

AN ORATION,

PROFOUNDED BEFORE THE

STUDENTS OF BROWN UNIVERSITY,

IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL,

JULY 4, 1817,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

ANNIVERSARY

OR

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY BENJAMIN F. ALLEN,
MEMBER OF THE SENIOR CLASS.

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1817.

MR. ALLEN.....SIR,

Your fellow-students unanimously return you their thanks for your oration pronounced this day in the College Chapel, and request a copy for the press.

**WILLIAM GREENE,
WARREN LOVERING,
WILLIAM R. STAPLES,**

COLLEGE COMMITTEE.

Brown University, July 4, 1817.

GENTLEMEN,

The late hour of my appointment, and the pressure of my collegiate studies, rendered my performance both short and imperfect; but by the solicitations of my fellow-students, I am induced to yield it with all its imperfections to their disposal.

I am, gentlemen, yours, respectfully,

BENJAMIN E. ALLEN.

Messrs. WILLIAM GREENE, WARREN LOVERING, & WILLIAM R. STAPLES.

Brown University, July 5th, 1817.

ORATION.

THE day we celebrate reminds us of past scenes, brings to view present objects, and unfolds future prospects. Forty-one years have rolled away, since our forefathers, driven to the last extremity, by outrage and cruelty, unsheathed the sword and declared to the world, that they were *free*. All the force of language has been employed, and the powers of description exhausted, to portray, on the one hand, the rapacity, cruelty and *malignity* of the oppressor, and on the other, the patience, fortitude and *magnanimity* of the oppressed. It is sufficient for us to say, that our *illustrious fathers*, persecuted in Europe, fled to America; that immured in her forests and surrounded by savages, they here sought that repose, which was denied them in a land *professedly* civilized. They hoped *here* to have escaped the rapacity of their enemy. But alas! malignity pursued and hostility attacked them. They arose, and in the irresistible majesty of their strength, repelled their invader, and preserved their country; and while the thunders of defiance rolled through the continent, the lightnings of freedom illuminated its scenery. It would

4

be useless, at this time, to repeat the story of their sufferings, privations and distresses. When they had obtained their freedom, and established their independence, their work was but half completed ; without rules to regulate or a constitution to bind them, they stood tottering upon the abyss of ruin, exposed to all the dangers of civil dissention, and all the horrors of an intestine war.

But that valor, which had defended, and that patriotism, which had preserved them, found means to continue their protection, by giving them a constitution, in which is united the liberality of the philosopher, with the wisdom of the politician, and the benevolence of the christian. A constitution in which is displayed the concentrated wisdom of ages,—a constitution equally calculated to secure the rights of the individual, and maintain the independence of the nation. Under the guidance of such a constitution, the nation has continued rapidly to progress in honor, wealth and power; its inhabitants to increase in knowledge, civilization and virtue.

But the past prosperity of the nation is far from securing its future safety : nothing but the people can do this.

‘They are the support of peace, and the sinews of war.’

A republic without union will be torn by faction, without patriotism will be subverted by force, and without virtue will fall a prey to its own licentiousness. But union in a *republic* must not

consist in cold, external, lifeless form. It must consist of that unison of sentiment and feeling, which connects every heart;—that spirit, which impels every citizen, when the honor of his country is attacked, to stand forth its defender;—that spirit, which has existed in the breasts of republicans, from the battle of *Marathon* to the battle of **NEW-ORLEANS**.

Where there is the least restraint, there is always the greatest danger.

Where there is unbounded liberty, there *will be* unbounded licentiousness. The framers of our constitution, fully aware of this truth, have preserved a just medium between despotic power and licentious freedom.

Liberty of conscience, which has ever been considered the dearest of all earthly blessings; and for which our forefathers left their homes, their friends, their native land, and for which they toiled and suffered and bled, is here guaranteed. When our Congress ratified that article, which says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”—‘they said to the people, we give you that freedom for which kingdoms have bled and empires been convulsed; we give you that freedom, which is denied all other nations.’ It remains with you to preserve it.

But the opposite of religious fanaticism and ecclesiastical tyranny, is *infidel licentiousness*.—From history we may learn the *nature* of the former,

and from history we may learn the *destructive* tendency of the latter.

Wherever civil and ecclesiastical power have been united, both have been corrupted. One has been made an instrument to subvert man's freedom, the other to defile his conscience. Government has lost its justice, and religion its purity. Religion, when connected with civil power, loses *her native lustre*; she no longer appears like an angel of *benevolence*, bearing in one hand the promise of heaven, and scattering with the other the blessings of earth; but rather, like a demon from *hell*, *stalking through creation*, hurling with one hand the thunderbolts of war, and riveting with the other the chains of despotism. Spain, Portugal and France are witnesses of this truth; and the flames which ascended from the persecuted protestants of England will attest it.

But its opposite, *infidel licentiousness*, is equally dangerous to civil society, and destructive to human happiness. Republican France was wrecked upon this rock. REPUBLICAN AMERICA has, as yet, escaped it. The same principle which opened in America the path of religious freedom, opened in France the flood gates of infidelity.— But France was too vicious to enjoy the freedom here possessed, and too ignorant to preserve it. When religious freedom was proffered, she embraced infidelity. Not that infidelity, which merely denies the authority of divine revelation, but that which denies the existence of a God:

that which denies the use of all religion, *both natural and revealed*; that which banishes from the human heart every virtuous and honorable principle, and renders man the vilest monster in creation.

Such was the infidelity which France embraced. And with such principles, wherever she advanced;—(no matter what form she assumed or under whose banner she moved;)—but wherever she advanced, rapine, devastation and destruction preceded, desolation and ruin followed; kingdoms, empires and republics bowed and trembled and *crumbled* at her approach. Under the dominion of this infidelity, we heard her with one breath renounce the laws of nature, and with the next deny the existence of a God; we saw her in one moment, subverting all those institutions of science, virtue and religion, which had for ages preserved mankind in a state of civilization, refinement and happiness, and in the next, bursting asunder those ties of social union, which connect the human family together, and dissolving those moral ligaments, which bind the soul of man to the throne of God. All the rapacity, barbarity and cruelty of ferocious beasts, united with all the malignity of *infernal spirits*, would never form a monster so inhuman, unnatural and tremendous, as *Republican France*, under the *reign of infidel licentiousness*.

These facts shew the awful danger of religious liberty. But is man to be deprived of this liberty? Is there no medium? Must he be forever bought

in the chains of ecclesiastical despotism, or become the assassin of his own freedom? We answer,—there is a medium. America has pursued it. *While the wisdom and virtue of her citizens preserves her from the dangers of infidel licentiousness, her government guarantees the full enjoyment of religious freedom.* Here, whatever a man's sentiments may be, he may enjoy them unmolested—no inquisitorial spies to search for victims—no inquisitorial judges to condemn, and no *wheel* to torture. Whether a Mahometan, a Christian, or a Deist, in America he may enjoy the pure air of religious freedom, having no accuser but his own *conscience*, and no tribunal but *Heaven*.

Numerous are the dangers to which republics are exposed. The ruins of Carthage, Athens and Rome will remind us of our dangers. Carthage once stood the pride of commerce, the boast of antiquity—her wealth and power co-extensive with the world. But avarice, the bane of society, and corrupter of nations, hurled her from her pinnacle of glory to the abyss of ruin.

When avarice takes possession of a republic, it absorbs every noble sentiment of the human heart; man will then barter his liberty for gold, and sacrifice his dearest rights at the shrine of Mammon. And a republic, of all governments, is the most exposed to this vice. Where the means of acquiring wealth are open equally to all, where the ruler and the ruled are placed on the same footing, all are equally liable to be seized by this malignant

disease, till like a raging fire it spread through the nation, and in its conflagration destroy the sacred temples of science and freedom.

But America, by maintaining a just medium between the commercial and agricultural interests, has secured herself from that avarice, which is the offspring of the former, and those illiberal sentiments, which *sometimes* spring from the latter.— She has preserved that hardy independence, which is the offspring of an agricultural spirit, and that liberality of sentiment, and refinement of manners, which is the offspring of commerce. And if she continue to pursue this course, she will remain peaceable at home, and respectable abroad; and while the ocean is whitening with her canvass, the forests will resound with blows of her hatchet, and the mountains re-echo the thunders of her eloquence.

Commerce, beside promoting wealth, encourages the arts and sciences. It unlocks the wisdom of other nations, and brings to our own doors the knowledge of foreign countries,—it refines the manners, enlarges the understanding, and ameliorates the heart;—it assimilates the taste and exalts the honor of nations, and is calculated to destroy those national prejudices and national antipathies, which, from age to age, have deluged the world in blood.

If such be the benign effects of commerce, let every American stand forth its advocate, and whenever the commerce of the nation is *pillaged*, or her flag *insulted*, let every sword *leap* from its scabbard, and let it never return until the glory of

victory shall perch upon the banner of JUSTICE.

“Then and not till then,” we may say of our own native land, what Phillips once said of Erin, “the breath of Heaven blesses her flag, the extremities of the earth acknowledge her name—her fields are waving with the fruits of agriculture, her ports alive with the varieties of *commerce*, and her temples *rich* in *unrestricted* piety: above all, the mountains crowned with the wild wreath of freedom, and her vallies vocal with the extacies of *peace*.”

If the agricultural and commercial interests be duly balanced, and every citizen will consider his *own interest* as connected with the public good, all local prejudices and party animosities will cease, and that reciprocity of sentiment, and unison of feeling, will ensue, which shall guarantee to the Republic, peace, independence and wealth. These are some of the means by which union may be preserved; but various are the ways by which it may be destroyed. And Americans cannot be too sensibly impressed of the importance of union, or the danger of faction. When we review the history of other republics, we find that faction has done more to subvert their freedom, than foreign wars.

While Rome continued united, she resisted the encroachments of regal power, and repelled the invasion of foreign force. But when corrupted by luxury, and divided by faction, that empire, which for ages had stood a monument of human grandeur, and human glory—that empire, whose power was co-extensive with the world, and whose name was

mentioned only to be revered, fell by her own division, and science, taste and genius were buried amid her ruins ;—

“ As the lone widow when her lord expires,
 “ Mounts the dread pile, and braves the funeral fires;
 “ So science fell at thralldom’s bitter sigh,
 “ So genius died, the spouse of liberty.”

Perhaps no nation has given a more melancholy proof of the danger of faction, than Switzerland.

Switzerland for ages stood firm ; and while kingdoms and empires were crumbling at her feet, her patriotism defended, and her union preserved her ;—but alas ! by the vile intrigue of foreign nations, her citizens were corrupted, her union dissolved, and her liberty subverted.

“ Happier then had been her fate,
 “ Ere she fell by such a foe,
 “ Had an earthquake sunk her state,
 “ Or the lightning laid it low !”

The enemies of our country have ever been predicting, that this republic will not long stand, ‘that it will be convulsed by faction, and rent by civil wars, until a military despotism shall ensue.’ But America, by her union, has refuted the predictions of her most malignant enemies, and is equalling the expectations of her most sanguine *friends*.

Although she has been divided into parties, yet she has never been *convulsed* by faction. Although her citizens have differed in political opinions, yet when the country has been *actually invaded*, when a rapacious and malignant enemy has *prowled* around our coasts, or *invaded* our territory, we have known but one party, and that *party* a BAND OF HEROES. The battle of New-Orleans will attest this truth ; regal slaves could there find no

footing;—*multos Anglorum demissimus Orco.* And *Boston* (although she has been sometimes accused of disloyalty to her government, yet when invasion was *actually* threatened) built her forts, planted her batteries, and mounted her cannon, and was prepared to give his majesty's fleet *a warm reception.* These facts refute the opinions which many entertain of serious division and anti-American prejudices.

One of the most effectual means of preserving union in the country, is by a general diffusion of knowledge; and although this country may now boast of a more general diffusion of knowledge than any other, yet we have reason to believe, that some parts of it are still groping in intellectual darkness. And if there be political demagogues among us, endeavoring, by vile intrigue, to foment disaffection among the people, no instrument will so effectually defeat *their* projects. Where the people are truly enlightened and truly virtuous, political demagogues cannot exist.

In enumerating the dangers to which our country may be exposed, we cannot pass in silence over that of slavery. For a nation that is free, and professes to be virtuous, to hold, in abject servitude, one eighth of its population, is an *anomaly* in political science. Neither expediency nor policy can justify it, and the immutable principles of justice will ever condemn it. It cannot be policy for a nation to deprive a part of its inhabitants of their freedom, that they may pamper with luxury and bloat with pride *an idle few.*

Slavery is a two-fold curse. It debases the slave, and corrupts the master. It destroys the

last ray of virtue that trembles in the breast of the one, and produces in the other every corrupt and malignant passion, every base and illiberal sentiment, every deformed and ruinous vice. It is calculated to destroy those social and benevolent affections, which exalt and dignify human nature.— Can a dealer in slaves be a lover of freedom? Can he have those pure, humane, exalted and dignified principles, which ought to glow in the breast of every republican? Does he look upon his slave as a fellow-man, endowed by nature with the same faculties, the same desires, and the same RIGHTS; capable of progressing in science, in virtue, in moral excellence? Can it be beneficial to a republic, to encourage principles hostile to equality, principles of tyranny, which create in a part of the community those selfish and haughty feelings, which, if brought into action, would reduce the happiest republic to the most perfect despotism? But slavery is calculated to do this. In its very nature it is hostile to a republican government. The slave, deprived, not only of his natural, but his civil rights, is ready, whenever an opportunity shall present, to subvert the laws which protect the free, and burst the fetters that bind the slave. And where republican principles prevail, and are generally diffused, the danger is increased; if but a ray of republican light enter the mind of the slave, like an electric spark it will produce an explosion—those combustibles which have been buried in his bosom amid the rubbish of ignorance, will blaze forth, and in their conflagration consume the power which degraded him.

Much has been said by foreigners respecting our want of literature. And in what manner have we not been calumniated by *foreigners*?

That our progress in literature has been slow, when compared with our progress in military and naval glory, is true. But time is necessary to establish the literary character of a nation. Before America could establish a permanent literary reputation, it was necessary that she should be sufficiently powerful to repel the assaults of her invaders, and sufficiently *distinguished* to command their respect. These objects she has now acquired; in military and naval glory, she has taken her stand; and she *stands supreme*. And we have reason to believe, that whenever she shall take her stand in literature, she will be equally *supreme*; and equally *firm*; that her philosophers, orators and statesmen will as much excel those of Europe, as her heroes do *their* plunderers.

But even **NOW**, America can boast of a list of orators, philosophers and statesmen, which Europe would be *proud* to own. As an *orator*, Ames would not suffer by comparison with a Sheridan, nor Hamilton with a Burke. As a *philosopher*, the immortal Franklin stands pre-eminent. It has been justly observed, that—"His name is inseparably connected with an era of philosophical investigation of his own forming; and long as the thunder rolls over our heads, or the lightning flashes innocently in our eyes, the Jupiter Tonans of this western world will continue to be associated with the brightest characters of both hemispheres."

Such are the pleasing and flattering prospects of America; united and peaceable at home—respected and honored abroad;—in military and naval glory pre-eminent, and rapidly progressing in literary fame, to the same *pre-eminence* and the same *supremacy*. These prospects ought to stimulate our minds to exertion, and expand our hearts with benevolence.

But pleasing and flattering prospects are not confined *solely* to America. Perhaps no age of the world ever presented to mankind so flattering prospects as the present. Europe, which, for half a century past, has been shaken by the most terrible wars, that ever convulsed the civilized world, is at *peace*. No longer are her kingdoms deluged with the blood of her citizens, or *illuminated* by the flames of her cities. The human mind, disenthralled from the chains of tyranny, superstition and ignorance, no longer wanders in political delusion, or grovels in intellectual darkness.—Mankind have ceased from the unprofitable and unnatural practice of war, and have found that the felicity of society depends upon reciprocal beneficence. Nations from experience have learned to shun the two extremes of tyranny,—the tempestuous whirl of democracy, and the iron sceptre of despotism; they have found that the preservation of liberty consists in the maintenance of their natural rights, the subjection of their dissocial passions to the empire of reason, and mutual kindness with regard to each other. Virtue, shocked by the excesses and banished by the cruelty of her enemies, again revisits the earth, clothed with the

white robe of peace, and crowned with the laurels of everduring science. *Religion*, which for ages has been persecuted from society, and immured in cloisters, again comes forth to enlighten, to cheer and to save. Her benign influence extends "wherever the billows of the ocean roll or the zephyrs of Heaven sigh." On the banks of the Ganges, where late was planted the blood-stained flag of desolation, now waves the mild banner of gospel peace. And wherever a human being is kneeling at the altar of pagan idolatry, or wreathing beneath the tortures of pagan fanaticism, if but a ray of her heavenly benevolence strike his stubborn soul,

" His heart is awed, confounded, pierced, subdued,
Divinely melted, moulded and renewed;
'The bold, base savage, nature's hardest clod,
Rises from dust the image of his God."

And in America this religion may be possessed pure, and enjoyed unmolested. In America the bounties of Heaven are united with the blessings of the earth. And if her citizens continue to preserve the one and abuse not the other, the Republic will stand—the glory of the world—and an unanswerable retutation of *that doctrine* which says, 'republics cannot long exist.' Yes, she will stand

" Till wrapt in fire the realms of ether glow,
And Heaven's last thunder shakes the world below."