

ORATION

BELIVERED AT JERICO

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

July Fourth,

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FOUR.

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BY MARTIN POST, ESQUIRE.

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WINDSOR

BY A. M. S. S. S. S. S.

JULY 5th, 1804.

SIR,

BEING dignified by the assembly, who were yesterday furnished with your Oration, to present you with their thanks, and request a copy of the same for the press: we take this method to express our approbation of, and full concurrence in the sentiments therein exhibited, and believing the same may become more useful by being put into print, desire you to favor us with a copy for that purpose.

Accept, Sir, not only the unanimous thanks of the assembly, but the well wishes of your humble servants.

NATHANIEL WILLSON,
ELEAZER HUTCHINS,
JAMES A. POTTER, } Committee.

To MARTIN PEER, Esq.

JULY 7th, 1804.

GENTLEMEN,

I CONSIDER myself highly honored by the approbation of my performance on the 4th inst. which you are pleased to express in your note, requesting a copy of the same for the press. Were I to follow the dictates of my private feelings, I should choose to have it remain in a state of silence; but if you shall think that its publication will be in any degree beneficial or gratifying to any one, the copy is at your service.

I am, Gentlemen, with all sentiments of respect, your obedient servant.

MARTIN PEER.

To the Committee.

OF A T T O R N E Y

FELLOW CITIZENS,

I DO not deem it proper to intrude upon the important employments of this day, by introducing my present discourse with any unnecessary prefatory remarks, which would neither hide its errors nor varnish its defects. But, sensible of my imperfections, and my unworthiness to fill the conspicuous station of a public speaker, I ask the liberal exercise of your candor, that tho' I may be so unhappy as to differ from some in opinion, you will do me the justice to believe, that I am not actuated by a desire of fomenting political divisions, but from a sincere determination ever to direct my feeble efforts to the vindication and pursuit of those measures which I shall judge will best advance the interests of my country.

On this day devoted to the celebration of so great an event as our national birth, we are naturally led into contemplations on the science of civil government. That man is formed for civil society, and that civil government is necessary to the existence of that society, are principles which have long since been established beyond controversy. And it is equally certain, that whether government be of origin in the real world, or in the fancies of imagination, its true end and object is, the preservation and security of the rights of mankind. It is not a mere fiction, or a mere form, the only end of which is to support the government from the consent of the people.

And that kind of government which, with the fewest imperfections, combines the greatest number of those qualities which lead to social happiness, is the best. It is not my intention to attempt an investigation of the various causes which have led to the establishment of the different species of government in the world; this would far exceed the limits of my present undertaking; it would require the labor of an age instead of an hour, and must be left to the professed historian. Monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical forms of government have all been strenuously advocated, even at the expence of the lives and fortunes of millions of the human race. But all to no purpose. Social happiness has never found permanent security in either of them.

MONARCHY is founded on ignorance and supported by violence. The minds of men can never be brought cordially to adopt the principle, that the national happiness depends on the greatness of one man, unless they are enthralled in the most consummate ignorance. And it has ever been found necessary to employ the powerful engines of fraud and force in all their various methods of operation, to preserve such a government in existence; to prevent the people from acquiring a knowledge of their rights, and bursting the chains of their oppressors. It is impossible to find a man who, in his own person, possesses all the wisdom, knowledge, prudence, and firmness necessary to govern a nation; and in proportion as he fails in any of these qualities, the people must be injured. It has never yet occurred in favor of monarchy, that it is expedient to place the government in the hands of one man, and to give the people to the expence of government, themselves, that they are not to be considered as a national

and that, in the state that will exist of government, there is a necessity to have our laws, our liberties, and our property, as placed at one end of a scale, and our trust or dependence on the law, at the other. And this can be thought of as placing power in the hands of a monarch, or the *many mad-men, fools, parasites, errors and crimes*. We say therefore, conclude, that to qualify a being for a monarch, he must be omniscient, omnipresent, almighty, and infinitely beneficent. And to one who is not possessed of these qualities may we never submit. An aristocracy, or government of nobles, is worse, if possible than monarchy. It possesses all the bad qualities of the former, with many others peculiar to itself. It is the despotism of a few instead of the despotism of one. It wants that unity of force which is necessary to protect the state from external injuries, and is ever subject to internal factions; as the passions and interests of the rulers always lead them to clash with each other, except in the great point of abusing the people. In all respects, and in many others, it is therefore worse than monarchy. Both these kinds of government have in their natures a direct tendency to enervate and debilitate the human mind. They obstruct the exertions of genius, place every obstacle in the way of honest merit, stifle the fountains of information, and repress every patriotic and liberal effort. They are inclined to encourage a servile obedience, and such members only will be admitted and patronized by them, as will be ready to prefer the property of a few to that of many, and vassalage to freedom. It is a direct consequence that results from the prevalence of these governments, that the laws are made by a few, and not by the people, and that the laws are made to oppress the people, and not to protect them.

phases of the government, and even the best of them, at the time, are not so well adapted to the objects for which they are intended, as the best of the human faculties, in regard to the human mind. There being no power, or no authority, resting on those wild and extravagant rights of nature, which we find all human to be disposed to, whether individual or collective, we frequently behold the most flagrant acts of folly, injustice and violence, committed under this kind of government, while it gradually progresses in licentiousness, till anarchy is introduced, liberty destroyed, and the state ruined. Besides, a pure democratical mode of government is, in its nature, wholly impracticable except in a very small community. — Therefore, we see, that these three kinds of government, which include, under various modifications, most of the known governments in the world, are radically defective; and have proved, and ever must prove, inadequate to the production of the great end and object assigned to all civil government.

Under these kinds of government, differently modified and combined, have the nations of the Eastern continent been groping for ages, in search of happiness, through scenes of darkness, ignorance and terror, of which we can hardly form an adequate conception. Revolution has indeed succeeded, — but to what purpose? Not to obtain the enjoyment of the inalienable rights of nature, nor duty to exchange the chains of one nation for those of another. Altho' there have been some noble and virtuous spirits, who have opposed the tyrannical and oppressive measures, which have been pursued, yet the nations have not been able to shake off the yoke of their oppressors, — and are still in the same state of slavery and degradation. —

not, and extinguish that which is the source of our political corruption.

They saw that a more liberal and more virtuous system, they thought, in the regulation of our concerns would give us liberty. They had likewise, before them, the experience of past ages, and the example of the free nations of Europe, to guide them in the political liberation of their colonies. They resolved to be free, and determined to strike out a new path for the course of government. They accordingly established such institutions for the regulation of the uncultivated wilds, as accorded with the purest spirit of freedom. By ingrafting the representative system on the first principles of democracy, they laid the glorious foundations from which have arisen our present national and state constitutions, forming the most perfect system of government ever produced by man. Here let me explain myself.--- By the first principles of democracy I mean the following:-- That all men are born into the world with an equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: That the people are the only source of all legitimate power: That all lawful authority must be derived from them; and that their will, properly expressed, must constitute the supreme law of the land. By uniting the representative system with these principles, a kind of government is formed, which is incomparably better calculated to attain the great end of government than any other which has ever existed. The people are rescued from the yoke of monarchy, for no individual can be so arrogant to be the ruler of a free people, as to think that he is more their monarch than man. They are no longer the slaves of a few despots, but are united into one common body, which may be said to constitute a monarch, who is not a monarch in power or in fact, but only in name. The monarch is no longer a

third. The general end of all, which is the good of the great community, or one or a few, is the direct object of pursuit. The government is not a mere temporary expedient, but by far the most permanent of all. They are, therefore, when acting without bias or restraint, naturally led to adopt and pursue such measures of policy for the regulation of the state, as their greatest wisdom shall determine to be best. In the choice of those measures they must be the judges, and will act accordingly.

The evils arising from monarchy and aristocracy, are effectually opposed by democracy. And the principle of representation is introduced to regulate, refine and improve the latter—to amend its imperfections, and render it practicable in an extensive empire. By a just and adequate representation, the united wisdom of the nation is brought to one common centre; the representatives are enabled to act with all the necessary information; and, especially, where the Legislature is composed of several branches, with that cool and dispassionate deliberation which is requisite to the attainment of important objects, and which seldom fails to produce the desired end. The representatives are placed, in a good degree, beyond the influence of those sudden flights of caprice, and violent sallies of passion, which too frequently actuate assemblies of the people. And, on the other hand the people are secured against any attempts to enslave them, on the part of the representatives; so the latter must ever be sensible that *their persons and property must be regulated by the same laws which operate on the rest of the community, and that when a short period they must themselves be liable to the same laws as every citizen, and equally with them participate in the effects of their own good or ill conduct.* In

that in this kind of government, it will perfectly
 maintain. It is founded in the narrow sincere de-
 sires and wishes of the proficients and happiness of the
 nation, with wisdom to direct, and with the most
 proper methods for producing that important end,
 which are the fundamental principles of a good
 government. It is armed with power suffi-
 cient to preserve with force, what wisdom may
 dictate. Experience has abundantly shown that
 no human government is equally powerful, espe-
 cially in repelling the attacks of external foes.—
 Republics far less perfect than ours, have ever pro-
 ved terrible enemies, to the satellites of despotism.
 The powers of mankind are directed with the great-
 est energy, when acting in concert with their
 known interest and voluntary choice; and a gov-
 ernment will be so strong in proportion as the citi-
 zens are enlightened and free. The whole collec-
 tive power of the nation is brought to a focus by
 the government, and from thence emanates again
 through all the extended parts; and a same spir-
 it which renders freemen invincible to their ene-
 mies, secures their obedience to the laws. This is
 the only form of government which is calculated
 to secure the liberties of the people, and at the same
 time prevent their abuse. Merit is the direct road
 to honor, and the exertions of genius are rewarded
 with distinction and fame. Liberty furnishes the
 only soil congenial to improvement in useful knowl-
 edge, and the advancement of those liberal sciences
 which ennoble human nature.

THESE are a few of the outlines, and leading
 features of the government of the United States. A
 government founded in the affections of the people,
 which is calculated to secure a unanimous feeling
 that will triumphantly mark, and accelerate the

condition of the human race. I might proceed further to show the excellencies of our admirable constitution, in the composition and organization of its several parts; in the division of the legislature, the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers, the regulation of elections, and especially, in containing a provision for its own improvement, according as the wisdom and experience of the nation may require. But these subjects have been so frequently discussed, and are so generally understood, that I think they cannot fail of producing a conviction in every rational mind, that if we preserve this constitution inviolate, we have before us the fairest prospect of national prosperity and happiness.

THE preservation of our rights and liberties, therefore now becomes our serious and indispensable duty. And if we fail to perform it, we shall prove ourselves unworthy of the blessings of freedom, and justly merit the heaviest chains of slavery. Our greatest danger arises from amongst ourselves. But can it be possible that any should be found who are base enough to attempt to destroy that on which their own and their country's safety depends? Charity would induce us to believe there could be none so depraved. But alas! experience proves too certainly, that it is possible, that it is probable; nay, that the emissaries of corruption, and enemies of our constitution, are now prosecuting their infernal schemes, with the most unremitting perseverance. And it requires our diligent and unceasing exertions to unvail their machinations, and seasonably to discover the dangers to which we are exposed; that by a firm adherence to those virtuous principles on which the existence of a Republican government depends, we may be able to defeat their infamous

the idea of a hereditary monarch is a contradiction in terms. The monarch is a person who is chosen by the people, and his power is derived from them. If his power is hereditary, it is not the power of the people, but the power of a few. The monarch should be a servant of the people, and not a master. He should be chosen for life, and his power should be limited. The people should be free, independent, and equal. They should not be divided into three separate and distinct classes, such as king, nobility, and commons. These classes do not exist in nature, but are a mere invention of human folly.

The sacred oracles inform us that our Creator has formed all mankind of one blood; therefore, if this be true, the divine right to hereditary honors, asserted by some, falls at once to the ground. Besides, if rulers be hereditary, we must take them as they are sent to us, whether wise men or fools. The government will in fact be administered by the sycophants and favorites of the prince, and even the show of liberty left to the people, will become an instrument of tyranny, and their own hands will be improved to rivet the yoke on their necks. In short, if the freedom and purity of elections be once destroyed, we know not where we shall stop. Only this is certain, that we may try to recover liberty, favor of independence, love of happiness, and welcome any form of government, save hereditary monarchy.

For every man has a right to another's happiness, which should be a subject of our raising and care. Republics are the only form of government that can be maintained in a free and independent manner. The United States are a free and independent nation, and we should maintain our independence and liberty. We should not be divided into three separate and distinct classes, but should be free, independent, and equal. We should not be divided into three separate and distinct classes, but should be free, independent, and equal.

have been so liberally heaped upon it? If it has let it be consigned to deserved infamy. But if it has not, surely I may be permitted to advocate the righteous cause. A few remarks on its prominent features and leading measures, will enable us to determine the point. First, I ask, have any of the evils which were predicted to accompany Mr. Jefferson's election to the Presidency yet taken place? Has religion been destroyed by his influence? Or has it not remained free and been more widely extended than in former ages? Has the national honor and independence been prostrated? Has the imbecility of the government reduced the national character to such a point of degradation, that foreign nations dare insult us with the hope of impunity? Has the public faith been violated by striking off the national debt contrary to law? Has the constitution been broken down, our liberties annihilated, and the reign of anarchy commenced?—I appeal to facts to answer these enquiries. The nation was never held in higher estimation by foreign powers, than at the present time. Our political connexions with them are reduced within the proper limits, by which we experience an annual saving of many thousands of dollars; they are convinced that we understand our own interest and that any attempt to force or allure us from them would be futile; and as we will not prostrate ourselves to their views, they are disposed to respect us and court our friendship.—Our wealth and commerce are increasing in an astonishing degree. Some unhappy differences have occurred with the state of Tripoli, which have rendered it necessary to have recourse to arms. The government has evinced a determination to protect our commerce against the most distant aggressions; and by the gallant conduct of our brave officers and seamen in the Mediterranean, our rights have been

treaty, which their talents and ingenuity could suggest. And to you, fellow citizens, and to future generations, I leave it to judge of the consistency of their motives, and the propriety of their conduct.

AND may we not now, justly congratulate ourselves on our present enjoyment of the most distinguished national blessings, under this truly republican administration! Among those blessings we may particularly enumerate the following: Equal and just laws, made for the benefit of the nation, and faithfully executed: The different interests of the country duly protected: Taxes lighter than those of any other nation, and wisely applied to the public service: Liberty of the press: Freedom of discussion: A freedom from an unnecessary army, an unjust bankrupt system, and useless expenditures: Protection in the free enjoyment of our religious rights and privileges: The preservation of the elective franchise: Honors and distinctions, the reward of talents and virtue. And while the horrors of war are desolating the nations of Europe—while fire and sword destroy their tranquility by day, and terror and alarm disturb their repose by night, we, excepting Tripoli, have peace with all nations—entangling alliances with none. We may repose ourselves under our own vines and fig trees, with none to molest or make us afraid. Respected abroad, we may, if we will, be happy at home. Our happiness depends on ourselves, and if we neglect the means to secure it, we shall deserve to be miserable.

LET us cherish the pure spirit of patriotism forever in our breasts. Let us by every possible mean preserve alive the sacred fire of '76, that produced the declaration of independence, and secured us from a foreign domination. Let us ever consecrate the day on which we declared to the world that we would be free. Let me conjure you by the memo-

