

# ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT

*NEW BEDFORD,*

JULY 4th, 1806.



*BY JOHN M. WILLIAMS, ESQ. A.M.*



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1806.

NEW BEDFORD, July 5th, 1806.

JOHN M. WILLIAMS, Esq.

Sir, Our fellow citizens highly gratified with your patriotick discourse delivered yesterday, have appointed us to wait on you with their thanks for the same, and to request a copy of the same for the press. We sincerely hope you will comply with the request.

We are respectfully, Sir,

Your most obedient.

WM. ROSS.

MANASSEH KEMPTON.

JOHN COGGISHALL.



GENTLEMEN,

The author is sensible that he may be justly exposed to the charge of plagiarism in the composition of the following pages. On a subject so frequently discussed, new ideas were, to him, unattainable. As the piece was composed without the least view to publication, he did not deem it necessary, nor perhaps was it possible for him to give credit for every quoted passage. The reader is therefore desired to supply the deficiencies of inverted commas and *give tribute to whom tribute is due*. With these observations the copy is yielded to your solicitations.

I am, Gentlemen,

respectfully yours,

J. M. WILLIAMS.

Messrs. Wm. Ross,

JOHN COGGISHALL, and

MANASSEH KEMPTON.

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AN  
O R A T I O N.



**U**NWILLING servitude is the worst of misfortunes : voluntary slavery is the meanest of crimes. Liberty is dear to her votaries, let us gather around her standard and pay our homage at her shrine. Welcome to the bosom of sensibility are the feelings which rush to the heart on this auspicious day. It is a day devoted to the memory of scenes that are past, to the recognition of principles of eternal duration. The thunder of cannon that reverberated in our ears and ushered in the morn of this anniversary, awoke us to the recollection of the desperate conflict of our fathers and benefactors, which terminated in liberty. Thirty years have elapsed since our country proclaimed her independence, and unrolled the solemn declaration in the armed front of her host of foes. Imagination delights to dwell on the dangers and escapes, the struggles and the victory of that eventful period. With sympathetick agitation we turn to view the heroes of that day, roused by repeated aggression, assemble in the attitude of defiance, while their hearts are glowing with the pride of Independence. The exaltation of a popular favorite, or the ambition of an individual, the pride of conquest, or extension of empire, those gilded allurements to destruction, have

sometimes kindled the passions into combustion, rent asunder the bonds of social life, “whelmed nations in blood, and wrapped cities in fire.” At such a scene Justice frowns indignant, Liberty retires, and Humanity veils her weeping face. Such motives, however, cast not their sombre shades over the achievements which we celebrate. On the contrary, Justice, Liberty and Humanity illuminate the retrospect by the combined radiance of their united smiles. Ours was the defence of right against the assumptions of insolence; the struggle of innocence against the grasp of power. Though Britain was then exulting in the vigour of her strength and brandishing the arms of her authority, though her nod was as the earthquake that shakes the mountains, her armies numerous as the locusts of the summer, and restless as the blasts of pestilence; yet the undaunted sons of freedom dared to disobey her mandates; their fortitude resisted the onset; their courage repelled the foe. The impenetrable steel of conscious rectitude was their armour of defence, and the GOD OF BATTLES gave them victory.

We are assembled to commemorate this glorious event, to reanimate our patriotism, and pay our annual offering on the altar of Independence. While gratitude distills, over the memory of those who perished, the dews of sensibility, let us who survive evince to the world that we duly appreciate those blessings which they purchased with their lives, that we will preserve inviolate, and transmit unimpaired to posterity that charter of liberty which was *sealed* with their *blood*. Let us this day review our patriotick vows and unite

in the participation of social festivity. Let the overflowings of feeling be unchecked by the harsh voice of acrimony. Let the stubborn prejudices of party be melted at the fire of patriotism. Let the principles of policy be discussed with freedom. Let unbounded latitude be given to a candid expression of opinion; and the pure spirit of charity and joy smile on the efforts of the speaker, and diffuse its mild radiance on every countenance.

*National honour* is a gem of inestimable value. In its untarnished purity, it shines with peculiar lustre and sparkles with resplendent beauty. It gives dignity to indigence and grandeur to affluence. On prosperity it confers new charms; and, in adversity it commands the homage of respect. It awes the insolence of foreign aggression, secures domestick fidelity, and sheds a ray of glory on every member of the community. Its attractions allure the affections to its standard, animate the flame of publick spirit, and inspire the bosom with the ardour of patriotism. But this gem, beautiful and splendid as it is, in its native purity, may be tarnished by the breath of infamy. It will be *shorn of its beams* by the first touch of corruption. Its delicate texture will be marred by the management of unskillful guardians. It must be defended with incessant energy, and guarded from pollution with unwinking vigilance. Preserve this, and, as a nation, you cannot lose the joys of self-approbation—lose this, *an angel's arm cannot snatch you from the gulf of self-condemnation, and merited contempt.*

The members of our national government are the immediate guardians of this sacred deposit of national

honour. From the system of measures which they pursue our national character derives its colouring. From their measures will emanate a splendour which will gladden every heart, or issue fell poison that will stain every honour, and blast every hard-earned laurel. While wisdom, blended with dignity and energy, tempered with moderation, are the distinguishing characteristics of their conduct, our national reputation will remain unimpaired. But should they be infected with folly, depraved by corruption, or unnerved by pusillanimity, national infamy will be the inevitable result and every true American will blush to own his country.

It is the part of folly and imbecility to be continually deluded by the idle dreams of speculation, and to pant in the incessant chase of novelties. Folly and imbecillity lead to contempt. Wisdom and dignity direct to the path of experience as the path of safety. This is a beaten road, and, at every turn the unerring guide of history warns us of the latent dangers, and points the finger of truth to the object of pursuit. Experience is an enclosed and cultivated garden, blooming with a variety of unfading sweets: Here we can walk in conscious security for every avenue, every plant, and every flower are familiar to the mind. Here safety is an ample compensation for the exclusion of novelty, and no tempting fragrance or alluring beauty attracts us to swallow concealed and unknown poison. Theory, on the other hand, is a desert unbounded and pathless as the wilderness of Louisiana. Though mountains of gold may rise in its interior, lurking dangers swarm around. Dazzling meteors gild its recess-

ses with the false glare of transitory splendours, and clothe the distant prospect with apparent beauty. But its splendours lead to bewilder, its charms frequently fade at the approach of scrutiny, its labyrinths often lead to destruction. Let our government, then beware lest they be bewildered in its mazes, thus involve our country in disgrace and ruin, and our citizens in misery. True policy never will abandon a certain blessing in possession, to chase the distant hope of precarious improvement.

Imbecility is the grave of national honour, of public spirit, of prosperity and security. It unnerves the arm, and relaxes every sinew of the body politic. Energy of character is essential to the preservation of national honour. Not however, the lawless energy of despotism that knows no bounds but its own will. Not the imperial, sanguinary energy of a tyrant who can delight in the effusion of blood, in the infliction of misery on his prostrate slaves, and dance to the music of their groans. Here national honour lingers, droops and expires in chains. Not, on the other hand, the enthusiastick energy of licentious democracy, which sweeps away with hurried and delirious infatuation, every impediment, and leaves not behind a wreck of law and justice, or a vestige of order and beauty. Not the energy that arises from the blind impulse of sudden fanaticism; not "the paroxysms of infuriated man," which shake to its base the whole fabric of society. Here national honour bleeds at every pore, or expires in convulsions. But it is that energy which marches forward with a progression steady as time, and wields, with vigorous arm, the sword of justice in defence of

injured innocence. That energy which suffers not the laws to slumber, or the guilty to escape, and builds an impregnable rampart around the rights of the community. That energy, which answers every foreign demand to surrender our rights, like the Spartan hero, "*come and take them.*" In fine, that energy tempered with moderation, which, when danger frowns, is firm as the oak that waves over our native mountains, and when tranquillity smiles, mild as the zephyr that rustles through its leaves. Such is the energy that leads to prosperity and honour : such the government under which a nation may repose in security : such the system of measures which will spread over the world the fame of its benignity, and kindle on every countenance the irradiations of joy.

Although the members of our national government are the immediate guardians of the national honour, yet think not, Americans, that you have no public duties to perform. The sanctuary of your country's rights, is ultimately committed to your superintending care. To your hands are confided the vast and complicated interests of your nation, and of posterity. Every officer of your government is either immediately or remotely the work of your hands. On the judicious exercise of your elective privileges, therefore, ultimately rests the honour of your country. Should the vicious, the ignorant and the pusillanimous be elevated to important stations you can expect nothing but misfortunes, insults and infamy. Think not that elevation can supply the deficiencies of intellect, or confer integrity and respectability. Magnanimity is not essentially inherent in exalted stations, it is not the

gift of earthly power. Nothing can make that great which the decree of nature has ordained to be little.

“Pygmies are pygmies still, though perch'd on Alps;

“And pyramids are pyramids in vales.”

The throne itself is unable to give that dignity which it happens not to find. It only serves to render the impotence of its incumbent still more extensively conspicuous. It depresses feeble minds, though it may elevate the strong. As you prefer honour to infamy and prosperity to degradation, let promotion be the exclusive tribute to merit. Suffer not the strongest current of popular opinion to overwhelm your reason or delude your judgment. In the eyes of partiality the magick of popularity, like the pontifical dignity, bestows an imaginary impeccability on its possessor. But the snail-paced wisdom and artifices of shallow politicians will, sooner or later, be stripped of their borrowed plumes and meet their merited contempt. Admiration, to be durable, must be founded on noble and durable qualities; on qualities which corruption may counterfeit for a time, but never can acquire. While the dignified offices of our government are adorned with men of integrity, moderation, energy and wisdom, our national reputation will continue unblemished. Such men will meditate on the great interests of nations and of mankind with the most daring expansion of thought. Their genius will be ever on the wing, grasping great objects and executing grand designs. Ignorance and error will shrink from the penetrating vision of their minds. Arbitrary power will tremble before their vigorous investigation of its principles, while the authority of

the laws alone will stand immoveable and sacred. Their maxims will be adopted as the rules of political orthodoxy. The ebullitions of internal animosity will be hushed. The arm of usurpation will be palsied. The tongue of faction will be withered. Competition will withdraw into the caverns of envy. Discontent will tremble at her own murmurs, and foreign insolence will vanish like the mist before the sunbeams of our nation's glory. Do your hearts bound at such a prospect of national felicity? Its realization is demanded of you, fellow citizens, by the voice of your country; it is demanded of you by the still but impressive voice of posterity; it is demanded of you by the sacred voice of duty and conscience. Obey the solemn mandates, participate a nation's blessings and reap your rich reward in perennial gratitude, in the joys of your own hearts and in the approbation of Heaven.

*Citizens in arms! Gentlemen Officers, and Soldiers of Liberty!*

When we behold yonder standard waving to the winds of Heaven, and those instruments of death glittering in the sunbeams, though yet unstained with blood, we feel the possibility of war. When we cast our eyes over the pages of history, and trace the succession of events, we see little but a long, black catalogue of national conflicts, victories and defeats. Here successful ambition tramples on the rights and triumphs in the miseries of man; there the stings of slavery, sharpened beyond endurance, rouse at length the oppressed to burst their fetters and hurl them at their proud oppressors. Here a nation rises by a rapid

succession of victories, there it *sinks* beneath the accumulated weight of misfortunes. On the eastern continent, the struggle continues to rage at the present hour. Ambition is continually making new conquests and scarcely a passing gale from the ocean but wafts to our ears the knell of some expiring nation once prosperous and powerful. The present is an age of wonders, an era of revolutions. The fairest portions of Europe have been swept by the besom of desolation. The political systems that had withstood the conflicts of ages, have been burst asunder at a blow, and the whole world trembled under the dreadful explosion. The cravings of ambition are not yet satiated. His sword is still drawn and reeking with gore, his eyes are still glaring for new victims, like Polyphemus in his cave, he is still fattening with carnage! With this mighty devastation frowning around us, can we feel secure from its ravages? Is there any decree of nature to exempt us from similar calamities? Can the extent of ocean circumscribe, or all its waters quench the thirst of domination? While we regret and deplore the murderous depravity of man, experience and observation compel us to answer no! The struggle, which we are this moment commemorating, this very contest, which gave our nation birth, evinces that the desires of man are not limited by these barriers, that the fangs of war can grasp the world. At the present moment we have serious difficulties with the great belligerent powers of Europe. We are, by turns, a prey to the mammoth of the continent, and the shark of the ocean. Our territories are invaded, our commerce is plundered, our flag is insulted, our national

dignity is derided, and even at our harbours' mouths, the citizen is murdered by the lawless band of foreign depredation. Your courage is our last resort. When every other resource is exhausted without effect, when negociation, conciliation and concession only add new acrimony to indignity, and aggravation to injury, and the voice of foreign insolence still howls in our ears, then, SOLDIERS, gather round the standard of your country, exhibit a front of brass impervious to the sword of invasion, and glance on the assailant the flaming bolt of awakened vengeance. Undaunted courage is the primary attribute of a hero.

“ When lightning fires

“ The arch of heaven, and thunders rock the ground,

“ When furious whirlwinds rend the howling air,

“ And ocean, groaning from his lowest bed,

“ Heaves his tempestuous billows to the sky,

“ Amidst the mighty uproar, while below

“ The nations tremble, *Courage* looks abroad

“ From some high cliff, superiour, and enjoys

“ The elemental war.”

Let this ever be the characteristick of an American soldier. Firm be your heart and vigorous your arm amidst the shock of battles, but never stain your honour with the blood of innocence or of prostrate foes. Suffer not the dæmon of ambition to point your swords against the bosom of your country, or prompt you to triumph over her liberties. The short-lived intoxication of despotick authority, cannot be a rational object of pursuit. The terrestrial greatness of ill-gotten power is fleeting and transitory as the odour of incense in the fire. Trace it to its close! The sun of gladness soon grows weary of gilding the palaces of undeserved prosperity. Even in the moment of the exultation of

unmerited success, the clouds of discontent gather around the brow of the tyrant, and the tempest of hatred roars over his dwelling. The cold hand of the angel of death rests upon him, the voracious grave howls for his prey, and execrations pursue him to the tomb.

Far different is the career marked out for you by the heroes who achieved our independence. The expectations of your country, the dictates of your duty, and, we trust, the pure inclinations of your own hearts, point you to a far different course. The defence of the rights of honour and your country is true glory which will endure with time. Sell it not then, like the corrupted legions of the Roman empire, for gold.

“ Let virtue’s flame,

“ The sense of honour and the fear of shame,

“ The thirst of praise and Freedom’s envied cause,

“ The smiles of heroes and the world’s applause,

“ Impel each breast, in glory’s bright career,

“ Firm as your rock-raised hills, to persevere.”

To your protection is committed the only republick remaining in the world. Cast your eyes over the surface of the globe. Nought but varied shades of despotism strike the view. Not another republick brightens on the aching vision. Where are the glories of ancient Greece? They are faded. The Genius of Liberty has deserted her cities. The fire of patriotism is extinguished in her sons. The descendents of Aristides and Solon, grovel in dust and grope in intellectual darkness. The tyrants of Turkey stalk over the ashes of Leonidas. Where is the former grandeur of Rome? It is eclipsed. She was once the protectress of arts and sciences, the nursery of poets, sages

and heroes, the mighty empress of the world. She is now reduced to a state of pusillanimous insinificancy. She is dependent upon nations who were formerly her slaves. Desolation and rapine have ravaged her territories. Her ancient spirit was buried under the ruins of her own magnificence, and has risen only to nod and slumber over her blasted and withered laurels. Where are the modern republicks of Europe? They are swallowed in the vortex of revolution. The United Provinces feel the power and wear the livery of a master. The republicks of Italy are devoured by the politico-imperial mammoth of Europe. The descendants of TELL are crushed under the weight of the manacles of ambition. The glaciers of Switzerland still blush with the blood of those who expired with her expiring liberty.

While you shed the tears of sympathy and regret over this tomb of our sister republicks, take warning from their awful fate. Dangers frown around, seize the flaming sword and disperse the threatening tempest. Bid the shades of departed heroes bear testimony that their successors have not degenerated from their virtues. Imagination now beholds their beatified spirits bending from their bright abodes to watch over the destinies of their country, and hears the language of your hearts thus address them: “Ye sainted Patriots, martyrs in your country’s cause, and the cause of liberty, rest in your mansions of immortality. Though the tribute of a mausoleum is denied to your consecrated memories, though posterity cannot gather around your collected ashes to bedew them with the grateful tear-drop of sensibility, yet your imperishable

fame shall not be tarnished by the lapse of years, nor your felicity disturbed by the degeneracy of your sons. The remembrance of your toils and virtues, like the rich and salubrious perfume of spring, shall float on the odoriferous breeze down the current of time, and brighten with progressive brilliancy along the tract of eternity.”

“ And thou Supreme, whose hand sustains this ball,

“ Before whose nod the nations rise and fall,

“ Make this great empire grow on wisdom’s plan,

“ The seat of bliss, the last retreat of man.”

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