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Fay, Samuel Phillips Prescott, 1778-1856.

An Oration, Delivered at Concord.

Cambridge, Hilliard, 1801. 20 pp.

MWA copy.



MR. F A Y's

Oration.



AN
French
Oration,

DELIVERED AT

C O N C O R D,

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4th, 1801.

BY SAMUEL P. P. FAY.

*“ La liberté n'est pas dans aucun forme de
gouvernement ; elle est dans le cœur de
l'homme libre.”* ROUSSEAU. EMILI.



PRINTED BY WILLIAM HILLIARD.

1801.

AT a meeting of a number of the Citizens of the town of Concord, Voted, That Messrs. EPHRAIM WOOD, JOHN WHITE, THOMAS HEALD, ABIEL HEYWOOD, and JOHN RICHARDSON, be a Committee to wait on Mr. SAMUEL P. P. FAY, and thank him for his truly ingenious and pertinent Oration, delivered to a respectable audience in the Meeting-house in Concord, on the 4th July 1801 ; and likewise to request a copy for the press.

GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE,

HAVING written the following pages under circumstances unfavourable to the display of even the small abilities I possess. I had determined not to submit them to the press. Your request is however, flattering ; and alas, my vanity is more eloquent than my judgment !—The manuscript is at your service.

With the proper sentiments,

I am, Gentlemen, yours, &c.

S. P. P. FAY,

EPHRAIM WOOD, Esq.
Mr. JOHN WHITE,
THOMAS HEALD Esq.
ABIEL HEYWOOD, Esq.
Mr. JOHN RICHARDSON. } Committee.

AN
ORATION.

CITIZENS,

THIS day closes the twenty-fifth year since the declaration of American Independence. We are assembled to celebrate the anniversary of that august act, which gave us freedom, and a rank among sovereign and independent nations. This occasion, so deeply interesting to freemen, furnishes equal cause of gratitude, serious reflection, and unreserved joy.

ON this short festival, agriculture shall suspend its labours, commerce shall resign its cares, and the meaner considerations of private interest, and party heat shall repose under the broad shade of liberty and peace.

IF there be any man among us, whose groveling spirit aspires not to the privileges of freemen; who is willing to renounce the rights he received from the impartial hand of nature, and bend his neck to the yoke of an hereditary master; let him go hence; let him shut his ears to the voice of joy and exultation, that this day echoes through our land. To that man this must be an hour of melancholy and chagrin! He will remember, that this jubilee is sacred to him, whose blood frolics at the name of liberty;

who feels adequate to the office of thinking and acting for himself; whose bosom swells with honest pride at the glorious achievements of his fore-fathers: and who will expose his life in defence of the rights they have transmitted him. Let such pour out their hearts in devout thankfulness to the Parent of all good: let them remember the immediate authors of their happiness with gratitude, and rejoice in possession of the blessing. We will, for a few moments, cease troubling ourselves with those imaginary evils that exist only in the prolific brains of ignorant or designing politicians, to congratulate ourselves on the real benefits we enjoy. The discordant tones of civil dissension shall not be permitted to interrupt the harmony of the scene, and the green-eyed monster, faction, shall sleep undisturbed on this annual union of sentiment and joy.

THE part which has been assigned to me in the rites of this sacred anniversary, is conspicuous and honourable. Invited by a number of respected fellow-citizens to the discharge of this office, pride, gratitude, and duty forbid my declining the attempt. Should I have the good fortune to contribute to the pleasure or utility of this commemoration every wish will be attained. I shall not trouble the audience with apologies for my want of abilities, or with solicitations for their candor. I disdain the contemptible hypocrisy of the first, and the last would imply an insult on those feelings which ought to characterize this occasion. In awakening the dignified and patriotic feelings of other times, I will endeavour to be useful; and I shall utter my sentiments with that honesty and freedom, which becomes a republican.

WE are not now to perplex ourselves with the political controversies of 1801; the events of 1776 furnish a more noble, useful, and interesting subject. It will be our duty to sketch the history of liberty; to turn our recollection to the origin of our glorious revolution; to pay our tribute of gratitude and applause to the brave and patriotic actors, who graced that august scene; and to congratulate ourselves on the fortunate issue. We are to con-

template the new duties and relations we assumed with independence ; we shall examine the republican character, and remark the errors and dangers that lie in ambush for our happiness.

IN the accomplishment of man, liberty, like the Promethean fire, was necessary to give activity to the human mind, and a moral qualification to human actions. Political liberty, of which we now speak, has had, from the early ages to the present time, the most romantic and interesting vicissitudes of fortune. In Greece and Rome, for some centuries, her reign was auspicious, and her character supported with more dignity and splendor, than at any other period in the annals of civilized man. Under her influence all the great and ennobling virtues there flourished in their highest luxuriance. There shone, with unobscured lustre, that simplicity of manners, that invincible integrity, that hardihood of character, and that heroic courage, which are still the admiration of degenerate posterity.

FOR more than eighteen hundred years, the greater part of the civilized world has been enveloped in a continued night of despotism ; while liberty, like the moon, has but occasionally glimmered on man through the transient opening of the cloud ; or, like the midnight flash of lightning, has only made his situation more dreadful, by sometimes rendering it visible ! In most countries of Europe, the fetters of slavery seemed fast rivetted on the human race. Liberty was a persecuted vagrant, and scarce found a spot, that could yield security or repose. She occupied but few places, and her influence was feeble. The small republics of Italy she held by a precarious tenure, and in the United Provinces of the Netherlands, she enjoyed but a divided dominion. Her most valued asylum was chosen in the impregnable mountains of Switzerland. It was to be expected, that, on the ice-bound tops of the glaciers, her hardy sons would find undisturbed tranquility and freedom ; that their simplicity, their poverty, and their mountains could have offered no temptations to the lustful

eye of avarice, or the distempered appetite of ambition. But "Alps on Alps" oppose no effectual obstacles to those scourges of human happiness!

DISSATISFIED with her narrow possessions in Europe, liberty sought a retreat in the new world, from the corruptions and miseries of the old. This country, from the ruggedness of its soil, and its remoteness from the intrigues and vices of courts, seemed equally propitious to rearing a brave and spirited race of men, as to the culture of the republican virtues. Animated with the souls of freemen, and disgusted at the political and religious intolerance of their native countries, our forefathers here sought liberty and peace. Thus was a new empire peopled, and such the origin of the destined assertors of freedom.

GREAT BRITAIN, (who claimed this country as her right, with no other reason, than that she had seen it,) when she saw our youthful colonies thriving and prosperous, treated us with kindness and attention. While we were yet young; while too weak for resistance, and too tender for oppression, she established a dominion over us, to which her only title was her power. Lest we might be unable to govern ourselves, she generously supplied us with magistrates of her own appointment. She even permitted us the liberty of fighting our own battles with the Indians; and the honour of aiding her in the conquest of Canada from the French. But her kindness carried her a step too far, when she undertook to save us some trouble, by taxing us without our concurrence! Then her politeness became officiousness, and her goodness a grievance. Neither her rights, or our obligations, were a sufficient authority for a submission to that illegal measure; and pretence wore too thin a veil to cheat the eagle-eye of Americans, jealous of their rights and their liberties. But Britain had too little delicacy to disown her real designs because they were detected; and henceforward our chains were prepared without disguise. We felt the injury, but we sought our remedy in the mild methods of petition and memorial. In vain were we told that we were Brit-

