

*C. Gill*

*from Mr. B.*

AN  
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED AT  
T H O M A S T O N,  
JULY 4th, 1797.  
AT THE REQUEST OF THE  
F R I E N D L Y S O C I E T Y,  
A N D

IN COMMEMORATION OF  
T H E A N N I V E R S A R Y O F

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

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BY SAMUEL S. WILDE, A. M.

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HALLOWELL,

PRINTED BY HOWARD S. REBINSON, 1797.

At a Meeting of the FRIENDLY SOCIETY, July 4th, 1797.

*VOTED, That the Reverend Messrs. WHITING and HUSE, and JAMES H. HEAD Esq. be a Committee to wait on SAMUEL S. WILDE Esq. and report the thanks of the Society for his elegant and spirited Address this day delivered to them, and to request a copy of the same for the Press.*

Attest, JAMES MALCOLM, Sec. pro tem.

To the Committee of the Society.

GENTLEMEN,

*A disposition to meet the wishes of the Society, so obligingly expressed by their Committee, induces me to forget the defects of a hasty production, so far as to submit it to their disposal; hoping to experience from the public a larger share of candor than criticism.*

I have the pleasure to remain with due regard,  
Your Friend and Brother,  
SAMUEL S. WILDE.

A N

O R A T I O N.

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ON this day, fellow citizens, which ought to be commemorated as the birth day of American Liberty, it may be proper to indulge the remembrance of those brilliant events, in which she originated; and to refresh in our minds those ardent principles of Patriotism, and that fervid love of our Country, which, under divine protection, have hitherto cherished and supported her.

To the man who delights in the happiness of man, the true Philanthropist; to those who can estimate the blessings of liberty, and who feel the importance and dignity of national Independence, this employment must afford the sweetest satisfaction, the most endearing consolation.

When the Tyranny of man, the persecuting spirit of Intolerance, and the barbarity of religious fanaticism, had veiled the face of Europe with the thick darkness of ignorance and superstition; when slavery groaned under the hand of power, and the iron rod of oppression; when the dearest rights of the People were sacrificed to the ambition of an unfeeling Despot, or the subtle policy of a designing and prostituted ministry: at this gloomy period of public and private misery, the very existence of civil liberty must soon have been extinguished, had not an asylum been discovered in the new world, where the poor and oppressed inhabitants of the old might find a retreat, secure from the frowns of Tyrants, and the untold miseries which flow from a system of oppression.

Our high spirited and noble minded Ancestors, disdain-  
ing the yoke of slavery, and the chains and fetters which bound them in disgraceful vassa-  
lage, embraced with a degree of ardor and enthusiasm the prospect which  
opened through the wilderness of America, to the blessings of Freedom  
and Independence. With a spirit and fortitude, which few could emu-  
late, and none surpass, they readily renounced the sweets of social inter-  
course, the friends, relatives and connections, whom time, nature and ha-  
bit had rendered dear to them, the country which gave them birth, and  
the high cultivated fields of their Forefathers; undaunted by the dangers  
of the mighty deep, an ocean untried and unexplored, alike fearless of a  
fierce and barbarous race of savages, they bravely assumed the mighty  
hazard: and here in the bosom of a wilderness, first engrafted that scion,  
which has since flourished as the tree of Liberty, and whose branches over-  
shadow our great and rising Empire. Untainted by the vices, and luxuries  
of the old world; actuated by the sublime virtues of Fortitude, Patience,  
Christian Humility, and clothed with the garb of innocence and sim-  
plicity, they meekly submitted to the allotments of Providence: and  
without a murmur at their cruel destiny, endured and survived such accu-  
mulated hardships, and misfortunes, as would wound the soul of human-  
ity even to relate.

Being thus cruelly banished and expelled from their native country,  
and without assistance or protection, exposed to a fierce and vindictive  
enemy, to hunger, nakedness, penury and the long list of human calami-  
ties and wants, they might with propriety feel themselves exonerated from  
all homage, fealty or obligation to their parent state, and at liberty to

form and establish a government, such as their situation, habits and necessities might require.

But the principle, however just, was not allowed us by Great Britain : her lengthened arm of tyranny stretched over the vast ocean, which divided us, and basely attempted to rivet her chains on her free born American descendants. The disgraceful edicts of her corrupt and venal Parliament, and that uniform system of oppression, which governed her King and Ministry, at length roused us to a sense of inquiry, and awakened in a nation of Freemen, the fervid and exalted spirit of Independence.

We were still, however, desirous of peace : it was our first wish, and the dearest object of our toils and counsels, and we suffered the most wanton oppressions, the grossest insults, and the most barbarous injuries before we could even admit the idea of a rupture with a nation, whom we had been taught to love and honor, whom early habits of intimacy had endeared, and whose language and manners so nearly assimilated with our own : we even prostrated ourselves at the feet of our inexorable tyrants, and humbly sued and implored for "peace liberty and safety ;" but we sued in vain. A mistaken notion of the American character, led the haughty tyrant of England, to impute our humility to cowardice, and our love of Peace to a mean and debased spirit : after adding insult to insult, indignity to wrong, and cruelty to oppression, a haughty Parliament and an insolent Ministry, as a proof of our debasement, imperiously demanded a dereliction of our dearest rights, "*unqualified submission*" and "*passive obedience.*"

The spirits of our Forefathers now swelled the bosoms of their descendants. Indignant at a demand, as tyrannical as it was insolent and base, we solemnly appealed to the God of justice for protection ; and with a firmness and decision, which expressed our abhorrence of slavery, and an ignominious dependence, rejected their insolent terms of reconciliation ; and without arms or ammunition, the arts or implements of war : without money and without friends to assist us, we dared the mighty contest, and bravely prepared for those scenes of horror and cruelty, which marked the progress of an unnatural war.

Europe and the world stood astonished at the firmness and magnanimity of the American character. The genius of liberty smiled on our efforts, and the God of conquest, after leading and supporting us through untold dangers and bloody conflicts, finally confirmed us in the secure possession of peace, liberty, and independence.

The present occasion will not permit a full display, or minute detail of those brilliant and mighty events. They exist, however, in the minds and memories of Americans ; stand recorded on the brightest page of history, and shall never cease to be commemorated, while liberty shall be considered as a blessing, or bravery a virtue ; nor shall we I trust cease to remember, with a grateful sensibility, the exalted talents and virtues of those patriot statesmen and heroes, who planned and executed the birth of our Empire : Their names shall be transmitted to posterity, with the brightest deeds of their lives, and with the warmest acknowledgments of a grateful country : And on this day, and each succeeding anniversary, the tear of sensibility shall stream unchecked for those hero-

ic patriots, who, in the cause of freedom, bravely struggling for the rights and liberties of their country, fought and bled on the day of battle, and fell undaunted in the crimsoned fields of glory.

Happy and heroic spirits! renowned by your toils and labors, your bravery, sufferings and deaths; your bright examples shall animate the young warrior in the footsteps of danger and the road which leads to glory!

Placed now in an equal rank with the nations of the earth, and secure in the possession of independence and liberty, it remained for us to guard and protect them by equal laws, and an equitable and vigorous administration. The few years which succeeded the peace, prior to the adoption of the Federal Constitution, formed a striking but miserable contrast to the bright annals which preceeded. Divided in our councils, without regulations to commerce, or encouragement to the arts, sciences or manufactures; with a government merely nominal, without the powers of protection, or energy to enforce a due execution of the Laws; we at once realized the wishes, and almost justified the prefaces of our ancient foe.

But the formation and adoption of our present happy Constitution, effectually removed those obstacles which impeded our prosperity, and formed an *era* in the American history, from which we may date our encreasing greatness and importance: Under the protection of that bulwark of our liberties, we have risen to a pitch of national splendor and happiness, which has become the astonishment and envy of the world.

The fertility of our soil, the excellence of our climate, the rapid increase of population, the various embellishments and inventions in the mechanick arts, the improvements in agriculture, the growing importance of the produce of our country, the unbounded extension of commerce, the general diffusion of information and science, the security of property, the majestic freedom of our government, and the firmness and equity of its administration, render America at the present period, if not the richest, at least the most flourishing, happy, and best informed nation on the globe.

But the picture remains to be completed. Our relative situation with the nations of Europe in some measure obscures the brightness of our prospects, and casts a gloom over our rich and various blessings. At the commencement of the present cruel and destructive war, which hath drenched Europe in blood, ravaged and despoiled her fair fields of industry, and hurried millions of our fellow creatures into the presence of their maker, we gratefully acknowledged the goodness of God in our exemption from such awful calamities. The great transmarine distance of our situation, our love of peace and the impartial equity of our government, rendered the expectation not unreasonable that we might still escape them.

A line of strict neutrality towards the contending nations, was at an early period, marked out and enjoined by our government. To guard our neutral rights and privileges, to render justice to all and injury to none, seems to have been the first wish, and the governing object of the

chief Executive of the union. At that eventful period, the helm of our government was happily entrusted to one of our wisest and best of citizens ; to the beloved and immortal WASHINGTON ; one whose life had been covered with glory ; whose exalted virtues envy could never tarnish, nor calumny pollute ; whose active benevolence and disinterested regard for his country, had raised him a name on the earth, which the present and future generations will never cease to revere. The firmness and impartiality of his administration for a time secured our tranquility ; but restless spirits were not wanting to excite a jealousy between our own and the English nation, which soon led to the most serious complaints.

The wanton depredations committed on our commerce ; the violence and insults offered to our citizens in the peaceful employments of active industry, raised our wounded spirits to a just sense of indignation ; but the wisdom of our Executive soon pointed out a remedy, and a successful negotiation ended in a Treaty of Amity, which promised indemnification for our past wrongs, and remained as a pledge of our future tranquility.

At our last happy anniversary, perhaps our country never assumed a more flourishing and majestic aspect. We had buried the hatchet with our cruel and vindictive neighbours. By a treaty more favorable than could be expected from the tyrant of Algiers, he released to us our brethren from slavery. Our negotiations with the Court of Madrid were not unfavorable. The trade of the Mediterranean was open, and invited the enterprise of our citizens ; our flag was displayed in the four quarters of the globe, and the prospect of peace with the nations of the earth appeared neither delusive nor improbable.

But this calm, like most others, was but the prelude to a storm. Trusting to the flattering expectation of a continued peace, and splendid prosperity, the Father of his country and the Friend of man, to the deep regret of his fellow citizens, signified his desire and intention to retire from the weight of public cares and trusts, and to conclude a life, which had been devoted to his country, in the peaceful retreat of domestic tranquility. Having fought the battles, which had established our liberties; having guarded and preserved them by a firm, wise and equitable administration; having baffled the efforts of the enemies of our prosperity—and raised us to a high pitch of national splendor; he calmly retired, loaded with the thanks and blessings of a grateful country.

In choosing his successor, the views of the French government, which before had been merely suspicious, assumed an alarming and menacing appearance. A daring attempt to establish a French party and French influence in the decision of this important election, appeared too evident to remain unnoticed. At this moment of interesting expectation, their Minister, to the astonishment of America, announced a Decree of the French Directory, authorising the most wanton depredations on our commerce, the express violation of a solemn treaty, and those national obligations, which had hitherto been deemed sacred and inviolable; this he accompanied with a long list of unfounded complaints, and concluded, by announcing to our government, or rather the people, a final suspension of the powers of his mission.

A conduct so unjust and arbitrary, and officially communicated, could

hardly be credited in America. How could we even imagine that a Decree made up of the compound of tyranny and injustice, should proceed from a nation, professing a fraternal attachment to us, and an enthusiastic devotion to liberty, and the rights of man? But the events which succeeded did not permit us to doubt.

To our grief, surprise and indignation, we have been the spectators of scenes, which have outraged the feelings of humanity, and which even despotism itself would blush to acknowledge. We have seen for these eight months past an uninterrupted spoliation on our commerce; our peaceful mercantile brethren robbed of their property to the amount of millions; men of the first affluence reduced with their families to poverty, bankruptcy and ruin; our brave and enterprising mariners stripped even of their apparel, loaded with chains, and confined to dungeons; while the sighs, groans and complaints, which might escape from their wounded spirits, have been interdicted under the pains of death, and the terrors of the Guillotine. And all this even without pretext or provocation; for I maintain with confidence, that our government has been fairly and impartially administered; that our chief Executive has been invariably guided by a strict regard to the faith of treaties, our relative duties as a neutral power, and an equity unknown and unrecorded in the history of nations. Prepossessed with a friendship and partiality to France, and the cause of Freedom in which she professed to be engaged, we turned our eyes with sympathy and solicitude on the bleeding pages which traced her Revolution; and whether fortunate or unfortunate, in prosperity or adversity, conquering or retreating, we steadily manifested the warmth of our feelings, and a disposition

to afford her every favor and assistance which might not militate with our obligations to other nations, or the known duties of neutrality.

To this national attachment, this friendly disposition, may be imputed the patience and forbearance, with which we have endured the wrongs and indignities offered us by her citizens; and the extreme sollicitude which we have discovered to "remove jealousies, obviate complaints," and restore a "friendly and lasting union." Tho' greatly injured, we did not hesitate to make the first advances, and tho' our Minister, commissioned for this purpose, has been rejected with indignity, we are now attempting a fresh negotiation.

May it be our present and constant wish, fellow citizens, that these renewed efforts, may prove successful; that returning justice in the French nation, may restore us to a due exercise of our rights, and grant us such terms of indemnification as may with safety and honor be accepted.

The possession of peace carries with it, such various, rich and important blessings, as may well justify many and great sacrifices: It holds forth the most solid benefits, the most alluring charms: it is the hot-bed from whence spring the finer feelings of benevolence and humanity, and in which grow the arts and sciences, which perfect our natures, and that national opulence which secures our happiness and greatness. But I trust, however, we are not yet so debased, so poor in spirit, as to purchase it at the expence of the dignity, freedom and independence of our country: if it is only to be bought with slavery "who is he so base" as to covet the possession!

No, Americans ! if all our efforts to preserve this invaluable blessing should prove abortive, and we should again be forced (which God forbid) into the horrors and distressing calamities of war, let us once more rally round the POLE OF LIBERTY—once more cast our eyes to Heaven for protection—and with the assistance of the Almighty we may justly defy the arm of oppression, and the efforts of human power.

We have already fought and bled in the cause of freedom ; and let us not cease by every effort to preserve her inviolate ; let us, with unremitting care, nourish and support knowledge and virtue, the two great pillars on which she stands. Without virtue a free government cannot exist ; and without knowledge and general information, she remains exposed to the grossest corruptions and abuses.

Despotism, oppression, intollerance and priestcraft, have ever found their sure and only support in ignorance. Let mankind be enlightened ; let them know the rights which the God of nature hath bestowed upon them, and the thrones of despotism and the tyrants of the earth shall be crumbled to dust. Wherever knowledge, escaping from the monopoly of a few, hath extended to, and enlightened the great mass of the people, there hath freedom flourished—there hath liberty erected her standard.

Under these impressions, it must afford every true friend of his country, the most lively satisfaction to observe the extension of knowledge among the various classes of our citizens. The free and general circulation of newspapers, the encreased and growing establishments of schools and seminaries of learning, and the encouragement offered to every im-

provement in literature, has served to remove that mist of ignorance, which obscures the faculties and enslaves the mind.

And here my brethren of "THE FRIENDLY SOCIETY,"\* permit me to notice our laudable and flourishing Institution, as one wisely calculated to promote these important objects. To extend useful knowledge, to remove ignorance and prejudice, and to tighten the bands of friendly union and intercourse, are, if I mistake not, the principal, if not the sole views of our Institution. In a new country, where the sources of information are few, and where books, the keys of knowledge, are with difficulty procured, the advantages resulting from a well chosen circulating Library, are almost incalculable. To enlighten and lead the mind thro' the paths and intricacies of science, without books, is as difficult, perhaps, as to navigate a vessel without helm or compass. Our warmest thanks are therefore due to those Founders of our Institution, who have opened to the rising generation these invaluable privileges; let it be our remaining care, brethren, that we neither neglect or abuse them; with such rich treasures before us, let them not remain unexplored; with such opportunities to improve and extend our talents, let them not remain clouded by Ignorance.

It is not my intention, brethren, nor will the present occasion, allow me to enter into a minute consideration of our various and relative du-

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\* THE FRIENDLY SOCIETY was first instituted in 1787—principally for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a circulating Library.—It consists of upwards of seventy Members—the Library contains from three to four hundred volumes; generally well chosen and useful.

ties : give me leave, however, to observe, that in purchasing and choofing our books, we are called to the exercise of an important duty, in the difcharge of which, we ought to feel the higheft responsibility. The confequence of an injudicious or incautious felection, is not merely a wafte of property ; it involves in it a far more alarming danger ; it tends to miflead the mind, and to produce in the rifing generation, a vicious, falfe and depraved tafte in fciences, which time and after obfervations may never eradicate ; and the perufal of a book, containing falfe principles, erroneous conclufions, or romantic notions, is not merely a lofs of time ; it too often infects the heart, marks the future character of the young reader, and encumbers the mind with a mafs of rubbifh, which precludes the admission of more ufeful information.

Let us therefore felect with caution. Let us be diligent, conftant and wary, in guiding our children and young friends in the road to true knowledge. Let us furnifh their tender minds with none but ufeful information, and let us guard againft the admission of falfe principles, as we would againft a peftilence. Then, my friends, fhall you deferve and receive the thanks and acknowledgments of your country ; “ your children fhall rife up and call you bleffed,” and lateft pofterity fhall render you a tribute of praife ; in the fecure poffeffion, of LIBERTY, HAPPINESS, VIRTUE and KNOWLEDGE.

FINIS.