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ORATION;

DELIVERED AT PORTSMOUTH, NEW-HAMPSHIRE,

On the FOURTH of JULY, 1788,

BEING THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY ONE OF THE INHABITANTS.

*"Who builds a church to God and not to Fame,
Will never mark the marble with his name."*

POPE.

PORTSMOUTH:

Printed by GEORGE JERRY OSBORNE, for the Subscribers.

M, DCC, LXXXVIII.

To the Inhabitants of Portsmouth :

THE following discourse, composed, delivered, and now published at your particular request, is with the warmest affection and respect, humbly inscribed,

by your sincere friend,

and fellow-citizen,

The AUTHOR.



An O R A T I O N.

Fathers, Brethren, and Fellow-Citizens,



WE are this day assembled to commemorate one of the greatest events that has occurred in the history of mankind.—An event which will be remembered with wonder and astonishment, and (I trust) with the warmest gratitude and transport, by every American to the latest generation !

THIS auspicious day completes the *twelfth anniversary* of *American Independence*. Well may every bosom throb with joy ! and every countenance wear an unusual smile ! Heaven hath prospered our cause ! America is independent—her sons and her daughters are free ! But say, amidst the general joy, is not an attempt to augment it, by any weak endeavours of

mine, superfluous, and vain? Deference to your superiour judgment, forbids my reply. You have yourselves resolved the question, by condescendingly requesting my appearance here on the present joyous occasion. In that goodness confiding, animated by the presence of so respectable an auditory, and especially that *part* of it, on whose account alone, freedom and every other blessing, derive the least value, I mean the *fairest, loveliest* part of the creation, I shall chearfully proceed with the agreeable task assigned me.

ALTHOUGH a public discourse, on this great occasion, be a novelty with us, yet it hath been annually practised by our nearest sister-state, and (for aught I know) by others, since the memorable event took place;—so that it is very improbable (as all those discourses have since been published) that any thing new can be either said or heard immediately relative to the subject of our declaring and supporting our Independence on Great-Britain. And to take notice of some events, particularly the loss of so many gallant heroes who nobly immolated their lives on the ALTAR of LIBERTY, would cloud the sunshine of this happy morn, and call forth the tear of sensibility from many a brilliant eye!

I SHALL therefore principally confine my subject to those events which have taken place since the peace, consider the

subject of Independency in a general view, and enquire how we ought to act in future, as individuals, as a state, and as a nation.

It may not be amiss, however, briefly to recapitulate a few of the most striking particulars which have heretofore been insisted on by others, relative to the causes and events which brought about and established the Independence of the thirteen American States on Great-Britain.

THAT haughty power, after the unsuccessful effort of the Stamp-Act, deeply involved in debt, jealous, perhaps, of our rapid growth, and burning with resentment at our uncomplaisant treatment of their East-India gentry; passed an act asserting their right to bind us by future acts in all cases whatsoever; and sent a fleet and army to awe us into submission—the consequences are known to all—our appointment of a Congress—our humble remonstrances—their insolent treatment—Lexington battle—the raising and establishing an army—the choice of a leader (and such a leader! —the emission of paper-money—its astonishing feats—temporary constitutions of government—marine-laws—public and private-armed vessels—their success—manufacturing, as well as capturing gun-powder—with all the various and surprising events which took place until the formal declaration of Independence—our many bat-

ties afterwards—the numbers and strength of our enemies—the uncommon patience, perseverance, and bravery of our army, amidst poverty, hunger and nakedness—the rapidity of our military improvements—our successes, particularly the capture of two whole British armies headed by their most experienced Generals, and every other event that took place until our enemies were compelled to give over fighting, and induced to make peace upon terms more humiliating to them, and more honourable and advantageous to us, than our most sanguine wishes could have aspired at.

THESE have already furnished subjects for the orator, the historian, the painter and the poet, and will continue to do so, for many an age to come. To all which, may we not super-add, the arm of heaven, during the whole struggle, (worthless and undeserving as we were and are) visibly and gloriously stretched out in our behalf, arming our hands, and fighting all our battles. Well may we adopt the language of inspiration without fear of incurring the censure of enthusiasm, and say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be all the praise! Thine, O Lord! is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty! for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine it is to make great, and to give strength; thine is the kingdom, O Lord! and thou art exalted as head over all!”

BUT it is time to proceed, as was proposed, to consider the subject of Independence in general.

MAN is formed by his maker a dependent creature. The very idea of his creation involves in it that of dependence on the great Creator. He is also made dependent on his fellow-men. The first sort is absolute and unlimited, the other is limited and transient: On God we immediately and ultimately depend, not only for all the blessings we enjoy, but for the very power of tasting and enjoying them. In him, "we live, move, and have our being."

YET so deeply is the desire of Independence rooted in our nature, that the very first act of the very first of our species, we are informed, was a declaration of Independence on their rightful lord and sovereign. Every obliquity in the conduct of their offspring since, may, perhaps, finally be resolved into the same ill-guided propensity.

THE impious wretch, by often acting as independent, at length almost fancies he is so. The pious devotee, no less, sets up for independence. Guilty and dependent as he is himself, he assumes the right to judge his neighbour, wrests from the hand of infinite justice "the balance of the rod," "and deals damnation round" on all he judges a foe. What tor-

rents of error, and what torrents of blood, have deluged mankind from this same self-righteous, self-dependent, self-exalting, diabolical spirit. But it is enough just lightly to touch on so ungrateful a subject on the present joyous occasion.

BUT men are also formed mutually dependent on each other.

“ No bandit fierce, no tyrant mad with pride,

“ No cavern'd hermit rests self-satisfy'd.”

SINCE the first pair, we all enter on the theatre of life, wholly dependent, under God, on our parents. In this respect, we are far inferior to the beasts that perish. For a long period, and sometimes to the end of our lives, we depend on those born before us for food, raiment, shelter, and protection, as well as for knowledge and instruction. This necessary dependence is doubtless what first suggested to men the idea of society, and the many evil dispositions of individuals; the necessity of government. The former, as hath been justly observed by a fine writer, being founded in the *weakness*, the latter in the *wickedness* of mankind. Yet still this innate thirst for freedom and independence has prevailed; predominating more or less as the reins of government have been relaxed, or straitened, or the subject more or less accustomed to the yoke. Nor need we confine this impatience of restraint to states and societies,—it

is equally discoverable in the infant, the child, the school-boy, and the adult: all of whom love to be independent, and abhor controul. Nay, even the gentlest, and (as many suppose) the least-fallen part of our species, who seem all pliability and submission—I mean the softer sex, are not insensible to this powerful principle. The modest fair, tho' not totally averse to the tender connexion, yet sometimes starts at the word *obey*, and, perhaps, would submit to have the word *govern* substituted in its stead. However, what is wanted in the *word* is amply made up in the *thing*—'tis they at last that move the wheels of society, and indeed, every other wheel; and the haughtiest spirit is finally proud to wear their chains.

WHAT shall we say then? Is this aversion to restraint, and love of liberty, a laudable or illaudable instinct? The answer is plain and easy. Like every other passion, if permitted to rage uncontrouled, 'tis pernicious, but laudable and salutary, when properly regulated. When like Charity, it

“ Knows with just hand, and steady reins to guide,

“ Betwixt vile shame, and arbitrary pride.”

—It is useful both to individuals and to society; a powerful stimulus to industry, and a strong barrier against indolence, servility and want.

BUT this powerful inclination requires to be checked. The *necessity of government*, in the present imperfect state of humanity, is therefore obvious. It is what most of us are able to see, and what all, of late, has sorely felt.

THE abuse of government to the perverting its proper ends, has been equally obvious to our sight and feelings.

THE arbitrary measures of Britain, with our successful opposition thereto, exemplify the latter—our own sufferings from the want of a permanent, efficient, national government, since that success, evince the former.

AT length Heaven has again graciously smiled upon us.

A Federal Constitution of government is now ratified by nine, which is, in effect, by all the United States. A constitution which no earthly power short of our own, will ever be able to frustrate, or violate! And next to him “by whom kings reign, and states decree justice,” our gratitude should arise to those patriotic sages, the members of the general and particular conventions (many of whom were also instrumental, in the cabinet, and in the field, in promoting that revolution for which we are this day called to rejoice) who, with all the labours of wisdom and public-virtue, enforced

with all the powers of eloquence, happily effected the glorious, all-important object. Long, long may they live to taste the blessings it so justly promises !

BUT I hasten to the last thing proposed, namely, to consider what our future conduct ought to be, as individuals, as a state, and as a nation.

THAT every individual, possessed, in any degree, with rational faculties, is bound by the law of his nature, to act according to the light of REASON, in matters *within the province of Reason*; and agreeably to the dictates of CONSCIENCE, in every concern of a *moral, or religious* nature, no one needs to be told. And did every one always act according to that light and those dictates, there would be little need on the present, or any other occasion, of “stirring up your pure minds by way of remembrance.” But, alas! who is there among us that practises as well as he knows? Reason and the moral sense may deliver their mandates—but our unruly passions often prompt us to disobey them. And he who vainly imagines otherwise of himself, is ignorant, and “knows nothing yet as he ought to know it.”

BUT, as *interest* is one of the most powerful motives to human action, and we are all but too prone

to look chiefly at the things that are *seen*, did mankind in general thoroughly believe it was always for their best interest, in the *present state*, to act virtuously, that "*Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,*" it would operate more powerfully on their conduct, than more distant consequences, which they but faintly believe, and very rarely properly understand. Did the churl but know the heart-felt joys of benevolence—the cruel oppressor, the transports of pity and compassion—the miser, the benign pleasures of beneficence, which, like the rain and sunshine of heaven, impartially descend and rise on all.—In fine, that virtue is, in every instance, its own reward.—“The churl would become bountiful”—his purse and his bosom would be eagerly opened to want.—The scourge would drop from oppression's hand—and the widow and orphan would change their sighs into songs of joy.

BESIDES the practice of all the moral virtues, so pleasing to the individual, and so beneficial to mankind—every man has some talent entrusted to him by the author of his being, “the bountiful giver of every good gift,” by the culture of which he may both honor the giver, and benefit society and himself. What a field do the various professions, arts, and sciences, open to our view! where each may have sufficient employment without encroaching upon, or envying his neighbour: *ali va-*

rious, yet equally useful---so that “the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you,” but each (in his place) harmoniously conducing to the welfare of the whole body.

WHAT a call is this to every member of society, to exert his peculiar talent for the good of the whole, and to the glory of HIM “who hath given us more understanding than the beasts of the field, and hath made us wiser than the fowls of heaven!”

I AM next to consider *our duty as a State.*

I DWELT longer on the preceding head, “*Our duty as individuals,*” considering it as the ground-work and foundation of the present and succeeding one---If we act well in the former, we stand the fairest chance of excelling in the latter characters. Though many of the foregoing and following observations equally apply to all.

SHOULD private individuals be just?—So should rulers. Should the former be frugal, circumspect, diligent, and faithful? —So should the latter. Should the people repose confidence in their rulers?—The duty is reciprocal. Should the former be reasonably jealous of an infringement of their *civil*, and with a “godly jealousy” over

their *religious* rights?---The latter should also be reasonably so of their prerogatives. The same candour and circumspection should be exercised, as a State, towards the federal authority. We should be emulous of excelling our sister states in every thing praise-worthy : in enacting wise and wholesome laws, and in the impartial administration of justice. As a state, we should promote and encourage, to the utmost of our power, Agriculture, Manufactures, Trade and Commerce, with every useful art.—Our rulers should consider themselves as nursing fathers to our schools and seminaries of learning,---the patrons of all useful science.

WHILE I am upon this subject, will you pardon me, if, for a few minutes, I implore your particular attention while I take notice of, and recommend the cultivation of a most pleasing science too much neglected among us—and yet extremely necessary in our present situation—I mean that of ELOQUENCE. The ancient states of Greece and Rome considered this as essential to their very being—The science of Eloquence was interwoven with their very laws and constitutions. And is it not equally, nay, more important, to us? We may be assured, among so many confederated states, that particular one, who excels most in this *divine science*, will ever have the greatest weight in the scale. Are we as brave and valiant in the field, at least, as our neighbours, and shall we

be outdone by them in the cabinet? Forbid it ambition!—
Remember,

*The self same sun on our cold climate shines
That ripen'd diamonds in Siberian mines.*

LET us recollect that the rising generation are now to consider themselves as candidates, not only for the several professions—for members of the assembly—and senators—but for members of congress—presidents, and foreign ambassadors—where, for the honour of their country, they may be called to stand before kings.

THERE is besides, a bewitching force and charm in true eloquence which is undescribable. What is said by Horace, of the *Poet*, equally applies to the *Orator*—

* “ ’Tis he who gives the breast ten thousand pains
“ Can make us feel each passion that he feigns,
“ Enrage, compose, with more than magic art,
“ With pity and with terror tear the heart,
“ And snatch us o’er the earth, or thro’ the air,
“ To Thebes, to Athens, when he will, and where.”

* *meum qui pectus inaniter argit
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
Ut magus; et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.*

There are many who are insensible to the beauties of Painting, Poetry, and Musick; but none are unsusceptible to the irresistible charms of Eloquence. It happily addresses itself equally to the reason and the passions, the understanding and the feelings of all. While Song only charms the *sense*—Eloquence captivates the *soul*, and dissolves the *heart*! All artificial rules (though extremely good in their place) will never make an *Orator*—The *life* will still be wanting—It will be but a *Vox, it preterea nihil*—the shadow, without the substance—Prometheus's image of clay, before animated with the heavenly spark. Nothing but a *living* example, present to the eyes and ears of the pupil, can effect the purpose. Can any means, therefore, be so proper as the present and similar occasions afford (I wish the present were more ably improved) where the speaker is called to celebrate some great event, in which the audience are all equally interested? He will, then, always be likely to *feel* his subject, and make others feel it too. He will become, also, not merely an *Orator*, but an *Author*. And every one who has tried knows, by experience, how much easier it is to deliver his *own*, however inferior, than another's compositions.

NONE of the objections, made by some, against the establishment of a theatre in an infant country (which I shall not at present combat, lest my attachment to them

should bribe my judgment) apply to the present mode. It is without expense, and without risque of infecting the morals—On the contrary, it is highly promotive of morality, and, by substituting truth for fiction, and reality for shadows, has the advantage of dramatic exhibition, and makes a deeper and more lasting impression on the mind.

Is it not, then, a matter of grief and wonder, that any place should be deemed too sacred for so laudable and useful a purpose? Can any spot be too holy to do good in? Do not such objectors, in some degree, resemble the ancient Jews, who thought their sabbath prophaned by healing the sick on that day? But we should be indulgent, even to the foibles of our brethren, especially when they appear to proceed from a zeal for religion—however ill-directed.

I CANNOT, however, forbear observing, that, though the temple of old (which was figurative of a far greater, not made with hands) was honoured with the visible presence of the Deity—we have no reason to suppose, that any other building, since that time, has been so honoured.—Wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, he has promised to be in the midst of them—And for the same reason that people consider any particular church, or building, as sacred—they

may, every mountain, hill, and high place, and erect their altars there, too, if they please (as the heathens of old, and many more heathenish Jews, did) because it pleased the glorious Majesty of Heaven once to descend in thunder and lightening on mount Sinai; and because, when the Divine Presence cleft in twain the Red Sea, and Jordan recoiled to its fountain-head, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills, like lambs."

I would close this digression by reminding you all of the words of *one*, who, perhaps, had as much true zeal for the honour of God and the good of mankind, as any in our day; to the Samaritan—"The time is coming (saith he) when it will be said, neither in this mountain, nor in that mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem—but the father will seek those to worship him, who do it in spirit and in truth."

But it is time to draw to a close. Every thing already said on the two former heads, relative to our duty as *Individuals* and as a *State*, as pertinently apply to the present, and last,—*Our duty as a Nation*,—with this addition,—That the theatre on which we act, in the latter character, is far the most extensive.—The stage on which individuals, and even particular states, move, is comparatively circumscribed—but that on which the latter appear, is bounded only by the globe itself.

From pole to pole, from Atlas to the East, all eyes will be upon us. Let us, then, act a noble, a becoming part. Let us ever remember, that other eyes, beside those of men, are upon us, even *those* which, like "a flame of fire, run to and fro in the earth, beholding the evil and the good." Let us remember his unerring law---that "righteousness alone exalteth a nation"—while a contrary practice brings on them inevitable ruin. While a just retribution, to individuals, is always deferred to a future state, states and kingdoms, which have none, necessarily receive theirs in the present. Let our views be enlarged. May we consider ourselves, not barely as subjects of a particular state or nation, but as citizens of the world, even of *his* family "whose offspring we all are," and "in whom all the families of heaven and earth are named." Oh! may love, unity, peace, and harmony pervade every bosom throughout this wide-extended empire--- May it be an asyllum for the distressed from every quarter of the globe--- May we be an example, to all nations, of the practice of every private and public virtue, 'till that period, when all the kingdoms of this world shall be dissolved, and united to him, who is emphatically stiled "the Great and the only POTENTATE," the KING of KINGS and LORD of LORDS, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and whose dominion ruleth over all,"

Oh! stretch

" O! stretch thy reign, fair PEACE from shore to shore,
 " Till conquest cease, and *slav'ry* be no more,
 " Till the freed Indians, in their native groves,
 " Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable loves.
 " Peru, once more, a race of kings behold,
 " And other Mexicos be roof'd with gold.
 " Exil'd, by thee, from earth to deepest hell,
 " In brazen bonds shall *barb'rous* discord dwell:
 " Gigantic pride, pale terror, gloomy care,
 " And mad ambition, shall attend her there:
 " There purple vengeance, bath'd in gore, retires,
 " Her weapons blunted, and extinct her fires:
 " There hateful envy her own snakes shall feel,
 " And persecution mourn her broken wheel:
 " There faction roar, rebellion bite her chain,
 " And gasping turles thirst for blood in vain!"
 Whilst thou, immortal *Love*, fair *Liberty*,
 And dove-wing'd *Peace*, and heav'n-born *Charity*
 " Your office, nature, essence, still the same,
 " Lasting your lamp, and unconsum'd its flame,
 " Shall still survive——
 " Shall stand before the host of heav'n, confess,
 " Forever BLESSING, and forever BLEST!"