

AN  
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

IN THE CHAPEL, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1805.

BEING THE

TWENTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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BY JAMES BRACKETT,  
*MEMBER OF THE SENIOR CLASS.*

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*TO THE PUBLIC.*

**T**HE writer of the following pages may be thought, by many, an enthusiast in politics. But his friends know his sentiments ; and he would blush not to feel a degree of enthusiasm in that cause, which interests every virtue, and every noble passion, of humanity.

Though sensible of its many imperfections, he submits the composition to the tribunal of public and impartial opinion.

*THE AUTHOR.*



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# O R A T I O N.

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MY FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

WE are convened to celebrate the natal day of our national independence and glory. We are not called together to commemorate, with apparent joy, but dissembled sorrow, the birth-day of a tyrant, or the accession of an usurper to a throne. Our's is the peculiar and grateful task to strengthen our virtues, by a recollection of the emancipation of a mighty, though infant, people.

TWENTY and nine times, on this day, has the sun, in travelling his vast rounds through the Heavens, visited our country, since the birth of her freedom; through twenty and nine annual circles, has he smiled upon her, happy in the enjoyment of Independence. Let us then, on this joyful occasion, lift up our hearts in thankful devotion to the beneficent Parent of nature; let us offer the acceptable sacrifice of freemen at his votive altars. The manes of those heroes, whose blood sealed the charter of our freedom and felicity, and whose bodies now lie entombed in the soil that gave them birth, summon us to the duties of the day.

In performing these duties, may our observations not evaporate into idle declamation, nor our joy into indecorous and untimely mirth and festivity. While we call to mind the grand causes, which led us from the iron grasp of servitude and oppression, let us barely glance upon them. While we recollect, with gratitude and thankfulness, the patriotism and martial achievements of our American FABII and SCIPIOS, let us not attempt a delineation of them. We might recount, with pleasure, but with little advantage, their valorous exploits at Lexington, on the heights of Bunker's Hill, during the  
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glorious retreat through the Jerseys, at Trenton, at Princeton, at Saratoga, at Monmouth, at the Eutaw Springs, and at York Town. But these heroic and immortal deeds are recorded on the fair pages of history ;—You are all conversant with them ;—You have all heard them related by the warworn veteran ;—You have all, at the recital of them, felt a flame of patriotism enkindle in your breasts, that would have fired you to emulate their excellence, their greatness, and their glory.

We might dilate on the misguided and venal policy of that people, from whom we were severed, by the unnatural and bloody contest, that fixed our invaluable privileges and liberties. But this would rather tend to inflame passion and perpetuate resentment against the British nation, than to conciliate the affection, and command the respect, of noble rivals.

We are free, we are enlightened, we are brave ; and there is, at present, no danger of our relapsing under the domineering and potent sway of British ambition.

As we are the only people, who can, at this period, boast with truth of rational freedom ; it becomes us to point out proper objects of pursuit and latent dangers, rather than exult with intemperate mirth and, sitting down in supine sloth, leave our government to the direction of chance.

Much has been done by our fathers ; something remains to be done by us, their descendants.—Their's was the arduous and mighty undertaking to acquire freedom, and establish a republican government on the broad and permanent basis of law ; it is our's to preserve this freedom, by watching over and defending this government. Their task has been honorably and illustriously performed ; and many of them have departed to receive the immortal rewards of their labors. Our's we ought to be daily performing, by our example, by our zeal, by our private virtues, and by our patriotism. But,

BUT, to have clear and precise notions of our duties, as citizens of a vast and wisely constituted republic, much study, much industry, much patience, are requisite. The machine of government is not so simple, that all its springs can be comprehended at a glance; or the use and importance of each of them be understood by an idle survey. It is a work of time, of labor, of constant and sedulous application.

THOUGH our government, in its prominent features, strike the most vulgar and illiterate beholder, with admiration; yet, who can perceive the nice adjustment of its various parts, and the comparative beauty and harmony of the whole, without profound investigation, long experience, and attentive observation?

IT is sufficient for us to consider the liberty, which is guaranteed to each individual, who enjoys the high privilege of reposing, in security, under its invigorating shade. Here the beauty of our government is visible to every beholder. Even the Turk, dissolved in sloth, enervated by luxury, whose soul never soars beyond the narrow horizon taken in by his eye, gazes upon it, in mute devotion and astonishment. Perhaps, the innate thirst for freedom, breathed into him, by Omnipotence, sometimes prompts him to sigh for the enjoyment of it; but the chilling blast of tyranny congeals the current of so noble a desire.

So excellent is our constitution, respecting the liberty of the subject, and its whole scope seeks this end, that all the powers of genius are roused into action, by the encouragements, which it holds out. Equal rights and privileges, secured and defended; equal laws and equal rewards to exertion, if they incite not to enterprize, and greatness, and heroism, must prove the people corrupt, venal, and despicable.

THESE superior advantages have not escaped the sagacity of our brethren of Europe ; and the easy terms of our naturalization law, have encouraged many of them to desert the abodes of their infancy, cross the extended and boisterous ocean, that rolls between them and us, and seek new habitations in our land of liberty and of happiness.

BUT, amidst all the freedom and blessings, which our constitution presents, secret and unseen dangers lurk. Our very liberties may carry in themselves the seeds of their own destruction ;—seeds, which will produce the noxious and deadly plants of anarchy and despotism.

WITH reverence should we look on every thing, whose tendency is to give full scope to the energies of human nature ; whose tendency is the amelioration of our condition. With reverence should we look on those rare characters, the chief object of whose studies and labors has been the emancipation of our race from the slavery of opinion, which they have contracted from our acquaintance with the tyrannical and despotic governments of the Eastern continent.

BUT we should guard against the extreme of equality, with the utmost caution. The earthquake of popular commotion is equally terrible with the thunderbolt of despotism. Its ravages are less confined, though its effects may be prognosticated and guarded against, with greater ease.

MANKIND are not to be viewed in the deceptive mirror of French sophistry. They are not all to be considered, as guided by the simple dictates of reason ; or illumed by the benign and cheering rays of a benevolent philosophy. Many of them should be viewed as guided by the tempestuous impulses of passion ; many of them, governed by the contemptible arts of a low cunning ; many of them, actuated by the mean motives of a slavish and selfish ambition.

Hence the necessity of restraints and checks to passion. Hence the necessity of barriers against the inroads and encroachments of ambition. Hence the necessity of moderation in our desires, and of modesty in our demeanor.

GOVERNMENT has ever been vibrating between the extremes of licentiousness and of despotism. These have ever been the fatal whirlpools, which have engulfed political navigators. To steer clear of these has called forth the art, and exercised the talents, of the most sagacious and discerning. To define the exact medium between these had never been accurately performed, before the attempt, made by our venerable fathers, the framers of our Federal Constitution.

Was it performed by the far-famed and immortal lawgiver of Sparta? No. He made her citizens slaves to his very institutions. Was it done by the mild, the sage, the philanthropic, SOLON? The people of Athens, under his laws, were the sport of their own passions, and the dupes of ambitious demagogues. Was it achieved by the people of Syracuse, the renowned colony of Greece?—They were sometimes the cringing dependants of bloody and inexorable tyrants;—sometimes the miserable victims of innovation and caprice. Thus the golden mean was not to be found in refined, enlightened, and philosophic Greece.

WHERE then shall we look for this inestimable prize? Shall we seek it in Rome, the mistress of the world, the boast of ages? No! Here we search in vain. Though formed to conquer and govern the nations, her citizens were ever at variance. Patrician pride, and plebeian ignorance and obstinacy, continually rent the devoted city into factions.

BUT, leaving the government of antiquity, whose effects are the delight and admiration of the scholar, shall we be more fortunate in our researches in modern Europe? Will Italy furnish us with ex-  
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amples of what we are seeking? No! Here our search will be fruitless. The governments of all her little republics were sometimes the proud mistresses of a few nobles; sometimes the vile prostitutes of the whole populace. The constitution of Venice, long the seat of commerce, and the emporium of nations, was swayed by the impetuous and cruel passions of a haughty aristocracy. The terror of her state inquisitors, completely awed every sally of enterprize and genius in the common people.

But shall we not be gratified in climbing the bleak and dreary mountains of Switzerland, the place, where TELL dared be honest and brave? No. Her ancient simplicity, industry, principle, virtue, are no more. They are all enveloped in the thick and delusive mists of French intrigue, deceit, fraud, and fraternity. Her constitution was long ago a bloody victim, of which not even the stuffed skin now remains.

But we turn, with pleasure, from Eastern revolution, gloom, and devastation, to a brighter horizon, and more animating prospects. We turn to America, the land of our nativity, the asylum of oppressed humanity, the garden of freedom. Here we enjoy a government nicely balanced, energetically operative, calculated to diffuse happiness, and glory, and grandeur.

What must be our emotions! what the emotions of all the virtuous! to see a government, formed by an infant people, possessing the concentrated wisdom and experience of all ages and all nations;—a government, having the three grand departments; the executive, the legislative, the judicial,—all exactly harmonizing, yet each in a degree independent; a government, which secures to its subjects the unspeakable privilege of transacting their national concerns, according to the dictates of their own pleasure; of transacting their concerns, either immediately by themselves, or through the medium of representatives of their own choice. Glorious sight! Happy country! But



But let us pause in the midst of our admiration. Let us pause to consider our dangers, if we hearken not to the admonitions of virtue and science.

VIRTUE counsels us, that, if we depart from her goodly and delightful walks, our government will vanish from us, and leave us, either in the vortex of licentiousness, or in the oblivious calm of despotism. Science assures us, that without her cheering, and benign, and diffusive, light, we shall wander from the walks of virtue, though actuated by honest and patriotic intentions.

SHALL we listen to these wise and venerable counsellors? or shall we slight and despise their advice? We will heed them; we will consult them; we will follow them; we will worship them.

OUR system of representation and of freedom, presupposes two essential requisites in the citizens, the electors of our land. It presupposes sufficient foresight and knowledge in them, to enable them to designate those, who are most worthy of trust, of confidence, and of power. It presupposes sufficient virtue in them to choose such, as are thus qualified, to offices of consideration, emolument, and honor.

As soon as our citizens are destitute of these requisites, they cease to be capable of governing themselves; they cease to be capable of electing others, able to wield for them the departments of their government. Cabals will arise; intrigue prevail; every election be made by fraud or violence; every virtue be depressed, every vice exalted. Ignorance, and deceit, and falsehood, will bear sway for a while; at length, the settled and impenetrable gloom of despotism encircle our political horizon.—The fair and, once deemed, immortal pillars of our liberty will lie mouldered in dust; and the dreaded and terrific palace of tyranny, the cemetery of every thing manly, generous, heroic, and noble, occupy their ruins.

BUT we will not indulge in these gloomy presages. We will never live to see the day of our national debasement and degradation. We will never suffer ourselves to become the dupes of sophisters, of cowards, of hypocrites. We will cultivate our intellects;—we will cherish the virtues, we will delight to imitate the example of our illustrious forefathers. Already they appear to speak to us from their tombs, admonishing us to be virtuous and happy. Already do the ghosts of our immolated heroes; of WARREN, of MONTGOMERY, of MERCER, of NASH, and of LAURENCE; whose minds soared *extra flammantia mœnia mundi*, seem to beckon us to pursue in their footsteps.

WHILE we attentively cultivate the arts and sciences, we shall be respectable. While, with the arts and sciences, we pay that homage to virtue, which is her due, we must be happy, and great, and exalted.

THOUGH the present state of our country debar us from exhibiting those virtues and those talents, which figure most conspicuously on the pages of history; yet the theatre of action is sufficiently extensive, for us to display virtues, that are dear to the heart; virtues, that advance and illustrate the grand end of our being. Though the tocsin of war summon us not to the martial field, yet the cries of oppressed humanity are ever sounding in our ears, are ever importunate for relief. Though the establishment of our government preclude the possibility of our ever standing high on the catalogue of lawgivers; yet duty demands of us care, watchfulness, and attention, to the preservation of our present institutions. In the most profound peace, preparation for war is necessary; in war a disposition for peace ought to predominate.

MOST of the revolutions, which have deluged republics in blood, and have robbed them of their liberties, have originated in an impatience, among their citizens, of the restraints of law, and in a desire for  
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the honors and emoluments of office. Whenever men become thus desirous of exclusive honors, and envious of the rewards of merit and virtue, the tide of public misfortune is rolling rapidly towards them; and they are forging the shackles of rectitude, which themselves are destined to wear.

Hence arises to us an instructive lesson. Hence duty calls upon us, in language, "solemn as a pause in nature," that, as we value our own safety and happiness, as we prize the safety and happiness of our beloved country, we should be moderate in our desires of receiving the rewards and honors, which she has to bestow.

In what other way, can we exhibit to the world a more noble specimen of our patriotism? In what way, can we give our country a more pleasing and certain earnest of our devotedness to her interests and felicity? In what way, can we more surely promise ourselves to secure the general happiness, and promote the emancipation of our fellow men, from the galling and ponderous chains of slavery, under which many of them, at present, groan? How glorious for us! to have it said, that, like the illustrious Spartan of old, we rejoiced because many citizens were found in our republic, more worthy of serving her, and more capable of advancing her interests, than ourselves.

MAY we all possess this moderation; may we all see it displayed in our fellow citizens. May all party zeal and passion soon happily subside; and the public good be the only object, able to interest freemen. May every American clearly perceive his true interests, and their connexion with those of his fellow men. May every one justly appreciate the blessings of freedom and independence. May the pure light of science be diffused far as the remotest bounds of the habitable globe; may it irradiate the breasts of all those, who have long groped out their way through the gloom of ignorance and of barbarous superstition.

MAY our country, as she was first visited by the celestial influences of pure liberty, be the last asylum from the chill blasts of tyranny and oppression. May peace, honorable peace, attend our country, and plenty our habitations. In fine, may the God of our fathers, "who drove out the heathen before them," and planted them in this land of promise, of liberty, and of happiness, ever watch over us for good, and for prosperity, and for glory.

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