Some of Josiah Quincy's friends

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1822,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE CITY OF BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

THE ANNIVERSARY

OF

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

BY

JOHN C. GRAY, ESQ.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CITY OF BOSTON.

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY CHARLES CALLENDER,

No. 25, School Street.

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1822.

CITY OF BOSTON.

In Common Council, July 8, 1822.

ORDERED, That the Mayor and Aldermen be and they hereby are requested to present the thanks of the City of Boston, to JOHN C. GRAY, Esq. for the elegant and spirited oration, delivered by him on the fourth of July, at the request of the City upon the anniversary of American Independence, and to request a copy for the press.

Sent up for concurrence.

WM. PRESCOTT, *President.*

In the board of Aldermen, July 8, 1822.

Read and concurred.

JOHN PHILLIPS, *Mayor.*

A true copy

Attest,

S. F. McCLEARY, *City Clerk.*

H

ORATION,

FELLOW CITIZENS,

It would be unnecessary as well as impracticable to enumerate the auspicious circumstances, under which we now meet together. You have already expressed your sense of them most unanimously and unequivocally by the usual rejoicings of this day; in public and in private, by military and by religious ceremonies, your steps are thronged by a cheerful multitude, the current of business stands still, and joy and gratitude are proclaimed by every tongue and reflected in every face. Our national prosperity is not a subject, upon which you need to be either informed or excited, and all, that I could say to display it, would be little else than a repetition of the sentiments of every one who hears me. But it is not solely for the purpose of exultation that we are here assembled. You have considered this as a proper occasion, not merely for innocent enjoyment, but for sober reflection. You have recollected that on this day, if ever, we must be naturally and forcibly led to think of our ancestors and of posterity, to investigate the causes which conduced to the establishment of our national happiness, and the formation of our national char-

acter, and to ask what are the means within our reach for increasing the one and improving the other. The practice of assembling annually for the consideration of subjects like these has been established among us by long custom, and might be defended if necessary on the soundest principles of reason. The beneficial effects, which it is calculated to produce both on our understandings and feelings, though difficult to define, are real and important. We meet together as members of one community; our attention is diverted from those points, upon which we honestly differ, to those on which we must warmly unite; we are reminded of objects, which we have a common and equal interest in pursuing, however we may disagree as to the best means of procuring them; the spell, which is too often thrown over the most liberal minds by the spirit of party, is interrupted and dissolved, and we are prepared to return to our ordinary political duties, not perhaps with less difference of opinion, but with clearer views, with more dispassionate judgments, with more generous feelings. The anniversary of our independence will we trust be ever an occasion of universal gladness to all parts of our spreading empire; but this return of it, my friends, is rendered peculiarly interesting to us, by a circumstance which has occurred since we last met together, which has probably already suggested itself to your reflections, and which it would be doing injustice to your feelings to pass over in silence. A thorough alteration in our municipal government is an event, which, as it has happened but once, and as it was undertaken and conducted with the most mature deliberation, will probably not again recur. Like those important changes which sometimes take place in the life of an individual, it seems to break

the continuity of our existence ; our attention is irresistibly arrested for a season, and directed to the serious consideration of our past and our actual condition. To attempt even the slightest abstract of the eventful history of Boston is a task, which, however interesting, would oblige me to trespass on your patience, far beyond the proper limits of this occasion, and I shall merely select a few facts, which appear to indicate more fully and correctly than any others, the general course of our fortunes from the beginning of the last century, to this moment. One hundred years ago, Boston contained 18,000 souls. From that time till the year 1790 its growth was slow and inconsiderable, and its population remained nearly stationary. Since this last period, the number of its citizens has been regularly augmented one third in every ten years ; and from 1810 to 1820, not only the relative, but the absolute increase of the county of Suffolk, exceeded that of any other in the state. The accumulation of property in Boston has been more than proportioned to the multiplication of its inhabitants. True, our prosperity has not been uninterrupted or unmingled ; but our embarrassments have been shared by the rest of our country, and greatly exceeded at all times, and never more than at present, by those of every other capital in the union. We cannot open our eyes, without beholding the most unequivocal monuments of the general success, which has crowned the industry and economy of our citizens. Their honestly acquired wealth is continually rising round us, not only in comfortable dwellings, but in magnificent and useful works not more conducive to the interests of the projectors than to the advantage and honour of the City ; and what is still more, in splendid edifices for the celebration of public

worship, and the relief of disease and poverty. We can hardly give a stronger proof of our prosperity, than by stating that it surpassed even the expectations of the sagacious and enlightened politicians, who formed our state constitution, and was in fact the sole occasion of those difficulties, which led to the summoning of our late Convention. It is a cause of no inconsiderable gratification, that the contemplation of the magnitude and beauty of our city, leads to none of those melancholy reflections, which arise in exploring the more splendid capitals of the Eastern continent. Their monuments of art, glorious as they are, are generally the fruits of despotism or superstition, the sure indications of general suffering, the incontestible proofs that the comfort of the whole people has been sacrificed to the decoration of the metropolis.

> "When verging to decline, their splendours rise,
> Their Vistas strike, their Palaces surprise."

The embellishments of this place, on the other hand, are principally the result of private enterprise and liberality, the symptoms not of distress and decline, but of the general prosperity of the capital, the state, and the union. I have said thus much of the increase of our city, not to indulge or excite an idle vanity, but for the purpose of leading your attention to the causes, by which this increase has been promoted and accelerated. Such a subject will, I trust, not be considered as altogether inappropriate to this great national festival, since many of those causes are manifestly of a general nature, and have operated alike on us, and on our whole country. Much of our success is doubtless owing to external circumstances, and particularly to the condition of the European world, during the late

protracted and doubtful war. But what rendered the operation of these circumstances uniformly and highly favorable, what enabled us to improve our unequalled opportunities ? It would be doing a flagrant injustice to our early ancestors, to forget that our actual prosperity arises primarily from causes which existed before the revolution, though their operation was for a long time lessened and retarded by adverse circumstances. We owe the principles, feelings, and habits which have enabled us to acquire and preserve what we possess, in a great degreee, to their virtuous example and their wise institutions. I shall touch for a moment on a few of the most peculiar of these, those of a political, literary, military nature. That the will of the people is the only just foundation of government, and that all rulers are their delegates, were considered by our fathers, in common with every man of liberal views, as self-evident axioms. With them, however, these were something more than mere abstract propositions, which like maxims on the origin of law or of property, serve only to exercise the ingenuity of studious theorists.—The popular form of internal government, imperfect and restricted as it was, which we enjoyed in our colonial condition, may perhaps be considered as the principal source of our whole republican system. By their frequent elections, the people were reminded of their equal rights, and common interests ; they were admonished that the praise or blame of those legislative measures, which were sanctioned by their approbation or acquiescence, must rest upon themselves, and excited to an incessant and anxious inspection of the conduct of their representatives. The whole country was reduced to one vast seminary of political instruction, and those principles of knowledge

which were implanted in early youth in the minds of all, but which might have been effaced from those of the greater part, by an exclusive attention to their daily labours, were kept alive and expanded by frequent reflection and discussion upon subjects of the highest general moment. A profound skill in political science, was necessarily limited to a few, but an acquaintance with the most important facts of their history, and leading principles of their government, was acquired almost insensibly by every citizen of the colony. Sensible, however, that a representative system could conduce to the happiness only of an enlightened community, our predecessors endeavoured to secure and increase the beneficial influence of their political institutions, by their provisions for the instruction of youth. Scarcely had they acquired a scanty subsistence for themselves, and their children, when they laid the foundation of our venerable university; and, could all else that they did be erased from our memory, this glorious monument of their wisdom and piety should alone entitle them to our never ceasing gratitude. They were still more remarkably distinguished from every other community by the establishment of schools. That laws are nothing without morals, and that these are principally the fruits of early instruction, are truths which were felt in all their force, by the most ancient writers of Greece, and the public education of youth is laid down by Plato, as the corner stone of his perfect republic. But it was the glory of our ancestors, in this as in many other respects, to reduce theory to practice; to execute those rules which had often been urged by the wisest political philosophers, as vitally important, and universally disregarded by governments, as visionary, erroneous, or injurious.—The beneficial ef-

fects produced on the character of our ancestors by their militia system are so obvious, that very few words will be necessary to display them. A high spirit of independence can scarcely exist in any community, unless accompanied by the consciousness, that they hold their rights by a firmer tenure, than any which can result merely from written instruments; that their liberty is secured not merely by laws, but by the possession of physical force. Time would fail me to dwell on the religious or judicial institutions of our forefathers, or even to mention many others of scarcely less importance. I shall therefore detain you no longer on this part of my subject, than merely to point out the combined influence of the political, literary, and military institutions which existed among us, before the revolution, in bringing that all important struggle to a successful issue. It was because the minds of our citizens were expanded by early instruction at our public schools; because, in administering their internal concerns by their own representatives, they acquired a thorough knowledge of their great political rights; and because their skill in the use of arms, and in the rudiments of discipline, inspired them with a confidence not only in the justice but the strength of their cause, that the war of 1775 was truly and emphatically a war of the whole nation; that the people, instead of being the blind followers of a few illustrious leaders, were separately and individually actuated by a spirit as enlightened as it was enthusiastic, a spirit which carried them through seven years of defeat, to final victory, and which nothing could have quelled but utter extermination.

I now turn from those causes of the prosperity of our city and country which existed previous to the event we this day commemorate, to those which have since arisen. The first and greatest was our independence itself. It was this that freed us from the impendent horrors of Arbitrary power. It was this that opened those channels of industry, from which we had been inexorably debarred by the jealousy of the mother country; and it was this more especially, that struck off the shackles from our commerce, and enabled her to spread her snowy pinions, in every region of the globe. To recommend your independence to your care would be equally idle and presumptuous. Such recommendations indeed could scarcely be necessary, till they became unavailing. The love of liberty, in any people worthy to enjoy it, is a feeling like the love of life in an individual, which no reasoning or persuasion can either increase or impair. Yet our emancipation would be at best a doubtful boon, had it not been succeeded by the establishment of our national government. To this therefore we may point as the next cause in order, though scarcely inferior in efficacy of our public prosperity. No sooner was the independence of our States acknowledged, than the coalition, which had been instantaneously formed between them by a community of objects, of dangers, and of sufferings, began to relax its hold, and was vanishing as rapidly, as it arose. It was indispensably requisite to perpetuate their friendship, by establishing a sovereignty, which, springing from the will of the United people, should be accountable to them alone, by creating a power which should be like

"The glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered

Amid the other, whose medicinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
And posts like the commandment of a king
Sans check to good and bad."

Our national government is indeed, as observed on another subject by an eloquent English writer, "The Sun of our system, the soul of our political world, the source of light, life and motion and genial warmth and plastic energy." Never may we forget that the severance of our union is the only human means, which can arrest the march of our greatness; that, should it ever happen, all the goodness of Providence will "prove ill in us and work but malice," and the convulsions, which must then agitate our whole country, will be dreadful in proportion to its previous prosperity. Let it be our peculiar care, to prevent any tendency to an end so lamentable, by a careful detection and strenuous resistance of local prejudices.

These are by far the most dangerous, because the most lasting of all. Party divisions on mere political questions, are generally limited in their duration, and can scarcely long survive, when those questions lose their interest by the fluctuation of circumstances. Hence the lines of demarcation, which such divisions create, are perpetually changing, from the want of permanent landmarks. Not so with local jealousies. They run with the land, they strike into the soil, and when once deeply planted, all hopes of removing them are utterly chimerical. To "impress the forest, bid the tree unfix its earth-bound root," were not a more desperate attempt.

If those geographical distinctions are to be dreaded, which might destroy the harmony of our national union, how much more those, which might tend to array one portion of our own state against the other. May not only the name, but the very imagination of a difference between the interests of Town and Country, if indeed an idea so absurd can ever have prevailed, soon be utterly forgotten. It cannot be, my friends, that our honestly acquired prosperity should excite any undue jealousy among our industrious and well informed yeomanry. Should such a feeling enter their minds for a single moment, the recollections, which this day naturally excites, must be alone sufficient to suppress and expel it. They cannot fail to remember, that they are the children of those, who, when Boston was singled out as the foremost object of ministerial vengeance, and when every temptation was held forth to them to build their fortunes on her ruin, were anxious not only to relieve but to share her distresses; were ever prepared, by the sacrifice of their property and their lives, to bear witness to the great and eternal truth, that the prosperity or suffering of one member is that of the whole community.

Meanwhile let it be our particular object to remove even any temptation to partial or oppressive legislation, by diffusing just ideas of political economy. The labours of Smith and of Say have at length exposed the fallacy of those cumbrous and unwieldly systems, which have checked the advancement of every country in Europe. They have shewn that the great principles of Political Economy, like those of every other science, are few and simple in themselves; that it is the perverted ingenuity of men,

which has sought out many inventions, which has distorted what was direct, and darkened what was clear. They have proved that the safest guide to the efforts of every man is his own interest; that what is best for the individual is best for the whole; that industry, whether it guide the plough, or ply the loom, or spread the sail, is alike entitled to protection, to encouragement, and to respect; that legislative interference to assist one species of exertion, at the expense of all others, is not more unjust than impolitic, not more injurious to those classes of citizens, which are unwarrantably restricted, than to that which is unreasonably favoured. I shall notice as the next cause of the prosperity of Boston the flourishing state of her schools. Those of our public laws which relate to the subject of education, as their operation extends to the whole state, have required only such provisions for the free instruction, as are within the means of towns of a moderate size.

To build on the solid foundation which these laws have laid, to add the useful and ornamental to that which was indispensably necessary, is wisely left to voluntary munificence. It may be asserted without vanity, that, in fulfilling this trust, the inhabitants of Boston have not been unmindful either of its high importance, or of their own character. More than *forty thousand* dollars are annually expended by them for the gratuitous schooling of children, and this single circumstance is perhaps that of all others in our whole public conduct, on which we can reflect with the warmest, and most solid gratification. It is our aim to diffuse not merely elementary knowledge, but refined learning. That classical education, which is in other countries the highly valued privilege of the noble and the opulent, is with us freely bestowed on the children of the

poorest citizen. May no narrow or mistaken ideas of economy ever lead us to withhold our liberal support from institutions so truly republican, as our public seminaries. We yet owe much to the literary interests of our country. Large cities are every where the nurseries of elegant knowledge, and nothing will more conduce to render the literature of the United States worthy of their political greatness, than the preservation, multiplication and enlargement of classical schools. It is there, that a pure taste can be formed in the very infancy of the faculties, by an accurate acquaintance with those specimens of Grecian and Roman eloquence, which the experience of two thousand years has proved to be the only sure guides to literary distinction. These plain truths are continually gaining a firmer hold in the minds of our countrymen; we are every where becoming more and more convinced of the real value of a national literature. The acute observation of one of our own writers, that "men of letters and not a hereditary nobility are the Corinthian capital of polished society," is most true, but it is not the whole truth. Elegant writers, as you well know, conduce not less to the strength, than to the splendour of a free country, and it is with literal justice that Homer has pointed out "the heaven-taught poet and enchanting strain," as among the first blessings of a peaceful state. Manners have changed, but human nature remains the same; and though the eloquent authors of modern times are not invested with the open and public honors paid to the Sages and bards of ancient days, yet their influence, while less ostentatious, is far more extensive, efficient and permanent; their works are not recited in palaces and at feasts, but transmitted by the press to the closet and the fireside; they still continue in fact, though not in name, the guardi-

ans of public sentiment, the real lawgivers of their country, the moral guides of the civilized world. The cultivation of elegant literature is a duty, which we owe not more to our own interests than to the memory of our predecessors. It is a cause of regret, not to say complaint, that their gallant achievements have as yet found no American to record them in a style worthy their excellence. We have produced indeed several histories of our own country; but these, though entitled for many reasons to the highest respect, have been generally written by men, whose numerous professional avocations prevented them from doing justice to their subject or to themselves. We may venture to hope, that so glaring a defect will not remain unsupplied; that it will not long continue to be said, that the most elegant account of the United States has issued from the pen of an Italian; that we have left it to foreign hands to adorn the graves of our fathers.

While the formation of an elegant national literature is thus recommended to us by every motive of policy and morality, the actual situation of our country presents still more obvious and pressing inducements for the cultivation of the sciences. It is these which must assist us to explore those rich gifts, which nature has scattered over the forests, or buried in the mines of our vast territory, and which are as yet untold, undiscovered, and unsuspected. It is these which will shed new light on our agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, which will teach us to improve our physical resources; and multiply our daily comforts. May those among us, whose privilege it is to investigate the principles, on which all the useful arts are founded, never be unmindful of the urgent wants of their country; may they ever reflect that the abstract

sciences have never been so gloriously directed, as when brought down to the practical purposes of life; when devoted by those who think, to the success and safety of those who toil; when employed by Davy for the preservation of the miner in the depths of Earth, or by Bowditch for the guidance of the adventurous mariner over the pathless wilds of Ocean.—The last source of the prosperity of Boston which I shall mention, is the wisdom and fidelity with which its municipal concerns have been regulated, ever since its foundation. This city was for more than 190 years a pure democracy, administered in a great degree by the people themselves, without the intervention of representatives. Notwithstanding its large population, yet, till within a few years, little practical inconvenience was experienced from a form of government which is said, with much truth, to be generally incompatible with the peace and success of a numerous and compact community.

We may remark a proof, equally conclusive and gratifying, of the efficacy of the feelings, manners, and principles of our ancestors, in the simple fact, that the mere force of public sentiment should have so long protected us from those irregularities, which can scarcely be repressed in many cities of the Eastern world, by severe laws and by military force. The late alteration of our town constitution was indeed not made without opposition, or without reluctance. It was no wonder that we should fondly cling to a form of government, dear to our honest prejudices (if indeed they do not deserve a better name) alike from its venerable antiquity, from its similarity to the municipal institutions of our country brethren, and from a

recollection of the virtues of those ancestors, by whom it was established and preserved. We were at length taught by a thorough experience, that the administration of our town affairs in person, was rendered impracticable by our overflowing population. The frequency of our town meetings became a heavy and embarrassing burden, and a general attendance upon them was utterly incompatible with a proper regard to our private duties. Our ordinary municipal concerns were actually managed, and our by-laws enacted, by a small proportion of our whole number; and we had no alternative left but to determine whether that proportion should be an ever changing assemblage, collected almost wholly by accident, or a body of responsible delgates chosen by the deliberate suffrages of the majority. Convinced that either the municipal constitution which our ancestors had left us must be changed, or that the good order and good principles, which it was the sole object of that constitution to cherish, must be impaired or hazarded, we felt ourselves bound, by a regard not merely to our own good, but to their memory, to sacrifice the means to the end, and to establish, under the sanction of the legislature, a government of representatives. This has been framed with an accuracy and caution, which will appear superfluous to none, who rightly estimate the importance of city laws. They are those, of all others, which touch us most nearly. We feel their influence every hour. The neatness and beauty of our streets, our public places, and public edifices; our general health; the quiet pursuit of our business; the enjoyment of our innocent recreations, our daily comforts, and nightly repose,

are all materially dependent on wise and well executed municipal regulations. Such regulations, by their effect upon our condition, contribute materially, though indirectly, to the formation of our character : for who does not know how much character is affected by situation, how forcibly our minds and hearts are influenced by our physical circumstances ? Still more may the government of every city control and guide the conduct of its inhabitants, by that vigilant and internal police, which checks vice at its very spring, and prevents the deeper guilt, which more general laws can, at best, only punish. Without such a police among ourselves, the wisest enactments of our congress or our legislature could do but little to render us a flourishing and happy municipality. This great end, we devoutly trust, will be materially promoted by our new form of government. But let every citizen seriously reflect, that it is still a government of the people ; and that the talents and fidelity of our municipal officers can avail us nothing, unless seconded by the prompt obedience and liberal approbation of the inhabitants in general. What indeed, let us inquire for a moment, is the origin, and what the nature not only of municipal, but of all public institutions? They are valuable only as instruments for promoting the happiness and virtue of the community where they exist. They spring from the character of the people, and are powerfully effectual in strengthening and improving that character, by their reaction. Hence the maxim, that forms of government are of no consequence, if the people are generally virtuous, is alike illusory and dangerous. But as the character of the community is the primary source of public institutions, so it is their sole

support, and they are either thrown by, or rendered useless, when that character is vitiated by other causes. For let us not forget, what, incontestible as it is, is daily overlooked, that no laws can infallibly render us virtuous; that Heaven has made us free agents, and no ordinance of man can change us into mere machines. Indeed it is not the least excellence of our invaluable systems of government, that they furnish a stronger motive than those of any other country to individual virtue. Public opinion is particularly the ruling spirit of that community, where the voice of the majority is the supreme law; and in what other way can we hope to secure the purity of public opinion, than by the prevalence of private integrity? Our republican constitutions and laws are not upheld by the strong arm of military power, or protected by the influence of hereditary rank; to assist in their preservation is made the duty and the privilege of all classes, of either sex, and every age. Let us consider that it is in the power of each of us to contribute something to the derangement or harmony of our political machine; that we are all parts of one stupendous whole. Whatever then be our condition, whether it be ours to defend or to enlighten our fellow citizens; whether we be the ministers of health, of justice, or of religion; whether ours be the labour, which supplies all the comforts and ornaments of life, or the capital, by which that labour is stimulated and sustained, may we feel that there is no sphere of action so humble or retired, which is not embraced by the all surrounding orb of social duty; that our talents should all be ultimately directed to the best good of a country, which dispenses equal rights to every one, and recognises no claims to superior

honors, but those of superior usefulness. May it be the endeavour of each citizen to render himself worthy of the happiness, which he enjoys under her impartial care; and may it be her prerogative, when the bigotted admirers of external splendor shall sneer at her republican simplicity, and ask where are her ornaments, to answer, like Cornelia, by pointing to her CHILDREN.

FINIS.