

AN
ORATION

PRONOUNCED AT SPRINGFIELD, MASS. ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1823,

BEING THE

FORTY SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE DECLARATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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Oration.

DEEP was the gloom which overspread the nations, when liberty first dawned upon the western world. Its morning beams are now diffusing light and life over the fair fields of *our* happy land; and soon will its meridian splendour shine abroad upon the earth, crowning every hill-top with its radiance, and filling every valley with gladness.

The events of the revolution—its momentous causes and consequences—the consummation of our national independence—the triumph of the rights of man over those who pretended that man had no rights but what he derived from them—these are themes that can never tire. When they cease to be interesting to an American audience, even if rehearsed by the lips of dulness itself, we may conclude that the spirit of freedom is about forsaking us forever. With what pride and pleasure, fellow-citizens, should you recur to the history of those times, when our beloved country exhibited a brighter display of the moral and intellectual capacities of human nature than the world had ever before witnessed. Too long has our attention been turned to men and scenes of other climes. Too long have we gazed upon the tempestuous ocean of European politics, watching with breathless anxiety the heaving of the mighty billows, which, at every swell, engulfed a state or inundated an empire. At first, it seems insipid to withdraw our eyes from this dreadful but sublime spectacle, and survey the “calm surface of the summer’s sea” which washes our own shores.

Yet the patriot and philanthropist will find *at home* a much more delightful subject of contemplation, and, in reality, one more truly magnificent.

Look at the history of America from the discovery of Columbus to the present day, and in the retrospect with what grand reflections does the mind dilate; and what boundless and glorious prospects open on the view as we extend it into futurity? What are the evanescent revolutions of the European governments, with all the noise they have occasioned in the world, compared with the march of civilization on this immense continent, advancing with gigantic steps from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, and reaching with a colossal stride almost from the North to the South Pole? The one is but the transient turbulence of a tempest—the other is like the revolving of the spheres, silent but stupendous.

How insignificant in their consequences are the changes and commotions which have convulsed Europe, and which, after all, result only in the overthrow of one dynasty to make room for another, or the transfer of a set of slaves from one master to another—compared with the magnitude of the event we are celebrating; whose effects, important as we even now feel them to be, cannot be estimated in all their greatness, till the lapse of ages has peopled the vast regions of America with countless millions of freemen! I do not intend any profane allusion, when I say, that the American revolution was the redemption of mankind from a state of political degradation and depravity. The world is not yet prepared to receive its blessings, but future generations will embrace them with joy and gratitude. In the meantime, we may well be proud that *ours* was the chosen land where the great work of reformation was appointed to begin. *Here* was the standard of the true faith first planted. *Here* did its few but fearless disciples uphold it against the might of the oppressor. And hence will it extend its triumphs, till it waves in every sea and o'er every clime.

Are we disappointed that the progress of republicanism has not kept pace with the swiftness of our anticipations? A little reflection will convince us that we have more cause for encouragement than despondency. I believe it to be a part of the grand system by which God governs the world, that the obstacles to the march of reason should be *gradually* overcome; and that it should advance slowly, but

steadily, and surely, to a final victory over prejudice and error. Much is already done. Even in the old world, republican principles animate the breasts of thousands. The smothered flame cannot always be suppressed. It will burst forth in a general conflagration; and the monuments of bigotry and ignorance, the institutions of priestcraft, and the thrones of despots, will be consumed like stubble.

It is true, that to the superficial observer the prospect is dark and forbidding, and only a few faint gleams of light break through the gloom. The friends of liberty have once and again struggled in vain. They are still borne down by the hand of tyranny. The minions of arbitrary power are now employed in rivetting the chains of vassalage upon those who flattered themselves that they had shaken them off forever. They will not suffer a great and generous people to support a government founded on the will of *the many* in opposition to the usurpations of *the few*. Unhappy Spain! Would to God that thy own sons did not deceive and betray thee—that disaffection did not corrupt thy life blood and palsy thy right arm! Didst thou present the same unbroken front before which the legions of NAPOLEON retired in discomfiture, not all the forces which the *Holy Alliance* could marshal against thee, would break down the adamant wall. *But we will not despair.* The invader may be defeated—the blow he strikes may recoil on his own head—he may be entangled in his own devices—he may find too late for his safety, “*that he who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind!*” Whatever may be the result, WE WILL NOT DESPAIR! The night *will* pass—the morning *will* come. And the longer and darker the night, the more bright and welcome will be the dawn. The reign of oppression must terminate. The progress of knowledge is irresistible; and tyrants can no more arrest its course than they can roll back the waters of the Mississippi. When the human mind shall be enlightened, mankind *will* be delivered from their thralldom.

The example of America has not been lost upon the world. The older nations who witness the operation of our democratic system, will have, in the successful experiment we are making, a lesson of wisdom constantly before their eyes, and to which every day will give increased authority. With us is deposited a sacred trust for the benefit of the whole human race. Upon the test we are making of the

efficiency and durability of a republican form of government, not only the happiness of ourselves and of *our* posterity depends, but the welfare of generations to come in the remotest regions of the globe is suspended on the issue. Such being our awful responsibility, may we so acquit ourselves, that the blessings and not the curses of those who shall succeed us may rest upon our memories!

And are we free from danger? Are we secure against that fate which has overtaken every other empire? Will our liberties which now seem founded on a rock survive the ravages of time, the collisions which they must undergo in our intercourse with foreign nations, and that "canker at the root" the progress of luxury and vice among ourselves? Do we properly estimate the worth of our blessings and watch over them with that vigilance and solicitude with which so invaluable a treasure should be guarded? Triumphant in our deliverance from slavery and our escape from perils, and glorying in our might, are we not too confident, too self-secure? Let the history of other nations, and let our own short history give the answer. Faction, the hydra to which so many states have been the prey, has already reared among us its detested form. We have more than once witnessed the operation of that party madness which inflames the passions, perverts the understanding, shuts the eyes to the light of truth, closes the ears against the voice of reason, and fills the imagination with a thousand false alarms. Under the influence of this phrenzy, we have seen doctrines advocated and measures pursued, which have afterwards produced in their authors the bitter fruits of repentance. At a crisis when the united energies of the country were demanded to vindicate her rights, her strength has been paralyzed by internal opposition. The passions of the ignorant and the prejudiced were successfully addressed; unfounded jealousies were excited; every measure, even of self-defence, was denounced and resisted; unauthorized combinations were formed; and that war, which at length "terminated with so much glory to the nation," had well nigh terminated in the prostration of the government and the separation of the states. The recurrence of such scenes as these, is the evil most to be apprehended by the citizens of a free state. The convulsions of faction, if often renewed or long continued, will end, as they ever have done, in the

destruction of liberty. The people will prefer despotism to anarchy.

The American Republic is not exposed to the same dangers, because not liable to the same temptations with other empires. We have no rival neighbors to provoke our jealousy. We are not confined within narrow limits and tempted to enlarge our territory by conquest. Our wars must commonly be wars of self-defence, and will not give sufficient scope for the ambition of conquerors. But we are exposed to dangers of a different nature, and we have narrowly escaped from them. Let us take warning from experience, and "indignantly frown upon the first dawning of any attempt" to divide a people who can have but one interest and one common cause.

There is no surer safeguard against the mischiefs to which popular governments are liable, than an inflexible adherence to that fundamental principle of every democracy, whether pure or mixed, that *the majority must govern*. If we depart from this unerring rule confusion will inevitably ensue. When the will of the people is unequivocally expressed, it must be cheerfully obeyed. It is the duty of the minority to acquiesce, if not in silence, yet without factious resistance. This doctrine is an essential part of the republican creed. By constantly maintaining it, and by *practically* adopting the maxims of political equality, republicanism has obtained and will preserve its ascendancy. It is indeed the cause of the people, and will prevail as long as the people know and value their own privileges.

It is one of the most gratifying circumstances attending the triumph of the republican party, that their political antagonists are compelled by the force of public sentiment to avow principles which they once denounced as *Jacobinical*. We hear nothing now about the "mob" and the "swinish multitude." The federal leaders profess the utmost deference for popular opinion, and a sacred regard to the equal rights of all classes of citizens. I pretend not to decide on the sincerity of these declarations; by their fruits we must judge them.

How cheering are the reflections of those republicans who have remained steadfast from the beginning. Their confidence in the discrimination, consistency and firmness, of the people has been justified. Their promises and predictions have been fulfilled; and the ill-omened prophecies

of those who foretold all manner of evil from the triumph of democracy have been completely falsified. The constitution still exists in its original purity and efficiency. Peace and order prevail where anarchy and discord were to have their "perfect work." We still live under the protection of equal laws, instead of being subjected to the caprice of an ignorant populace whose will, we were told, was henceforth to be the only law. Courts of justice are still open to judge between man and man, where the guillotine was to be erected to execute the vengeance of an infuriated multitude. Our religion still blesses us with its holy institutions and influences; nor are its altars yet demolished, nor its temples desecrated by infidelity, which it was pretended was in strict alliance with republicanism!

Experience, fellow-republicans, has tried the integrity of your principles, and has proved that they are adapted to every condition and exigency of the state, to times of difficulty and danger as well as to those of calmness and security. They have passed an ordeal which nothing unsound could have endured. They have withstood a shock which would have levelled them with the dust, had they not been founded on the immutable basis of truth. Thanks to Heaven! You did not desert your country in her utmost need—you were faithful among the faithless. At a period when, in Massachusetts at least, every friend of the government was proscribed and persecuted, you remained "unmoved, unseduced, unterrified." You did not fear to raise your voice in defence of a just and necessary war, amid the clamours of faction. The God of battles heard you, and your prayers were answered.

I will not dwell on the conduct of those infatuated men who, to gratify their party resentments, would have surrendered the nation to the mercy of its enemies. It is painful to revert to that pernicious policy which then directed the councils of Massachusetts; which arrayed her in hostility to the union; squandered her treasures in maintaining an attitude of defiance against the constitutional requisitions of the government; and brought upon her a reproach from which she is now striving to redeem herself. In alluding to these unhappy circumstances, I hope that my motives and feelings will not be misapprehended—"I speak more in pity than in anger;" nor should the subject have drawn from me a single remark, had it not been forced on my at-

tention by the language of those who formerly exercised a commanding influence over the public mind. We hear them vindicating the course pursued by the predominant party in New-England during those days of delusion and disorder. We see them assailing our venerable Chief Magistrate with the most unsparing invective, because he expressed his honest indignation in terms not quite courteous enough for the nice ears of sensibility! Instead of manifesting signs of repentance, we behold them glorying in their own shame. The attempt of these disappointed men to "pluck up their drowned honor by the locks" ought to be stamped with general reprobation. And I deem it an imperative duty to join my feeble voice to the verdict of condemnation which an indignant people has pronounced against those measures and their abettors.

The progress and termination of the late war are subjects of exultation to every patriot. While commemorating the triumph of liberty in the *first* struggle for independence, we cannot pass by in silence the conflict we have so recently sustained in defence of what our fathers won. These events are fresh in our recollection. They make part of our experience; they are, therefore, deeply interesting to our feelings. Was the war unnecessary? Is it unnecessary to defend our pockets or our throats from the midnight robber? Abused, despised, brow-beaten, trampled upon—were we to lie down patiently under the accumulating load of insult and injury? No indeed! Some sparks of our fathers' spirit still lived in the breasts of their descendants.—We used reason and argument with the haughty invaders of our rights—they derided them. We tried remonstrance—they spurned it! We ventured to utter menaces—they laughed at them! We drew the sword—and we found it the most effectual negotiator!

Compare our situation now with what it was before our appeal to arms, and how striking is the contrast! *Then*, our character was almost at the lowest possible degree of abasement. We were regarded as a nation of poltrons, without the spirit to resent insult, or the power to resist aggression. The American flag was no longer a protection to the vessel over which it waved. American citizenship was no longer a security for the persons of our seamen.—Our commerce was plundered upon every sea, and the pittance which remained, we were tauntingly told, was held

merely by sufferance. Nothing seemed wanting to complete our degradation, but to be stripped of our nominal independence. *Now*, wherever *the flag of stripes and stars* is displayed, it is hailed with admiration, and greeted with welcome. We occupy a place among the nations to which the ambition of the patriot hardly dared to aspire. Our wrongs are redressed; our rights respected; our impressed seamen released; our commerce emancipated from its shackles.

And how is the scene changed at home! *Then*, we were divided and distracted, jealous of each other, and doubtful even of our combined strength; ashamed that we had submitted so long, yet shrinking from an encounter with the dreaded foe. *Now*, disaffection has ceased to impede the operations of government. The clamours of party are, for a season at least, hushed. We are confident in our own ability and resources, and may regard other nations without fear or envy. Should the discordant voice of faction again interrupt our harmony, fomenting discontent and plotting mischief, we may confide in the proof furnished by experience that the cause of the country, if it is the cause of justice, will finally prevail.

—True, it has cost us toil to reach the eminence on which we stand and survey the dangers we have passed—and it has cost us blood to achieve the victories which will form the key-stone to the triumphal arch of the nation's glory.—But it is one of the wise ordinances of Providence in his dealings with man, that what is valuable in possession should be difficult of acquisition; and we feel assured, that however great the sacrifice which it became necessary for us to make, it was sanctioned by the cause in which we were engaged. The boon which Heaven has granted to us is doubly precious because *sealed with the blood of the brave*. When we consider the price paid for it, we shall value it the more highly, and guard it more assiduously.

Amidst the joys of this festival, we must not forget the debt of gratitude which we owe to those sages and heroes, the fruit of whose labors we participate. I need not enumerate the glorious catalogue. Their memories are still “green in your souls.” But there is *one name* which it has been my pride, upon occasions like the present, to repeat before my fellow citizens. Your voices will respond to mine when I utter the name of JEFFERSON.

Can you hear him mentioned without mingled emotions, of reverence for the greatness and goodness of his character, and of indignation at the calumny which has assailed him? When I reflect, that his life will adorn the page of American history, I feel proud for my country that she can boast of such a man. But when I consider that on the same page will be recorded the history of his enemies, that it will tell to the world the shameful story of their ingratitude—how vindictively they pursued him, not only through his public career, but into the bosom of his family, and the retirement of his closet; how they misrepresented all his deeds, and words, and thoughts; how industriously they labored in the work of his destruction, to blast his reputation, to destroy his influence, to undermine the monument of glory which he was building for the nation, I blush that so indelible a stain must rest upon any of my countrymen. But, thank God, virtue has triumphed, and the fine gold has come forth pure from the assay. The “tall clin,” which lifted its “head above the storm,” now rises before us in all its grandeur, for the tempest no longer rages at its base. The luminary which held its “glorious course through the skies,” though “clouds of detraction” gathered round it, is now setting bright and unobscured, and throws its milder radiance over the land which it enlightened and enlivened with its day beams. It was said by an ancient philosopher, that no spectacle was so pleasing to the gods, as a great man struggling with adversity. And is there, now, a spectacle more interesting to the world, than a great and good man contending against bigotry and falsehood and prejudice, and at last shaking them off as the “lion shakes the dew-drops from his mane.”

The republicans of Massachusetts have, on this day, more than common cause of gratulation. We celebrate not only the revolution of 1775, but that of 1823. We trust that the latter will be the means of perpetuating the blessings of the former. This depends upon the use we make of our power. Union and firmness, joined to prudence and moderation, will preserve our ascendancy, establish us in the confidence of the people, and conciliate the affections of our opponents. Avoid all recrimination and retaliation upon the party over whom you have triumphed. They would be as impolitic as they would be ungenerous and ungentlemanly. In view of the vicissi-

udes to which, in a free state, every party is liable, it would be extreme folly, as well as want of magnanimity, to insult and proscribe the minority. They have the same right to their opinions that we have to ours, and we have no reason to doubt that the great body of them have acted honestly. We are convinced that their policy has been a mistaken one, but we are not therefore bound to believe that they have been influenced by corrupt motives. They started in their political career with false premises, and false conclusions have naturally followed. But time is curing the evil, and proving the correctness of the maxim, that "error of opinion may be safely tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it." While, therefore, we continue *steadfast in the faith*, let us cultivate that charity which *suffereth long and is kind*, and which will be more effectual than intolerance to reclaim the wandering from the error of their ways.

There is one subject, however, on which I hope you will always be stern and unbending. It is one upon which I have already commented in terms unpleasant to my own feelings. I mean the stand taken by Massachusetts during the late war. A parricidal blow was aimed at the vital interests, nay, at the very existence of the national confederacy. This event should be held up as a beacon to posterity, to warn them against that fatal course in which the madness of party was hurrying us to destruction. Never suffer in your presence an attempt to justify those proceedings, without venting your indignation in the most decided language. They *cannot* be justified—I repeat it—*they never can be justified!* And I am happy to say that, out of Massachusetts, nobody seems inclined to make the experiment.

The duties we owe to each other, fellow republicans, are perhaps more difficult to discharge than those which are due from us to our opponents. We must preserve harmony among ourselves, or we shall fall more rapidly than we have risen. Here lies our chief danger—upon this rock all our hopes may be wrecked. It has been so in other sections of the Union; and the same mistakes by us will lead to the same mischiefs. We have seen deplorable instances of this folly in neighboring states. No sooner has the republican party acquired an undisputed supremacy, than it has forfeited every advantage it had gained by unnecessary disputes and divisions. What has produced this

unhappy result, and how shall we guard against the recurrence of the evil? Is not *jealousy* our besetting sin? Are we not too apt to condemn those who have acted in concert with us, because they do not think on every point exactly as we do? Are we not inclined to fix a standard of political orthodoxy, and denounce as apostates all who fall short of this mark? Because there *have been* traitors in the camp, our suspicions are kept constantly awake. But why should we, on slight grounds, distrust those who with us have borne the heat and burthen of the day, and can have no inducement to desert us? Are not their interests the same as ours? Have not they been laboring for the same end, and have not they the same stake in the issue of the contest?—No independent man will suffer himself to be deprived of the liberty of thinking and expressing his thoughts freely. This is his privilege, as much as it is his duty to bow with deference to the will of the majority. And it is a privilege which cannot be taken from him, without the grossest injustice. By the miserable policy which I have described, many of our ablest men have been driven over to the enemy, or been made the instruments of scattering disaffection in our own ranks.

Another error into which republicans have fallen, is their neglect to bring into active service the talents in their power to command. For some inexplicable cause, there has existed a prejudice against men of learning and genius, as if they *knew too much* to be entrusted with the reins of government. It seems to be feared, that they will overreach their more simple and unwary countrymen, and sacrifice the public good to their private interests. This delusion has not yet prevailed to much extent in Massachusetts, but it has occasionally appeared even here. There cannot be a more groundless prejudice, nor one more detrimental to our cause. History will acquaint us, that in every age of the world, the friends of science have been the advocates of liberty, and that ignorance is the mother of despotism.—Examine the present state of Europe, and you will find that their universities and schools are, in general, nurseries of republicanism; and that tyrants regard with an instinctive dread the progress of literature and philosophy. Survey *Germany, France, Italy, Spain*, and tell me whether their men of learning are not the most powerful champions of freedom—while the disciples of the *old school* cling for their

support to an ignorant nobility, a bigotted priesthood, and a blind and stupid populace.

Let us, then, fellow citizens, choose as the guardians of our rights those who can best appreciate their importance, men of enlarged sentiments and well informed minds, of whatever class, condition or profession. We may be sure that the government will be safer under their guidance, than in the hands of the ignorant and the narrow-minded. Let us watch at every avenue against the intrusion of aristocracy. But it is the aristocracy of *wealth* or of *birth* alone that can endanger us. An aristocracy of *talent* is a chimera of the imagination—it never can exist where the rich and the poor have equal access to the fountains of knowledge.

It is our especial duty to encourage those *young men* who are now pressing forward in the ranks of republicanism, panting with honorable ambition, and eager to distinguish themselves in public life. Their aspiring hopes ought not to be repressed. They will do honor to themselves and to their country.

We have never celebrated the return of this anniversary under circumstances more propitious than those which now attend us. The government of every state in the Union is now administered on republican principles. We trust the event will prove, that the people have chosen good rather than evil. May the blessings we enjoy be communicated to all the nations of the earth! May the great cause of liberty **HAVE FREE COURSE AND BE GLORIFIED!**

W. L. G.

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