

AN  
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

PROVIDENCE,

IN THE

*FIRST CONGREGATIONAL MEETING-HOUSE,*

ON THE

Fourth of July, 1804.

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By the Rev. JAMES WILSON,  
Pastor of the Second Congregational Church.

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THE Committee of Arrangements for the 4th of July in behalf of the town present their thanks to the Rev. Mr. WILSON, for his Oration delivered at the celebration of that Anniversary, and request a copy for the press.

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*Providence, July 6th, 1804.*

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IN compliance with the request of, and through the Committee of Arrangements, the following Oration is respectfully presented to the Citizens of the town of Providence, by

THE AUTHOR.

To the Committee of Arrangements for }  
the celebration of the Anniversary, &c. }

*Providence. 6th July, 1804.*

AN

O R A T I O N.

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**T**HE auspicious and eventful day, which now we celebrate, commenced not, like the present, amidst halcyon scenes of tranquility, when the dove reposed on the olive branch, and lute of the shepherd transported the listening villager. But though it was announced by the clarion's martial voice, the deep sounding drum, and was uttered from the cannon's mouth in the presence of hostile and approaching armies, yet were American citizens and soldiers unappalled. Trusting in the Almighty, as the Founder of nations, and great Arbitrator in the last appeal of conflicting hosts, they refounded American Independence, and with dauntless courage, bad defiance to Britain's thunder, and to the shafts and tempests of war.

It was at this eventful moment, that HOWE, indignant at his flight from the batteries of Dorchester, and reinforced by the veteran legions of an obstinate and misguided monarch, lighted on your shores, unfurled the banners of despotism, threatened, flattered, and waged cruel warfare. The *Isles* on your coasts felt the impression. *York City* fell, *New-Jersey* was invaded, was over-run. A cloud gathered in the western horizon: *Ticonderoga* was overwhelmed; *Albany* trembled. The hostile invaders extend to the south. The *Carolinās*, *Pennsylvania*, *Georgia*, and *Virginia*, are deluged in blood, are wasted with fire, sword, and rapine. But vain are their victories. Checked by *Washington* in the *Jerseys*, vanquished by American valour at *Saratoga*, forced from the south, by *Mitchell*, *Morgan*, and *Green*,

the British Lion crouches, the destined conqueror of *Seringapatam*, and his legions, yield to America's illustrious Chief, and to her Allies.

BUT what are the rewards for the toils sustained, privations endured, and blood and treasures expended, in this arduous conflict? As the meed of victory, we this day recognize American Independence. As the reward of Toils and Privations, lo! we are unshackled from Britain's wars, from Europe's wayward politicks. And in our Federal Constitution, as the bond of our union, palladium of our rights, anchor of our Liberties, and pledge of future prosperity, we receive the boon conferred on us by the blood of a *Warren, Montgomery*, and an *host of fallen heroes!*

BUT as a test of the importance of this Independence, efficiency of this Constitution, and as evincive of the talents and integrity of those who have exercised the highest powers which it confers, we shall recognize, in a few conspicuous instances, the enhancing prosperity of our country under their fostering patronage.

WERE we here to glance only on a single particular, how manifest would be the improvement of our condition. Contemplate, if you will, American commerce. Prior to the revolution, it was restricted to Great-Britain and her territories. But now, all Europe solicits her intercourse. Africa offers her gold dust and ivory. The south seas propose their spicy productions. Canton is her resort. The Indies are explored by her. Even the desolate islands of the vast Pacifick, pay to her their ample tribute. But what surpasses astonishment itself, and which perhaps posterity will yet regard as the tale of romance, is, that amidst all this extended intercourse, effected in so few years, England and her colonies, so far from being deserted by our shipping, are become more our mart than when connected with them.

THE effects of this extension of commerce are precisely what might be expected. They have roused the energies of our husbandmen. The forests have re-echoed with the sound of the axe. The ploughshare has turned up the virgin soil, and millions of acres of new lands have annually added their luxuriant crops to those of

each preceding year. Commerce and agriculture thus expanded, necessarily have propelled the ratio of population. It is generally and credibly supposed, that the number of inhabitants in these states was about Three Millions, both at the beginning and end of the revolutionary war. The ratio of increase, when not interrupted by the wastes of war, has been stated as doubling our numbers once in twenty three years. But it is now with much probability supposed, that the last twenty and one years have multiplied us from *three* to *six* millions of people. The impulle of these augmenting numbers we experience on our eastern frontier, in the transformation of villages into cities. But in the west, the forests themselves give birth to sovereign states, and have added *Verment, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio*, to the *renowned Thirteen*.

BUT would you duly estimate the enhanced prosperity of these states, you should contemplate their condition when hostilities ceased—when the balmy sounds of peace hushed, in this war worn land, the discordant noise of battle—when your citizens, from the toils of the camp, with well-earned laurels of victory, returned to the sweets of domestic felicity; or returned, with *honourable scars*, from exile and captivity, to the endearments of long separated friendship—what was then the condition of this land? An immense debt hung over it, publick credit was on the verge of annihilation, private fortunes were much impoverished, many families from affluence, reduced to real want, through means of a depreciated currency. An excessive importation of foreign merchandize, uncontrolled by American exportation, but enhanced the growing calamity. The veteran patriot, wearied in victory, or worn out with toil, finds, on his return, his hamlet in ashes, or his fruitful farm become a wilderness; and to complete his sufferings, his scanty wages, long in arrears, remain unpaid. The revenues are unproductive, and the government feeble and tottering. Amidst this vortex of ills, and from these quicksands of publick and private distress, the *Federal Constitution* providentially sprang up. The great WASHINGTON, by the unanimous voice of his

fellow-citizens, was called to the helm of the States. Aided by wise and able politicians, the true interests of the union were descried; and, happily for America, the principal part of the publick debt was met by permanent funds. It is, however, matter of deep regret, that in but too many instances, and in this state in particular, the honourable asserters of American Rights have remained unrecompensed by that country which owes its independence to their valour displayed upon the tented field. But though in these instances the wisdom and resources of government were inadequate to obviate difficulties or to control adverse circumstances, yet to the profound measures of the *Washingtonian* administration was owing, in a very great degree, the happy change from poverty to opulence, which soon pervaded every state. An energetick government, producing a resurrection of publick credit, commanded universal confidence, roused individual exertion, and in the success of these exertions, gave stability to private credit. This improving condition of the union being then met by the disastrous wars of Europe, a new field opened, and unusual resources offered themselves to American commerce. The world itself became their emporium, and the wealth of the nations was flowing into their coffers. The jealousy of Great-Britain, and rapacity of France, were then awaked up. Our maritime defence was not even in embryo; with impunity, therefore, were the properties of our citizens plundered, the sources of our revenues diminished; and *insulted* were the *honour* and *independence* of our country and government. The wrath of Americans was kindled, indignation burned in every breast. An infantile navy was created, and defensive measures were resorted to. But prudence suggested the importance of neutrality. It recommended remonstrance; and remonstrance terminated in amicable treaty, which secured, and recovered to us, much more than successful hostilities could possibly have obtained.

The present is doubtless a period more proper to scrutinize the expediency of temporizing at such a

crisis, than was the moment when these transactions occurred. Then passion and conjecture beclouded reason's eye: But time should now have lulled passion into candour, and *facts* should lead the dispassionate mind to unerring decision. For facts, loud and stubborn, proclaim the sagacity of that policy which, whilst it averted the horrors of unequal warfare, fostered the pecuniary interests of states, then but emerging from revolutionary embarrassment. These facts appear in the indubitable evidences of the accumulated wealth of our citizens. Turn your eyes wheresoever you will, and you behold them, not so much indeed in the splendour of buildings, glitter of equipage, costliness of furniture, or richness of apparel—but you behold them in the multiplied flocks and herds, and luxuriant crops of independent land holders; in the navies and store-houses of our mercantile community; in the opulent capitals of our numerous banks and insurance companies; in the vast sums annually and profitably expended in turnpike roads, publick bridges, and productive canals; in the diminution of our publick debt, and in the prolifick revenues arising from a lucrative commerce.

AND these facts, thus substantiating the wisdom of the first Presidency, appear to have operated conviction in the present. This we infer from the late *Louisiana* transactions. Fresh in the memories of this assembly is the recent instance of Spanish aggression, when our right of deposit at New-Orleans was openly violated, the navigation of the Mississippi obstructed, our western fellow-citizens precluded from commercial intercourse, and when the insidious machinations of Bonaparte threatened the repose and safety of the union. Then was roused the spirit of Americans. The *East* and the *West*, the *North* and the *South*, participated in the general emotion. The cry of *war! war!* resounded from *Kentucky* to the *Capitol*, from the *Capitol* to the *Ocean*. It was urged that *rights* essentially important, founded in nature, and solemnly ratified by treaty, were, without provocation, openly, injuriously, and wantonly violated; that we had a right, and were

competent to redress our wrongs; that our insulted honour demanded the atonement of retaliating force; and finally, that delay, by transferring the decision of our claims from the feeble Spaniard to the subtle and potent Corsican, might forever wrest from us the opportunity of redress. But on the other hand it was considered, that *war*, however plausible in prospect, is often uncertain in issue; that however *successful*, it is still an evil pregnant with calamity; that hostilities, at that momentous crisis, when the two mighty competitors for *universal empire*, were about to astonish the world with unexampled conflict, might have long embroiled us in European warfare; that our strength, if nurtured by *peace*, had fair to become gigantick; yet was then, but as that of the beardless stripling; and finally, that our honour remained untarnished until remonstrance should fail, because the usages of able statesmen, of the illumined WASHINGTON, and of all civilized nations, had established the interposition of negotiation before the sanguinary appeal to the sword. But negotiation is anticipated; the Mississippi expedition is disembarked and abandoned; *Livingston* from the brow of *Munro*, bears away the laurels of treaty; whilst in the revenues nurtured by the first President, the existing government finds the millions which purchase Louisiana, and which from our western frontier, happily avert that fraternal embrace, whose *touch* crushed the liberties of Switzerland, and impoverished the High and Mighty States of Holland.

BUT when we thus contemplate, on the one hand, the unexampled prosperity of our country, and when, on the other, we perceive the expansion of our possessions far into southern climes; when we behold them range the shores of the Mexican Gulph, embrace the majestic Mississippi, ascend the rapid Missouri, join limits with New-Mexico, and unite the sugar-cane to the rich and varied productions of our fertile fields; when our enlarged possessions promise mines, rich as Potosi, and add New-Orleans to our cities, and Louisiana to our territories; then how are we led to anticipate futurity!



9

SEATED on the highest summit of Allegany, we survey on the North the Bourbon's devious course; on the South the Mississippi's broad streams. The West presents the Oregon, whose waters, with the beams of the setting sun, are submerged in the waves of the Pacifick. Before us lie also the broad surface of the land locked seas; the Ontario, the Erie, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. On their margins, where once the Mammoth had flaked his thirst, or the Indian hunter had lurked for the timid deer, cities spring into existence, and on their waters are borne the enriching commodities of commerce. The hum of men pervades hills and vallies; hamlets and villages bespread the plains. Vanished are the impervious forests. The sheep, cow, and generous horse, on the verdant lawns, succeed to the bear, wolf, and tiger of the wilderness. Arts, science, and manufactures, diffuse around their salutary influence; whilst the "church-going bell" announces a people favoured of heaven, and invited to the house of God. With anticipations thus creative, we hail the United States; we congratulate her on her numberless, added millions of western citizens, all speaking one language, cemented by one interest, and united in peace and felicity, under one general and happy government.

BUT who amongst us, after all, perceives not this anticipated portraiture, however probable or desirable, to be still in *part* but fancy's airy flight? For though a population thus vast may at some future period fill with its countless millions these immense tracts of country, yet those millions we contemplate as not to be produced in the same ratio as our now existing millions were; for luxury, that known enemy of population, like a flood rushes in upon us. And as our numbers multiply this very increase, in proportion to its magnitude, must unavoidably produce augmenting obstructions to a further increafe. This perhaps may appear paradoxical; but all ambiguity will vanish, when it is recollected, that diminished means of subsistence and increased diseases are the legitimate offspring of a crowded population.

OUR geographical surface, exclusive of Louisiana, is about one million of square miles. Our white inhabitants are probably short of five millions. But a population equal to Connecticut, would give us *fifty millions*; and one equal to England and Wales, would confer on us *two hundred millions*, so that our present population, exclusive of the late purchase, is but a fortieth part of what it may yet become. Should then two, three, or more centuries elapse in filling up the vast blanks in our territories, what assurances have we that through all those periods, we shall remain one undivided people? That wars, foreign or domestic, shall not desolate us? That a million of slaves, fast augmenting, and increased by a present impolitic and vile importation, will not yet shake terribly the peace of the now slumbering South? Or that Louisiana shall not hereafter become to us a Rival, great and powerful, sustained by the arms of France?

INFERENCES respecting the future, can be drawn only from the past and present; and should be so drawn, not from circumscribed and partial events and views, but from views and events general and extended. If then we would take this just and enlarged view of appropriate events, we should mark the rise, the glory, and the decline, of distinguished nations of the Eastern hemisphere. Crossing for this purpose the Atlantic, passing the pillars of Hercules, and penetrating the Mediterranean, you, from the mouths of the Nile, may ponder Egypt's fame of old, her victories, her oblivion. Along Africk's shores you may glance the wishful eye, and remember that Hannibal and Carthage once were there. Proceed Eastward, and in search for great Ninevah and renowned Babylon, convince yourself that cities, the capitals of empires, and excelling in magnitude all others, are obliterated by the hand of time, and leave no certain evidence of where once they stood. Return by the ruins of famed Troy, but tarry not to lament old Priam's slaughtered sons, to bedew the relicks of their fallen conquerors; reserve thy flowing tears. O Greece! Greece! where are thy boasted Liberties, thy renowned Lawgivers, thy Heroes, and thy Orators? O Athens! where are

thy fleets, and where thy Attick fires? Sparta. where thy veteran bands, and where thy valour? Curbed by the Macedonian, fettered by Roman legions, and crushed by Turkman despotism, O Greece! thy sons are slaves, thy daughters gone into captivity, and thou remainest but the sad monument of degenerate greatness. But where this haughty Macedonian, those resistless Romans, and these oppressing Turks? The two former, their empires and hosts invincible, blotted from the nations of the world, have, through elapsed centuries, existed only on the page of history, and there existed to proclaim the crimes of conquerors, the miseries of the vanquished, and instability of all that bears on earth the name of man. Whilst the decrepit Turk, convulsed by insurrection, trembles, as the destined prey of rapacious France or of Russian ferocity. Are further admonitory events and facts needful? Come, then, and on the banks of the Vistula, hear the plaints of dismembered Poland. Condole with her, a ruined, patriot king, her slaughtered freemen, her brave, though vanquished Kosciusko; and from ill-fated Warsaw, learn Suwarrow's cruelty, and the triple allied despots' insatiable ambition. Oppressed Holland claims now your listening ear. She fought for Liberty. From France its tree she purchased; she planted it; it grew; but Oh! its leaves are chains, its blossoms, poverty, and its fruit, destruction. From Holland's humid vapours, and from the deleterious effluvia of her *Voltarian Upas Tree*. we now ascend to inhale the balmy breeze of Gothard's Alpin height. But even here, burdened is the air with sighs; for at your feet is bleeding Switzerland. Oh! once famed, free, and happy nation! speak forth thy wrongs; say by whom insulted, and who have murdered thy William Tells! Hear her impeach the silver-tongued Rousseau! He presented *infidelity's* illusive cup: Some amongst her sons they tasted and were intoxicated. The philosopher of Ferney and his apostate associates beguiled them still further from reason, knowledge, faith, and duty. The Parisian insanity came next in train. Bern and Zurich were alarmed; the other cantons slumbered. But French

agents were vigilant; they gained the demagogues, and gained Rousseau's deluded votaries. All was uproar, all division, and all a prey; for lost to fame and virtue Brune and his mock French patriots have, on ruined Switzerland, inflicted ills and wrongs too vile to name.

BUT disgusted with the atrocities of *republican* France, now expiating her offences under the iron yoke of an absolute despotism, and leaving her "bloody area" strewn with the corpses of her illustrious sons, the murdered Enghein, bow-stringed Pichegru, and perhaps immolated Moreau—we return to Rhode-Island's still peaceful shore. But here returned, and in the presence of these assembled citizens, what conclusions from Europe's prostrate liberties shall we now infer?

THE base thought we spurn, that American freemen, like degenerate Parisians, would kiss the hand that crushed them: Or that, while their chains were fast riveting, they would be consoled by the amusements of the play-house, the ball-room, or the puppet show. Neither do we contemplate the exposure of our free-born states to exterior violence as equal to that of Switzerland or of regenerated Poland. The latter had no strong barriers, and the former's cloud-capt Alps were unequal to our fathomless and wide-spread Atlantic. And on which barrier, in a day of *war* or *danger*, should we possess that naval force which our commerce may demand, and would support, then, under the blessings of Divine Providence, and in co-operation with a numerous and formidable militia, our Truxtons, Decators, and other heroes, may bid defiance to Europe's threatening hosts.

OUR dangers are not however to be apprehended so much from abroad, as from, and within ourselves; for our most formidable enemy is *disunion*. Break the federative bond that constitutes us a nation, soon we shall have enemies on every hand. Each state will become a rival. The larger will devour the smaller. The powers of Europe will play one state off against another, until the whole become at length their helpless prey. And then these ruined states, like Europe's

divided and destroyed republics, will have too late to mourn those broils that lost them more than Holland, Poland, Switzerland, or Greece, had ever in their power to loose. If then *dis sen* is our worst foe, how should we deplore whatever gives birth to, or fosters it! Why should the words *Federal* and *Republican*, be the rallying points for discord amongst American citizens and brethren? when both appellations are alike constitutional; when constitutionally explained, they are nearly synonymous; and when duty, honour, and interest, demand of every honest man amongst us to bear the appellation, a *Federal Republican*.

OUR beloved *Washington*, in his valedictory, laments the invidious distinctions of "Northern and Southern" states; "Atlantic and Western." And how often have we experienced another source of growing discords, in the jealousies of the farmer against the merchant, and of the country against the seaports. But would a war betwixt the hands and the feet, or the right hand and the left, be more preposterous or ruinous, than are these execrable animosities betwixt the several parts of one great whole? where there exists such a reciprocal intercourse of commerce and mutuality of dependence and interests, that no *one member* can suffer but at the *expence* and *injury* of the *whole body*. It is then as manifest as if written in sun-beams, that our contentions arise not so much from real causes of complaint as from our ignorance, our ambition, our mercenary passions, in one word, from a *vicious* desire of the honours and emoluments of office.

THE genius of our governments also, necessarily, but innocently, contributes to the growth of strifes amongst us. For that freedom of thought, speech, and action, which republican institutions guarantee, unavoidably produces dissentions which, in such a community, grow up as weeds in a luxuriant soil. And whilst it is the infirmity of this best form of governments thus to accelerate controversies and divisions, so this form itself and its administrators, like every thing else human, are liable to mutation, perversion, and to errors least to be expected.

BUT wishing to avert each threatening ill and heal

the widening breach, we offer expedients to each friend of peace and advocate for harmony. But what will expedients avail, if a general diffusion of knowledge be wanting? Monarchies may exist peaceably and securely amidst general ignorance; but general ignorance is *death* to republicks. If this then is a truth, which no man amongst us will deny, can there be too much done to illuminate our numerous rising youth, in a community the most popular and republican in all its features of any of the same magnitude that ever existed on the face of this globe? We, as a nation, are one representative republic; as states, are seventeen such republicks; and this number must increase. Each state or republic of these seventeen, is constituted of a multitude of distinct democracies, called towns. And how great their number, may be inferred from this republick which, though one of the smallest in the union, yet contains *thirty* such democracies. These things considered, should convince us, that sound policy, duty, interest, necessity, with one united voice, demand of our general government, of our state-legislatures, and of all our citizens assembled in town-meetings, a prompt and adequate support of publick institutions competent to the due instruction of American youth.\*

As an essential aid to our civil interests and political institutions, *Religion* now offers itself. A nation wholly atheistical, never had a being. France, in her insanity, approached perhaps the nearest to it of any other: But alas! the guillotine brought her to more sober thinking. Religion is one in nature and essence. It is diverse in respect to degrees and dispensations. Natural religion all nations have enjoyed, in greater or smaller portions. The religion of the Old Testament, though located, yet blessed multitudes of people besides the Jews. But the dispensation of the New-Testament is neither confined to one nation, nor forced upon any people. It tenders its benign influence to all who will accept it. Wherever received and cherished the heavenly visitant abides; and to the constituted civil authorities imparts essential aids, gives validity to an oath, stability to moral principle, takes cogni-

\* See note (a)

zance of crimes which illude human laws and magistrates, reforms the vicious, exhibits luminous examples of piety and virtue, enjoins due reverence to civil laws and rulers, heals divisions by authoritatively enjoining brotherly love and the forgiveness of injuries, and to all this adds the special blessings of Divine Providence, without which all other dependencies and aids become abortive. But whilst the services of the Christian religion are thus tendered, let none suppose that religious establishments are solicited. These we deem pernicious. All we demand is protection. Preserve from persecution, and religion thus protected, but not meddled with, will sustain itself, and become Society's most substantial pillar.

*Love of Country* makes now a proffer of its services. This associate of knowledge and virtue consists in attachment to soil, inhabitants, language, becoming manners and customs, religion, rulers, laws, and constitution. It exists in those who possess it, as their birth-right, conferred on them by the land of their nativity: Or Fidelity creates it in us to that country which, deliberately, we have preferred to all others, and which country, with expansive bosom, hath adopted us amongst her sons. But love of country, if it should be ardent and vigorous, in proportion to the magnitude and importance of its objects, then who should feel its energies in force greater than American citizens? If strong, still it should be just; we should duly respect the rights and well-being of other nations, not seeking unjustly to establish ours on the ruin of theirs. But in this respect our errors have been against ourselves; we have esteemed others too much, and ourselves too little. Vile adulation has been offered to a government, whose only popular branch is degenerated into placemen and pensioners; whose parliament, through means of mercenary borough members has lost its once noble independence. And a still more servile homage has been paid to the pernicious institutions and follies of revolutionary maniacks. Whilst in those days of discord, but too few stood with the steadfast *Washington*, in duly appreciating their better institutions, and in firmly resisting the machinations of an intriguing Ge-

net and Talleyrand. But whilst we thus yield the palm to the United States and their institutions, we regret it with our sister state of Massachusetts, and with many of the sage patriots who devised our well adjusted constitution," (b) that imperious necessity which opened a constitutional door for the representatives of slaves into our national councils and legislature. Nor can we forbear deploring those stretches of power, repeated innovations, and bitterness of feuds, which, in some of our southern and middle states, have in some degree beclouded the rising glories of Republican communities.

BUT seeking the promotion of the best interests of the only Independent Republics now existing on the face of the whole earth—we ask what will perpetuate their freedom beyond the durability of the fallen *liberties* of the East? What further amend the Federative bond by constitutionally transferring *three score* suffrages from the Carolinian tyrannizing over an *hundred slaves*? What obliterate all undue attachment to Europe's policy? What subjugate all hearts to each authority lawfully and constitutionally appointed? What restore the endearing intercourse of friendships marred by strifes for power and office? What realize in *all its parts*, that anticipated portraiture of American glory, which transfuses through all our territories, and from Louisiana's south eastern bourn to the margin of the western deep, its innumerable millions of united freemen? And what, under the blessing of Divine Providence, transmit unimpaired, to unborn ages, that Liberty, those Rights, and this Independence, for which unitedly, you together fought, bled, and conquered? The answer is, these can be effected only by that illumined, virtuous *Love of Country*, which shall transform and consolidate us into *one people*; into *Federal, Republican, Independent AMERICANS*.

(a) It is not here meant that publick institutions should supercede those of a private nature, but that the former should supply the lack of the latter. Neither is it forgotten, that many towns and some states have made ample provision for the education of their respective youth.

(b) This clause, and a few others, are added since delivery.