

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT CHARLESTOWN,

ON THE

4th JULY, 1821,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE REPUBLICAN CITIZENS OF THAT TOWN,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

BY PAUL WILLARD, ESQ.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

REMARKS, INTRODUCTORY TO THE READING OF THE

Declaration of Independence,

ON THE SAME OCCASION,

By NATHANIEL HALL LORING.

PUBLISHED BY THE REQUEST OF THE REPUBLICAN CITIZENS OF
CHARLESTOWN.

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ORATION.

SELF-GOVERNMENT is as clear and indisputable a human right as self-preservation. We need not search the theories of the civilian or moralist for the truth of this position. It is derived from the very nature and capacities of man. His moral and social qualities—his ability to reason and compare, to discriminate between good and evil, and above all, his unconquerable love of self and desire of happiness, render him capable of this elevated purpose. Yet, this principle, however true and essential to human welfare and pleasing to human pride, has been reluctantly recognized, and is comparatively the result of modern innovation. It was not the interest of the few to develop it. For its discovery would prostrate the power, which accident or usurpation had given them, and which could only be secured by the ignorance of the many. Aware of this, individuals, who have seized on the government of communities, have always made it their primary concern to shut up the fountains of knowledge, and divert the attention of the multitude from an inquiry into their rights, to a stupid veneration of the power that oppresses them.

It was reserved till the seventeenth century, for our immediate progenitors to embrace the doctrines of political equality and self-government, and to restore mankind to their rightful condition and original character. This was not the

work of an individual, nor the effect of chance. It was the necessary consequence of a combination of circumstances. We cannot ascribe to our ancestors, qualities which are not common to men, nor suppose that they were favored with any special interpositions of Deity. True it is, they committed their lives and their fortunes to the hazard of the waves, and the uncertainties of a region but little known. Any thing was preferable to the oppression they escaped. It was even now, that the revolution, which gave us our liberties, had commenced. The little bark, which shoved off from their native shores, amidst darkness and doubts and perils, carried in its bosom, the germ of a powerful people. Human nature received a new impulse and began now to draw from its own vast resources. The artificial restraints, which had fastened upon the society they had left, were shaken off, and the mind had free scope for the exercise of its energies. Removed from the vicinity of courts and the influence of the idolatry and corruption which surround them, they could adopt that plainness and simplicity of manners, which qualify men for hardship and exertion. They were no longer terrified by the frown, nor intoxicated by the smile of royalty. Their senses were no more bewildered by the pomp and parade and mockery of kings. They began to receive right perceptions of things. The greatness of their enterprise and its successful result, gave them a confidence in their own strength, and led them to contemplate their exalted powers and destiny. The country they adopted was peculiarly favourable to the encouragement of these reflections. Remote from the theatre, where our species has always been depressed, their spirits were not broken, and their hearts appalled by the groan of the oppressed, and the song and revelry of the oppressor. These were exchanged for the howl of the wilderness and the roar of the cataract. But the productions of nature do not weaken and terrify man. He knows how to enjoy, to improve, or subdue them. The grandeur of its

mountains, the majesty and beauty of its streams, and the innumerable glories of its soil, were substituted for towers and palaces and pagantry. These could not fail to elevate the soul and give a higher tone to the feelings and sentiments. It was here, amidst this bold scenery and on this extended scale of things, that the human faculties were to take a new bias, and human character was to be formed upon a new and improved model. Here, man was destined to walk abroad in the freedom and dignity of his nature, considering all men as his brethren, and acknowledging no superior but the Supreme of the universe.

It is impossible to describe the operations of the affections, or trace the progress of the mind, as we would mark the movement and direction of bodies. Its revolutions are silent and gradual, and its course unseen. No herald proclaims its march; no force can arrest its career. It was this secret and powerful agent, aided by the causes and facilities, already assigned, that paved the way to the great events which were about to break upon the world. Beyond the reach of the trammels which had heretofore bound them, men began to think for themselves. They found they had power to will and to do. The means of communicating knowledge had become easy and common, which wonderfully accelerated these inquiries and the advances of intellect. A change was imperceptibly wrought in their religious sentiments, and in their views of social rights and duties. Christianity unfolded her pure principles, and taught men their relation to each other, and to their God—that all men are equal, and that conscience is amenable to no human tribunal. The developement of these truths, which had been concealed for centuries by the dignitaries of the church, powerfully co-operated to hasten the overthrow of political usurpation. Ignorance and superstition were yielding their empire to truth and light and free inquiry. These great changes were silently going on in the new world, unobserved by the dynasties of the old. Before the

eurs of royalty were saluted by a single whisper of disaffec-
 tion, or note of remonstrance, the revolution was deeply
 founded in the hearts and minds of the colonists. They were
 possessed of the great secret, that all political power must be
 derived from the people—that, this is the only source of legiti-
 mate government, and this alone is obligatory. The princi-
 ple of representation was understood and appreciated. Its
 benefits had been partially realized, in consequence of the
 incautious indulgence of the parent country. But the jeal-
 ousy of the sovereign was soon alarmed at our increasing
 greatness, and began to abridge those privileges which had
 been sparingly allowed. Opposed from our principles and
 feelings to violence and blood-shed, petition was resorted to,
 but in vain. We even bent before the foot-stool of monarchy
 and supplicated for the enjoyment of those rights which were
 already ours, and of which no power on earth could deprive us.
 But swollen with the pride of imaginary supremacy, and blind-
 ed by the flattery and obsequiousness of his minions, he was
 deaf to our entreaties.—He sent out his legions to subdue us
 by force. It was vainly supposed that the roar of the British
 Lion would hush our inquietudes, and that we would cower in
 unconditional submission, or retire to our forests like the hart
 before the hunter and his hounds. This impolitick mea-
 sure of the ministry is a proof of their utter ignorance of
 the great moral and intellectual reformation which had taken
 place in the new world. Their armies swarmed upon our
 shores, versed in all the arts of human butchery, and secure
 of success and victory. They supposed they had nothing but
 mere flesh and blood to contend with. They little thought
 they were to be opposed by the mighty energies of talents,
 intelligence, and public spirit. The grand consummation was
 now approaching.—The unequal conflict between power and
 right was about to commence. On the one side, were mili-
 tary skill, numbers and wealth, the main spring of human ex-
 ertion.—On the other, justice and the hopes of humanity. It is

matter of surprise and rejoicing, that the same views, and the same spirit actuated all the colonies on this momentous occasion. They were sprung from various nations, their constitutions of government were dissimilar, their habits and manners different, and their intercourse and acquaintance with each other, limited and imperfect. Upon this diversity of religions and customs and pursuits, the enemy grounded his expectations of an easy subjugation. To divide and conquer was his favorite maxim. It might have seemed to the timid and superficial mind, an attempt at impossibilities to harmonize these diversities and unite them in the same principles and system of action. But the same causes will invariably produce the same effects, and human nature is every where the same, when the circumstances are equal. The subject of dispute was not a portion of territory, nor like any of the trivial causes which usually provoke nations to war. It was a contest between arbitrary power on the one hand, and rational liberty on the other. And, the issue would be equally beneficial or injurious to all the colonies. The causes, which have been mentioned, had operated upon all, though perhaps not in equal degrees. All had shared more or less the influence of this moral revolution. Here, then, was their community of interests—this the bond of their sympathies. The first blow that was struck, touched a chord which vibrated in every heart, and aroused the slumbering energies of a brave and devoted people. They drew the sword and flung away the scabbard, resting their hopes on their God and their cause. The spirit had gone forth, and, it was impossible to recall it.

The history of this eventful period is fresh in our memory. We need not dwell upon the instances of undaunted valor, patient suffering and incorruptible patriotism, which signaled our fathers in the revolutionary war. Let it suffice to say, that they have never been surpassed in any age or

nation. It would be invidious to particularize among such a host of worthies. The object was achieved, not by the skill of a commander nor the arm of individual prowess; but by the unconquerable energies of a moral and intellectual people, determined to be free. We might challenge the straits of Thermopylæ to compare with the heights of Charlestown. But, we come not here, to mingle our voices with the din of arms, nor the shouts of victory.—The day we celebrate, is sacred to the triumph of principle.

The effects of the revolution were not confined to the American people; they have been powerfully felt throughout civilized society. The declaration, which proclaimed these states, free and independent, was more terrible to kings, than the thunders of Sinai to a guilty world. It was the harbinger of universal emancipation. The spell was broken. The voice of truth was heard beyond the bounds of ocean. The gleam of knowledge shot through the midnight of ages; and thrones were riven to their centre. The French, who were ever of a lively and ardent temperament, first caught the influence of this new state of things. They heard of the advent of Liberty, and they went about in wild uproar and intemperate zeal to embrace her. Their philosophers deluged them with doctrines, which they were not capable of comprehending, and they were dazzled, confounded, and mad. Enough had not previously been done towards clearing away the rubbish, which despotism had been accumulating for centuries. It is in vain to attempt to hurry a people into the enjoyment of their rights and true interests. The progress of truth is slow, and its influences to be good, must be gradual. Men must be enlightened and essentially free, before they are equal to self-government. Could our Washington have given freedom to France, or would Napoleon have here dared to assume the imperial diadem? The result of this great and unsuccessful attempt at political reformation is a sufficient proof that the real causes of our rev-

olution, and the basis of our Independence were not known in Europe. The recent abortive efforts at constitutional government in some of the European states resulted from the same cause—want of intelligence and purity in the people. These disasters may teach mankind, that revolutions to be permanently beneficial, must not be the work of a day, nor the fruits of a fantastic brain. The revolutionists in Europe have begun at the wrong end. A people should reform themselves, before they attempt to reform their systems of government. Innovations are always hazardous, and require intelligence and integrity to direct and maintain them. Individuals may kindle the flame of revolution in vain, if the people have not already been enlightened. It will only bewilder and mislead them. They must have a steady and determined purpose, and a clear perception of their object. They must be guided by the unerring principles of justice and humanity, and their success is certain. The friends of freedom and the rights of man, have no occasion to despair. The cause of truth must eventually triumph. The sun is but just arisen; its light will continue to travel on to cheer the hearts and illumine the minds of the oppressed of all nations. The progress of revolutionary principles cannot be stayed. This league of tyrants, more commonly called the “*Holy Alliance*,” might as well undertake to arrest the planets in their career through the heavens. It is nature and truth who speak, and their dictates must be obeyed. The march of mind will proceed, maugre the millions of the *meek* and *pacific* Alexander. But we will leave the old world, where we find little to admire, and much to disgust and to wound the sensibilities of the philanthropist.

This is the only nation in existence, where the great doctrines of political equality and self-government are clearly understood and exemplified. Our government is grounded up-

on the virtues of the people, and consists in the public will. It is a moral edifice, reared upon the common sense of mankind. It recognizes no artificial distinctions, nor exclusive privileges, but guarantees to all, the full exercise and enjoyment of the excellencies and advantages, derived from nature and cultivation. It is not to be supposed, that no differences will arise in the course of human exertions. Diversity of pursuits will produce diversity of character. But this should not be a cause of uneasiness and jealousy between members of the same community. Here, man is left free to follow the bent of his natural inclination, and the occupation of his choice. He may drop in his line, and draw forth jewels from the deep; or, he may turn up the glebe of our vallies, and find abundant treasures there. He may embark his hopes upon the mountain billow; or, he may listen to the music of the nimble shuttle and the busy loom. These confer no political distinction. He is equally a member of the same great republican family. His voice may speak with the same eloquence and power in our halls of legislation; and his arm be as strong in defence of our common country and liberties. It is the genius of our institutions to let every thing take its natural current, and, at the same time, to keep every thing to a tolerable level. Our system abhors every species of monopoly, and individual and family aggrandizement. The wealth, that is piled up to-day, by some successful speculation or daring enterprise, may be seen to-morrow, spreading in a thousand channels, carrying comfort and gladness to industry and want. The great machinery of things is in silent and perpetual operation, restoring name and fortune to their proper equilibrium.

It has been objected, that our system discourages distinction in every department of science and of art. To this it may be replied, that it is impossible for an individual to shine exceedingly pre-eminent in a firmament, that blazes with a myriad of luminaries. True it is, our institutions will not per-

mit particular elevations at the expense of the community.— We want no factitious pre-eminence. Our object is the general sum of human happiness. We want no meteor to dazzle and terrify with the intensity of his glare. We desire no mummery of greatness to attract the gaze of the million. Political equality is the boast and birthright of freemen. It is ours to enjoy the high blessings that flow from it, and transmit them to our posterity.

The salvation of this people depends upon the indissoluble union of the states. Here is our strength—here, the permanency of our liberties. The fact of so many independent sovereignties, united in the same principles, and their interests revolving round a common centre, is a singular anomaly in the science and history of governments. No examples can be found upon ancient record, nor in modern existence. The advantages of this connection to the whole American people and to humanity, are too many and palpable to require demonstration. It is a perpetual barrier against intestine commotions—a paramount bulwark against foreign encroachment and subjugation. This truth should be regarded as an axiom in all our political speculations and practice. The extent of our territory is no objection to the continuance of the Union. It can never, like the Roman empire, crumble beneath its own weight; so long as the people continue in their present moral and intellectual condition. The people are above the miserable influences, which too often affect their public servants. Personal dislikes may distract our national councils—individual jealousies may paralyze the national arm: but the sovereign people possess a rectifying power, and will restore them to their original tone and vigour. The Union may tremble under the herculean grasp of party violence, but so long as the broad basis of public virtue remains, it will receive additional strength from every shock. To destroy the Union, it must be removed from the influence of the people. While Antæus could touch his mother earth, he received new

strength and was unconquerable. It cannot be doubted nor denied, that there has been and still is, an extensive combination among us to destroy the union of the republic and subvert its liberties. This arises partly from anti-republican principle, but mostly from an uneasy and unprincipled hankering for power. However strange it may seem, that a system so beautiful and universally beneficial as ours, should have enemies, and those too, who share its benefits; it is, nevertheless, true. There is no human perfection. The same Liberty, who spreads out profusion to her honest worshippers, permits a serpent to lurk within her shrine.

In the late struggle which confirmed our Independence and the stability of our institutions, it was easy to distinguish the true from the pretended patriot. When our territory was ravaged, and our cities wrapt in flames, kindled by vandal hands; when the friends of our country were baring their bosoms to the storm and the battle—what *then* was the conduct of those, who arrogated to themselves the talents and the religion of the community?—How were *they* employed? In embarrassing the finances, discouraging enlistments, and in convening on the banks of the Connecticut, for secret consultation, like Catiline and *his* associates. It were well for our honor, that this foul stain were wiped from our national escutcheon; but it will be better for our future safety, that it remain for the instruction and warning of posterity. Teach your children to shun the fate of those unhappy adventurers. And, we are-constrained too, to remember *certain* servants of the sanctuary. See *them* in solemn mockery, at the altar of the Most High, grasping in one hand the book of life, and waving with the other, the unhallowed torch of discord and death.—Withholding from the lambs of their flocks, the pure principles of the gospel of peace, they poured into their hearts the subtle poison of disaffection and civil war. Is there no one among us, who has seen with complacency, the steel of the enemy, stained with the blood of his broth-

er?—Is there no one here who viewed with satisfaction, the smoke of the Capitol, curling to heaven?—If none—“then none have I offended.”

In no instance since the establishment of our government, has the Union sustained so tremendous an attack, as in the discussion of the Missouri question. The same spirit that unfurled the standard of disunion and revolt in the last war, now seized the parricidal dagger, and under the imposing robes of humanity, aimed a deadly blow at the vitals of the Union. Our feelings and principles, as freemen and christians, were appealed to, and thousands of honest hearts were deluded by this insidious cant and hypocrisy. The pride of New-England's morality was called upon by the champions of African rights.—And, who among us, would wish to be thought the enemy of man?—Who, of proud honor and high sensibilities, could bear the imputation of encouraging slavery? By these means a respectable portion of the American people was duped, and we were led almost to confusion and ruin. Is this humanity? is it patriotism? is it religion?

The master spirits of this farce will receive their reward, by the inevitable re-action of public sentiment. The Union is safe. Though its pillars were shaken, they are grounded deeper and firmer in the affections of the people. It should be the prayer of every member of this Union, that all sectional jealousies may cease. Why indulge this illiberality and rancour towards the South and West? They are our brethren, and we should be proud of the affinity. Our interests are the same—our rights a unity.

It is pleasing to contemplate the sublime destinies that await this nation. Future generations will see one vast and powerful Republic, extending from the banks of Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, covered with schools of good learning and temples of

piety, and an enlightened people, cultivating all the arts of peace, and practicing justice to all men and all nations, and terrible to the enemies of freedom.

Our Revolutionary FATHERS!—Where are THEY? They have mingled their ashes with the soil they defended. They have gone to the “home of the just made perfect.” Yet, some few are among us, silvered with the frost of years, and bending to their long repose. Let not the twilight of their days, be beclouded by the infidelity of their sons. They may sleep in peace. We will hallow their memory. The treasures they have given to us, we will give to our children. The American family and the American character shall go to an interminable futurity, gathering in strength and brightening in glory, till the voice of the Almighty, shall proclaim to the nations, that human governments are at an end.

Mr. NATHANIEL HALL LORING introduced the Declaration of Independence, which he was appointed to read, by the following remarks :—

BEING appointed to read to you the Immortal Document which has made this Day a Jubilee, I shall hazard a few remarks which perhaps, may not be deemed impertinent.

On the 4th of July, 1776, this celebrated paper was signed by the General Congress, and our Country took its place among the Nations. It was the sublimest spectacle that the world had ever beheld. The splendour of monarchies, the tinsel greatness of monarchs, and the profane mummeries of the Popedom, were all overshadowed by the moral and intellectual grandeur by which that day was consecrated.

Connected with our reverence for the day, is our gratitude to the great Republican, THOMAS JEFFERSON. He has imparted to this document, not a little of his own character. It is clear, plain, and destitute of any ornament but its own vigorous thought, and noble proportions ; there is no redundancy of epithet—no pruriency of style—no affected majesty of diction : It appears throughout like the first aspirations of a great Nation raising itself from the slumber of slavery, and hurling back the Javelin of the Tyrant. It is a naked appeal to the common sense of mankind ; a proud pyramid of political truth, deeper rooted than the mountains. It sets forth injury after injury—it details crime after crime, and presents an eloquent description of dignified and patient suffering, a hateful example of mean, and cowardly, and senseless oppression. It is indeed a lesson to Nations—a flaming beacon to enslaved man.

Similar in many respects is the character of its Author. The same majestic simplicity, the same strength and compactness, distinguish his mind. His character, like this Instrument, was formed while convulsions were rending the moral surface of society, and Devastation was at its harvest-home : Like this instrument, it survived the storms which threatened destruction, and has become, not the property of this, or the last age, but of posterity. He has toiled for his Country from childhood to old age, and it was his singular lot while aiding in the work of her Independence, to illustrate her Literature and Philosophy. He is a philosopher, and has been placed by the old world with the Montes-

quens and the Bacons. He is a statesman, and is ranked by the new world even with its Washington and its Franklin; He is a patriot, and mankind assign him a station with a Russell, a Cato, and a Sydney. But he is more than a Philosopher, a Statesman, or a Patriot: He is an illustrious and almost solitary example of a pure and verdant mind, retaining all its excellencies through every variety of fortune; whether in obscurity, or on a seat far above the highest. The high offices which he has filled, the unexcelled services which he has rendered, are not his only titles to fame. The moral sublimity of his character does more for him, than conquests, or public works, or great discoveries, for other men: He has been prosperous, without pride;—he has mixed with the world, without acquiring its vices—he has dwelt with the great without imbibing their vanities: Seldom, perhaps never, have we seen a man so simple and yet so great—so much milder, and yet so far superior to all other men—so virtuous and yet so singularly eminent. It is for these reasons that the majesty of his departing mind is even superior to its splendour when it rode with meridian glory in our hemisphere; Other great men have risen with brilliancy, but few have gathered fame with every step to the tomb.

We have seen him when young, placing himself front of the front rank in the cause of liberty, and fixing the seal to our Independence. We have seen him seated in the chair of government, by the influence of those pure principles to which he had assisted in giving currency, and infusing new life and vigour, into the infantile frame which has since grown up to gigantic manhood. We have seen him in every stage of life, looking calmly upon his enemies, from a height to which their calumnies could never ascend.

“ Like some proud cliff that rears its awful form,
Swells in the vale, and midway leaves the storm;
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”