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Burges, Tristram, 1770-1853.

An Oration, Delivered in the Baptist Meeting-House.

Providence, [R. I.], Carter, [1801]. 22 pp.

MWA copy.

A N
O R A T I O N,
DELIVERED IN THE
BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE,

I N
P R O V I D E N C E,

O N T H E

Fourth of July, 1801,

I N C O M M E M O R A T I O N O F

American Independence.

BY TRISTAM BURGESS, Esq;

PROVIDENCE:
PRINTED AND SOLD BY JOHN CARTER.

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THE Committee of Arrangements, in behalf of the Town, return thanks to Mr. BURGES, for the elegant and spirited ORATION delivered by him this day, and request a copy for the press.

WILLIAM ALLEN,  
THOMAS P. IVES,  
JAMES BURRILL, jun. } Committee.  
JOHN WHIPPLE,  
WILLIAM LARNED, }

*Providence, July 4, 1801.*

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GENTLEMEN,

THE People of Providence merit and always may command my warmest gratitude. With their request, made by you, I readily comply; and beg the honour of dedicating to them the following cursory remarks, which you are pleased so politely to dignify with the name of an Oration. It is the production of a few days, interrupted by ill health, and professional avocations. It has many imperfections, which a want of time will not permit me to correct. These I hope the People of Providence will forgive. If they read with the same generous candour which gave their attention to the speaker, it will more than satisfy,

Gentlemen,

Your and their most obliged  
and most humble servant,  
TRISTAM BURGES.

*Providence, July 4, 1801.*

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AN

O R A T I O N .



TWENTY-five years ago, the fathers of our country delivered to the world the Declaration of American Independence. That declaration consecrates the Fourth of July, holds out to us the charter of freedom, and bids us forever remember the day which first shone on its existence. The American people have obeyed the injunction, and always solemnized the birth-day of their sovereignty. Once more the annual sun of our political year has risen on the world; our national independence is still our own, and again we hail the morning hallowed to freedom. On this occasion, the hardy genius of our country does homage to the cause of man. To-day, Labour relaxes his sinewy limbs; Agriculture leans on her plough, and Commerce furls her sail. The eye of Omniscience, whose immeasurable ken looks across the regions of the universe, and distinctly surveys the widely-extended kingdoms and empires of the earth, can surely find nothing in all this world, to mortals more sublime, to Heaven more acceptable, than the united hallelujah of a great, an independent nation of free and happy men. This is found in our country. At this moment, the whole

nation, as one august assembly of six millions of people, is offering up to Heaven the incense of gratitude.

AMIDST these delightful emotions, the origin of them should not be forgotten. Let that national independence, which we solemnize, be the mighty theme of contemplation. To think coolly on this subject has not always been in our power. This anniversary has often revolved, when more, far more fervid feelings glowed in the bosom of our country. At this time, no strong and universal sentiment agitates the American mind. We have no war; we are threatened with no invasion; Labour in tranquility reaps the fruit of his own toil. This crowded concourse evinces a joyous occasion. Thousands of glad souls seem to look through the vivid countenances of this numerous assembly. The arms and military habiliments which glitter before our eyes, are worn to-day, more to ornament a national festival, than to display any fervid and hostile sensation.

IN what manner, then, shall we contemplate our independence? You have, often, been told the dreadful story of revolution, in all the glowing diction of patriotic eloquence. Would you listen to a repetition of the bloody narrative? Must we pass before our recollection the misery of our fathers, before we can rejoice in the prosperity of our own condition? Must we break up the consecrated bosom of the earth, harrow out the bones of our buried heroes, and bear them along in military procession, that the awful spectacle may inspire us with courage? True, our liberties were violated, our country was oppressed; but when we have taken vengeance on a foe, to reproach is pusillanimous. Still have we enough remaining monuments of those dreadful days. The traveller yet gazes at the once fortified hill, the "green tomb" of the warrior, and the scattered bones left whitening on the field of battle.

WILL a recollection of all the horrors of our

revolution lay before us the principles, or point to the means of defending our national sovereignty? It would call up our feelings; but what have feelings to do in such enquiries? Have we assembled merely to invigorate each other's patriotic feelings, and form resolutions of unchanging attachment to our independence? Let the man hide himself, whose patriotism and resolution need such auxiliaries. Has memory a tablet on which they are not inscribed? Did not the bosoms which nurtured the infancy of millions who now celebrate this day, beat with the same divine principles and attachments? I trust in God, the hour of danger will never find one of this assembly lingering in his country's defence, because he has not been told the story of her former sufferings in the cause of freedom. Liberty is of value, intrinsic, unlimited and immortal. Who can calculate its worth? Who, in such a calculation, will add the little fractional circumstances of acquisition? Had our independence cost us no toil and blood; had it been guaranteed by the nations who opposed it; and, from an ancestry older than tradition, descended to us like the soil we inherit, could it, for these accidents, be less valuable? Should we relinquish it with a less violent struggle? Should we not then, as we do now, guard it as the temple of all our rights, nor ever suffer the unhallowed foot of power to step over its consecrated threshold?

My Countrymen, no violence will ever rob the American people of freedom and independence; but deception can do what violence can never perform. Fleets and armies, revenues, courts of justice, and magistrates, give no security against deception. In vain are we told of British cruelty, and French benefaction; in vain do our anniversary orators call up before our eyes our country's wrongs; they may "a tale unfold, whose lightest touch would harrow up the soul;" but all in vain, if we lack dif-

ernment, if we suffer the veil of deception to be thrown over our eyes. It is opaque as night. Behind its dark shadow our enemies will silently approach, and, in an hour of unsuspecting security, rifle us of freedom and independence.

THE business of to-day is, therefore, less to feel than to reason. Let us pass by the sufferings of our country; let us forget the joyousness of the present occasion, the civic and military parade, the feast and the song; let us contemplate our awful liability to be despoiled of freedom and independence, by political deception; and then, for a few moments, look after some of the means of security against its fatal delusion.

MUFFLED in the venerable robes of Patriotism, political Deception steps softly and silently on towards the perpetration of dark and bloody deeds. It whispers suspicions into the ear of Jealousy, gives to the tongue of Calumny a louder clamour, and goads Faction into his wildest and most ungovernable frenzy. These delusions are favoured by that misty atmosphere of passion, which forever surrounds the human intellect. Humanity, like the varying face of a vernal morning, can boast of nothing permanent. Man is dissatisfied with the present. A restless mutability of soul gives his ear, with eager credulity, to every whisper which can promise a better condition. To such a temper any government will be grievous, while there is one fear that it may be unchangeable. Innovation will be better than permanency, and though monstrous and absurd, it will be called reform, and receive the benediction of the votaries of change. When thus prepared, deception is welcome to man. The human mind is bold and aspiring. By necessity alone it is governed at all. Freedom is the pleasant inheritance of nature; restraint the cumbrous and painful concomitant of law and society. Those very laws which secure enjoyment, and guard from in-

jury, hang like a heavy yoke on the neck of that wild and ungovernable spirit, which pushes men beyond the dominion of all restraint. All are too much disposed to these feelings; and there are times, in every country, when demagogues may call, and be applauded for calling, justice oppression; government, tyranny; subjection, slavery; and when universal licentiousness will be hailed, as universal emancipation.

HISTORY will best illustrate these remarks, and lay before us the fatal effects of political deception. The popular and aspiring Pisistratus wished to be the tyrant of Athens. He took the democratic side in all public debates; and stood up the intrepid vindicator of liberty and the rights of man. He procured his friends, and partizans, to call him the man of the people. Wounding himself and horses with his own sword, and reeking in blood, he drove his chariot full speed through the city into the agora; and with a loud voice exclaimed to the people, then in public assembly, "Behold the wounds I have received fighting for your liberty—your enemies would sacrifice me to enslave you." "Who hereafter at the hazard of life will be the friend of the poor?" Deception was complete. The Athenians shouted applause; gave a guard of soldiers to the man of the people; with that guard this patriot surprized the citadel; forced his opposers into exile or submission; subverted the government of the state, and became, what he first wished to be, the tyrant of his country.

ROME, before power had rendered it unnecessary, always offered her alliance to the people she intended to conquer. This magnanimous pretext of securing liberty, often gave the independence of nations into her hands, and reduced sovereign states to tributary provinces. Towards the close of that republic, when the spirit of the constitution could no longer balance the fiery element of the people, the whole commonwealth seems to have given itself

up to deception. It was then that Claudius, the infamous engine of tyranny, would crowd the forum with Appenine bravos, mingled with slaves and gladiators, the very sweepings of the streets, the foul and loathsome scum of city democracy, and in this outrageous mob huzza the dictates of the Pompean triumvirate, and deluded Italy received them as the laws of the Roman people. That nation must be credulous indeed, which could be thus deceived. When will the mob of Columbia dictate laws to the citizens of New-England? Not until lordly dissipation shall riot in the spoils of their labour; not until southern slavery shall scatter her sable children along the green hills of the North; not until American liberty shall proudly embrace the chain that binds her to the wheel of tyranny.

WHEN Cæsar, warm from the conquest of Britain and Gaul, returned to enslave his own country, what did he say to the Roman people? Not that he desired dominion. No; dictatorships and imperial crowns had not a charm for him. Liberty, Roman liberty, had drawn his sword. Affectionate regard for his fellow-citizens called him towards the city, at the head of his hostile legions. When he had freed the people from the tyranny of the senate, he would lay his laurels and his arms at their feet, and become a private man again. The victory of Pharsalia gave Rome to his power, and convinced the people that all his promises were deceptions; that he was a tyrant, and they were slaves.

MODERN times afford more striking examples of political deception. Europe has passed through many mutations, since the Roman Eagle took his last flight from the cliffs of Albion. While Iberia, Gaul and Helvetia, were conquered and enslaved, the Celtae in the regions of the north enjoyed a kind of savage freedom, wild and inaccessible, like their own native forests and mountains. Nearly all the liberty of Europe was buried, though not

