation, we appealed to their justice, until forbearance ceased to be a virtue. On the 18th June, 1812, war was declared against Great Britain and their dependencies. The martial spirit of the country was roused to action. The brilliant victories of our navy, and the splendid achievements of our army, shed a lustre on the American name, retrieved our character from the charge of pusillanimity, gilded the page of American history, and gained an honorable peace.

When the clangour of arms had ceased—when the hostile foe had withdrawn from our shores—when our citizen soldiers had returned to their domestic circles— we all can recollect the thrilling sensations of joy which we felt. Wars are always calamitous, and should never be resorted to, but as the last alternative to vindicate the rights of man. The scenes of misery they have occasioned, makes the philanthropic mind recoil with horror. How happy for the world will it be, when “the swords shall be beaten into plough-shares, and the spears into pruning-hooks, and the nations learn war no more.”

But, strange as it may seem, notwithstanding the justness of our cause and the forbearance we had exercised, we had a faction among us, who in peace, were clamorous for war—but who, when war was declared, branded it with every opprobrious epithet—Who were professedly the exclusive friends of the country—and yet, were conniving

with its open enemies—who styled themselves the disciples of WASHINGTON, while their conduct was diametrically opposite to his injunctions—who were endeavouring by every means which their ingenuity could invent, to render the war unpopular and odious, to paralyze the arm of the general government—to render abortive the measures of defence, and who were secretly plotting a dissolution of the union. The famous Hartford Convention caps the climax of folly, and has cast a stain upon its authors which india-rubber cannot efface. This, worse than gun powder plot, will be a beacon to future ages. Had not a merciful providence interposed, and turned the counsel of Ahithopel into foolishness, and inclined the hearts of our enemy to peace, we have good reason to think, that our country would have experienced the horrors of civil war—that the dire scenes of Lavendee would have been witnessed—citizen armed against citizen, neighbour against neighbour, father against son, and brother against brother, to imbrue their hands in each other's blood. One general scene of carnage would have ensued—torrents of blood would have rolled down our streets, and mangled corpses have strewed the ground. We should then have fallen an easy prey to our enemies, and been subdued and enslaved. It is not intended to cast reflections upon those who sincerely doubted the expediency of the war, for many such there undoubtedly was, whose characters are entitled to respect. But, after war is legally declared by the constituted authority of the land, united exertions in a vigorous prosecution, is the surest way to mitigate its evils, and to bring it to a speedy and successful termination. In times of danger, all difference of opinion should be merged in love of country. Although the evils of party spirit have been happily averted, and its rage is now subsided, yet the awful consequences which might have resulted from

it to us, and which have been felt by others, furnish us a solemn memento to beware of its contaminating influence. Not all the evils of Pandora's box is more to be deprecated than this hateful dæmon. It renders alive, to each other, those who ought to be united by the strongest ties, it cherishes the most baneful passions, it expels liberality and patriotism, it mars the peace of society, it weakens the energy of a free government, and if unrestrained, will prove its ruin. The necessity of union cannot be too forcibly inculcated. It was union which achieved our Independence, and union must maintain it. It was union which elevated Greece to the pinnacle of renown, and it was division that sunk her to the lowest state of degradation. In an elective government like ours, the rulers are chosen by the people, and amenable to them for their official conduct; and when the people are dissatisfied with their rulers they can remove them by their suffrages. It is right that the majority should rule, and it is a duty incumbent on every individual to yield obedience to the laws of his country. As the opinions of men are so various, it is seldom that any measure will exactly coincide with the views of every person. Hence arises the necessity of mutual concessions. And I will ask if it is possible for men to advocate every measure emanating from their own party, and indiscriminately to oppose every measure proposed by the other party, and at the same time maintain a good conscience.—Although we ought to obey the laws of our country and State, yet we ought not to place a blind confidence in our rulers. We ought to be jealous of our rights. We ought as individuals to be satisfied that our rulers are aiming at the welfare of the public, or we ought to exercise our veto in the right of suffrage; and having discharged our own duty, little have we to fear but that we shall be governed by wise and salutary laws. The ma-

majority of a free and enlightened people, possessing the requisite information to enable them to judge correctly of men and measures, will seldom depart from the right path.—It is matter of joy and congratulation that our country is so highly favored with the means of education. Learning is the source of happiness—the safeguard of our rights, and the ornament of our country.

Let us now consider our present situation. Our country enjoys a profound peace. The clashing of belligerents have ceased to threaten our repose. Foreign nations are disposed to cultivate our friendship. We have a great extent of territory, with a salubrious air, and embracing a diversity of soil and climate—with a hardy yeomanry to cultivate the luxuriant soil, and reap its abundant harvests. We are rapidly increasing in population, in wealth, in the cultivation of the arts and sciences, and in whatever can ameliorate the condition of man. We have the best government in the world—one which has stood the test of experience and proved its efficiency in the severest trials—A government which abridges none of our natural and inalienable rights, but protects us in the enjoyment of them all.—Unanimity among our citizens remarkably prevails—Our elective franchise has recently been exercised in placing in the gubernatorial chair of the nation, the man of our choice, Our Chief Magistrate has commenced his administration under the most favorable auspices. He is now on a tour through the country, to view the fortifications and works of defence, in order to discharge with the greatest ability the duties of his function. The reception he has met with in the various cities through which he has passed, evinces the attachment of the people to their political father. A spirit of liberality and toleration has diffused itself through this State. The freemen have elected their new Chief Magistrate with un-

common unanimity. The mist of ignorance is dispelling—bigotry and superstition is vanishing away—the genial rays of truth shed their illuminating and invigorating influence, and our steady habits become more confirmed. Notwithstanding our country labours under some embarrassment which have arisen from an uncommon state of things, at the close of the war, yet these are but temporary, and will soon be removed. Commerce, agriculture and manufactures, the three great pillars of our strength, are prosperous, and reciprocating their advantages with each other. It was not until lately that the public attention was roused to the subject of manufactures. A spirit of investigation has now spread through the country—Societies are formed in various places, to acquire, concentrate, and diffuse all possible information relating to this important subject. Associated with one of these societies, we behold the President and Vice-President of the nation. It is now admitted by the most enlightened statesmen, that manufactures are essential to the prosperity, the freedom and independence of our country. The excessive foreign importations have drained the country of specie, and if long continued will render it bankrupt. Our manufactures have already attained a good degree of perfection, and, if fostered and encouraged, will prove sources of wealth and happiness to the nation.

Where is the spot on the globe so highly favoured as America? The advantages that result from our situation and the nature of our government, are many and great. We are blessed with all the combined resources that can render our nation independent and happy. Our domain is not the circumscribed extent of Britain's isle, nor the sterile desert of Zahara. Our means of subsistence and comfort are not confined to a few occupations, but here is ample scope for all the various branches of in-

dustry. Here are employments suited to the genius, the taste and the capacity of all descriptions of people. The mutual interchange of the productions of each other's valor strengthens the bonds of society and weaves together their destinies. The benign influence of equal laws tends to promote the cause of humanity, morality and religion. Here are no courts of inquisition to tyrannize over the consciences of men—but all denominations of Christians are entitled to the enjoyment of their inherent and sacred rights, and can “sit under their own vines and figtrees with none to make them afraid”—Here are no hereditary distinctions, no entailed possessions—Here are no corrupt courts surrounded with the glare of pageantry, and pampering in luxury, to smile with contempt at “the simple annals of the poor.” Pride and superciliousness, with all their hideous train, are incongruous with the pure principles of “liberty and equality.” In Europe, we behold the effects of legitimate governments. The wretched inhabitants succumb to the will of their masters and obsequiously bow to their mandates. Within a few years past, their wars, waged for ambition and conquest, have destroyed millions of human beings, and involved millions more in wretchedness. Their governments were founded in dark ages and under untoward circumstances. Monarchy has become so deeply rooted that little hope can be indulged that they will ever enjoy the blessings of freedom. France, indeed, made a desperate effort to acquire a republican form of government; but in the attempt she endured the most distressing calamities, and became the victim of a tyrant—him her enemies dethroned and banished to a desert isle, and then restored her former legitimate dynasty. England has a national debt which she can never reimburse—A vast portion of her subjects are in deplorable circumstances—their wants have lately drove them to desperation—The

Habeas Corpus Act has been suspended to restrain their violence. The nature of the European governments and their contiguity with each other render it probable that they will be often engaged in war. It is a happy circumstance for us that we are situated so remote from them.

In South-America a brighter scene unfolds to view. The dawn of freedom has commenced. The Spanish and Portuguese dominions have shaken off the shackles of despotism, and are now struggling for emancipation. What American but sympathizes in their sufferings, but wishes them success in their glorious cause?

Let us, my countrymen, learn duly to prize our happy situation and our civil and religious liberties; let us wisely improve them—let us act worthy the country that gave us birth—let us never tarnish the name of the American citizen—let us cling to the constitution of our country—let us cherish the principles on which it is founded—let us yield due obedience to the constituted authorities of our land—let us be united in maintaining our liberties—let us use all our endeavours to promote the welfare and happiness of our beloved country—in fine, let us discharge our duty to ourselves, to our country and to God, that the blessings of Freedom may be transmitted to our posterity, and be enjoyed by them when we are gone to a better world,

In this blest land may freedom reign,
And happy be this wide domain,
Till earth shall from its axis fall,
Or fire consume the spacious ball.