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From the author*

AN

**ORATION**

DELIVERED JULY 4, 1811,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE SELECTMEN OF BOSTON,

IN

COMMEMORATION

OF

**AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.**

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BY JAMES SAVAGE, ESQ.

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BOSTON:  
FROM THE PRESS OF JOHN ELIOT, Jun.

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1811.

**VOTE OF THE TOWN:**

**AT** a meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of **BOSTON**, duly qualified and legally warned, in publick town-meeting, assembled at *Faneuil Hall*, the 4th day of July, A. D. 1811.

*On motion voted,* That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed, a committee to wait on **JAMES SAVAGE**, Esq. in the name of the town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited oration, this day delivered by him at the request of the town, upon the anniversary of American Independence, in which were considered the feelings, manners, and principles, which produced the great national event ; and to request of him a copy for the press.

*Attest,*

**THOMAS CLARK**, Town Clerk

## AN ORATION, &c.

If the accidental advantage of generous birth may well be a cause of congratulation to an individual, how greatly ought we to exult, my countrymen, on a review of the circumstances of our national origin. Descended from the only people, to whom Heaven has afforded the enjoyment of liberty, with a well balanced government, the means of securing its continuance, in an age of general refinement, in a season of universal peace, our fathers began the controversy which ended in the glorious event that we this day celebrate. The felicity of its termination will allow us to consider it a fulfilment of the interrogative prophecy: "Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall a nation be born at once?"

The right of Great Britain over these colonies was admitted to comprehend every branch of external regulation. She might make war or peace for them. She might, and, like other European nations, she did, confine her plantations with the fetters of commercial monopoly. But the rights that had always been claimed and exercised by the inhabitants, of superintending the interior economy of their commonwealths, rights in some instances

guaranteed by charters, in others implied from the British constitution, of personal freedom, of overlooking the expenditure of their own revenue, of representative government coextensive with taxation, our patriots could never resign but with their lives. It was for the privileges of Englishmen, for the liberties of our ancestors, for the customs assured to us by inheritance, not for any fantastick innovations in government, nor for any speculative extension of the rights of man, that we contended. We wanted no change, but petitioned the king and remonstrated to parliament against it.

For twelve years the miserable system of alternate enforcement and relaxation of measures, adopted by error and supported by passion, founded in no views of practical policy of the mother country, opposed to the habits, injurious to the feelings, and adverse to the dearest rights of the colonies, was resisted with the sagacity, moderation, unanimity, and firmness of a people who respected themselves too much to burst lightly or suddenly the ties by which they were bound to the land of their fathers. An acute statesman, penetrating with a prophet's eye the operation of natural causes, might indeed have foreseen the separation; but it would have been long retarded, had the prudence of the parent equalled the affection of the child.

The independence of our country was not declared from any ambitious project of its authors. It was forced on them by unwise rulers of the nation.

whose sovereignty was allowed, until it would pass every limit, and affect to bind us “in all cases whatsoever.” Our patriots felt no enmity to the aristocratical balance of the British constitution, for history informed them, that the great charter of their liberties was extorted by the barons from the crown, and they daily heard that some of the most strenuous and intelligent asserters of colonial rights and freedom adorned the peerage. With the regal prerogative they had no quarrel, for all their complaints of grievances were addressed to the king, and they would not easily despair of his attention to the most faithful of his subjects. They contended not for forms, but for substance. They acknowledged no sacred duty of insurrection; they vindicated no holy right of rebellion.

The *feelings*, which produced the event of this day, were those of the most enlarged philanthropy, that made all sympathize with the sufferings of one. They were quick in apprehending danger, and anticipated the exercise of arbitrary power from the mere assertion of its maxims. *Sagacious of their quarry from so far*, they sent out their faculties upon discovery, and “snuffed the approach of tyranny in the tainted breeze.”

The *manners* of our fathers sprang from the enjoyment of property in nearly equal divisions, from a strong sense of the value of civil liberty and the frequent exercise of personal rights, from an unbounded commercial enterprize, from a general dif-



fusion of information, and a higher standard of morals than had obtained in any other country. They would gradually have meliorated a bad form of internal polity into a system that should, like their own, admit every practical enjoyment of freedom, as they had changed the barren wilderness into a fruitful field.

Their *principles* of religion had characterized them throughout the world. For conscience sake they had given up every thing that man could withhold, and the same untameable spirit modified and exalted their principles of government. Their religious system was not, as in most countries, made subservient to the political, but legal authority was subjected to the predominating influence of a future life. These notions, governing all their conduct, made them fear no greater evil than slavery, affect no greater good than liberty, acknowledge no human power greater than the law.

Such feelings, manners, and principles require no farther developement before this audience, who would exhibit the same in similar emergencies, at this time when the daily agitation of questions that must be settled by them has rendered them familiar, in this sacred temple, the altar on which the fire of independence was kindled, and where it cannot be extinguished. If however it be necessary to shed light by comparison upon their history, the most prominent points in our revolution may derive the purest illustration from a contrast with the French.

Ours was a revolution not only of right, but of the strictest necessity. As we were cut off from all trade to any part of the world, we ceased to be a portion of the empire that thus put us beyond protection. As the mother country refused to defend her children, we were obliged to defend ourselves. As she levied war upon us, we could only resist.

The overthrow of the ancient constitution of France was neither necessary nor just. At its head was one of the most pious, benevolent princes that ever adorned a throne, whose patriotism yielded to every suggestion tending to increase the happiness of his people. If reform was requisite, reform was promised; reform was attempted, and his promise fulfilled. The several orders of the government might have so improved the machine, so regulated and watched its motions, that no reasonable complaint should remain.

Our revolution was wholly defensive, all the early measures of it were strictly proportionate to the aggressions, and they would at any moment have ceased as of course with the attacks from abroad.

From its commencement the French was an offensive revolution. The rights of the different orders of the legislature were almost instantly violated. The constitution of the church, the privileges of the nobility, the sanctity of the monarch, all which had been protected by oaths, were outraged without any other provocation, than that the sufferers had been injured and had forgiven the wrong.

We neither desired to pull down the old fabrick of government, nor to erect a new one. No abolition of ancient customs, no violation of prescriptive rights, no forfeiture of personal privileges, no denial of general or special duties, no confusion of publick or of private property was declared or projected.

In France the fierce revolutionists and their headlong followers, the few wicked, uniting with the many weak, impelled by no desire of extending the general blessings of government and the enjoyment of national liberty, but stimulated by vanity as eager as their design was execrable, overthrew without distinction the consecrated forms of their ancient polity, violated the immutable principles of justice, bade defiance to the sanctions of oaths, prostrated the universal landmarks of property, beat down all the institutions that benevolence had erected or had employed to mitigate the miseries of man, scorned all the affections that bind the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the wise, the great and the humble to each other, and proscribed even the natural *charities of father, son and brother*.

The movers and directors of the popular will in America were a sober, calculating assembly, satisfied with what was feasible, and governed in its attainment by maxims of ancient wisdom. They resembled the farmers and the merchants whom they represented, in the adaptation of means within their power, and in the expectation of happy results from prudent experiments.



All the observations of political experience, on the contrary, were derided by the French reformers. No extravagance of paradoxical novelties could prevent their adoption; and they might have safely preached, that whatever is impossible is right, in consistency with their conduct, which proved that whatever was right was impossible. Without ascertaining what the habits of their constituents, what the temper of the age, what the condition of the world required, they borrowed the severe simplicity of Lacedæmon to unite with the utmost refinements of their own luxury. Nor would they be less original in government than in manners. At one time the checks and balances of the English constitution, at another the representative oligarchies of Holland or Switzerland were preferred, and both were combined with the discordant materials of the stormy democracies of Athens and of Rome. One shape after another was exhibited for a government, which rose, like the airblown bubbles of childish sport, and glittered for an hour, till its feeble consistence was scattered by the concussion from the very shouts of admirers.

In this country the same men who originated the revolution, fixed its limits. We had but one change. The people felt little alteration in their private rights and domestick enjoyments. No higher degree of civil liberty was acquired, for it was not sought; but we gained, what the wise consider of greater value than any single blessing,

the security of all. Power was withdrawn from rulers at a thousand leagues distance, and deposited in hands of our own choice. Personal violence was perpetrated only by stealth; it was generally prevented, and always disapproved.

By the anarchists of France no limit to the revolution was settled in the judgment, or conceived by the imagination. Every thing was to be changed today, rechanged tomorrow, and changed again the third day. The multitude feared quiet as subjection, and order as tyranny. Like intoxicated slaves, they kept up their first insanity by continual draughts of the fiery spirit, supplied by the leaders of one faction, whom they followed over the reeking bodies of the leaders of another. Any other people would have been exhausted, if not sobered; but they, constantly supplying the vacancies of massacre, held on for years their melancholy march of madness.

Through many a dark and dreary vale  
They pass'd, and many a region dolorous,  
O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,  
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,  
A universe of death.

The representative powers of our Congress were executed with a sacred regard to their authors; no part thought of encroaching on another's right, any more than of surrendering its own.

In France the bands of assassins that governed Paris in quick succession, usurping all the powers of the empire, and decreeing havock and murder in

the name of the people, seemed to triumph in their emulation of a democracy of infernals.

In our revolution every object was definite, every project sober and attainable, every means honest and judicious. The result was happy. Our people obtained every thing that their imaginations could desire, or their virtues deserve.

Every object of the other revolution was undefined, and undefinable as chaos; every project foolish or impracticable; the means inadequate, outrageous, and bloody. In its course it respected neither the innocence of infancy, the tenderness of woman, nor the feebleness of age. Of its end no human hand can draw, no mortal eye could endure the picture. The pitiless grasp of despotism, to gratify its ferocious ambition, drags the parent from the circle of his children, the husband from the bosom of his wife, the child from the arms of its mother, the lover from the embrace of his mistress. The people have no voice in the prosecution of this war, as endless, as, thanks be to God, its purpose is unattainable. They have no rights. The simple virtues, the amenity of manners, the chivalrick honour, the activity of enterprize, that characterized France, and of old supported her fame, have all fled. Human forms indeed remain; but their moral desolation resembles the black and blasted forest that has been swept of its ancient honours by a universal conflagration.

It is an interesting inquiry, my fellow citizens, whether we have asserted the principles of our revolution, and maintained our independence, on every subsequent occasion.

At the close of our war we were in no less danger from allies, than we had been from enemies. France had made herself a party in the conflict rather to gratify her hatred of an old rival, than to vindicate our independence; and, if a reunion could be prevented, she would have made us surrender many points in negotiation, to obtain from England more favourable terms for herself. Before her court declared openly in our favour, a few members of Congress, in a moment of despair, suggested the project of transferring to her the same monopoly of our trade, which had been enjoyed by the mother country; but our guardian genius remembered that independence required us to consider all nations alike, enemies in war, in peace friends. The base surrender was at that time prevented. Heaven grant that it may not enter the contemplation of our future rulers!

The English had almost universally apprehended great injury or total ruin from the separation of the colonies; but they soon began to observe, that our prosperity, as a nation, would be equally beneficial to them as when we were only subject plantations. The extension of their commerce has been commensurate with the markets America has opened: it has grown with our growth and strengthened



with our strength. The jealousy of France extended to us more than to England; she would gladly have seen us nominally independent, deprived of the fisheries, and *curtailed of half our fair proportion* of territory.

The greatest perils, however, to which our national existence has ever been exposed, arose some time afterwards from ourselves. We had no general government with the attributes of sovereignty, with the power of affording justice to other nations, and requiring it for our own. We neglected to fulfil our parts of the treaty of peace; and the other contracting power did not admit the excuse, that Congress was too weak to enforce ~~their~~ requisitions. Abroad we lost in peace all the respect that we had acquired in the war. At home the jarring interests, the different degrees of publick virtue and intelligence through the thirteen states, were proceeding in a strait and swift course to make them first foreign, and then hostile to each other. Individual ambition was in our own, and the other great states, the chief obstacle to union. We had a long probation of folly and misery, before happiness was recovered by the wisdom of the federal constitution. Never were a people so truly preserved from themselves. Some romantick spirits, in pursuance of maxims, of which the gloss of novelty charmed away all apprehensions of falsehood, had deluded a majority with representations of the simplicity, and beauty, and strength, and justice, and happiness of



executive magistracy without restraint, and government without subordination. The people were advised to retain all power in their own hands, and not to put it out at interest even to men chosen by themselves. They were called sovereign, and thought competent to govern themselves without the intervention of checks and balances, the troublesome combination of negative limits and positive definitions.

Melancholy experience convinced us, that the doom of man was not reversed in favour even of our republics. So long as "by the sweat of his brow he shall eat bread," so long will liberty need to be guarded by power. She is in less danger from open enemies than from indiscreet or false friends. Our national constitution acknowledges not the sovereignty of the people in any other sense, than as the origin of power, which they can retain to no useful purpose, and must therefore delegate. They have a right to be well governed; and the most perfect security of this right is in their own hands.

In the present condition of the world our independence cannot be preserved without a strict confederation between the states; and the general government must be corrupt or stupid beyond endurance, before the people of a single section will generally believe that any good is to be preserved to them by the sacrifice of union. We cannot however but regret that the aggregate wealth and power

of the United States affords less protection to our citizens than might be received from a proper development and exercise of the resources of a single member of the confederacy. I will not name Massachusetts, lest affection for my native land might be thought to have magnified her capacity and exaggerated her virtues ; but who will not believe that a judicious administration of a powerful commonwealth, like New-York or Pennsylvania, could better maintain peace at home and dignity abroad, could by a competent naval force better vindicate the rights and assert the privileges of commerce, than our national rulers have done for years. The purposes of the union will be respected by all the true friends of union. They are unworthy to govern, who will not defend the community. We have too long paid more as the forfeit of cowardice, than would have prevented or avenged our injuries. With nearly four times the population and wealth of Denmark, we were, in one year, by that power alone, robbed of thrice as much as our whole expenditure for a navy. In the last ten years our revenue has amounted to one hundred and twenty millions ; and an economical administration has built one sloop of war, three or four brigs, and uncounted gunboats. Instead of lighting up and cherishing the fire of national honour, the course of our policy has appeared to subdue or extinguish it. Nothing can tend more to degrade a government than to be wholly

occupied in proposing alternatives to foreign nations ; and when one is rejected to offer another, and another, until propositions become the only weapon of warfare on one side, and retaliation returns only the alternative of injury or contempt. Who does not feel that we have degenerated from the principles of our independence? that as we have increased in power, we have diminished in spirit? Can we expect to maintain our dignity abroad, before our rulers learn to respect themselves? We have much, very much, to recover, before we regain that sublime height on which our infancy was passed. The emblem of our sovereignty, the eagle of our mountains, attempts in vain his accustomed excursions ; some malignant influence *hangs on his flight*, and confines him to regions that his aspiring wing spurned when he first left his nest. He could once expatiate with unwearied pinions in the fields of heaven, bearing the thunder in his talons, pouncing with vengeance on his adversaries, and soaring with undazzled vision towards the sun ;—how is he tamed and dispirited now !

Quench'd in dark clouds of slumber lie  
The terror of his beak and lightning of his eye.

Is it asked, what is the cause of this degradation of a high-spirited and free people? The answer is, **FAC-TION**—Faction, which overthrows every thing established by its predecessors in power ; faction, whose pride will not permit it to be instructed by

rivals, whose meanness subjects it to every threat from its friends ; faction, which sharpens the hatred of a majority, and banishes the weaker party from every situation of publick usefulness ; faction, whose energies are solely devoted to provide or to secure office for its friends, regardless of the wishes or the welfare of the people ; faction, which denounces diversity of opinion as sedition, and remonstrance as rebellion ; faction, which pretends to bewail the influence of party spirit, while it adopts every means of increasing and gratifying its malignity. It is the same vice in a single state, as in the administration of the federal government ; but we behold its operations on the great theatre with stronger emotions than those of pity.

What sacrifice of our national honour has not been made in the fluctuating management of our commerce. Instead of the embargo, the derision of those whom it was designed to ruin, the terrour of those whom it pretended to protect, we adopted another spiritless “ municipal regulation,” executing verbal revenge upon the great belligerents. By one the punishment is received with silence ;—is it of despair—or of indifference ? By the other our presumption is punished with a decree of universal confiscation, under the name of reprisals. This is equivalent to war, but has it been resisted ? has it been remonstrated against ? was not an apology made for the aggressor by the supreme executive



of our country on the most solemn occasion? When France declares a "municipal regulation" which destroys almost all our trade with the continent of Europe, she is permitted to retain our immense wealth as a pledge of good behaviour, as security for our fulfilment of a *contract* for commercial hostility with England. But she had proclaimed on the fifth of August, that her hostile decrees are repealed, and that, on certain inadmissible conditions, they should cease to have effect on the first of November. On our side was required "a satisfactory provision for restoring the property" which had been seized, as "indispensable evidence of the just purpose of France," and a preliminary to our non-intercourse with Great Britain. This satisfactory provision is not made; this indispensable evidence is dispensed with; this preliminary is not waited for. In November restitution is postponed to February, in February to May, in May to doomsday. The hour when our wealth will be restored is marked only in the apocalyptick vision, when the sea gives up the dead which are in it, and death and hell deliver up the dead which are in them. Yet we seem to submit to the requisition of Napoleon; and to assume fetters, as if they were ornaments. When we are tempted with promises of "modifications" of trade, as "the result of measures" by us to be adopted in conjunction with France against "the common enemy," and a meas-



ure is forthwith adopted forbidding all importation from that country, "the common enemy," with which we had the greatest commerce, who does not feel as if the spirit of independence were dozing or dying at Washington? Who does not ask with gloomy solicitude, are we betrayed, or are we deluded?

Can we be deluded, my countrymen, out of our liberties by him, who announces, that "the Americans cannot hesitate as to the part which they are to take," who declares, that we "ought either to tear to pieces the act of our independence" or coincide with his plans, who implicitly calls our administration "men without just political views, without honour, without energy," and who threatens them "that it will be necessary to fight for interest after having refused to fight for honour." Shall the Emperour, who is no less versed in the tactics of desolation than in the vocabulary of insult and the promises of perfidy, deceive our government by assertions, that "his majesty loves the Americans," "their prosperity and their commerce are within the scope of his policy?" We knew before that his political magazine contains rattles for babies as well as whips for cowards. Our commerce has, indeed, long been within the scope of his policy, as our merchants and mariners will forever remember. His majesty, no doubt, does love the Americans; as the butcher delights in the lamb he is about to slaughter; as the tyger

courts the kid he would mangle and devour. For such promises the sacrifice of honour, of interest, of peace, of liberty, and of hope is required. For such promises some are willing to stir up former national antipathies; and when these are too weak for their purpose, to employ new artifices of treachery to excite the passions of those who are slow to reason; while others promote the design by reproaching opponents with idle words and threatening them with empty menaces. If Heaven has abandoned us to be so deceived into ruin, on some future anniversary of our national existence we may exclaim, with Anthony, in the bitterness of despair :

They tell us 'tis our birthday, and we'll keep it  
 With double pomp of sadness.  
 'Tis what the day deserves that gave us breath.  
 Why were we rais'd the meteor of the world,  
 Hung in the skies, and blazing as we travell'd,  
 'Till all our fires were spent, and then cast downwards  
 To be trod out by Cæsar ?

Without adverting to the political questions of our own government, we have, my fellow citizens, a criterion by which to distinguish the supporters of American Independence. They who behold with indifference the freedom of other nations prostrated, are no friends of our own. One country after another, in melancholy and rapid succession, is absorbed in the imperial vortex; and some of our citizens are led, by the enmity against England which they are instructed to cherish, to exult in these forewarnings of our destruction. Shall the delusion be corrected? Shall we feel that our own exist-

ence is hazarded, when Holland, and Switzerland, and Naples, and Spain, and Austria dissolve into the heated mass of French power, like the towering ice-mountains of the pole, as they float towards the south? Shall our rulers "suffer scorn, till they merit it;" and lose the inheritance of valour by the expedients of imbecility? Shall they adhere to error, till it becomes treason? Ardent as is my execration of the cowardly policy that submits without resistance to degradation, I should more earnestly abhor the alliance, in which many apprehend that we are irrevocably bound. Every part of our body that was sensible to pain has smarted with the lash of French enmity; but the sighs and groans of Europe, from the Baltick to the Hellespont, witness the exquisite torments inflicted by their friendship. Let the spirits of our fathers be evoked from their tombs to recall their posterity to the recollection of their honourable origin, to the vindication of their ancient glory. There is, we hope, a redeeming spirit in the people, which will restore dignity to government and prosperity to the country, which will bring us back to the principles of better times and the practice of Washington, which will assert our independence wherever the enterprize of our commerce has been exhibited, and make it lasting and incorruptible as the private virtues of our countrymen.