

AN

ORATION,

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE DAY

OF THE

DECLARATION

OF THE

INDEPENDENCE

OF THE

United States of America.

DELIVERED AT

NEW-GLOUCESTER ;

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By EZEKIEL WHITMAN, A. B. Attorney at Law.

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ORATION.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

AT the request of your committee of arrangements, I appear before you on this joyful occasion, to take a part in the performances of the day. The shortness of the previous notice which I received, must serve as an apology for many defects.

This is our nation's jubilee. On this day we celebrate an event the most august and important—an event pregnant with consequences of the first magnitude.

An actor in the scenes of the late revolution, would enter more feelingly and interestedly into a discussion of a subject of this kind, than a youth, who knows nothing of the transactions, but from history and hearsay. His language

would be more forcible, his families more apt and striking ; and his ideas more accurate, and better adapted to the occasion.

The commemoration of this event naturally leads us to a consideration of the laudable motives which operated to produce it ; and to a contemplation of the consequences resulting from it.

In recurring to the years 1775 and 1776, we shall discover the situation of these States (then colonies of Great Britain) to have been the most singular, and, at the same time, the most confused, distracted and perplexed, that can be imagined.

On the one hand we behold a nation powerful and terrible ; fierce and warlike ; and renowned in arms : A nation flushed with her former repeated successes in every quarter of the globe : A nation, proud, haughty, overbearing and insolent ; whose funds and resources, at that time, seemed almost inexhaustible. We beheld this nation making sundry oppressive and tyrannical acts relative to trade and commerce, and the internal government of our

country ; contrary to every principle of law, whether natural or civil ; and contrary to their own avowed maxims : And enforcing an obedience to these laws, at the point of the sword, with a mercenary and sanguinary army. We beheld them openly assuming to themselves a right to tax us in all cases whatsoever, without our consent, and without the shadow of a representation from among us.

On the other hand, we found ourselves, as it were, undefignedly, but necessarily, in a state of actual hostility against this nation. We were then a mere handful of people ; scattered over a vast extent of territory ; in a defenceless state ; without warlike accoutrements ; without any regular force ; without Generals experienced in the field, or in the science of tactics : And, under such an accumulated load of embarrassments, almost without courage to resist. We knew not our resources, if we had any.

The repeated aggressions and outrages upon our rights and liberties, were, however, such as instantaneously, and as it were by a shock of electricity, to unite every American in heartily execrating such measures, and their projectors.

Their first momentary indignation was such as to prompt them, inconsiderately, to oppose force by force. They had no opportunity to reflect upon the consequences which would probably attend their hostile and obstinate conduct. The principal leaders were, at that time, fearful that the spirit which then appeared in opposition to the British would eventually end in a few intemperate sallies of momentary heat and passion.

In this dreadful situation of things, what shall we do? was the question, which every one asked, and which no one could answer. Delegates, however, met near the center, from each of the States, seemingly by an intuitive impulse, to consult upon the state of affairs; upon their common interests: To ascertain the situation of the colonies; their respective dispositions and determinations. Although they were without constitutional authority; without organization; without any legislative powers; without any supreme head or executive officer; yet they were under the necessity of assuming power for the good of the community. This they did by the tacit and implied consent of the people.— But their powers were not acknowledged at foreign courts; of course they could not enter

upon foreign negotiations. At that time we were considered in the eyes of all European nations, as nothing more nor less than rebels.

Here then their embarrassments increased upon them. Foreign alliances, at that time, seemed absolutely indispensable. But the haughty potentates of Europe could not brook the idea of condescending to receive an ambassador from rebels ; and acknowledge him as such.

At this critical juncture it occurred to the understandings of the great pole-stars of our revolution, that nothing short of an absolute declaration of independence would be adequate to the purpose. They saw that we were an anonymous people ; without a head ; without a constituted frame of government ; without organization ; without system or arrangement ; without any compulsory or legislative authority. That we were a people designated only by the opprobrious epithet of rebels. That if we should declare ourselves independent ; should establish a form of government, and give to ourselves a name and character, we should put ourselves in a condition to be acknowledged as an independent power, by all foreign nations : and that

as such, they might be induced to receive an embassy from us ; and to treat with us upon honorable terms ; and to relieve our necessities.

But a declaration of independence, and a total separation from the mother country, intimidated some by its boldness, novelty, and apparent rashness ; while it disaffected others, who entertained sanguine hopes of being one day re-united in amity and concord with Great Britain. Many able politicians, who before that time had performed conspicuous parts upon the theatre of the great political contest, withdrew ; and either retired into obscurity or fled to the British dominions.

But the measure appeared so indispensably necessary to our success ; and so intimately connected with it, to those, whose views were more enlarged and extensive, that nothing could divert them from it. They persisted, and gloriously persisted, in their determination. Accordingly, on the ever memorable Fourth of July, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and seventy-six, to the astonishment and surprise of all Europe ; to our immortal honor and renown ; and to the glory and salva-

tion of these United States ; our delegates, then in Congress, had the magnanimity to declare these United States, for ever after, free, sovereign and Independent.

From this period the political aspect of things in America, was materially changed. We then announced the stature and form of a nation by ourselves. The opprobrious epithet Rebel, was no longer an appropriate term to designate the American people. From this moment we obtained a rank and consideration among the nations of the earth. We were no longer esteemed the rebellious subjects of Great Britain : but as a magnanimous people struggling for liberty—for our inherent birth right ; struggling in opposition to tyrannical and unjust oppression : in opposition to principles the most preposterous and absurd : in opposition to men and measures instigated by the vilest motives ; in opposition to men totally void of principle, of humanity, and of every species of fellow feeling ; men actuated by self aggrandizement, or by a pertinacious determination that the opposition however, righteous and honorable in their views, should not have their wills. Either of which are equally infamous and detestable.

The humanity of some of the nations of Europe was on this occasion moved towards us. They saw with a mixture of indignation and regret, the then abject state of the defenceless Colonies. They saw, also, the rapid strides of Great Britain towards power and dominion. They saw that if not checked in her progress she would ere long gain too great an ascendancy in the politics of Europe: and that the balance of power, subsisting among them, of which they are ever jealous, might one day be overturned and unhinged.

Under such impressions, they were induced to acknowledge our Independence and to assist us with their arms and resources. Louis XVI, whose motives were ever benevolent, disinterested, and of the purest kind, generously stepped forward the foremost among our friends and allies. To this circumstance, we may perhaps, attribute his final overthrow and destruction. For France, by the alliance and connexion, caught the flame of liberty.

By the aid and assistance of this Monarch; and our own resolution and perseverance, we were enabled to withstand the renowned hosts

of Britain ; and, finally, to overpower and discomfit them. Yes, my fellow-citizens, it was a vital wound we gave them—a wound which never will be healed. Previous to the American war, Great Britain was in her zenith. From that period she may date her decline. The vast accumulated and accumulating debt, under which she groans, will one day overwhelm her government.

Let us now turn our attention to a contemplation of the national felicity resulting from the declaration of Independence.

Hitherto fortune has kept an upward course with us, and we have been crowned with wreaths of glory. The sun of happiness has shone upon us in all the effulgence of meridian splendor. Our Independence and separation from the contentious kingdom of Great Britain has kept us free from concern in those bloody wars, in which she has been almost continually involved. We have even been so far from suffering by them, that we have reaped the fruits of her contentions.

A few momentary squalls and tempests have

thickened over our heads ; and for a time worn a threatening aspect. But the gloom has again been dispelled ; and the prospect brightened before us : and in some instances, the damage which we had sustained, considerably repaired.

We now, in this country, make our own laws ; direct the expenditure of our own money. Our governors and rulers are men of our own choosing—men after our own hearts. They are not avaricious, mercenary foreigners—sent here by a venal court and government, to fleece and plunder for a season : then to return, laden with their ill-gotten wealth, to riot in luxury and indolence. Merit is not suppressed ; but every where encouraged. Office and preferment being within the reach of every one, inspire our youth with a glorious and laudable emulation ; and stimulate them to deeds of heroism and renown. Literature and literary institutions are not cramped by a mean jealousy, that the people may grow too wise and discerning ; insomuch as to be enabled to discover the base and undue means practised to keep them in subjugation. Literature is in this country unrestrained ; and not only unrestrained, but warmly cherished and encouraged, as the bul-

wark of our safety, freedom and Independence. Our husbandry, fisheries, manufactories and commerce, are all free—are all encouraged and protected. We are under no obligation to Great Britain, for the privileges of exportation or importation. We are our own masters ; our own managers ; our own protectors. In one word, we are a free people. We are not slaves.

To have a clearer idea of our own felicity, we should compare ourselves with other nations ; and contemplate the world of mankind. We should imagine ourselves transported to behold the kingdoms of Europe, Asia and Africa. There we might behold scenes of misery and wretchedness. There we might view the abject, degraded, humiliating condition of the great bulk of the human race. There we might see them driven to work and labor ; to the most servile employments, like beasts of burthen. While a few—a very few, reap the fruits of their degradation and misery ; and riot wantonly in the spoils of wealth and luxury. They seem to consider themselves as a superior order of beings ; and the people below them as mere instruments of sport and gratification—as

mere brutes. In this abject situation, are at least nine tenths of our fellow-creatures. They are by the policy of their governments, kept in the most profound ignorance of the dignity of their natures ; and of their own strength.

In this country the case is far otherwise. Our government is a government of laws, and not of men. We are as the great God of Nature designed we should be, all equal. This perhaps is almost the only country in the world in which this can be said to be the case. No one man here can claim a right to domineer over an other ; or to oppress him in the least degree. Every one is entitled to the fruits of his labor ; and to a participation in the civil government. We have no Lordships—no unalienable hereditary estates, confined solely to the support of one individual, which, if equally distributed among a thousand families, would be every way adequate to their support and maintenance. There is no country on earth, wherein happiness is more abundant ; or more equally diffused throughout the whole community. Is it possible this could have been the case if the dissolution of the connexion between this country and Great Britain had not taken place ?

But the encomiums and eulogies pronounced on the memorable event of our Independence, have been almost innumerable. Poets, Historians and Orators, have not failed to assign it every advantage of which so great an event could possibly be productive. They have largely portrayed, in the most lively and brilliant colors, our delightful situation in comparison with the surrounding nations of the earth.

The American ear has not been callous and inattentive to their melodious enchanting strains. But, presuming fortune's fickle gale will ever continue to waft them on in the same propitious direction, they have, perhaps, been too inconsiderately lulled into a state of ease and unconcern about their future welfare. Hitherto our virtues have been our preservation.

But it is now high time to begin to look forward with a prophetic eye upon the shoals and quicksands on which our happiness may one day be wrecked. Is it possible that the tide of human affairs, any more than the tide of the ocean, should continue to roll on in the same uniform course of exaltation, without the signs of depression? Do we not find the scales of na-

tional grandeur and debasement alternately preponderating? And is not the period, with winged haste approaching, when all our splendor and magnificence shall be found declining at a rapid rate. History, which is a record of the experience of ages, will teach us, that the glory and prosperity of nations, as well as the glory and prosperity of individuals, is altogether transitory; altogether changeable.

May I not be permitted to hazard the conjecture, that the seeds of corruption are already sown and rooted among us? If so, the soil is fertile. They will spring up and grow with incredible rapidity to the final overthrow and subversion of all our happiness and freedom. Every step which we fondly imagine to be one of those huge, gigantic strides towards the zenith of glory, may only advance us one step nearer the brink of destruction.

Morals and religion are essential to the support and maintenance of a republican government. Without virtue in the people, and virtue in rulers, there can be no such thing as happiness in the land. Without the aid of religion, to impose solemnity upon the obligations of an

oath, we can have no security for the enjoyment of private property or personal safety.

Hence it is the duty, and for the interest of every community, to preserve religion and morality in all their purity and excellency.— To this end, education and literary institutions should be cherished and encouraged to the utmost of our abilities; insomuch that the whole nation might be made sensible that,

“Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,

“As to be hated, needs but to be seen.”

Most nations are anxious for the encouragement of commerce. American politicians have been extremely solicitous that she should pour, in swelling torrents, all her bounties upon the Columbian shores. But this is of doubtful consequence, as it effects the stability, virtue and happiness of a people. Commerce may introduce the most noxious banes that can effect the commonwealth.

This country produces all the necessaries of life. We might live perfectly independent of any other country in the world. Commerce supplies us with little else but the gaudy super

quities of foreign climes. It however augments our splendor, our opulence and apparent grandeur. As it makes us rich it increases pride and vanity; and makes us luxurious and indolent; and increases the miseries of the poor; and pampers the vices and follies of the more wealthy.

As luxury and indolence gain ground in the land, so will vice, immorality and irreligion. Wherever luxury and indolence prevail the powers both of body and mind are debilitated and weakened: every patriotic and manly virtue stifled in the bud. Vigor and magnanimity, so necessary to the strength and permanency of government, every where gives place to degrading delicacy and effeminacy. Liberty, in such a state of things, is readily converted into licentiousness. Dissipation, the rude nurse and parent of villains, together with lasciviousness and debauchery, will pervade the land.

Hence a most despicable multitude of citizens will be formed. Youths will be trained up to imitate the vices of their parents. The sacredness of the obligation of an oath, that cement of society, set at nought and ridiculed—

Religion will be banished the land—The moral turpitude of the most flagrant outrages consist in their detection : and crimes of the most horrid nature, and of the deepest die, perpetrated without compunction or remorse.

In such a society there is no confidence to be placed in any one. All is distrust and jealousy. The people can place no dependance upon their rulers ; nor the rulers upon the people. Every citizen is restless, ambitious, intriguing jealous and aspiring. In such a state of things, right reasoning is no more to be heard, than a whisper in a whirlwind. “ If such a people are not soon made slaves, the course of nature is suspended in their favor and they are miraculously safe.”

Let us, for a moment, turn our attention to the celebrated Roman Empire, whose government, in many respects, has been said very nearly to resemble ours. It was, however, such as to raise the Empire, from rude beginnings, to the highest pinnacle of happiness, grandeur and magnificence. The fame of the Roman arms was such, in the days of antiquity, as to strike the world with dread. She is now, in her turn, fallen : and remains a lasting monument of the fatal effects resulting from opulence, indolence, luxury and

a general corruption of manners. These extinguished entirely that patriotic fire which had glowed in the bosoms of her sons with such emulating ardor. She was finally overrun and conquered by a set of barbarians; whom she had been accustomed to set at naught; and to contemn as a cowardly and dastardly race.

It was, however, with difficulty that these barbarians could finally persuade themselves of the true state of Roman degeneracy. The former impressions, which they had, from sorrowful experience, received of her valor, were not easily erased. And, although almost as numerous as the sands on the sea shore; and, although they came in swelling torrents; yet it was gradually and by little and little that they mustered resolution to venture into the heart of the Empire.

Thus we find that this strangest and most warlike nation, that ever was assailed by the all conquering hand of time, was unable long to withstand the shock. And shall we alone expect immortality? It is a maxim respecting the vegetable kingdom, and will hold good with respect to almost every thing else, that things sudden in their growth are equally sudden in their decay. And shall we, who have arisen at once

from the depth of obscurity, expect to continue forever? Shall all the laws of impartial nature, be abrogated and annulled merely on our account? Or, on the contrary, will not our decline be as sudden as our growth? Depend upon it we must soon arrive at an ultimate pitch—at which we may remain in a dubious unsettled state for a season; but from which we must eventually experience an unavoidable decline. The only resolution we can take is to put the evil day as far off as possible.

If we take a retrospective view of the kingdom of England, from whom we derive our physical and political birth, well may we imagine that all national splendor and magnificence must continually fluctuate between the two extremes. Great Britain has experienced her rise, her progress, and is now seemingly on the verge of dissolution. She originally sprung from a rude, chaotic state of ignorance and barbarism. She has, in her turn, awed the kingdoms of Europe with her presence; rode triumphant on the broad atlantic, the imperious mistress of the ocean; and felt immortal within herself. But, alas! the prospect widely differs. She now totters and trembles beneath a burthenome and dangerous load. And is in circumstances the most

trying to the magnanimity of her rulers—in circumstances which forebode inevitable downfall.

Let us, my Fellow Citizens, take warning from these striking instance of human mutability ; and mark critically the causes which have produced them ; that we may avoid and shun them. Let us anxiously guard and cherish our seminaries of learning as we would guard and cherish our liberty and independence. And may we never loose sight of the oracles of our holy religion, nor be regardless of the morals of the people. Let us “ mark such as cause divisions and avoid them ; and meddle not with such as are given to change.” Let not the viperous tongue of envy and malevolence direct us towards the government under which we live. And, finally may he who is dissatisfied with the government and state of happiness in this country, compare them with that of other nations ; with that of millions of his fellow-creatures, groaning under burthens of calamities too grievous to be dwelt upon.

