

AN  
ORATION

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE  
CITIZENS OF NEW-HAVEN

ON THE

Anniversary of the Independence of the United States,

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AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

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BY NOAH WEBSTER, JUN.

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## FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

**A**MONG all civilized nations, in every age of the world, the foundation of States, and the establishment of religious systems, have been the subjects of annual festivity and public demonstrations of joy. This general consent of nations, in celebrating the distinguished periods of their history, is no inconsiderable evidence of the propriety of the custom.

These anniversary festivals have a very powerful influence in reviving public spirit, and in enkindling a flame of national ardor, which, without them, is liable to be extinguished in the perpetual round of private occupations. They call to mind the virtues of statesmen, who, by their wisdom, have founded empires and systems of law; and the sufferings of heroes whose bravery has defended them. They stimulate posterity to imitate their ancestors, in public virtues; they infuse into the child the principles which guided, and the enthusiasm which animated the father; they create and preserve national attachments, which are the cement of the complex edifice of government.

Such are the general objects of utility to be promoted, by the exercises of this auspicious anniversary.

Twenty and two years are completed, since the fathers of our empire, appealing to God and the impartial world, for the purity of their motives, rent asunder the bands that connected the English colonies with their mother country, and declared them an **INDEPENDENT NATION**.

It is known to the members of this auditory, that the general reason assigned for this bold and decisive measure, was the claim made by the Parliament of Great Britain, of a right, independent of the consent of the colonies, "to make laws of sufficient validity to bind them in all cases whatsoever."

This comprehensive claim, so repugnant to the principles of the British constitution, and of all free governments, which unite inseparably *representation* with the *right of legislation*, was no sooner announced to the people of this country, than a universal alarm was spread from New-Hampshire to Georgia—The hopes of a reconciliation to Great Britain yielded to necessity, and were succeeded by a general determination to resist at all hazards, the exercise of such an unwarrantable claim. This determination was pursued with the steadiness of wisdom and the energy of freedom; till it resulted in severing the colonies from Great Britain, and erecting, in the new world, an Independent Empire.

This however was not the only reason that called for a separation of the American colonies from a dependence on Europe. The impropriety of being subject to a legislation, placed at a distance of three thousand miles, from the people to be governed, was so obvious to men of discernment, that it was hardly conceivable, the British government should object to the independence of these states. It was even the clear interest of the mother country, that her colonies should become a nation, with the powers of sovereignty; a wise ministry would have seen this interest, and have proposed by a voluntary act, to acknowledge them to be independent. It would have appeared to a wise ministry, that in a state of independence, Great Britain might have received the profits of our trade, without the expense of governing and defending us. It would have been foreseen, as events have demonstrated, that under our own protection and management, the commerce of the country would increase with a much greater rapidity, than under the jealous regulations of a foreign monopolizing government.

It is with nations as with individuals—the less the mind is restrained by the authority of laws, in regard to its exertions for personal benefit, the more vigor will be displayed, and in general, with more success. Colonies are ever in a state of pupillage. Men never ex-

ert their full powers and resources, while they have not the right of self-direction. In a commercial view—therefore, the people of this country would have been less beneficial to Great Britain, as well as to themselves, in the condition of Colonists, than in the character of an independent nation.

The advantages derived from the commerce of a nation, are not in a simple ratio to the number of its inhabitants, but in proportion to their industry and wealth. The productive industry of a country is obviously increased by the number and variety of its foreign markets. While we were in the condition of Colonies, Great Britain, from that selfish policy, which governs most commercial nations, abridged our privilege of exporting to the best advantage. The consequence was, our citizens had less enterprize, less wealth, less circulating capital, smaller profits, and of course, less ability to purchase her manufactures.

In this manner, all restrictions on colonial trade, all monopolies, and probably all restraints on the ingenuity and industry of men, operate to the prejudice of the nation which imposes them.

In a commercial view therefore, it was the real interest of Great Britain, as well as of this country, that a separation should take place. Her ministry did not understand this policy—for pride is imperious, and passion is blind; we were therefore compelled to encounter the whole force of her arms in a long and bloody contest, to obtain that object, which ought to have been received from her justice and her policy.

If, in a commercial view, the citizens of this country, are gainers by independence, still more are they gainers in their personal character and in improvements. If the mind of man is debased by slavery, it is degraded and vitiated by subjection to a distant government.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we observe this truth, that a colonial administration is corrupt. Needy rapacious men, the idlers about courts, vile in their hearts and desperate in their fortunes, often find access to the most important offices in Colonies. The government

of the mother country finds it convenient to send abroad restless, turbulent, intriguing men ; and a Colony is a kind of honorable exile, for men who really deserve transportation, but whose crimes will not bring them within the purview of any existing law.—If many exceptions can be named of honorable and worthy men employed in administering colonial government, it detracts not at all from the general observation that such administration is usually corrupt.—This corruption at the fountain of influence ; the distance from the mother country, which renders it easy to commit violence with impunity ; the want of a standard of manners, which makes even vicious men cautious in their vices ; all concur to deprave the morals of colonists. Nor has the colonist the same chance for education, and acquiring an elevation of mind, as an inhabitant of the mother country—he is considered as inferior in rank—an outlandish being—humbled in his own estimation and degraded in the estimation of others.

From this state of degradation, my fellow citizens, was this country rescued by the glorious act of Independence, which we are now assembled to commemorate.

But let us not limit our views of the benefits to be derived from Independence, to the advantages of commerce or of character ; or of our own liberties and happiness. Let us extend our views to its connection with the safety and happiness of mankind in other parts of the world and in future ages.

To a man who believes in the superintendence of Divine Providence over the affairs of this globe ; the settlement of America by a civilized people, and the establishment of a free government, unfold a most splendid and consoling prospect. Secluded as America has been from a knowledge of the Europeans, till a late period of the world, may we not consider it as reserved by Heaven for the theatre of important events ; or as the asylum of persecuted freedom and religion ? If we cast our eyes over the other quarters of the earth, where do we find a spot for the retreat of religion, mor-

als, or arts, for private peace or public tranquility? In Asia, man is sunk to a brute, and so firmly established in the despotism that chains him to the earth, that we have no hopes that his condition can be ameliorated by ordinary means. Africa gives us no better prospect. That portion which was once civilized, has been reduced back to barbarism. Europe is in a state of ferment, and her future destiny may baffle all our calculations.

So far as history and a knowledge of the human heart will aid our conjectures, we may consider Europe as declining in improvement, and reverting back to the darkness and ferocity of the middle ages.

One of two consequences will probably result from the present system of measures pursued by France—Either all Europe will bend to the conquerors, and submit to be tributary; or all Europe will rise and unite to resist them by force of arms.—In the first case, Europe will suffer a universal declension in the arts, in science, in manners, and in freedom; and in the last, all arts must be suspended, except the art of war and its auxiliaries.

It is a favorite idea with some enthusiasts that the French, by introducing a revolutionary spirit in the countries they conquer, and overturning the despotism that oppresses them, will awaken the people from their torpor and excite into action those powers which constitute the dignity of man.

But there cannot be a more fallacious opinion, nor one that is more pointedly contradicted by every page of history. Improvement arises from competition, in a state of society, where tranquility fosters taste, and laws secure to every man the fruits of his industry. But under the dominion of a foreign power, all emulation is destroyed. Industry is generated and nursed by independence; but under the control of a foreign government, it must wither and perish.

Let examples decide this question. It has been said that the Romans introduced their arts and civility of manners, among the barbarians whom they subdued. But this is not true to any considerable extent. What

progress did the the native Gauls or Britons make in civilization, under the five hundred years' dominion of the Romans? Has history named one man among those nations, who acquired fame in arts or science? Has one monument of improvement among the millions of the Gauls, Germans and Britons who lived under the dominion of the Romans, been preserved? Probably not one.

On the other hand, Greece, after she was conquered by the Romans, the learned, the polite, the generous Romans, lost her ambition, her arts, and her character; Egypt also declined under their government; while Judea and Carthage, actually vanished from among the nations of the earth. Such is the effect of conquest.

A vanquished nation is a debased, a degraded nation. The brave Romans themselves, when they were conquered by the Northern Barbarians, gradually lost their elevation of character, and sunk to a level with their slaves.—With their character and their freedom, the Romans lost their arts; Europe, by conquest, was reduced to slavery, and under the military system which followed the reduction of the Roman Empire, was, for many centuries, overspread with darkness and ferocity.

Precisely the same has been the effect of the Saracen and Turkish conquests, in all parts of the world where their arms have extended. And from the uniform tenor of facts, we draw the conclusion, that the nation which aspires to universal dominion, solicits the reign of Barbarism. Indeed it is a melancholy truth, that the progress of civilization and refinement, has ever been defeated or retarded by a passion for conquest.—An Alexander, an Omar, or a Buonaparte, may in a year, destroy the arts, and extinguish the genius of a nation. Where is the Italian, who will toil for years, with his pencil or his chisel, if an edict from a distant tyrant can, at any moment, take from *him* the fruits of his labor, and from *his country*, the monuments of his ingenuity?

Such inevitably will be the ultimate effect of the universal dominion of France—a total prostration of arts.

among the vanquished nations, and the extinguishment of genius.

On the other hand, should the nations of Europe combine to repel the aggressions of France, whatever may be the final result, the first effect must be, to arm nations in mass, and all Europe must assume a military character. This condition of mankind is nearly as unfavorable for improvement in arts and civilized life, as the lethargy of despotism.—

The present war is also characterized by circumstances that are more than usually hostile to morality. That species of national piracy, or authorized plunder, which is indulged on the ocean, is demoralizing mankind with a rapidity that exceeds all calculation. Should the practice continue a few years longer, we may expect to see revived the condition of man in the tenth century, when all commerce was piracy; and when the Norwegians and Danes, like modern Algiers, laid Europe under tribute. Already are the moral, as well as political consequences of this practice visible, in every quarter; licentious men abandon their country, arm privateers, and plunder their fellow-citizens; others, with more address, but no less treachery, league with the foreign pirates, secretly supply them with means, and while they walk our streets, in the character of Gentlemen, are sharing the plunder. Such is the effect of the piratical warfare now prosecuted on the ocean, and an age will not repair this waste of moral principles.

In national and social morality, the licentious and unprincipled rulers of a great empire may speedily break down the barriers of good laws, which wise men have labored for ages to erect against the savage passions of untutored man; just as in arts, the knife of a madman, or the hatchet of a barbarian may, in a moment, despoil the finest productions of a Raphael or a Titian.—It is the destiny of human affairs, that the noblest efforts of wisdom and genius, are, liable continually to be defeated by blockheads.

That state of society which renders bad men masters



of the good, is unfriendly to improvement and to happiness. Such is a state of despotism—and such, in a degree, is a state of war.

On the other hand, that condition of man, which secures to him freedom in the exercise of all his rational faculties, and at the same time, places him beyond the reach of demagogues, tyrants and mobs, is best adapted to every species of improvement.

Such a state of society is not to be found in Asia, Africa or Europe. The two former are overspread with ignorance and despotism; the latter is agitated by an inveterate contest, between the advocates of the old systems and the delirious projectors of visionary schemes of reformation.—The dove of peace, of virtue and of religion, will, for a long time, find no nest in that quarter of the globe. America alone seems to be reserved by Heaven as the sequestered region, where religion, virtue and the arts may find a peaceful retirement from the tempests which agitate Europe. And it is a circumstance that ought not to escape our observation, that our revolution happened in good time, to prepare an empire and a free government, for the reception of the wrecks of the little freedom which Europe enjoyed.—The christian and the lover of freedom may consider this continent as destined by Heaven, to save and to foster the seeds of a pure church and excellent constitutions of government, which may hereafter be transplanted to Europe, when the hostile spirit of the present revolution shall have swept away all the old establishments. After Europe shall have been scourged with despotism in every shape; the despotism of kings, and of mobs, of hierarchies, of atheists, of visionary theorists; of armies by land and pirates by sea; after the half of her people have been sacrificed to the ambition of men, under the different covers of crowns and liberty caps; the survivors, weary of eternal discord, of error, of faction, of the persecution of princes and private clubs; of war, assassination and personal danger, the inevitable fruits of atheism and chimerical systems of government; will recover from their delusion and

seek a shelter from their miseries, under well tempered forms of government, analogous to that of the United States, and under the benign influence of that rational system of religion, which is the only sure basis of private happiness and public prosperity.

Should this be the destination of the United States, the idea furnishes new and powerful reasons for guarding the independence and government of our country, from the arts and the assaults of European nations.—If, in the old world, men are doomed to sleep away their existence in the torpor of slavery, or to live in endless hostility, perpetually shedding each others blood, or only enjoying short intervals of repose, while resting on their arms; we have the more reason to cling to the constitution, the laws, to the civil and religious institutions of our country, and to cherish the pacific policy which doubles the value of those blessings.—If there is a nation on earth which enjoys the same portion of freedom as the people of this country, a knowledge of that nation has never yet reached us.—And the condition of Europe herself demands of us that we should resist with energy and success, all attempts to introduce among us, the principles and the vices which disturb her repose.

Even admitting what some enthusiasts affirm, that the present political storms in Europe are necessary to rouse men from their lethargy, awaken their dormant faculties, and invigorate their minds, yet this consideration furnishes no reason why *we* should suffer the same revolutionizing frenzy to penetrate into this peaceful Republic. We probably enjoy, at this moment, more of the blessings of freedom, than European nations can acquire; and more than the people, in their corrupt and debased condition, are capable of enjoying.—The extreme pride and jealousy of the rich and the noble, on the one hand; and the ignorance and ferocity of the peasantry, on the other, absolutely preclude such a state of property, and of reciprocal confidence and respect, as we enjoy, and as we hold to be essential to a free government.—Hence the difficulty and danger of at-

tempting any great innovation in European governments ; difficulties which have hitherto defeated all schemes for suddenly ameliorating the condition of its inhabitants.

From these considerations, let us learn to estimate the value of the position we hold on the globe, and of our civil and religious institutions. Let us consider them as sacred deposits entrusted to our care by the God of nations, to be guarded with vigilance; and to be handed down unimpaired to posterity.

At no period since we became a nation, have our political affairs been so critical, as at this moment. Ambition, under the specious cover of republicanism, and infidelity, under the deceptive title of reason, have assumed the scepter and the sword, and are stalking over the earth, with giant-steps, levelling the mounds which wisdom and policy had raised, to restrain the vicious propensities of men ; turning the physical against the moral force of a nation ; dragging, from seats of justice, the wise and the venerable, and replacing them with bullies and coxcombs ; encouraging violence and robbery, under pretence of introducing a factitious equality ; plundering states, under the name of taking pay for protecting them ; dethroning God and trampling on man.

In the prosecution of this system, and in the confusion that results from it, the laws of political and moral obligation are forgotten or contemned ; authorities, venerable for truths, sanctioned by age and the consent of nations, are discarded and left to moulder in the neglected corners of libraries ; while men commit their interests to the guidance of untried theories. One nation seizes property on the high seas, under pretence of distressing her enemy ; while another thinks it sufficient to justify reprisals, that she is no worse than her neighbors. Neutral nations are plundered at sea, threatened with invasion, or civil war, and without a fault, compelled to purchase peace, with enormous tribute, under the name of diplomatic gratuities or loans. — Should this state of things continue for a few years

longer, national justice will be erased from our vocabularies ; all political intercourse between governments, will be managed solely by money ; justice must be bought and sold ; officers must be hired to perform their duty ; the poor man will lose his rights, because he cannot pay the premium demanded by a rapacious judge, and the temples of justice will become dens of thieves. Such will be the civil state of the world, while commerce will be the object of plunder at sea, and on land, formidable armies will enforce the tyrant's claim, and silence the clamor of the oppressed.

Such are the inevitable consequences of that false philosophy which has been preached in the world by Rousseau, Condorcet, Godwin and other visionaries, who, sit down in their closets to frame systems of government, which are as unfit for practice, as a vessel of paper for the transportation of men on the troubled ocean. In all ages of the world, a political projector or system-monger of popular talents, has been a greater scourge to society than a pestilence.

While then we rejoice that nature has placed our "goodly heritage" at an immense distance from the disturbances which harass Europe ; and that our citizens have had the fortitude to dissolve our political relation to that quarter of the earth ; let us guard our independence, our liberties, our commerce, and our principles, with the firmness of freemen, and the prudence of enlightened statesmen. Let us remember that force never makes a convert ; that no amelioration of society can be wrought by violence ; and that an attempt to reform men by compulsion must produce more calamities than benefits. Let us reject the spirit of making proselytes to particular creeds, by any other means than persuasion—that fanaticism in politics, which, like bigotry in religion, dogmatically arrogates the exclusive privilege of knowing what is right and denouncing all difference of opinion as damnable heresy.—A fanatical republican, who imposes his form of government on his neighbors, by violence, or silences opposition by the guillotine, is as much a bigot, and a tyrant, as the Pope

who shuts the Bible against investigation, and burns a heretic at the stake.

Let us never forget that the corner stone of all republican governments, is, that the will of every citizen is controlled by the laws, or supreme will of the state. That moment in which the regular authorities cease to govern, that moment the principles of our constitution are prostrated, and we are slaves. How little do the advocates of private associations for the purpose of influencing government, reflect on the effect of their principles. The same reason which will justify men of one description of principles, in attempting a private influence upon government, not known to the laws, will justify men of every other description, in associating for *their* particular purposes; and in the monstrous collision of interests, which would certainly arise out of such cabals, some party *must* be the victim of the hostile passions of its rival, and one party has nearly the same chance to be the victim, as another.—This remark has been verified in France in its fullest extent. In the rapid succession of parties, which have arisen, flourished for a few days, and disappeared under the murderous guillotine, probably no one was traitorous or hostile to the country: but they had different views to answer; a difference of views generated hatred, hatred soon produced open hostility, force decided, and the death or exile of the weakest party closed the completion.

With such melancholy truths before our eyes, let us never suffer an external influence, unknown to the laws of our country, to interpose and warp its administration. How glorious was it for America, that her revolution, was guided by wise and able men, and that scarcely was its progress disgraced by a popular tumult! If there is a species of despotism, more ferocious, more merciless, and inexorable, than another, it is the dominion of bullies and ruffians. May the illustrious example of the conductors of the American revolution, be sacred to imitation, in every period of our history!

Never, my fellow citizens, let us exchange our civil and religious institutions for the wild theories of crazy projectors; or the sober, industrious moral habits of our country, for experiments in atheism and lawless democracy. *Experience* is a safe pilot; but *experiment* is a dangerous ocean, full of rocks and shoals!—

Since the establishment of our independence, and more especially since the operation of our national government, our growth and prosperity have verified the most sanguine predictions. In the general information of the body of citizens, and in mechanical ingenuity, the American character stands probably unrivalled—in every branch of science, it is highly respectable. No nation can boast of more industrious and enterprising citizens. Already our commerce holds probably the second rank, and many of this assembly may live to see the shipping and commerce of the United States hold the *first* rank on the ocean.

Such advantages of a political, moral and commercial nature are not to be bartered away for visionary schemes of government or fraternal embraces.

Why should we suffer our nation to be split into parties about the contests in Europe? Why degrade ourselves to dispute whether the bastille or the guillotine is the more dreadful instrument of despotism? Whether the government of England or France is the more tyrannical? Or whether the English or French privateers rob us of the most property?—These questions may occupy private curiosity, but ought not to affect our attachment to our own government, or divide us into factions. *Our* business is to love our country, and to maintain its independence. Of what consequence is it, *which* of the European nations requires us to surrender our independence; or whether the requisition appears in the candid mode of claiming unconditional submission, or in the more insidious shape of demands on us for loans, gratuities and fraternity? Where is the man, who in '75 put on the soldier, to resist the imposition of a three penny duty on tea; yet will now shrug his shoulders, like a culprit at the whipping post, and say to the French

government, "we will give you a *few millions*, if you will only let us alone; we are afraid—we are very much afraid of war"!!!—My friends, had this been the language of '75, we should have had no independence to commemorate—and, at this moment, our ports would have been filled with British tide waiters.—But our fathers were *men*—they were heroes and patriots—they fought—they conquered—and they bequeathed to us a rich inheritance of liberty and empire, which we have no right to surrender to the all-grasping fangs of the French government.

Yes, my fellow freemen; we have a rich and growing empire—we have a lucrative commerce to protect—we have indefeasible rights—we have an excellent system of religion and of government—we have wives and children and sisters to defend; and God forbid that the soil of America should sustain the wretch, who wants the will or the spirit to defend them.

Let us then rally round the Independence and Constitution of our country; resolved, to a man, that we will never lose by folly, disunion or cowardice, what has been planned by wisdom, and purchased with blood.