

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT
LYNDEBOROUGH, N. H.

IN
COMMEMORATION
OF THE
INDEPENDENCE

OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

JULY 4, 1815.

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BY LEVI WOODBURY.
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1815.

ORATION.

ALL anniversaries of national joy naturally soften the heart and liberalize the mind. But the present one, as commemorating our political creation, elevates no less than it expands; and while lifting the soul to manly thought should inspire it with contempt for every species of prejudice or captious criticism. The speaker then need not fear, when those who listen may not condemn.

My friends and fellow-citizens, you have also nobler employment. You meet to celebrate the Jubilee of Freemen. Hallowed by its martyrs and immortalized by its heroes, this stood on the calendar of your fathers next the day of our religious redemption; and the moment we speak more than seven millions of their offspring are probably rehalting its return in all the gratitude and transport of filial patriotism. Vain, however, is the expectation to feel, unless faintly, what animated them. For distressed by poverty and maimed with scars, the founders of your Independence still stood alone in the era they ennobled, as the champions, who had successfully lavished their own treasures and blood to rescue and perpetuate the liberties of their country. On this anniversary, then, while in thought they could almost act over again their sublime sacrifices, we can only invoke their ascended spirits to witness our admiration of them. The immortality, already theirs, if not consummate, can never be augmented

by our eulogy, however warm the heart may burn at their remembered virtues. But its emotions can still be silently indulged; and they transcend any eloquence of the tongue, and shall never be polluted by feeble efforts of ours to pourtray the actors and scenes in the grand drama of your revolution. Something will be offered, merely on the principles which produced the event we commemorate. A recurrence to those sacred principles is in truth the great moral, if not political purpose of this splendid festival. Stripped of that, your pageantry becomes mere moonshine. The animating cheer of joy; the tinsel of military parade; the song of triumph, and the roar of cannon; how idle, unless "shadowing forth" their original design, by recalling the causes which begat them and invigorating those sentiments, that thirty-nine years since proclaimed, and to the present moment have protected the liberties we boast.

Suffer me, therefore, to remind you, on these sentiments or principles, that they were the growth of a sterling republicanism; that they too not only laid the base and reared on it the illustrious fabric of our civil governments; but, shielding that fabric long and laboriously from attack, have even in our days poured over its brightening dome a flood of imperishable glory. Yet not, as the elements of our national grandeur, simply, do they require investigation; for they exercise, in common with most other *principles*, an unequalled influence on all the interests of human society. It is these which penetrate almost every place and subject. They enter the cottage as well as the palace; the age of iron or the age of gold, and in a galaxy of signal revolutions they chiefly have demoralized or ennobled the nations of the earth. Their usual operation, however, whether political or religious, is silent and nearly invisible. They are the "still small voice," that bursts upon our sight only in its wide and regenerating effects. An unheeded change in fashion, some

trifling alteration in theological belief; here the modification of a single custom, and there the passage of one inconsiderate law, influence almost imperceptibly, till they convulse an empire. Instead of shoving at once with a giant arm the pillars of government from their base, they wear them down, particle by particle, with a tooth constant as time and inexorable as the grave.

Such, then, being the magnitude and characteristics of these principles, or of all principles generally, the common citizen, as well as the Burkes and Lyncurguses of the age, should regard the origin and watch the operation of those strictly *political*, with an eagle eye. In a government like ours, it is peculiarly incumbent on each individual to become a centinel of liberty. For this form of civil polity has no other protectors or guard but the people, and is destitute, like Sparta, of almost every wall against the snailish encroachments of the wary or noon day assault of usurpers, except the vigilance and courage of "highminded men." Believe me, the wretch, who administers opiates to such a watchfulness and drugs you into a lethargy as to men or measures, bears on his brow as legibly as Cain, the mark of a betrayer of your rights: and, till the unholy incantations of some such demons have soothed you into their syren sleep, Americans will never cease to be free.

Among those cardinal principles that thus deserve attention, and which have contributed to produce and hitherto sustain your independence, our time will permit us to investigate a few only. The hacknied one of Republican Equality, though very essential, is yet perhaps one of the most perverted and least understood. But while we forbear enlarging on it, suffer us to say, that its authors here, the Puritans who landed at Plymouth rock, were neither demagogues nor illuminatists. They professed a system of equality, to be sure, but not one of talents or property, contradicted by na-

ture and exploded by experience. No. It was rather an equality of civil and religious rights ; protecting the beggar as well as the prince ; and, while it guaranteed to all the respective privileges of all, man, almost ruined and redemptionless, regained the dignity of freedom and of nature. The peculiar situation of our ancestors undoubtedly endeared this doctrine to their persecuted hearts. Driven from the eastern hemisphere by the scourge of scorpion intolerance ; the bleeding victims of both church and state ; they welcomed for an asylum from their tortures even a wilderness and barbarians. Courageous Pilgrims ! “ Wherever liberty dwelt there was their country.” How ardently, then, must these primitive republicans have cherished, and how deeply must they have planted in their institutions the sacred principle of equal rights ! While to demonstrate, that deliberation and not caprice controuled their conduct, property, which at first, as among christians of the apostolic age, was mingled by them in common, soon became separated and unshackled midst an increasing population and an enlarged commerce. Stigmatized as all have been, yet neither they, nor the whigs of '76, nor those of the present day ever merited the reproach of levellers. For a community of goods, practicable among the few followers of an Evangelist, or the small societies of Shakers, was never contemplated or advocated by any of them as feasible in an extended empire, where industry enriches and talents aggrandize, and where an infinite diversity of avocations generates almost as infinite a diversity in the acquisition of wealth. At the same time this does not militate with their opinion, that in all republics something should be interposed to check without extinguishing the natural avidity of man to hoard and entail. But for this purpose your fathers neither adopted the iron coin of Lacedemon, nor the agrarian laws of Rome. Their intelligence or necessities introduced statutes on the descent and distribution of estates,

and on subjecting every species of them to the payment of debts, which are worth the whole code of the other sumptuary and equalizing provisions of the last thirty centuries. As mere laws then, they are sufficient. They divide without destroying, and pour the stream of wealth, like the Nile or Mississippi, through their hundred mouths, into the public ocean ; while the others, like a river of lava, dry up their contents in their own bed, or deluge them over the surrounding country to terrify and consume.

But, my fellow-citizens, all legal barriers against accumulations and perpetuities of wealth, those foodful nurses of monarchical government and fatal foes of equality, are surmountable, unless guarded by the vigilance of an active patriotism. Monopolies, official immunities, invidious taxes, colonial restrictions, legislation without representation, were sweeping the whole away, when this sounded the tocsin to your fathers to resist or perish. They flew to arms and rent from its parent trunk our then vast limb of the British empire. Undaunted and watchful, their genuine disciples also at the establishment of your present governments vanquished various attempts to introduce again unequal rights, and even down to the moment we speak, they frown indignantly on the slaves, that prefer to our own constitution the practical code of inequality and oppression, which is the Englishman's boast and the Irishman's bane. This principle, then, this great and redeeming principle of equality has proved throughout our history a true shibboleth of republicanism : and the man, who cannot speak it from the heart, you will never prevent from transporting himself for the full enjoyment of contrary opinions to the European fraternity of congenial spirits.

Another principle, that contributed to the triumph of the day we commemorate, was a love for Economy. This relative, if not daughter of Equality, influences more or less

many branches of government; but will be considered by us, only as connected with salaries and offices. On its proper extent as to these, much slang has been hawked round the world. But *our* cause, my friends, needs for its support nothing of cant or imposition; and however faction may have occasionally perverted it, as superstition and infidelity have at times sullied religion, yet like her it will ultimately ascend from the furnace purified and triumphant.

By examining then the foundations of economy in a country like this, you will discover not only its general nature, but those particular avenues abovementioned through which it may be attacked. Born equal, the distribution of property by our laws makes most naturally remain equal. Hence only frugal habits can ensure a competency to each: and should enterprize adventure or industry hoard, the system of conduct, which enables a person to acquire, prevents him from wasting; and the excess, if any, is so divided by succeeding generations, that a disposition and a power to be extravagant can seldom exist together in the same individual. Such being your ordinary state of society, economy and this form of government, which begets it, become as incorporate as light and heat. Introduce a custom, law or opinion, then, that fosters luxury, and you injure the former no more than you jeopardize the latter. You merely prelude all the inequalities and corruption of a pampered aristocracy. Such for instance is an enlargement of salary beyond an adequate compensation for the services performed. This lavishes wealth on an individual, which he does not deserve; which tempts him also to profusion; and which grinds down to the dust that people, whose painful earnings are thus pillaged and squandered. Proceed then, to multiply offices, where unnecessary, particularly with such salaries, and you multiply and augment the evils we deprecate. In the Declaration of Independence, therefore, where our ancestors embodied the black

catalogue of their grievances, they did not forget to enumerate, that their tyrant "had erected a multitude of new offices and sent hither swarms of officers to harrass the people and eat out their substance." No Protean shape was assumed to plunder them, which they did not detect and denounce.

The same attachment to economy breathes also through our present constitution; and indeed has never ceased to burn in the faithful disciples of our Jeffersons and Franklins. Parsimony, ingratitude and inconsistency are some of the stigmas received in return. But how deservedly, let posterity decide. For you do not proscribe all, but *too many* offices; not all but *too large* salaries. Nobody denies, that public business can better be transacted by a few than by the many; and none of us object to bestowing for the performance of it a comfortable support while employed; a fair remuneration for becoming qualified, and a surplus for the hours of sickness or age, when human frailty worn down in the service of others can no longer minister to human necessities. Other salaries and offices too are proper enough in the abstract, whose establishment, however, depends on certain contingencies for approbation; and unless rendered necessary by them should, like too large salaries and too many offices, be considered a moth and a curse. Consequently under one administration and one state of affairs they may really deserve execration, but under different ones be sanctioned, when having become indispensable to the operations of government as air to existence or motion to the universe. How unmerited then the preceding reproaches heaped on some for thus considering and thus describing certain offices and salaries of 1799 and 1814! For instance, the armies of both periods. One, some have said, needed and distinguished only in the recruiting rendezvous or the Oxford camp; but the other, rolling back a torrent of invasion on our North, hunting from our Western border the ferocious blood-hounds of British alliance, and immolating on the

shores of the South, the arrogant myrmidons of a merciless foe. Exceptions in either do not affect these general characteristics. One, therefore, they have condemned and the other approved. And the politician, who does not thus accommodate his views on salaries and offices to the circumstances of his country, but growls at all measures on all occasions, is himself the example of inconsistency, and of what is far worse, of a most contemptible quackery. He becomes a real Sangrado, mousing out diseases in every thing, and bleeding and hot water for all. But you are not to be thus duped. Fearlessly approving whatever is just and expedient at the crisis of its adoption, you will as dauntlessly reprobate the same, when neither justified or demanded by public emergencies.

These doctrines on economy humble and offend only such menials, in power or out, as when once elected, fasten on the jugular vein of your treasury with a grasp that never loosens. Leeches like these should feel, when practicable, that deserved *rotation in office*, which was another of those great principles, hallowed by the Declaration of your Independence. Whether considered as involving short terms of service; frequent changes of magistrates, or their constant accountability to the public, this becomes equally inestimable. In the practice as well as profession of it, your sires, the day we consecrate, dethroned the whole dynasty of their old rulers, whose daily acts were but its daily profanations. Multiplied and wanton oppressions, unavenged, had emboldened the inflictors of them to usurp most offices, as their admirers have since approved, "in contempt of the people."

As "once a mortgage always a mortgage," so with them and "birds of their feather," once in office always in office. Indeed they preached, like their converts now, that *Deity* himself had vested in some minions "of a little brief authority" a certain "legitimate right" to power; and that

“loyal subjects” were created only for a clan of royal bastards and dunghill princes, who disgrace the different ages of the world.

But however such blasphemous theories might triumph for a time among Grecian savages or Roman banditti, and even root deep under the ferocity of a Norman pirate in England, or a Vandal robber in France, yet our government, with so different an origin and object, seems designed to permit rulers to promote the *public*, rather than some individual's welfare, and to serve, instead of oppress the population they govern. Its few officers, therefore, should be nothing but the agents or attorneys of the people. “We can create and we destroy” them. Our advantage and not theirs being contemplated in appointments; office, if regarded as a gift, becomes the paradoxical one conferred to benefit the donors rather than the receivers. Duty then as well as right often requires rotation. The wheel of office, unless rolled, would rust. The magistrate repeatedly elected to the same station becomes indolent and indifferent. He even begins to talk about it as a species of property; employs its perquisites as a fee simple instead of a trust, and unless watched with Argus eyes will attempt in true English style to transmit the supposed heritage to his aspiring children. This feeling too sometimes rankles into an unholy lust; and like the affection of Hamlet's mother sharpens by enjoyment, “as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on.” Like the liver of Prometheus it only enlarges, as the vulture of ambition gnaws. It cries “give, give,” as the daughters of the horse leech, and believe me, my hearers, you might as well attempt to fill the ocean with dew-drops, as satiate with an occasional office this hunger for power.

Undoubtedly excesses may be committed in applying the principle of rotation; but not oftener, than in many other noble endeavors. In shunning one extreme no inevitable and mys-

terious decree shipwrecks you on the other ; and if it did, patriotism forbids to recoil or relax, for patriotism proclaims it far more glorious to suffer acutely in active efforts for good, than to doze a life in the dull, dropsical, and accursed apoplexy of political indifference. Deeply impressed with the importance of this purifying principle, the Athenians were sometimes compelled to exercise it in the harsh form of an ostracism. Their demagogues, who by too many reelections had become formidable to liberty, seemed scarcely to deserve a milder fate. But the rotation in office practicable by your frequent and constitutional choice of rulers is a more potent remedy against malconduct, than all the sanguinary proscriptions of antiquity. Even the modern scaffolds of England ; the bowstring of Turkey ; Siberia ; the guillotine, and indeed the much famed Island of Elba, are mere milk and water medicines, contrasted with that omnipotent elixir of a free people. Only *apply* the remedy where required, and no fear need be entertained, that your rulers will swell into Cæsars, or Cromwells, or Bonapartes.

Time forbids that we should enlarge much farther on those principles, recalled by this day, as the origin and support of your country's independence. But as an application of our subject, permit me to observe, that there existed a general spirit, feature and heroism, resulting from such hallowed sentiments and characterizing your immortal revolution, which faction can never efface, or patriotism forget. Should the preserving influence of that spirit be allowed to cease, this nation might shroud itself in despair, for the vestal flame of liberty has expired. True, the mere dross of wealth might remain ; you might perhaps number as many acres of territory, or even count by the head as numerous a population in your villages : but the heart and the mind, that alone can animate or ennoble the mass, is infected, nerveless, and dead. There is only the "whited sepulchre." Nothing left but the strawstuffed skin of the victim. You may vegetate

for a time, like the Mexican, or like the Hindoo, merely "propagate and rot"; but such a drivelling, bestial existence will deserve and receive all the contempt and chains it invariably provokes. What, then, let us inquire, was that spirit; great, irradiating, and saving spirit, which, begotten by those principles, warmed the breasts of your sires and still burns in their legitimate descendants? Among its ingredients there shone conspicuous an acute sense of political oppression and a dauntless ardour to resist its first approaches. It was our fathers, who "scented tyranny in the breeze." They called it "immortality to die for one's country." With them the charms of personal liberty always surpassed "the pomp and pride" of pampered affluence. Hence in the jealousy and valor thus inspired, they twice fermented into mobs at the "winged curse" of Impressment; and converted into martyrs the victims of the 5th of March, 1770, like the murdered Pierce, and the butchered seamen of the Chesapeake. The high spirited, therefore, the patriotic, the intrepid flocked to their standard. And when the idolaters of wealth and the tame dependents of power, the dupe and the coward, as in our late struggle, to deter and alarm, hung on high the cost of the conflict, our Hancocks and Gadsdens of both eras welcomed the sacrifice. Men, that would resist a three cent tax on tea, like the transit tribute of the Orders in Council, almost solely on account of the principle involved in them, were not, however, devoted to economy or wedded to peace, always to be injured, insulted and despised. Approach, my hearers, and behold, a moment, the progress of this divine spirit. See the heroes that swore the Independence we celebrate, that bled at Monmouth, and triumphed at Saratoga; see them like yourselves complaining and remonstrating; but in vain. See them with imploring eye invoking the intercession of friends, and supplicating the forbearance of foes; but in vain. See them spurned from the foot of an insolent throne. Behold the sneers, the contempt

and contumely of fawning courtiers. Thus repulsed, see their agents recross the Atlantic, reach our anxious shore, and half look the fatal tidings of submission or war. Without funds, or arms, or discipline ; without a general government, experienced officers, or powerful allies, souls of common principles would in such an emergency have shrivelled in despair and tamely resigned or basely bartered those liberties we adore. But not so with them. They rise with the crisis. That unseen and redeeming spirit has moved upon the face of the whole continent. Behold it electrified. Age throws aside its crutch, youth seizes the sword, and the great physical force of a population, that Sparta would have envied in her proudest days, rushes to the combat. Every breast becomes a rampart, and every defile a Thermopylæ. That iron arm, which had crushed them to the earth, they swore to wither ; and that marbled heart, which had only frozen at their petitions, they swore to appal. Illustrious conflict ! and thrice illustrious triumph of the principles we commemorate !

In a similar contest of our own, my hearers, you have yourselves witnessed and participated in this inherited heroism. Let us then invoke those who fell in both struggles, and who have long since greeted each other's congenial spirits in bliss, to smile on this day, which rears to their memory that most imperishable monument, formed of a recollection and adoption of their consecrated sentiments. These the wisdom of Washington and the eloquence of Warren designate as sure supports of national glory. Such remembrances too are required as much for an incense of gratitude as a free-will offering of patriotism. They even reunite us to the departed. We mingle in their achievements, and we hear in rapture the inspiration they utter. Glorious interview ! Will you one moment longer meditate and moralize on the consequences of these principles and their spirit ? How prodigal of life did they render our revolutionary and recent warriors ! And the deaths of such men, inspired by such sentiments,

and in defence of such causes, as those, where they fell, what instruction do they convey? The blood even of the lowest soldier "speaks from the ground." Is there a father present whose son's bones moulder on our frontier, or in "the green caves of the ocean"? a son, who mourns a father or a brother slain? Weep not, for thus to die was to your friend immortal gain, and to us all political redemption. His corpse proved one of the breastworks of your freedom. His example also has become a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to guide and to save. He is a martyr of liberty too, that covers with glory his cotemporaries as well as himself, and produces in every rank those reflections and resolves, which ennoble individuals, adorn their nations, and transmitted from age to age, stimulate millions of posterity in all countries to emulation and reverence. Like the death of Codrus, that of such persons frequently becomes both *the price and the cause* of national salvation. Look a moment at its exemplification in that disastrous period of your late contest, when treason menacing in one quarter and imbecility jeopardizing in another, our opposition within had begun to agonize all breasts and our prospects abroad had blackened into the deepest despair. Then the required spirit and heroism of those principles led a devoted Pike to the altar, who, turning the whole tide of war upon land, presaged and pointed to his comrades in arms, the discipline and sacrifices to country, which afterwards rescued Plattsburgh, immortalized the Chippewa, and converted New-Orleans into another Marathon. While on the ocean, conducted by a like inspiration, the doubly devoted Lawrence canonized, if aught could exalt those hallowed sentiments, which in a Macdonough, a Porter, and a Perry have rolled back in vengeance upon our oppressors, the calamities they provoked. Tell me, ye few surviving patriots of our revolution, whose whitened heads dignify this assembly, does not the revival

of such examples in these latter days renovate your age and rekindle the fires of those "times that tried men's souls"? "I cannot" say "what you and other men think of this life; but for my single self," and I believe to you also, treble the blood and treasure of the whole contest have been amply repaid. For, in addition to the above, the spirit of those principles hath in the late war pervaded and improved almost every thing else, estimable or great. Buoyed up by their saving influence, our national constitution has withstood the shock of hostilities without as well as Hartford Conventions within; and contrary to party menace still floats in glory and majesty "on the full tide of successful experiment." A century of peace could not have produced so demonstrable a conviction of its excellencies, or so hardened into adamant the bands of our Union. Nor has civil strife, notwithstanding the lying prophecies of Baals, dared to "cry havoc." While our Navy, the rainbow and thunderbolt of America, has not yet illuminated the Vandal orgies of England. We have also become enterprizing and national. Manufactures have started into manhood. Agriculture has covered the wilderness with harvest, and fertilized the waste. In fine, the talents and resources of our country having been discovered and applied, a tone of elevated sentiment and internal independence every where pervades, animates and improves. The very bitterest too of sectional prejudices, whose rancor seemed inveterate as death, have beheld their deformity, by the resurrection of such feelings and occurrences, exposed in a flood of light and under its piercing blaze have evidently diminished rather than augmented their unholy virulence. Now then is the accepted time to bury forever the hatchet of party with the hatchet of war. Why cannot all, whether republicans or federalists, come, and as at the close of our revolutionary conflict, embrace around the altar of their common country. Casting away the re-

maining symbols of faction ; the pagan in politics forsaking his idols and the catholic deserting his beads, why should any thing be known but Americans uniting throughout in the praise and support of their redeemed republic. She has still other and peculiar claims on your attachment. First, she is your own ; and the furnace of affliction having brightened instead of sullyng her, she merits by unnumbered excellencies all our hearts can feel or our tongues express. She too is a parent, protecting and nourishing. The desire of nations, she has been adorned by the sagest of statesmen, and the best blood of our predecessors and cotemporaries has flowed in her defence and sanctified her cause. Is there any, then, so base as not to love such a country ? Even the Icelander clings to his cliffs of granite and frost, merely because they are his. While the stupidest Gentoo, that bends before the pettiest tyrant of their meanest cast, prefers ignominy or death to a desertion of his native soil. What, then, but an infernal infatuation can frenzy the citizens of this western world, if they abandon their own for the cause of the oppressors of suffering humanity ? Is the grim Juggernaut of Europe not yet gorged with carnage in Ireland ? What ! has he not sated his cannibal voracity on victims enough in India ? that any of you can dream of espousing another crusade against liberty and of elevating him into a more formidable attitude to attempt revolt and massacre in our South, or conflagration and butchery in our West ? that any of you can justify and thus invite enormities to peaceful villages, monuments of art, and defenceless prisoners, at which even Goths would have recoiled, or his allied Algerine blushed drops of blood ? No ; no. If some pretended angels of light have entered our political paradise and seduced a few from their allegiance, this is not a day for recrimination. Wanderers from the great fold of our common country, may the deluded all return and unite, as already exhorted, in the praise and

support of this redeemed republic. Shielded by providence, encircled by patriots, and rescued by the heroism of the principles we would perpetuate, she has signally triumphed. Let Europe then re-arm her disbanded legions; let her despots drive their infatuated slaves into conditions of conquest; let her violate the codes of national law by inviting the assassin to destroy all but "legitimate" tyrants, by desolating her finest territory to dethrone a sovereign of the people's choice, and by threatening extermination to all his supporters; let her in fine rebarbarize under these sentiments, and her regenerated popery, her restored inquisitions, and royal barter of human souls; but the principles, immortalized by this anniversary, shall withhold America aloof from the conflict and forever canonize her cause. Whatever then may be our sympathies, we will all rally round our own country, and perish or protect her. Did I say she has triumphed? Almost every acre on your frontier wears some hallowed mark of victory. Every plank that floats in your harbors, has borne the star-spangled banner to glory. Not an eye you meet, but has beamed with the rapture of it; and every heart has throbbed its truth. The tidings have reached even the Arab in his tent, while civilized man, commiserating and solicitous, has daily admired your prowess and magnified your fame.

Liberty then still finds a resting place in the deluge of despotism. Her ark, having crossed the Atlantic, the stranger and the oppressed still enjoy one asylum from intolerance and chains.

Swear, like your sires, to protect it. Come, swear your children at the altar, as was Hannibal, to consider its enemies as their enemies; and trusting in those redeeming principles we have discussed, and that Providence, which has "so often made bare his arm for your salvation," our cause and our republic must forever triumph.