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Oration.

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Oration.

THE fourth of July well demands an union of hearts and of sentiments in its commemoration. We are not assembled, Fellow Citizens, to discuss questions which inevitably excite the rancorous feelings of party; but we are met, to celebrate the return of a splendid epoch in the history of our Country.—Let us approach, then, and discharge the grateful duty.

THIS day completes one and thirty years since America declared herself Free and Independent. When Britain, elate with her victories, achieved by the giant, enterprizing mind of Chatham, in every quarter of the globe, stood proudly erect, and from her crest shook fear on the nations; when her root extended from continent to continent, and the dew of the two hemispheres watered her branches; at that moment, full of peril, our Fathers dared to look her in the face, and assert their claim to Freedom.

THAT little speck, in the western horizon, scarcely regarded by the politicians of Europe, was seen successfully combating the energized resources of her most powerful Empire. The contest for Independence, which is perfectly within your knowledge, was indeed ardu-

ous; its termination, glory to the actors, and to their posterity Liberty and Happiness.

A POETIC imagination might paint to you Liberty, decorated in a thousand charms, perpetual smiles beaming from her countenance, and peace and plenty extended in her hand; a celestial spirit, that sometimes condescends to visit earth, and assume a residence among mortals. To make the lovely picture still more attractive, you might be told she would dwell with you forever; that you would enjoy her blessings, while water runs in your rivers, or the oak grows on your mountains.—But we mistake our interest, and we mistake our character, when we quit the sober, temperate deductions of reason, and yield to the tossings and vagaries of unlicensed fancy.

FACTS tell us, that *Civil Liberty*, inestimable as it is, like every thing to which we have here a claim, *perishes*. History, the best commentator on human systems, and the only infallible test of human projects, hath pages of lamentable record, where is noted the loss of the Freedom of Greece, of Rome, and of all the nations that have gone before us. As we explore its volumes, we travel a waste of desolated, departed Republics. The heart is alternately raised into hope, and depressed into fear, till at last it settles down into melancholy at their mournful catastrophes. The modern Republics, with every circumstance that can aggravate the loss of Liberty, have been overwhelmed in that torrent, which threatens the world with ruin.

Is our Republic exempted from the dangers which have environed every other that has hitherto existed?

Are our Liberties fortified by bulwarks, too strong to be prostrated, too deep to be undermined? Are they secured by a charter, that can never fail? Has Omnipotence spoken and said, "*They shall exist forever?*"—If not, it becomes us to devote this day to a consideration of the best measures, to preserve and perpetuate, in their spirit and purity, our Rights and our Constitution. Idle declamation, in the praise of Liberty, is no acceptable offering at her shrine.

DIFFERENT Governments rest on different foundations. Each has its peculiar principles of support and animation.—Unlimited Monarchies and corrupt Aristocracies draw nutrition from the very vices of human nature. Alas! whatever our vices contribute to support, is likely to be supported but too well, and to last too long. It is therefore that Governments of this sort take deep root, grow strong, and last for centuries.—A well constituted Republic concentrates in itself the best qualities of all the other forms of Government, and requires, for its support, a combination of the best and rarest virtues, that are to be found in the human character. Imbibing their food of life from a source so scanty and precarious, even in the best of times, the existence of Republics, in all periods of the world, has been unhappily too short. They have appeared, and, like waterspouts on the ocean, lived a moment, and vanished.

A POLITICAL vigilance, that watches over every exercise of power, over every act of a public character; a spirit of economy, a love of equality, with a reverential respect for constituted authorities, and a high, delicate sense of national honor, are efficient and powerful

supports of a Republican Government. Cherish these, Fellow Citizens, and you cherish the vital principles of your Republic—Destroy them, or render them unpopular, and your Government, beautiful as it may appear on paper, becomes an irregular, crazy machine, whose movements, if it move at all, will not compensate for the oil of its wheels.—Odious as jealousy surely is in private life, when not carried to excess it becomes a virtue in a Republic. It is a strong tie on a public character, for the full discharge of his duties. The magistrate, who knows every step is watched, by sagacious, enlightened observers, finds it his interest to walk uprightly.

OUR Constitution has distributed the powers of Government to various offices, and directed the mode and course of their operation. We ought to be extremely vigilant, that among them, there be no interference; no assumption by the one, of the powers and prerogatives of the other. A clashing among the co-ordinate parts of a Republic, is like a clashing among the spheres—It is more tolerable in a Monarchy, where there is a high, supreme power, that looks down from an eminence, and corrects abuses in its subordinate branches.—But above all, the military power should be subservient to the civil. Liberty cannot exist a moment in that country, where the sword and bayonet are paramount to its Laws and Constitution.

It is as prudent in politics, as in morals, to oppose the inchoate operation of a vicious principle. As no man becomes instantaneously a villain, so there are stages in the corruption and degeneracy of Governments.

Gradual, and often unperceived, are the steps from Freedom to slavery. The latter creeps upon us, like a disease hidden in the constitution, and its symptoms may be first discovered, when it is beyond the possibility of resistance.

In moments of unsuspecting confidence, an unwarrantable exercise of power may be attempted to be justified by necessity. Upon a second occasion, it is defended by precedent. Established precedents have the force of public statutes: and we are soon slaves by the Law of the land.—The first indication of a spirit to place the military power beyond the reach and controul of the civil, as it is directly in face of the Constitution, directly subversive of all the principles of civil society, ought to receive our most marked and cordial reprobation.

On this day, and this occasion, I certainly have no disposition to criminate, no desire to awake feelings, that ought to slumber forever. But I must say, there never was, in a free country, a more outrageous violation of its fundamental laws, a more gross usurpation of power, than we have witnessed, the last year, in our own. In a part of this country, distant indeed, but shadowed by the wing of the American Eagle, there have been played such “tricks by men dressed in a little brief authority, as would make high angels weep.” To these transactions, if we have human nature in our souls, we cannot be indifferent. They most awfully concern us. What has happened to a citizen at New-Orleans, may be the fate of each citizen of New-Hampshire. The same Government protects us. The

same Constitution guarantees our rights. A sense of common danger then should excite common apprehension, should make us alive at least to our own safety.

Objects of oppression, far removed, affect us but little. It is natural. Distance softens the aspect, and lessens the magnitude of misery.—But I trust in God there is a spirit of Liberty in this country, a spirit that has descended to us from our fathers, which can neither be deluded nor subdued; a spirit not habitually given to distrust, but which is not charitable in the face of undenied facts; a spirit of attention and vigilance, which sees oppression even at a distance, and snuffs it in the tainted gale.

SHALL this country be put under military government, upon every rumor that would disgrace the agitation of an hysterical old woman? Shall its citizens, unconvicted, unaccused of any crime, be arrested at the point of the bayonet, hurried on board vessels, and transported, just as the caprice, the malice, or the fears of a little petty tyrant, a mere creature of to-day, may dictate? And all this, perhaps, to cover his own secret designs of treason!

SHALL our Constitution receive no respect, no reverence, in those moments, for which it was most particularly formed? If it be a *fair-weather* Constitution only, its ties indeed are Lilliputian. It is not worth a single effort to preserve it. In cool, dispassionate times, men need but little the restraint and force of laws. It is in moments of danger and alarm, when distrust and confusion are around us, when the minds of

men are agitated, earth shakes, heaven menaces, and all the elements of society seem to be dissolving, that a Constitution, consecrated by our reason, and adored by our feelings, is necessary; that we may look to it, rest on its pillars of adamant, and be safe.

It requires more steadiness of nerve, than falls to my lot, to reflect on all that has been done in relation to the disturbances on our southwestern frontiers, without emotion. He that has no sympathy for treason, or traitors, may yet reverence the laws: nor does he believe that their gross and open violation can be justified, because the immediate object of this violence and outrage may be polluted with crimes. Another step, and a moderate one, would have created a Roman Dictator. Had the bill suspending the privileges of the "Habeas Corpus" passed into a law, this had not been a country for an honest man to live in. The subject of Turkey, proud of his privileges, might have pointed the finger of scorn at each of us, and said "there goes a slave." For a man born in slavery knows not, he cannot know, the value of Freedom. His mind early assimilates and conforms to his situation. But a more piercing pang cannot agonize man's bosom, than the recollection of lost Liberty.

It is a subject of proud consolation and of hope, that upon a great question, when a thrust is made at the vitals of the Constitution, men of different politics will unite to defend it; that, superior to the little, contracted views, which bind them to party, they will surround her temple, prostrate themselves at her altar, and protect it from sacrilege. An omen, so auspicious to our country, cannot but be mentioned with joy and grati-

tude on this Anniversary. If it were possible to believe, that the recent occurrences to which we allude, were free of all evil intention, they would then be to be set down to the score of unutterable imbecility and folly—Rash remedies are the resort of weak minds. Men of comprehensive views, well acquainted with human nature, who stand upon an eminence, and retrospect all the forms into which civil society has been thrown or passed, regard a Constitution, that great social compact, which binds and unites together in one family millions of human beings, as an object of reverential respect. They never approach to meddle with it, but with pious awe and the profoundest veneration. They fear and tremble to break up the foundation of the great deep. But the ground *they* deem *hallowed*, weak or wicked minds deem *common*. Thus it is, that “fools rush in, where angels fear to tread.”

PUBLIC economy is a necessary virtue in a Republic. There is a kind of miserly, counterfeit economy, that defeats its own calculations. It will grow poor, and emaciate itself into a skeleton. It is not economy, that grudges every cent given to encourage agriculture, to cherish the arts and sciences, to extend and protect commerce, to defend national rights, or to avenge degraded, insulted, national dignity—It is that beneficent, active principle, which induces liberal appropriations for all the necessary and laudable purposes of Government, and makes a prudent, discreet application of them.

AMONG the innumerable advantages of commerce, it has one bad effect on a Republic. It has a tendency to

introduce a spirit of speculation and avarice, very inconsistent with generous and manly principles of patriotism. A man's mind does not frequently step out of its ordinary habits. He whose life has been spent in accumulating wealth, believes nothing very important that does not immediately contribute to its increase. This is the object, around which all his ideas and views cluster. Place such a man in any office, exalt him to any station, let him legislate for Empires, and his mind goes instinctively into its old process of *per centage*.— A spirit so sordid, so chained to earth, provided his money is safe, is indifferent to slavery. He will make no sacrifices of ease or treasure for the preservation of Liberty and Honor. He will write a bill of sale for them, and vend them in market.

OUR Government ought to counteract and disgrace this paltry, pernicious love of gain. If it be a vice to which we are subject from our habits and pursuits, it ought not to be flattered and encouraged. Splendid examples of patriotism should be given us. The times of the ancient Republics should be recalled to our memories, and forced on our contemplations, when their citizens were ready to inventory all their property upon State emergencies. It is a vicious calculation, that public happiness and future security are in exact proportion to private wealth, and that the Government which for a time spares our purses, will spare also our Rights and Liberties. There are *some possible measures* of a Government, which ought to be represented *almost as frightful* to our imaginations as the imposition of a *two-penny tax!*

It is equally unfortunate, whether an administration be governed intrinsically by this *per cent.* principle, or whether it be a trait so popular and predominant in the character of its constituents, as to impress itself on its measures. If we should ever have an administration guided by these views, it will trim and temporize. A sense of duty will continually yield to a love of popularity. Every Canterbury tale will be put in requisition to amuse and gull us. It will please us with "rattles and tickle us with straws." It will sacrifice great future interests to present contingent advantages. It will never act for posterity, never elevate its views to such a range of vision as to comprehend all the various and multiplied interests of a great and extensive Empire.

A love of equality is likewise necessary in a Republic. But it must be that equality, which God and Nature have instituted. It is in vain to attempt to stretch every man on the bed of Procrustes. Men have different capacities, and they differently improve them. There are proud distinctions, which the laws of Nature recognize, and which they allow to talents and to virtue. The only equality that can be realized in civil society, is an equality of rights; equal protection under equal laws.

THERE should be, too, a reverence for constituted authorities. Our Government is a creature of our own forming, dependent on our wills. As we smile, it flourishes. Our respect and confidence give vigor and energy to its measures.—But there is a limit beyond which blind, implicit reverence should not pass. There is no character in this country too high for candid criti-

cism. A public office should be a temple for the consecration of virtues, not a sanctuary to protect a bad reputation.

A HIGH, delicate sense of national honor, is as necessary to a Republic, as charity to the character of a Christian. The protection of essential national rights and interests cannot be separated from the preservation of national honor in its purity. Administration should watch this jewel, as they guard the apple of their eye. It is the last thing that should be yielded or compromised. Without it, national existence is not desirable— with it, and “no man so vile who will not love his country.”

AN injury done by a foreign power to the meanest citizen, or the least wanton infringement of our rights, ought to be considered an insult offered directly to the majesty of the nation. A spirit of pride should avenge it, as well as a sense of duty and of policy. The nation that submits to insults, and complies with requisitions, only courts a repetition of them.—The violence and injustice of nations will not regard the rights of others. It is in vain to rely for safety on the rectitude of our own conduct. Reason and rectitude are no barriers to arrest the spirit of domination.

ENCROACHMENTS will be made. It is fate, inevitable. There is no exemption; no buying or begging off. And they *must* be repelled. It is worse than treason to say, that preparations for defence only solicit aggressions; that a nation's *poverty* is its best security. The sentiment is unnatural. It is not the ingenuous, unsophisticated language of the heart. It is infamous in theory,

and has been found infinitely worse by experiment. Would you, to preserve life, yield every thing which makes life worth possessing? Will you annihilate yourself, to gain impunity? A nation render itself too insignificant to be the object of ambition!—Carthage paid tribute to Rome, till she was too poor to be the object of avarice; and then the Romans conquered her for the acquisition of glory. Her Consuls led with the same intrepidity, her Legions followed with the same cheerfulness, over the burning sands of Africa, as when they depopulated the fair and rich Provinces of Egypt.

We live not only in a fearful crisis of our own Republic, but in a most extraordinary period of society. The nations of the world are in commotion. Astonishing revolutions every day vary the face of it. A gigantic form walks over Europe, and her nations bow at his feet. One Continent will not limit his ambition. It will ride upon the waves of the Atlantic. It can neither be conciliated by mean submissions, nor appeased by tribute. Resistance is the only alternative, and it is the only one an honorable mind would choose. Our administration, sooner or later, must quit its pacific measures; must be driven to an appeal from proclamations to the sword. In that tremendous moment, if our character is kept unsullied, and without stain; if we can die with glory, when we cannot live to honor; our Country will find us at our posts, ready to protect her rights, and redress her wrongs.

