



MR. PRESCOTT'S
ORATION.

AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED
THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1808,
IN THE
NORTH MEETING-HOUSE,
IN
PORTSMOUTH, N.H.

BY GEORGE WASHINGTON PRESCOTT.

"Hail the mild morning, where the dawn began,
"The full fruition of the hopes of man :
"Where sage experience seals the sacred cause ;
"And that rare union, liberty and laws,
"Speaks to the reasoning race ; to FREEDOM rise
"Like them BE EQUAL, and like them be WISE."

PEIRCE & GARDNER, PRINTERS.

THE republican citizens of Portsmouth present their thanks to GEORGE W. PRESCOTT, Esq. for the excellent and patriotic Oration delivered by him on the 4th instant, and request a copy thereof for the press.

WILLIAM RICE,
JOHN F. PARROTT,
THOMAS M. SHAW,
JOSHUA BRACKETT, } Committee of Arrangement.

Portsmouth, July 6, 1858.

GENTLEMEN—

I am induced to comply with your request through the same considerations which prevailed with me to accept the honor of the appointment--the ardent desire with which I am ever actuated to promote the best feelings of the Republican Citizens of Portsmouth--and to advance with my feeble aid, the cause of honest political principles.--You are aware of the very short time which was allowed me for preparation ; I am confident you will afford that indulgence on account of its literary defects, which it so obviously solicits.

*I am, Gentlemen, with due respect,
Your very obedient servant.*

G. W. PRESCOTT.

MESSERS. RICE, PARROTT, SHAW, and BRACKETT.

July 7, 1858.

ORATION.

WE are assembled, FELLOW-CITIZENS, to commemorate an event—which for two and thirty years has afforded a theme of joyous gratulation, to every AMERICAN throughout our wide extended Country.

This is the anniversary of a *day*, which witnessed the *creation* of an era, in the history of the world—which philanthropy proclaims, with all the fervor, and the pride of sublimated virtue, shall be hailed through *all succeeding time* as the genuine epoch of *real greatness*, the *birth day* of FREEDOM—of the *political regeneration* of the WORLD.

“It has ever been the enlightened policy of civilized nations, to celebrate the return of those days which have afforded any memorable lesson to mankind, or given birth to any remarkable event.—By calling our attention to those *eras*,—by reviewing the causes which originated them, the events of which they were productive; and the characters who bore an illustrious share in them; their memory is renewed and perpetuated, and the impressions made on our feelings, enlivened and strengthened. It is a recurrence, as it were, “*to first principles*,”—and affords us a standard, by which our *conduct* may be measured and appretiated; a criterion by which its *deviation*

may be detected, and its *rectitude* restored.—By reviewing the sentiments and conduct of the *fathers of the American Revolution*—our love of *virtue* is animated—our feelings of *gratitude* enlivened, and our *principles of patriotism* confirmed.

The consequences which have resulted to mankind from the declaration and achievement of our nation's independence, afford a subject of speculative meditation, rich and exuberant to the friends of humanity. The successes of our arms, did not eventuate in the *mere* subversion of a *feebler power*—the boasted slaughter of thousands of *fellow-men*—whom our own insatiable ambition, intolerance and oppression had made our enemies. Not, in a *mere* accession of *dessolated territory*, and of *wealth purloined*—but in the procurement to ourselves of *rational liberty*—in the establishment, on an imperishable basis, of the *inherent rights of man*.

Subjected to the arbitrary wills of a few *despots*—subservient to the controul of their capricious passions—the mass of our fellow beings had been made—like the ox of the field—to toil the round of time—to labour—vegetate, and die. The faculties of the human mind had become almost totally obliterated; and proud *man*, who by the hand of Omnipotence was ranked at the head of the vast gradation of *created beings*—in a perfect state of universal equality with his fellows—had become almost degraded, and debased to an inferior order. Whence had this proceeded?—it is to us an invaluable truth, “That every individual upon whom the God of nature has

impressed the stamp of humanity, is entitled to all the rights and prerogatives of man. All being naturally in a state of perfect freedom and independence, ought to regard each other as brethren—as fellow-sovereigns of the world. Yet such has been the prevalence of the vile passions—the lust for power—that man, time immemorial, has invaded the rights of man, assumed prerogatives in defiance of the laws of nature, and arrogated a *sovereignty* over his fellows—a *sovereignty*, my countrymen, which belongs *only* to the *supreme Governor* of the *Universe*. Hence originated imaginary gradations among men—hence the distinctions, *Lords*, and *vassals*—*masters* and *slaves*—hence the doctrine of servile submission of the many to the few!

If we revert beyond the splendid era of the Phœnicians, the reputed inventors of the *inky-record*, to the earliest authenticated oral traditions—we shall note the jarring influence of the turbulent passions on the happiness and peace of the civil, and moral systems—like the marring effects of the boisterous elements on the harmony and beauty of the natural,—’Tis the alliance of these tempestuous elements with power, and fortune, that have ever produced the greatest evils throughout the world. They have caused the destruction, and total annihilation of nations and empires—have trodden down and profaned the most sacred orders, both civil and religious—have deluged mankind in blood!—Inordinate and uncontrolled *ambition*, has continually disturbed the peace of mankind with her *Alexanders*’, her *Cæsars*’ and her *Charles*’; societies have been shocked with the horrid perpetra-

tions of *pygmalion avarice*; and unprincipled *lust for domination* has too frequently stained the pages of history with the crimes of a *Cataline*, a *Cromwell*, and a *Robertspeare*.

'Tis from the corruption of the morals and virtue of a people, that these passions shoot forth in production of such characters. The basis of ambitious tyranny, is the ignorance of the people--the extinction of *virtue* and knowledge in the human breast, and the inculcation of *slavish fear*, constitute the support, and policy of the *tyrant*.—An acquaintance with the sciences, discloses to man the *dignity* of his nature; a total *ignorance* thereof, makes him a fit instrument for every unworthy purpose. These are the *maxims* of every *despot*; and invariably where these passions have had their greatest sway--we shall there find the energies of the people sunken in *ignorance*, *effeminacy*, and *luxury*.—In support of these positions the pages of history afford abundant proof. A *Tarquin* could not succeed, whilst the *yeomanry* of Rome could boast their *Brutus*. *Athens* could not be subdued, till luxury and vice had *Ostracised* her *Aristides*, her *Cymons*, her *Thucidides*. But the disgrace of human nature, the reign of ignorance, and the baser passions is more fully exhibited, in those shocking days of *feudal distortions*, when popish artifice and intrigue had made mankind mere “beasts of burthen,”—literature and the arts had ceased to flourish; yea almost to exist. The spirit of man was depressed to that degrading state that the veriest *knave* could wear the title of *Heaven's vicegerant*; and whilst receiving *holy adoration* from thousands around him, would be perpetrating, under the shield

of the sacred appellation, the most shocking and ignominious crimes.

But, happily about the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the daring hand of *Luther* had rent the veil of the temple of superstition ; which for ages had concealed the deformity and wickedness of the church of Rome ; the “ sun of science,” burst through the misty clouds which had long, imperviously benighted the native energies of the human soul ; and man was enabled to perceive the degradation he was suffering from the rank of man ; to discern those civil rights which by nature appertained to him ; and to distinguish the true religion of his God, from the farcical, ridiculous and blasphemous systems of papal invention. The famous *Smalkaldic* confederacy was formed, which successfully opposed the mighty engines of *papal* power and oppression, and which bounded the extensive, subjugating and ambitious views of the German Emperor.

It was at this period, that the discovery of this Western world became a matter of general interest : It was then a mere wilderness ; the savage and the wild beasts of the forest, were then, almost, the only lords of its soil ; but as it were from an auspicious “ pre-arrangement and predisposition of things, it seemed peculiarly marked out by heaven, as the destined abode of civil and religious freedom. And lest persecution should destroy those illustrious reformers—was seen offering itself, as an asylum to the oppressed of all nations ; as a sanctuary for liberty, when driven from the Eastern climes, and haunted

from every other quarter of the globe. This *spirit of liberty*, brought hither by our forefathers, has ever found a soil congenial to its nature ; has ever flourished in its native luxuriance ; has ever *grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength* ; and though Great-Britain, often strove to subdue, and crush this spirit ; still did Liberty, *Antæus-like*, grow stronger by the struggle ; and that proud and haughty nation was at last compelled, with hesitating voice, and reluctant hand, to acknowledge us free, sovereign, and independent.

It is not my intention, had I time, and ability, to interest you in the course ; to narrate, particularly, the great, and interesting events which produced, and which flowed from the American revolution : They have been too often minutely descanted on ; too repeatedly discussed, to require at this moment, a particular recital ; they are ably delineated in the history of our country ; and there are too many present who bore a conspicuous part, in the impressive drama of those days ; to render necessary such an address to your sensibilities.

The successful exertions of the illustrious little band of heroes, who braved all dangers to preserve inviolate their civil and religious rights—to secure them from the iron grasp of the despots of the old world—the success of our fathers in the revolutionary contest—their display of heroism, of patriotism, and of virtue,—affords a lesson to ourselves too forceful and impressive ever to be obliterated by the hand of time.—As colonists to the mother country, their love

of order and of peace, rendered them obedient and submissive to her authority, when rightfully exerted,—but when those sacred privileges became menaced, when she extended towards them the deadly hand of despotism and oppression, *they arose in their might,*—and though without the aid of military succour, devoid of arms, and destitute of all the ordinary means to carry on *successful warfare*, they dared to oppose a disciplined host of powerful foes ; they fought, and *conquered*—Nor should the event surprise us—they were UNITED—They reflected

—“ That LIFE, like ev’ry other blessing,
 “ Derives its value from its use alone ;
 But— “ Not for itself—but for a nobler end
 “ Th’ Eternal gave it—and that end is virtue.
 “ When inconsistent with a greater good,
 “ Reason commands to cast the less away ;
 “ Thus life with loss of *wealth* is well preserv’d,
 “ And virtue cheaply sav’d with LOSS OF LIFE.

Stimulated by these noble, and ennobling sentiments, why should we wonder at the issue—for

—“ They have great odds,
 “ Against th’ astonish’d sons of violence,
 “ Who fight with AWFUL JUSTICE on their side:

The fruits which we have since *realized*—the benefits which we at the present period enjoy—is the result, my fellow-citizens, of the encountered perils of our fathers in the revolutionary struggle. It was the struggle of *virtue*, opposed to *usurpation*—it was a contest between right and prerogative—and right prevailed.—Hence did America present to the world, the *new* and august spectacle, of a people not compelled by foreign invasion, nor convulsed by civil war, convening “ voluntarily, deliberating fully, and deciding

calmly on a form of constitution which was to bind *themselves* and their *posteriority*.—It would be superfluous in me to repeat the encomiums so justly and almost universally accorded to the administration of government formed under it. Its salutary and invigorating effects speak its warmest eulogium, and give an experimental answer to the sophistry and declamation of its enemies and detractors.”

But, my Fellow-Citizens, are we secure in these enjoyments? are we certain that we shall be enabled to preserve them to ourselves; and to hand them down inviolate to generations yet to follow us? This is our confident trust; our boasted hope; but yet, to this end, “with what impartial care ought we to watch o’er *prejudice* and *passion*—nor trust too much the jaundiced eye of *party*—We should henceforth renounce its hot determinations, that confines *all merit* and *all virtue* to itself.”

At this momentous crisis, when all the *strength* and *energies* of our country should be concentrated and exerted to protect our rights, our liberties and national sovereignty, against infringement from the powerful and overbearing belligerent nations of Europe—this *fell demon party*, more destructive to our national *vigour* than the *death-producing Upas* to *animal life*—is seen rearing its baleful front, and menacing with haggard visage the destruction of the sacred charter of our liberties.—To serve its selfish purposes, it shifts its *title*, as oft as *Proteus* did his *shape*.—But whether *marshalled* by a *Hamilton*, or *guided* by a *Pickering*—whether attempting to cover its views by the virtues of a *WASHINGTON*, or the influence of

AN ADAMS—*federalism* cannot conceal its *native deformity*—it will be *federalism* still.

However versed may be the leaders of this party, in the history of ancient Republics—however thoroughly they may be read, in *their progress, decline and fall*—however *sanguine* may be their expectations and calculations that such will be the fate of ours—yet, I trust the people of America will ever retain discernment enough to perceive, and virtue enough *successfully* to *oppose* their wily and *insidious views*. Whence is this abuse of the able, virtuous characters who administer our National Government—what is it? but the rankerous ebullitions, which have their origin in the blasted hopes of disappointed partizans—And what is to be expected from a change, from a triumph of federalism? What but an elevation to power of men *who will*, as past occurrences shew, disregard your rights, and trample on your dear bought independence.

The *leaders* of this faction boast of *superior patriotism*—We look in vain for evidence to support this pretension. Have they ever sacrificed ought of personal interest to advance the public good? Search their whole history, and we shall search in vain for one solitary act of disinterested patriotism. *Selfish ambition, and over-weening lust for power*, constitutes the stimulating motives which actuate their conduct.

Proceeding upon the principles which governed the aspiring demagogues of ancient Greece and Rome, they have ever assailed the *virtue* of our Republic—

have ever endeavored to blast the merited fame of every active, honest patriot. Like them they would make you blind to your true interests—they would make you ingrates. They perceive too well the barrier to their wishes—they would have you forget the faithful, long tried services of those distinguished characters, whom you have so deservedly elevated to the guardianship of your liberties—They know too well that could they effect this—could they cause you to ostracise your present illustrious political father, your watchful, patriotic JEFFERSON, that very Aristides of your country—could they induce you to proscribe your MADISONS, your CLINTONS, and your LANGBONS—those centinels of liberty, they would be enabled to prostrate your sovereignty, and would triumph o'er your folly.

They have stiled themselves the TRUE political disciples of that pre-eminently illustrious hero and statesman, the founder of our empire, the immortal WASHINGTON!—but it is as true in politics as in morals, that “it is disgraceful to erect a sanctuary for our vices, upon the virtues of others.”

A simple recurrence to Washington's address to his fellow countrymen, at the close of his Presidency, could any thing have the effect, would make them blush at the artful and preposterous assumption.—Imagination cannot conceive of a more severe stricture on the conduct of federalists than is comprised in the pages of this invaluable writing.—To divide, distract, and disunite our country has been the immediate tendency of all their efforts. They have en-

deavoured to “disturb our *Union* by furnishing ground, for *characterising parties*, by *geographical discriminations*.”

WASHINGTON inculcates *union*, as the sole and life of our Republic. He warns us to be guarded against the influence and spirit of party—And yet I am almost led to believe that *they* consider it as the *forlorn hope*, as the only mean of attaining the accomplishment of their views—they appear to have their hopes encouraged, in contemplating the sentiment *thus expressed* by that departed sage. “Party spirit is to governments of a popular form, their worst enemy. The disorders and miseries, which thence result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual ; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.” If this is not the case, to what shall we *ascribe* the *violence of their conduct*—Their perpetual hostility to the present administration. Have they ever approved a *single measure* which has flowed from this administration, during the *seven years of its operation*—Have they not, on the contrary, *without discrimination*, virulently opposed them?—Nay, even the acts of British tyranny, which have recently *assailed* our *nation’s sovereignty* ; have from this source found—O ; *disgrace to our country!* *apologists*, yea *advocates* in our land.

Hence it was that *LOUISIANA*, previous to its being *purchased*, was *deserving a contest of arms*, the lives of thousands of our fellow creatures—*afterwards*, when

peacefully obtained, it *lost* its *value*, and was not *worth* retaining!

In perfect consistency with this systematized opposition, is found the present attempts of this party to elevate themselves to office, by a *perverted* and *distorted* use of a late measure of the National Government, the *act* laying an *embargo* on our commerce.— This was a measure dictated in prudence, and which grew out of the pacific policy of our country.

The political commotions of Europe, which have long agitated the *Eastern world*, have at length reached us, and menace the peace and prosperity of our nation. The restrictions imposed upon neutral commerce by the two great and powerful belligerent nations of Europe, rendered this measure the only remaining alternative of *war*. Yet conscious of this truth, knowing it to be beyond comparison the lesser evil, they are, when every principle of virtue, of honesty and religion, should induce them to UNITE, to rally round the insulted sovereignty of their country—endeavouring to unnerve the arm of Government, by fallaciously attributing the *ills* we thence do necessarily experience, to this *measure of precaution*, rather than to their proper source—the *agitations* and *collisions* of *contending Europe*.

They have insulted your integrity, your principles of patriotism, by attempting to excite your prejudices, through the medium of your *sordid interests*—Yet you will not heed it—but to avenge the indignity— For if, my countrymen, “ we can prevent the woes,

the cruel horrors of a bloody war—Yet hold un-
touch'd our liberties, and laws ;

O let us, rais'd above the *turbid sphere*
Of little selfish passions,—NOBLY DO IT !”

But for this bane—this gorgon monster party, *America*, the *real Canaan* of the world, would appear to convulsed and oppressed Europe, as a *paradise on earth*—Yet restless and ambitious *men*, sickening at the “*dull pursuits of civil life*,” would feign *marr* this *heavenly aspect*.

It has been asserted by some, that a government which places the supreme power in the hands of an individual, is founded in nature, and is best adapted to the genius and dispositions of man—or, in other words, that the sovereignty ought not to be vested in the *people*, who are *incapable of governing*. The fallacy of this position, the *erroneousness* of its *principle*, is sufficiently attested in the happy existence of our own polity—and what has before been observed of the dangerous tendency of power in connection with the passions, show at least the fatal consequences, which would be likely to ensue from such an establishment. Where the privilege of governing is made the *permanent prerogative of birth*,—a suppression of the means of education, rather than a promotion, would too probably be sought. And as every system, which discourages the cultivation of science, tends to the degradation of the human character, who will be so absurd as to call this the only rational government.—Is there an advocate in our land for such a system ?—I will pronounce him an *exotic* in *our clime*,

or if *indignous*, the *corruption* of a *court* has *poisoned* his principles.

It has *justly*, and with *enthusiasm* been advanced, that a free government has a natural, and inseparable connection, with *every species* of possible excellence—and hence as *knowledge* is the *fundamental pillar* in the *temple* of *Liberty*, it is, consequently the peculiar object of our laws, to extend the means of information to every grade and order of its citizens ; and so completely is it effected, that a total ignorance of the rudiments of learning, is considered a *crime* almost, in her poorest individuals. “Curiosity, speculation, investigation, and every species of mental exertion, is here emancipated, from despotic restrictions, from the *enslaving chains* of *Monkish superstition*.”

Here even the peasant lights his flambeau at the hallowed shrine of philosophy, and the humblest religionist burns incense on his *own* altar to the *God of nature*.

And, shall we *sport* with these invaluable blessings?—Shall it be *ever* said we *ONCE* were *independent*—we *once* were *virtuous*, we *once* were *free*—

*Forbid it Heaven !—forbid it--O ! my
Countrymen !*

