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Emerson, William, 1769--1811.

An Oration Pronounced July 5, 1802.

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MWA copy.

AN

ORATION

Pronounced July 5, 1802,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE

TOWN OF BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM EMERSON.

Some truths are not by *Reason* to be try'd,
But we have sure EXPERIENCE for our guide.

DRYDEN.



BOSTON:
MANNING & LORING, PRINTERS, NO. 2, CORNHILL.

[A 1802]

Vote of the Town.

AT a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston, duly qualified and legally warned in publick Town-Meeting, assembled at Faneuil-Hall, the 5th day of July, A. D. 1802:

On motion, *Voted*, That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a Committee to wait on the Rev. WILLIAM EMERSON, in the name of the Town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited ORATION, this day delivered by him, at the request of the Town, upon the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America; in which, according to the Institution of the Town, he considered the feelings, manners, and principles, which led to that great National Event; and to request of him a copy for the press.

Attest. WILLIAM COOPER, *Town-Clerk.*

BOSTON, JULY 5, 1802.

GENTLEMEN,

IN compliance with custom, I resign to your pleasure the Oration this day delivered.

I am, Gentlemen,

With sentiments of respect,

Your humble servant,

W. EMERSON.

The Selectmen of Boston.



Oration.



IT is the glory of nations, as it is of individuals, to increase in wisdom, as they advance in age, and to guide their concerns, not so much by the result of abstract reasonings, as by the dictates of experience. But this glory is no more the uniform felicity of ancient states, than of their ancient citizens. In the eighteenth century, the British nation had existed thirteen hundred years ; seen ages roll away with wrecks of empires ; marked thousands of experiments in the science and the art of civil government ; and had risen to a lofty height of improvement, of freedom, and of happiness. It was yet the misfortune and the disgrace of this kingdom, so famous in the annals of modern Europe, to war with the principles of her own constitution, and to tread, with presumptuous step, the dangerous path of innovation and unrighteousness.

This sentiment will be vindicated by considering, as on this occasion we are bound " to consider, the feelings, manners, and principles,

which led to the declaration of American Independence, as well as the important and happy effects, whether general, or domestick, which have already flowed, or will forever flow, from the auspicious epoch of its date."

In assisting your performance of this annual duty, my fellow-citizens, I claim the privilege, granted to your former orators, of holding forth the language of truth; and I humbly solicit a favour, of which they had no need, the most liberal exercise of your ingenuouſness and benevolence.

The FEELINGS of Americans were always the feelings of freemen. Those venerable men, from whom you boast your descent, brought with them to these shores an unconquerable sense of liberty. They felt, that mankind were universally entitled to be free; that this freedom, though modified by the restrictions of social compact, could yet never be annulled; and that slavery, in any of its forms, is an execrable monster, whose breath is poison, and whose grasp is death.

Concerning this liberty, however, they entertained no romantick notions. They neither sought nor wished the freedom of an irrational, but that of a rational being; not the freedom of savages, not the freedom of anchorites, but that of civilized and social man. Their doctrine of equality was admitted by fo-

ber understandings. It was an equality not of wisdom, but of right ; not a parity of power, but of obligation. They felt and advocated a right to personal security ; to the fruits of their ingenuity and toil ; to reputation ; to choice of mode in the worship of God ; and to such a liberty of action, as consists with the safety of others, and the integrity of the laws.

Of rights like these, your ancestors cherished a love bordering on reverence. They had inhaled it with their natal air : it formed the bias and the boast of their minds, and indelibly stamped the features of their character. In their eyes honour had no allurements, wealth no value, and existence itself no charms, unless liberty crowned the possession of these blessings. It was for the enjoyment of this ecclesiastick and political liberty, that they encountered the greatest dangers, and suffered the sharpest calamities. For this they had rived the enchanting bonds, which unite the heart to its native country ; braved the terrour of unknown seas ; exchanged the sympathies and intercourse of fondest friendships, for the hatred and wiles of the barbarian ; and all the elegancies and joys of polished life, for a miserable sustenance in an horrible desert.

It was impossible for descendants of such men not to inherit an abhorrence of arbitrary power. Numerous circumstances strengthen-

ed the emotion. They had ever been taught, that property acquires title by labour ; and they were conscious of having expended much of the one for little of the other. They were thence naturally tenacious of what they possessed, and conceived, that no human power might legally diminish it without their consent. They had also sprung from a commercial people ; and they inhabited a country, which opened to commerce the most luxuriant prospects. Of course, property with them was an object of unusual importance. Inhabitants of other regions might place their liberty in the election of their governours ; but Americans placed it in the control of their wealth : and to them it was a matter of even less consequence, who wore the robes of office, or held the sword of justice, than who had the power of filling the treasury, and appropriating its contents.

The resolves and attempts, therefore, of the British government to raise an American revenue, they viewed as a thrust at their liberties. By these measures, they felt themselves wronged, vilified, and insulted. If they acknowledged the pretended *right of parliament to bind them in all cases whatever*, it cleft, like a ball of lightning, the tree of colonial liberty, giving its foliage to the winds, and its fruit to the dust. There was no joy, which it did not

wither; no hope, which it did not blight. An angry cloud of adversity hung over every department of social life. Demands of business, offices of love, and rites of religion, were, in some sort, suspended, and the earliest apprehensions of the American infant were those of servitude and wretchedness.

Such were the feelings, which impelled resistance to Great-Britain, and the rejection of her authority. They were the feelings of men, who were vigilant of the rights of human nature, of freemen, whose liberties had been outraged, of patriots, determined never to survive the honour of their country.

American independence was also induced by American MANNERS. The planters of this western world, especially of New-England, were eminent for the purity and lustre of their morals. They were industrious from choice, necessity, and habit. Their mode of living rendered them abstinent from enervating pleasures, and patient of toil. The difficulties of subduing a rough wilderness, the severities of their climate, and the rigour of paternal discipline, were almost alone sufficient to preserve in their offspring this simplicity of life. It had, however, a yet stronger guard in their military and civil, literary and religious institutions.

Exposed continually to the incursion of hostile and insidious neighbours, they trained

