

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT BEDFORD,


ON THE


ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1809.

——
BY JOHN VOSE, A. M.
" "

——



AMHERST, N.H.

PRINTED BY JOSEPH CUSHING.

.....

1809.

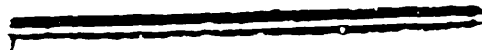
CELEBRATION OF INDEPENDENCE.



BEBFORD, JULY 4, 1809.

VOTED,—That Mr. ORR, Mr. GOVE, and Mr. J. AIKEN, be a Committee to wait on Mr. VOSE, and present him with the thanks of this assembly for his ingenious Oration delivered this day, and to request of him a copy for the press.

DANIEL WARNER, President.



Gentlemen,

APOLOGIES generally come too late, when a work, however small and indigested, is presented to the public. From his old friends the author of this is confident of candour.

*I am, with great respect,
your obedient servant,*

JOHN VOSE.

Messrs. ORR, GOVE, and AIKEN.

ORATION.

WE are assembled to celebrate the natal day of our national existence. What day can better unite all hearts? The harbinger of the morning gladly proclaimed its rising. The resplendent rays of the east never shone on a more auspicious day! Memory hath registered its wonders in the archives of fame; and anticipation fondly views, in the mirror of futurity, greater wonders, rising in lasting succession. We ourselves have seen; our fathers have told us, what good things have been done for us.

Let this day be kept as a national Jubilee. Let discord and folly cease. Let even the hum of busy labor pause in our streets. Let the ocean resound with acclamations; and let the western hills rejoice. Our God hath been our helper. Festive joy should be mingled with praises; and cheerful viands glow with thanksgiving. "How good and how pleasant it is" to unite our hearts with our voices in grateful anthems to that kind Benefactor, who hath led our nation, not by a pillar of cloud and of fire, but by the invisib!e

hand of Almighty Power ; not to Sinai's dreaded mountain, but to the blissful shores of our American Canaan.

It is usual on occasions of this kind to recount the exploits and the sufferings, which dearly purchased our national freedom. In turning aside from this beaten road, I might lead you to the fields of novelty ; but I must lead you away from the fields of glory. A tale so ennobling can never be too often rehearsed. "Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation." Lisping infancy will catch the patriotic flame, at the recital of his ancestors' achievements ; and even stooping age will rekindle with ardour at the remembrance of youthful valor. Here indeed we must all learn of aged wisdom. Here verily "days shall speak ; and the multitude of years shall teach knowledge." The veteran can demonstrate what I must feebly attempt.

In the darksome season of cold November, sixteen hundred and twenty, was the first landing on these northern shores. Here our ancestors sought an asylum from oppressed humanity in the old world. The desert wild was before them, the prowling monster, and the savage in the direst form of man. But here was liberty. Like Greece, determined to be free, the little colony endured all hardships with cheerfulness. Compared with the oppressions of

their native land, these were but insignificant trifles.

See our nation rising from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. They were harassed and re-harassed by a cruel and relentless foe, who, with the tomahawk, and the scalping knife, and the glaring torch of death, danced around the dying victim. But their God was with them. In all their hardships, in all their sufferings, they increased. Again and again they were invaded, still they increased; "they multiplied, they replenished the earth. "The wilderness," literally, "blossomed before them; and the desert became a fruitful field."

But ere they had arrived at national maturity, the eastern horizon was darkened in clouds. The storm of war gathers; the tempest lowers. The shackles of slavery are clanked in the hands of North and his myrmidons; whilst the gleaming falchion is brandished in front of Howe, Burgoyne and Clinton. Angel of pity whither art thou retired! Must the verdure of these plains be tinged with the blood of their fee simple lords! Must the soft echoes of our native vales be changed to the hoarse sound of the trumpet; the clangor and the roar of war! Our fathers scorned to be slaves, choosing rather to die like men, than live the minions of tyrannic power.

Reluctantly we come to the fields of Lexington, where was shed the first blood in the cause of our freedom. There sleep the first devoted

patriots. Peace be to their ashes. May the green grass grow softly over their beds; may the winds and the storms not disturb their dust; and the wandering traveller step lightly over the hallowed ground.

Bunkers awful mount next presents its front in our view. See a little band of Americans drawn up in battalia. See a double and a triple number marching against them to determined victory. The houses and the steeples of Boston are crowded with anxious spectators. On the one hand the flames of Charlestown are rising up to indignant Heaven. On the other, the blaze and the roar of cannon add successive light and horror to the gloom! See great Warren fall! My soul, was this for thy liberty! Embrace it; embrace it to thy bosom.

A little troop crosses the wilds of Maine and "ice enfrezen Canada." Worn down with fatigue and exhausted with hunger, they arrive before the walls of Quebec. But, where are the warriors? Where is Montgomery? Their bones have whitened the land of their foes. Scarcely a remnant is left to become prisoners on Champlain, or perish in the sultry fogs of Ticonderoga.

The surrender of that important fortress by St. Clair covered the nation with gloom. The arm of American valor seemed here "to be paralyzed." Hope, weary of disappointment and disaster, was quitting her last hold. Dismay

and terror and foreboding despair seemed hovering over our devoted country. But, weak, short sighted man ! how little dost thou know of the purposes of unerring wisdom ! The darkest season of the night is soon succeeded by the dawning splendor of morning.

A detachment from the victorious army, in reconnoitering the country, was met by our gallant militia at Bennington. Here prudence might possibly have dictated what valor despised. ‘The season is sultry. The enemy is disciplined. Entrenchments and ramparts cover and protect them. What shall be done !’—New-England courage never pauses. Fortitude is discipline ; and determined conquest is entrenchment.

Here the scene of war changed. Victory, weary of her late cruel votaries, returned once more to perch with our native eagle on the American standard. Unhappy Baum, what account wilt thou now give to thy disappointed master !

The confident Burgoyne marched on his army, and encamped on the banks of the Hudson. But here mark the sequel. Little did he think the memento was registered against him ; “hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther.” He was met by the hardy yeomanry of the land. The woods swarmed with resolute soldiers, determined to spill the last drop of patriotic blood ; to die the soil with the crimson of their gore,

rather than it should be possessed by an insolent and haughty enemy.

But why do I describe to you? Ye yourselves, who were actors, can far better paint to me, "what were the feelings, which glowed within your breasts, in that hour of perilous magnanimity." You were present at the solemn, yet joy-fui scene. You saw the haughty Britain yield. Forgive me, if my features be not sufficiently glowing. Give me the feelings of the time, and I will heighten the colors. As the grey hairs on your heads remind you of the laurels you have won, may they serve as monitors to us, and call forth the grateful tribute of your sons, who enjoy the freedom, thus dearly purchased.

"The time would fail me to speak of" Red-Bank and Trenton, of Princeton and Monmouth, of Eutaw and Charleston, of Guilford and Yorktown. Here was closed the last scene in the great drama. Here ceased the "clangor of war and the din of battle." The worn soldier returned to his happy friends and the bosom of his country. Let his crutch and his staff remind you of his valor, while your hospitable doors shall be open to relieve the wants of his declining years. May Heaven with everlasting blessedness reward his labors, when life's toilsome campaign shall be ended. May that fainted hero, who conducted our armies to victory, look down and enjoy the scenes of this day, if they can add to his immortal glory.

Thus was secured that Independence, which had been boldly declared. Those deeds of fame will bear to all posterity THE FOURTH OF JULY SEVENTEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX.

But here we must come to a solemn pause. "Our fathers, where are they?" Gone; almost all gone to the mansions of silence! A few only remain to fill up the broken columns of that wasting generation. What have we, their successors, what have we done? We have boasted of the deeds of our ancestors; but have we copied their magnanimous example? Lulled down on the couch of ease and pleasure we have said to ourselves, "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Our poets and orators have told us of eternal fame and immortal national greatness. In our dreams of the future, we have fancied smiling meadows and golden harvests; our hills covered with peaceful flocks, and our shores whitened with the canvass of affluence; nations bowing down before us, and monarchs suppliant at our feet.

But, while we thus slumber, may not our strength depart from us? So slept the mighty Sampson on the lap of Delilah; so the renowned Hannibal fauntered away his time of victory within the walls of Capua; so the great Alexander closed the conquest of the east in the grave of Babylonian luxury. The season of fancied security is generally the season of ap-

proaching weakness ; and the time of confident boasting, the time of hastening destruction.

The hardy Persians, with Cyrus at their head, carried conquest to the four winds ; but their descendants, enfeebled by ease and affluence, fell by millions under the arrogant Xerxes. Athens, while lived her Miltiades and her Cimon, her Aristides and Themistocles, defied the united armies of all the east. But the same Athens, become dissipated and luxurious, fell an easy prey to Philip of Macedon ; and this in its turn, a still easier prey to Paulus Æmilius. Rome, invincible Rome, was mistress of the world, while her poverty and her patriotism were her boast. But, effeminated by Asiatic profusion, she sunk under her own weight, and yielded all her glory to those northern tribes, she would have scorned to feed with the crumbs which fell from her sumptuous tables.

But to return to our own country ; wrapt into visions of futurity what may we behold ? These luxuriant fields, now waving before us, may pass to new, to strange lords. The present peaceful possessors may be driven from their homes to become wandering exiles ; or humble tenants may live on the moles, and bow at the nod of imperious nobles. The feeble limbs of infancy may be made to totter under the burden of haughty task-masters. Decrepit age, trembling on the verge of life, may be forced from the old habitation to linger out the little remainder

of being, and find a wished for grave in lands unknown. Our sons may be led to the galley, and chained to the galling oar. Our daughters!—But I forbear. The picture is too clouded; the thought is too humiliating. No; we will not be unworthy sons of worthy ancestors. We will rouse from our lethargy; we will start from our dreams. Our freedom shall never be bartered. Our patrimony shall never be yielded. We have been rocked in the cradle of liberty; or we have inhaled it in our native gales. We have seen the sad separation of parents; we remember the widow's woe. If our Independence must perish, may it be, when none of her children are left to defend, none remaining to mourn.

Much, very much, is for us to do. We must train our sons to deeds of arms; we must enkindle in them martial ardour. In this we cannot too soon begin. Promising are the little troops of soldiers, who sometimes parade in our streets. The child, who is thus trained in the way he should go, will not depart from it, when he is old. We must add dignity to the profession. The musket will be pleasing, when the employment is considered honourable.

But we will not only make them soldiers; we will instruct them in sciences and arts. The little city may be saved by the poor wise man. The mind is a field too often left to the rude-

ness of nature. Too often are the thorn and the bramble suffered to shoot, where with careful culture might grow the vine, the olive and the fig-tree.

We must instruct them in the principles of virtue and religion. Cold to the feelings of humanity must that parent be, who does not wish his children virtuous and happy. Enchantment lurks in the way to destruction. Much is often said, and many are the praises bestowed on the reformed profligate. Happy we are, that such a phenomenon is sometimes to be seen. But he is not a member of society equally worthy with him, who has never deviated. For the scattered few, who after long wandering, return to the paths of virtue, how many close their career, while hurrying on in the broad road! Who could wish a son to try the experiment? Philosophy, as well as inspiration, teaches us, that true happiness can be found only in rectitude of conduct. The bare thought of the contrary would be an irreverent reflection on the Author of our being.

The consideration, that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men,” inspires the most noble national sentiments. In his august Omnipresence how do all the fancied mighty of the earth shrink into their original nothing! Courage becomes inspiration, when the fire is lighted with a coal from off the altar. Even the

dark and silent mansions of mortality open for the righteous into eternal day.

We have a Constitution, which we all admire, which we value as the palladium of our rights. Let us read it, and ponder, and ponder and read. Let us give it the fairest place on our shelf, next to that volume, which promises eternal happiness. Let us be very careful how we admit amendments. By these the original principles may be lost ; and tyranny, creeping in at the back door, may bind our strong man sleeping, “and spoil his house.” Our divisions and animosities are preparing the obsequies of our liberty. But let it never be said, that the heavenly visitant must return to her native skies, because she can find no resting place in the abodes of man. Here may she enjoy a safe asylum, where, embowered in cooling shades, she may weep for the noise and the folly, the ambition and the slavery of the eastern world.

May we retain the simple manners, the frugal habits, the firmness, the patriotism and the religion of our ancestors. Then shall our “land flow with milk and honey.” “Every one shall sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree, and have none to molest or make him afraid.” Our fields shall white, and re-whiten with the harvest of peaceful plenty. Our children and our children’s children shall rise up and call us blessed.

May that millennial day soon come, when the nations of the earth shall no more learn war; "when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together; and there shall be none to hurt or destroy; when the whole family of man shall live in fraternal affection; and enjoy on earth some prelibations of celestial harmony.

May the sweet symphonies of grateful millions this day ascend to the God of Nations. May America—may these United States long, *very long*, "BE A PEOPLE CHOSEN OF THE LORD."

I cannot close this my first, my probably last, address to my native town and its vicinity without the warmest aspirations. With pleasing melancholy I revisit these scenes of my earliest days. The absence of but a few years has shown, in what quick succession "the generations of men are chasing one another down." A race is rising up, whom, though I know not, I will esteem for their parent's worth. Here may youth be innocent and old age tranquil. Here may not only patriotism, but all the virtues center. If there be peculiar blessings in reserve, may a double portion rest on this favored circle. May progressive harmony and increasing happiness make this in very deed "the gate of Heaven."