

ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE REPUBLICANS OF PORTLAND,

JULY THE FOURTH 1817.

By ASHUR WARE.

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1817.

AN ORATION.

The fourth of July is the only day marked in our calendar as a national festival, and this not by the authority of the government, but by the voluntary act of a free people; and if any people ever had reason to commemorate a particular day, to devote it to the feelings of gratitude and joy, this certainly ought to be hallowed by Americans. Other people have consecrated by national festivities the exploits of some legendary hero, whose true history is disguised and enlarged by the mists of antiquity, or the feats of some apocryphal saint, whose real character is shrouded in the mysterious gloom of monkish ignorance. The event which we commemorate is the birth of a nation, and the day we celebrate is the birth-day of freedom. The transactions which justly challenge our gratitude, took place under the eye of an enlightened and philosophic age, and possess a native and inherent dignity and importance that need not to be increased by the tales of romance or the fictions of superstition.

In these times of repose and tranquility, we can form but an inadequate conception of the moral courage, the heroic self-devotion, the hardihood and firmness of character in our ancestors that dared to brave the resentments of the mother country. At that time England was in her "high and palmy state." She had recently come out of a war in which she had triumphed over the combined strength of France and Spain. The whole house of Bourbon lay humbled and prostrate at her feet. Her fleets covered every sea, and the laurels were still fresh on the brows of armies that had been gathered from every quarter of the world. Neither the deadly heats of the tropics nor the frosts of the polar regions could check her

career of conquest. Her victorious flag waved over the sultry plains of Bengal, while at the same time it was fluttering to the chilling blasts of Hudson's Bay. She had a giant strength, and she used it with the tyrannous malice of a giant. To stake every thing that was dear on the issue of a contest between the infant resources of America, and the naval and military means of Britain, fostered as they were by every climate, and her unlimited wealth, to which the commerce of the world was rendered tributary, exhibits a sublimity of moral heroism, of which the records of the world furnish few examples.

But the eminence on which she was placed made her giddy. She was dazzled and infatuated by the brilliancy of her own successes. She forgot the maxims of prudence and policy, and plunged into the headlong career of pride and ambition. Least of all things did she suspect that her own colonists would defy the power, before which the genius of France and Spain trembled. She was not satisfied that the best blood of America had been freely and lavishly poured out in fighting her battles, extending her empire, and spreading the renown of her arms. In an evil hour she listened to the suggestions of pride and avarice. She adopted a policy as cruel and ungenerous as it proved to be foolish ; and determined to add to the most rigorous system of commercial subservience, the infamous badge of political slavery.

Our fathers were not slow to discover the approaches of tyranny. With all the acuteness of experienced politicians, they judged of the pressure of the grievance by the nature of the principle. They knew that the first day of servitude took from man half his virtue and all his honor. To the despotic mandates of Parliament they opposed an ardent, and I may even say, a fierce spirit of liberty. The corrupt politics of a profligate court were met by the generous and unyielding firmness of freemen. After a seven year's struggle, the pride of Britain drooped and cowered before the rising genius of America. The mortifying defeat on this grand theatre, to which the whole world were anxious spectators, she digested as she could ; but it left a wound behind that still rankles and festers in her bosom, and the sentiments and purposes of vengeance were carefully treasured up

for another season. The characteristic hypocrisy of her king, the pious George III. was preserved with dramatic consistency to the closing scene. After desolating our country by every species of barbarous warfare, disgorging on our shores a horde of mercenary Germans, those faithful and practised instruments of tyranny, after precipitating on our defenceless frontier a tempest of ferocious savages, and immolating thousands of prisoners of war by cruelties unheard of in modern times, he pathetically laments to his supple Parliament that in achieving our independence we had *lost the blessings of a paternal monarchy*.* Our experience of these paternal blessings left us no wish to have them repeated.

The spirit of the revolution was carried into all our political establishments. The principle of personal equality is the pervading and animating soul of the whole. Under these institutions we have grown and flourished, till on the continent of Europe our political importance secures respect, and in our old enemy the sentiments of hatred and contempt have been converted into fear. They allow every man to find his natural level, and to fill that place in society for which nature or education has fitted him. The most splendid gifts of the state are offered as the prizes of genius and virtue. We have no titled monopolists of political power. The road to preferment is not crowded, nor the posts of honor filled by a rabble rout of pretenders, pleading the merits of some remote ancestor and concealing the degeneracy of the descendant under a profusion of traditional titles. The avenues of the temple of fame are open to all alike, and he receives the crown of honor, on whom heaven has imprinted the seal of genius and habit impressed the stamp of virtue.

* Such was the sentiment expressed by the King in his message, announcing to Parliament that he had acknowledged our independence. Mr. Burke said, that it reminded him of an anecdote of a worthy tory, who having engaged in a political dispute with one of his whig neighbors, in the bar room of a tavern, was severely flogged by the unmerciful whig, kicked out of the room and the door shut upon him. The persevering loyalist, however, far from feeling any abatement in his partiality for the church and king, again opened the door, and thrusting in his foolish face, said, "permit me, sir, to recommend monarchy in parting."

A government thus founded on the basis of popular rights has not however escaped censure; and perhaps this day cannot be more suitably employed than in reviewing and vindicating that system of political liberty and social order that was the legitimate offspring of the revolution. If there was ever a time when we ought to cling to it with peculiar affection it is the present. The minions of despotism, the pimps and parasites and panders of kings are always ready to decry liberty; and recent events in Europe have quickened the general feeling of hostility to every form of freedom into an unusual degree of rancor and malignity.

The first charge they bring is that it degenerates into anarchy. We are far from wishing for the sullen stillness of a despotism where every generous propensity is chilled by the horrors of an inquisition, and the best faculties of our nature are benumbed into silence by the terrors of a bastille. If the charge were true, the blessings of freedom far overbalance the evils that attend them. But it is false.—The most despotic governments are most frequently disturbed by sedition, and for an obvious reason it is there always most violent and sanguinary. For those, who interrupt the portentous silence that reigns over those countries, there is no middle way between death and victory. They contend with a gibbet and a crown both placed before them. If they are unsuccessful the fires of sedition are invariably quenched in blood. Their success is just as certainly followed by a sanguinary revolution, and the dagger or the bowl inflicts summary vengeance on the tyrant that provoked rebellion. The fortunate usurper places the crown, reeking with the warm blood of its recent owner on his own brows, and the people are of so little consideration, that in a change of masters they scarcely feel a variety in the modes of their suffering. The poisonous breath of tyranny spreads gloom and desolation through society. It permits no great qualities to take root, no moral worth to quicken, but carries pestilence and death equally to civil virtues and social charities of life. It is true that free governments are liable to be disturbed by popular commotions. We have had two in America. But the misguided abettors of these tumultuary movements could throw themselves on a government, that was truly paternal, a government that was accessible to popular sympathy, and had a feeling for

human infirmity. They were suppressed with less bloodshed than every septennial election costs the kingdom of England. It is freedom, not despotism that banishes anarchy, as it is religion and not atheism that is the true antidote of superstition.

A second objection against our democratic system of government is that it is deficient in dignity. It might be a sufficient answer to this objection, that the design of government is for use and not for show. But as to every thing that pertains to true dignity we deny the imputation. There is indeed a strong contrast between the severe simplicity of a republic, and the tawdry magnificence of a court. If the dignity of a government consisted in purple and scarlet, in an array of brilliant jewels and sounding titles, then indeed the advantage would lie on the side of monarchy; but if it is best supported by the virtues and talents of the officers, that fill the highest stations in society, it is by no means clear that the pre-eminence will not be found on the other side. The parade and etiquette of a court when surveyed at a suitable distance form undoubtedly an imposing spectacle. The whole routine of petty formalities, as affairs of the greatest national importance, are settled by the grave councils of ministers of state. But if we approach nearer and enter within the purlieus of the sanctuary, if we survey the great state pageant, the heads and leading figures in the political masquerade, there will be seen quite as much of paltry intrigue, of low cabal, of pitiful rivalry in the grand mummeries of state, as experience proves to exist among the buskined brothers and imitators of these illustrious personages on the stage. It will be seen that they are quite as much degraded by low vices, fully as much under the influence of groveling passions, and as has been truly said "much more likely to beat their wives and cheat their benefactors than any set of persons above the condition of tinkers."

The dignity of the chief magistrate of a free people is indeed of a different character from that of a monarch, but we have no need to dread the comparison. A king is as fine as a jeweller and a tailor can make him, but beyond that he has no advantage over an ordinary mortal. I do not see the great dignity that can be attached to a man, the most brilliant achievement of whose life is, that with his

own hands he cooked and ate two capons a day, with whatever culinary adroitness they might be dressed, and with whatever royal gust swallowed. Nor can I perceive how the honor and dignity of a great kingdom is sustained by a sovereign, the utmost stretch of whose intellectual capacity fits him only to preside with suitable gravity and judgment over a privy council of milliners, prescribing the ornaments of ladies court dresses for a birth day.— Equally blind am I to the pre-eminent merits of another descendent of an ancient race of kings, whose highest title to the veneration of mankind is, that with singular taste and pious assiduity he embroidered a petticoat for the Virgin Mary. These are the distinguished accomplishments of three of the present reigning monarchs in Europe. A sorry catalogue of royal qualifications to compensate the absence of personal virtue and political wisdom.

A third charge brought against our democratic system of government, is that it is deficient in strength and stability. These are terms of very equivocal praise, when applied to the civil and political institutions of a country. A government may be very powerful to oppress its subjects, and yet very weak for all the legitimate purposes of government. It has but to disarm the people, to close against them the avenues of knowledge, and, supported by a small band of faithful mercenaries, with no other virtue than military obedience, and a trusty corps of priests and monks, it will be equally safe against the murmurings of an impotent and unarmed multitude, and the “still small voice” of philosophy. It may fill its prisons with the suspected, and the blood of the innocent may be made to run down the streets like water, but the government will stand secure on the immovable and adamant basis of military force and blind superstition. Nothing can shake its inauspicious strength but the defection of its janizaries.

The miserable and cowardly despot that reigns over the once flourishing kingdom of Spain, has infinitely more power of this kind, than the government of the United States. The best men of that country, by the despotic mandate of an unhallowed bigot, are chained by the side of common felons to the banks of a galley, or are pining out life in the solitude of a dungeon, or have already expiat-

ed on the rack or the scaffold the unpardonable crime of having professed liberal principles of government, and attempted to infuse into the gloomy despotism by which they are oppressed, a small portion of liberty. Yet hardly a murmur of discontent interrupts the death-like silence of that dreadful tyranny. The solemn mummeries of monkery continue their wonted course, and the gorgeous pageantry of a court still daily insults the miseries of a beggared people. The power of the ferocious and stupid bigot, whom fortune has placed on the throne, is felt in the proscription of every thing that dignifies human nature or adorns human society. It is felt in inflicting every mode of suffering, and spreading every variety of wretchedness over the realm that acknowledges his authority; in making war on the bounties of providence, and covering with famine and beggary, a realm formed by nature, one of the finest countries of the world. The delightful climate, the rich and luxuriant soil, the natural facilities of trade and agriculture that solicit the industry of the inhabitants, the unlimited extent and unbounded wealth of its colonies, such advantages as nature and fortune have conferred on no other part of the habitable globe, are all blasted and destroyed by the withering influence of a ruthless despotism, and Spain is now the poorest as well as the most ignorant and barbarous country in Europe. But this frightful power of mischief is all. The monarch is dreadfully formidable to the wise and good of his own subjects, but he is weak as an infant to contend with a foreign enemy. The Cortes and their constitution were dissipated before his breath like an airy and unsubstantial vision. A few solitary gems of virtue had been evolved in his absence by the turbulence of the times, and like the spangled dew drops of the morning on a barren heath, scattered their lustre over that wild waste of fanaticism and superstition. But they vanished like a dream on the appearance of that frightful and ferocious tyrant. Exulting in the timid submission of his European vassals from his divan of monks and inquisitors, he thundered his proclamations and anathemas against his revolted colonies; but though torn by internal dissension, and weak and ignorant from that long night of despotism and superstition in which they have spent their days, they have still energy enough to baffle the more feeble efforts of the pest and scourge of the mother country.

It is our boast and glory that the government of this country possesses no such fearful power; and I trust that for ages to come, it will be our pride and happiness that a gloomy and blood-thirsty bigot cannot by the breath of his mouth doom the lights and ornaments of our republic, to chains, dungeons and the scaffold. It is strong enough to second the designs of nature, and aid the bounties of Providence, to assist the nation in developing its resources, and giving stability to its prosperity; but long may it be destitute of that disastrous strength that can wage successful war with the beneficence of an overruling Providence, that can change our cultivated fields, our flourishing towns, and smiling villages into a howling desert; that can convert our halls of legislation into the miserable receptacles of drowsy monks, and our temples of justice into the charnel-houses of a bloody inquisition.

As the charge of weakness is that which is most frequently brought against our institutions, it may deserve a further consideration. It has been so often repeated by the servile politicians of Europe, and the interested ones of this country, that many persons well affected to our general system of liberty, began to fear that although beautiful in theory, it would prove unsafe in practice. It has been so often said that it would answer in times of peace, when the people in fact governed themselves, but would be found impracticable in times of war or civil commotion, when greater vigor was required in the arm of government, and greater steadiness in its councils, that many seriously dreaded a war as a signal for the general dissolution of our free forms of government. The experiment has been tried, and the constitution by a coincidence of circumstances, which will, I trust, prove auspicious, was subjected to its two great perils at one and the same time, the shock of foreign war and the tumults of domestic sedition. The thunders of war have ceased, and the murmurs of sedition are hushed into silence, but the constitution is unimpaired. It has added to the grace and purity of youth, the strength and stability of manhood.

There was indeed a period during the late war, when the most sanguine might reasonably feel alarm. The contest in Europe had terminated disastrously for the best hopes of mankind, by the revival

of that exploded abomination, the divine right of kings, under the new and more popular name of legitimacy. The hopes of liberty in the old world seemed to be drowned in the blood of that fatal struggle, and the united reign of kingcraft and monkery settled on the sure foundation of military power. The same events also liberated all the resources of England, and enabled her to turn her collected strength against this country. The wounds her pride had received in the war of the revolution remained unhealed after the lapse of thirty years; and the memory of the shame and mortification of those times was revived in all its freshness, by the breaking out of a new war. Under these circumstances she instantly prepared to gather up her whole strength, and crush by one blow of signal vengeance this devoted country. It was the most awful among the portentous signs of those times, that a party among ourselves viewed these events with a degree of pleasure that seemed to border on delirium. Priests and people in unhallowed rejoicings crowded to the Temples of God, and made them resound with Anthems and Te Deums; the very men who coldly refused to celebrate the victories of their own countrymen, as "unbecoming a moral and religious people." How much of this was to be ascribed to the drivelling infatuation of faction, and how much to the cool and malignant calculations of artful and designing men, it is perhaps not easy to decide. Undoubtedly both had their share. But we could all see that the prophets, who had always foretold the speedy downfall of our freedom, thought it had now reached its final term, and they eagerly began to prepare themselves for the new order of things.

The great body of the people in this country, without distinction of political party, are unquestionably republican. But in every society there will always be some who prefer the crooked and pimping politics of a Court, to the integrity and plain dealing of freedom, and still more numerous is another class of men, whose pride is wounded by being placed on a level with their fellow-citizens. Between the courtly sycophants whose polished servility fits them for the cringing attitude of a royal levee, and those whose air-blown vanity is swelled to an unseemly magnitude, there will ever be found an aristocratic party, of considerable magnitude, lurking in the bosom of a republic. The circumstances of the war, and the hopes held out by the triumph of legitimacy in Europe put all these ele-

ments of society in commotion. The blessings of a paternal monarchy seemed to be at hand. The golden age was dawning upon us. Those, who had long sighed for the sight of a king, were soon to have their eyes blessed. They began to brush themselves up for a coronation. It was wonderful to witness the inspiriting influence of their sudden hopes of exaltation. Every thing appeared to be in readiness. We had at the head of the state a pacific ruler that would make a very tolerable Solomon. But the times were full of danger, and we might want a Joshua as well as a Solomon. And for any thing that was known to the contrary, our pacific leader might also be a very martial chief, and so we surnamed him the "Washington of Massachusetts," on the credit of the battles he was to gain hereafter. We all remember the stir and bustle of the summer of 1814, and the following winter. Every thing was big with expectation. The leaders of federalism, and I may add some of the followers too, seemed to walk in the air and hold their heads among the clouds. Full of life, spirit and hope, they were impatient for the glorious change. As for opposition they scarcely thought of it. The democracy of New-England was to be frowned into silence by a single glance. And what? though the riflemen of the west were dangerous persons in the neighborhood of an enemy: we had our vanguard ready to receive them, a gallant band of knights that lined the banks of the Connecticut, whose swords were impatient to leap from their scabbards. What? though Brown with an army of disciplined heroes, that had torn the laurels from European veterans, hung on the flanks of the new kingdom: "our best friends," the British, might occupy him, and we had an unconquered corps of reserve in those fiery sons of Mars, the "Silver Greys" of Newburyport. The common enemy had by a cheap and bloodless conquest become masters of one third of our territory. So much the better. The commanding general had saved all his men, and for that matter reserved all his valor too, for the next battle. At any rate we had but to exhibit our invincible Washington, in frowning majesty, curbing his impetuous steed at the head of his Northampton chivalry; his very name was a tower of strength. There was the government of the union, the sacred banners of constitutional authority against us. But could there be any want of civil prudence and of vigorous councils on our part? Surely not while the congregated wisdom of the aris-

toeracy, the flower and hope of the new monarchy were condensed into the Rump of New-England and holding their sessions at Hartford.*

Mr. Ames, the oracle of our aristocratic Junto, feelingly lamented, that we had not in this country the materials for establishing a monarchy similar to that of England. We had no old and great families who were looked up to with that submissive reverence which is inspired by the inherited greatness, the family pictures, if I may so say, of ancient nobility. But the times are much improved since he wrote. All difficulties vanished before the enterprising geniuses of 1814. This man will surely make a very good Duke of Norfolk, and here is an Earl of Essex waiting for the letters patent of his nobility. A hopeful train of titled great could be quickly formed. But for a King! Who shall we clothe with the awful robes of majesty? Where shall we find the sublimity of genius and the transcendant dignity that is worthy to be encircled by the glories of the crown? Nothing so easy. It is a maxim of the British constitution, which is our model, that a paste-board king is the best of all possible monarchs, and so we will crown —, the sage of Northampton. Queen Mab was busy at her fairy work. Mitres and diadems, and stars and ribbons were dancing before the eager imaginations of these titled dreamers. But the Angel of Peace arrived, and the air-drawn phantoms of the fairies vanished before the wand of the powerful enchanter. The exhilarating visions of a heated fancy, the "thrones and dominions and principedoms," the stars and diadems and mitres, just as the pilgrims arrived at the wicket of their political heaven, were taken by this rude cross wind, and

upwhirled aloft,
Flew o'er the backside of the world far off
Into a Limbo large and broad,

the ancient receptacle of all the abortive and unfinished works of nature, and all the multiformed follies of men, of politician's dreams

*If the likeness of the Convention to the Long Parliament, commonly called the Rump, is not complete, there are points of resemblance enough perhaps to entitle them to that honorable appellation.

and lover's sighs, and Pope's indulgences, ycleped in olden time the "paradise of fools." And there may the sparkling glories of the New-England monarchy, the crosses and coronets, that charmed the waking and sleeping fancies of our political regenerators slumber in undisturbed repose, with the cowls and hoods, the relicts and rosaries of religious delirium, till the day of the general resurrection.

The war has not only proved but increased the strength and stability of our government. *Opinion* is the mighty queen that governs human affairs, and rules with as despotic a sway in politics as in fashion; and this mistress of the world from being our most dangerous enemy has become a powerful ally. Had we derived no other advantage from the late war, this alone ought in the peculiar circumstances of our country, to be considered as above all price. When the disciplined hosts of an ancient monarchy, were seen to retire baffled and dispersed before the untried energies of a youthful republic, and the clamors of disaffection sunk into silence under the sacred influence of the law and constitution, the voice of a thousand calumnies was silenced at once. Foreign powers will hereafter feel a greater reverence for the vigor and stability of a government, that derives all its resources from the love of the people, and the ambitious and discontented spirits, that are nurtured in our own bosom, will be awed by a more salutary dread of arranging themselves against a constitution, that has already proved itself adequate to the double purpose of shielding the country from foreign violence, and curbing the excesses of domestic faction. The tempest did indeed shake our political edifice, but without impairing its beauty or its strength, it was only to make its foundation sink deeper and stand more firmly; and may such be the result of every conspiracy, whether from within or without, against the permanence of the only remaining free government in the world.