

*John Frothingham*

AT

# ORATION

PRONOUNCED

JULY 4, 1814,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE SELECTMEN OF THE TOWN OF

BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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BY

BENJAMIN WHITWELL, Esq.

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BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY CHARLES CALLENDER.

NO. 11, MARLBORO<sup>S</sup> STREET.

1814

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## VOTE OF THE TOWN.

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AT a meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of *Boston*, assembled at *Faneuil-Hall*, on Monday the 4th day of July, A. D. 1814, 9 o'clock, A. M. and then adjourned to the *Old South Church*—Voted,—That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a committee to wait on BENJAMIN WHITWELL, Esq. in the name of the town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited Oration this day delivered by him at the request of the town, upon the Anniversary of American Independence, in which were considered the feelings, manners and principles, which produced the great national event, and the important and happy effects, general and domestic, which have already, or will forever, flow from that auspicious epoch; and to request of him a copy for the press.

Attest,

THOMAS CLARK, *Town-Clerk.*

## ORATION.

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**T**HE American Revolution was an event which not only affected the contending parties, but involved in its consequences the destiny of the world. The feelings, manners and principles which led to it were derived in legitimate succession from brave, pious and enlightened ancestors. As family resemblance is peculiar to different nations in the lines of the countenance, so it is accurately marked in the features of character. The original character of a nation, unbiassed by the pressure of tyranny, and unalloyed by foreign mixture, will be visible from its birth through maturity to its decline.

It was the first principle of our ancestors to fear God and serve their country; brave and free, they knew no other fear, they yielded no other service. They understood the nature of civil and religious rights, as well those they retained, as those they had yielded; and when persecuted by their sovereign for religious opinions, they never forgot their allegiance, while they rigidly asserted their personal privi-

leges—their ardent piety elevated their views beyond the joys and sorrows of life, and encouraged them to encounter the perils incident to a new settlement in the American wilderness. Such principles and feelings formed the manners of our ancestors, and these they bequeathed to posterity. By these were a hardy race of yeomanry readily converted into soldiers, at the period when the connection between the mother country and her colonies was dissolved; the child asserted the rights of maturity, and the parent after a struggle consented to acknowledge the claim.

A view of the “*consequences which have flown from the American Revolution*” will naturally involve the consideration “*of the manners, feelings and principles which led to it.*” Being an event which has affected foreign nations not only in their internal policy but in their intercourse with other states. Among the most important consequences to this country are those which have resulted from its relations with France.

For the successful issue of the contest, we were partly indebted to the aid of the French monarch; our debt of gratitude to him we transferred to the nation he governed; during his life this was a pure and virtuous sentiment, and the regret we felt for the calamities of his family was too feeble to destroy our attachment. The usurpers of his throne ungenerously abused their power over us, they indirectly increased our prejudices by exciting our hatred against their rivals and enemies. Our passions were artfully fomented by comparing the revolutions in both countries, by misapplying the same principles to an op-

posite course of conduct, regardless of the essential difference, that our struggle was to retain the rights we had enjoyed, theirs, to remove the evils they endured; ours, was a blessing we inhaled with the breath of life, theirs, an unknown good of which they neither knew the kind nor the value.

In an early period of the French revolution there was a party in this country who were wilfully seduced to promote the designs of that government. Twenty years since the French republic passed a decree, under which in direct breach of their treaty, American commerce suffered much vexation and injury. Our minister at Paris was repeatedly charged to remonstrate against this gross violation of our rights, instead of which he declared to that government, that he had no instructions to complain of the decree or request a repeal of it, on the contrary, if they supposed it would produce them any solid benefit, the American government and his countrymen, would bear the departure with patience, and even with pleasure. This declaration was disavowed by Washington, and the minister recalled, but it convinced the French cabinet, that he would not hazard it on his personal responsibility only, unless he was supported by a powerful faction at home, as he was a man high in office, and has since been gradually rising to the highest stations.

From this origin, we may date the rapid growth of that pernicious influence which, secretly operating, has promoted the designs of France, as much as if she had issued a formal decree requiring our concurrence. Whether fear, hatred, love or admiration,

was the ruling principle, the rigour of her commands have only been equalled by the zeal with which they have been obeyed, there was an entire harmony between the design and the execution, that in effect we have been treated, rather as a French vice-royalty, than as a free republic. During the various changes in their government, we have successively felt this influence, but never did it so much predominate over the opinions, prejudices and passions, as during the reign of the Corsican usurper. Secret service money, liberally circulated through all the grades of corruption, funds were supplied by sequestration of property, and the sale of Spanish provinces. Now, the glory has departed, and this meteor shorn of his beams, we may with steadfast eye discern the shameless arrogance by which, he seemed to direct every measure of our administration. The victim which he could not reach with the sword, he circumvented by intrigue, or poisoned by corruption. To what motive but fear, can we ascribe the subserviency of our ministry? It was their prevalent opinion, that Great-Britain could resist but a few years, and must then yield to the usurper. It has been confessed that America was ensnared, that the knot was entwined round her neck, an infernal charm rendered it indissoluble to negotiation, and which the sword only could dis sever. That master hand, as it marked the gigantic shadow of his own policy, with the same physiognotrace described in miniature, the features of our government:

These are not unfounded assertions—they are attested by the conduct of the French government, and by the acknowledgments of our own. Witness his

imperious declaration, when we humbly urged the rights of neutral powers, that "he would permit no neutrals, that we should aid him to enforce his system to destroy the commerce of England." Witness his insult on our weak and unsteady policy—"that we submitted to pay duties to Great Britain, and that such men, who thus submitted, were more dependant than one of her provinces. Men, without honour, and without energy, who, having refused to fight for interest, would be compelled to fight for honour"—with such menaces, having vanquished opposition, he then declared "the American government had retraced its steps, and had resolved to oppose the enemy." But he did not confine his measures to words only—he sequestered our merchandise to the value of twenty millions, and tauntingly pretended it was for violating restrictions imposed by our own laws, which he officiously undertook to enforce.

His subjugated provinces of Germany and Holland did not more quietly endure such outrages than the free government of the United States. To complete the climax of humility on the one side, and overbearing insolence on the other—as if Congress was of incompetent discretion, and he their guardian, he declared war for us against England; and our subsequent declaration appeared to the impartial world, more like the servile recital of an imperial decree, than an original, independent act of a free government.

Do not believe these insults were received with unconscious stupidity. Full well did Mr. Madison know their extent and bearing: he had but lately dis-

missed a British minister for a constructive insult, which none but microscopic eyes could perceive, and nothing but his nervous sensibility could feel. Yet within a year before, his reluctant consent to terminate the controversy, was connected with so gross an affront to his Britannic majesty, that he was obliged to reject the instrument which would otherwise have been confirmed, and thus the fatal consequences of the rupture would have been avoided.

To what more excusable cause than timidity, can be referred this fatal partiality? With the one, he has constantly resisted pacific overtures, and magnified the shadow of an affront into hostile aggression; from the other, he has endured with the meekness of a saint, every species of indignity. This coquetish honour, like a sensitive plant, has shrunk from the touch of a British fairy, yet has borne the gigantic grasp of a French lover, and not recoiled from the pressure. What motive but the fear of France, produced the rupture of Mr. Erskine's agreement, or the concealment of the absolute repeal of the French decrees affecting our commerce? Had this fact been seasonably made known to Great Britain, she would have withdrawn her orders in council, and thus, the chief cause which had been assigned for hostilities, would have been removed. But fear has not been the only passion which has been excited, to produce these baneful measures, baser motives, and more unprincipled instruments, have been employed to destroy our national peace.

The history of the French cabinet which the national convention published to the world, develop-



ed a mystery of intrigue and corruption, a system of domestic and foreign espionage, which for more than a century, had extended through Europe, and even to the United States, while British colonies. The same system was renewed by the usurper, with instruments as much more numerous and efficient, as were the resources of the empire than those of the monarchy. He organized a regular band of spies and informers, and distributed them through Europe and America; with the pillage of one class of citizens he bribed and corrupted another. The honest merchant was robbed to enrich with the plunder some venal politician. Thus with diabolical policy, he compelled the victim which he butchered to provide the instruments of sacrifice. If the present king should favour the world with a second volume of the history of that cabinet, it might supply the remaining fragments of those mutilated and half-suppressed documents which our President reluctantly yielded to Congress, under the injunction that they should not be copied for the inspection of the people. As he has declared that France wanted money and must have it, these archives might disclose, how much she wanted—what sum she received—and how she expended it.—They might reveal the price that has bought our prostituted presses and our foreign editors, and beam a blaze of light on that hand, which has directed in darkness, the machine of government.

Should the pension list be published, how many democratic officers, besides those of Massachusetts, might exile themselves to Canada, that American Siberia for disgraced courtiers. And if ever the in-

fluence of the court should be too feeble to resist the call of national justice, plenary evidence may be procured to accuse certain great personages with breach of trust, and to support an impeachment.

Had the usurper continued on the throne, his nefarious designs on our liberties might eventually have been accomplished. His hirelings had from time to time hazarded a course of experiments, not one of which has so well succeeded that they dared to repeat it. The vigilance of freemen has frustrated their purpose, and the overthrow of their master destroyed their power. Can it be doubted that such means have been employed to controul our national councils, to deceive the people and inflame them against Great-Britain? Their emissaries have swarmed through the country; except in New-England, they have infested every city in the Union. There was not a place of resort for health or pleasure, where our ears were not inflamed by slanderous whispers or stunned by republican gasconade. Not a measure could be adopted by the English, which they did not denounce—by the French, which they did not advocate and espouse; not an outrage committed, which they did not palliate; not a crime perpetrated, which they did not excuse. While France stiled herself a republic, the friends of peace were pronounced aristocrats; when she became despotic, monarchists; while, with all the inconsistency of supporting lawless tyranny, they assumed to themselves the modest name of republicans.

The influence thus acquired, has been employed to prepare the country for a provincial government,

and familiarize it to the controul of a military chief. When we have complained of unconstitutional laws and violated rights, the minions of Napoleon have threatened to enforce silence with the sword. After they had reconciled the people to endure the war, to enforce their measures, they dared to recommend that most horrible feature of an arbitrary government, a military proscription, and to establish martial law, under pretence of punishing as spies American citizens. To destroy commerce, they imposed such severe restrictions, that if continued, would have transformed a maritime country to an inland desert. The legislature of Massachusetts has had the proud honour to compel them "to retrace their steps." The temperate, firm conduct of this state has effected the repeal of the law violating our constitutional rights. They knew that a legislature which had declared a law not obligatory, would never permit any of its citizens who should resist its authority, to suffer its penalties. Had they persisted, a civil war must have ensued. They were step by step pursuing the course of the French people; if we had succeeded, we had to apprehend anarchy—if defeated, despotism—when that Power, who directs the storm, suddenly averted it when ready to burst upon our heads, and saved us from destruction. The inscrutable purposes, of which this scourge of nations was the instrument, having been completed, he sinks to his original insignificance. With the fall of the usurper, peace will be restored to the world—peace too must revisit America. Whatever our ministry may pretend, the ability to conduct the war, depends on

the disposition of the people, and they can endure it no longer. Whether it will be honorable or disgraceful, we fear may depend less on our own, than the British government. We should be prepared for the worst. The dangerous secrets, with which France may furnish our enemy, may enable him to fix a price, which might ruin New-England, by compelling her to the abandonment of the fisheries, or might humble the pride of the South, by requiring the cession of Louisiana. These may apparently be the terms of purchase, when in reality but the bribe to secure secrecy. Like him who has tottered on the brink of a precipice, it is with terror we view the dangers we have escaped. But for the downfall of the tyrant, your property would have been seized to discharge exorbitant taxes, your children led to the conscription, yourselves to the scaffold. All these have been threatened—and did they ever threaten, and if able, fail to perform. The tyrant had already marked his victims. He never forgave you the capture of the *Insurgent* and *Berceau*; for this he would have annihilated your navy, as he has proscribed your commerce. The speeches of your patriots were recorded and their names entered on the list of proscription, his ruffian executioners menaced the pillage of your property and the murder of your persons; fortunately, the massacre at Baltimore was a premature experiment before the banditti were completely organized and their schemes of conspiracy matured.

But, glory to God! the tyrant is fallen, and we are delivered. Who lament his fate? who are there to follow the pall of departed greatness? does it go

unattended to the grave? are there no mourners from his dissevered household? Holland and Italy desert him; the German family he had collected, return to the hereditary mansion; there is not a sad countenance worn in Europe, except by the American embassy. With the tyrant must vanish his whole host of retainers, spies, informers, prostituted editors, fugitives from Tyburn and the gallies. Alas, their vocation is gone! hitherto they have turned with the revolution of the political wheel, and contrived always to be uppermost. Will they tender their services to the new king? that virtuous monarch would as soon release convicts from prison, and introduce them into his cabinet. Will they return to Europe? alas, they superstitiously believe that crossing the water would dissolve the charm which now secures them from Tyburn. Where will you find them next, if their friends at home desert them? Arm yourself, incautious traveller! you will meet them on the highway.

With the tyrant has fled that veneration and confidence, which a generous, but deluded people had reposed in their political chief. The head which had been turned by the honours of French citizenship, ought never to have been the head of the American people. Left to the torture of remorse, perhaps there is not another being so miserable on this side the Isle of Elba. History will record, and posterity denote him—not, as he might have been considered, as the successor of Washington—but the confederate of Bonaparte;—not as the cherished friend of the American hero—but the abject dependant of an Italian adventurer;—not like Washington, insulated

from foreign connections, and standing on the pedestal of his own greatness—but, ignominiously clinging to a fallen colossus, which has crushed him under its weight. They who shared the friendship must participate the enmities of the usurper—and *he*, was the enemy of human kind. Into what an abyss might he have plunged our country! Almost ruined by evil councils, whither can she turn for relief? If she remind the French monarch of the ties of ancient amity, Will he not reply—“These ties you have long since ungratefully cut asunder. No sooner did you see the blood of your benefactor flow from the scaffold, than you clasped the reeking hand of his murderers. If not principal, you were accessory to rob me of my crown, my subjects and my life, and to aid in the pillage and massacre of Europe.”

How the heart sickens, and shame tinges the fallen countenance, to feel, that our nation has added its weight, to depress the fortunes of this illustrious family. That we like savages, have adored through fear that destructive dæmon, who only gave his friends the miserable privilege, to be the last he should devour.

But for this fatal policy, we might this day have celebrated the festival of humanity—the universal jubilee of nations; in humble adoration might have knelt with the assembled crowns of Europe, encircling the altar of peace, and worshipping the God of heaven. Our gallant youth, trained in the school of honour, the nursery of manly principle, might have fought to rescue mankind from the oppressor, under the banners of the deliverer of Europe, of that mon-

arch who last on the list of time, is first on the roll of heroes.

Could we have hailed the restoration of that family, whose arm supported us in our unequal contest with Britain; could we have aided to conduct their king to the throne of his ancestors, and have received his grateful acknowledgments that we had thus extinguished the original debt, which gratitude had written in our hearts; on this day, the fraternity of nations might have united in one grand celebration of the Independance of the Eastern and Western world. From myriads of voices, Europe and America would have resounded with grateful acclamations, while the opposite shores of the Atlantic re-echo to each other, the names of their heroic deliverers **WELLINGTON** and **WASHINGTON**.

We should be aliens from the principles and feelings of Americans, if we did not exult in the deliverance of mankind. Though compelled to participate in an unjust war against England, we must acknowledge that but for her exertions we might long since have been slaves of the usurper. In our war with France what protected our commerce and restrained her armies from the invasion of our shores? The British navy; what arrested the course of intrigue which was secretly undermining our liberties? but the success of the British and allied armies. We predicted the downfall of England at the moment she prepared to rescue us from ruin. She crushed that serpent coiling round the neck of his sleeping victim, who unconscious of danger, was dreaming of her deliverer's destruction.

Our adversaries accuse us of foreign partiality, we love no country like our own; we are attached to the union, being all members of one body, of which Virginia assumes to be the head, but we know that NEW ENGLAND is the heart; her sons have no certificates of French citizenship to divide their love. She has no patriots by adoption, those exotic weeds, which exterminated from their native soil, take root on any spot where they casually fall. Her sons trace their descent from ancestors, whose institutions they preserve and whose memory they venerate. She requires no mixture of the best nation on earth in her political composition, let the head, and the heart and the arm be purely American.

Our sires achieved the Independence we now celebrate, in a just cause, like them we should feel but one sentiment; they did not nicely calculate the chance of success, with God and their rights, our rude yeomanry withstood the disciplined veterans of England. They required no diplomatick skill to discover their wrongs; they were taught them by the voice of nature, it was not persuasive,—it was imperious,—not the cold step-by-step process of argument; it was the electricity of instinct, penetrating in an instant the sultry sands of Georgia and the icy mountains of Maine. In a just cause, the feelings of the fathers would revive in the children. They appealed to Heaven, and when like them, thou canst thus appeal, beloved New England! we will again confront thine adversary on the ocean or on the field. He dares not despise thee,—death at Bunker's hill, stripped off the ridicule he had thrown on thy yan-



*lee soldiers, and THE HERO OF THE LAKE, the contempt he had cast on thy fresh water sailors.*

It is rude mockery to declare to our merchants and seamen that the real object of the war was to protect their rights, when but a few years since our political chief recommended them "to abandon the ocean altogether, and to cultivate the soil." Strange as it is, the passions of those who suffer, are far less excited, than of those who sympathize; our sailors rights are vindicated in the woods, and the champions of our merchants, are the hunters of Kentucky; they invite our gallant seamen who in the storm of war have shed a stream of glory on the wave—to share with them the darkness which overspreads the field. They promise our enterprizing merchants a fertile soil and a temperate region; ease unbought by exertion, and abundance without industry. But what would they relinquish in exchange, for this sensual paradise. The friends of their youth, the habits and manners in which they had been educated, and their ancient institutions of religion and literature.

Spirits of our ancestors! until we are unworthy of your virtues, we will preserve our civil and sacred rights of inheritance, and in this temple where you have worshipped will renewedly resolve, that where you died, we will die, and there will we be buried; your people shall be our people, and your God our God. For our shield of defence against foreign and domestic foes, is the

**“SANCTUARY OF OUR GOD AND THE  
SEPULCHRE OF OUR FATHERS.”**