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Hegeman, Adrian.

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A N

ORATION,

DELIVERED ON THE

Fourth of July, 1801,

IN THE TOWNSHIP OF OYSTER-BAY, IN QUEEN'S
COUNTY, BEFORE A NUMBER OF REPUBLICAN
CITIZENS ASSEMBLED TO CELEBRATE
THE ANNIVERSARY OF OUR
NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

[Published at their request.]

BY ADRIAN HEGEMAN,
ATTORNEY AT LAW.

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AN ORATION, &c.



THE anniversary of our Independence cannot fail to be interesting to every American — the birth of a free and great Empire must ever be beheld with complacency by the admirer of rational liberty. Our hardy and enterprising predecessors had forsaken the rich soil and luxuriant fields of Europe, to tread the rough deserts and uncultivated wastes of America. Having braved the perils of the ocean, and landed safely on this western hemisphere, the gloomy prospect lies full before them. A wide extended wilderness whose awful arches resound with the dismal howlings of ravenous beasts of prey, apprizes them of what they have to encounter; but the sturdy oak soon falls by their stroke, and the tall pine is laid low with the ground. The face of nature becomes changed, and the desert is made to “blossom like the rose.” — The thick forest is converted by the hand of industry into verdant fields, with intermingled groves; instead of the howling of wolves is heard the lowings of the fattening herd — The humble cot gives place to the mansion house — Proud cities erect their towering spires, and the rivers teem with vessels — Commerce is extended to foreign climes, and richly rewards both the merchant and the husbandman.

This unparalleled rapidity of improvement attracted the attention of foreign nations. Britain ever attentive to her aggrandizement, devised

means of turning to her own advantage the prosperity of this country. The plausible pretext of being the mother country, presented a temptation too strong to be resisted. She accordingly laid restrictions on our trade, and directed our commerce through such channels as would finally redound to her benefit. Instead of a free communication with the world, our intercourse was confined to such nations as would least injure her immense traffic—When notwithstanding all these obstacles we still continued to prosper, recourse was had to other means of impeding the rising greatness of the colonies. Duties were imposed on merchandizes which enabled *her* merchants to undersell the colonists, or prevented the latter from reaping the same profit.

The interests of our country being thus sensibly affected did not fail to create the discontent and murmurs of an injured people. Remonstrances were made; but, instead of a redress of grievances, our humble intreaties were spurned with indignity. It now became too evident that open resistance by force must be resorted to, or we must abide with unconditional submission, the dictates of the parent State. The former was viewed with horror by a peaceable people, but to think of the latter was death. An appeal was therefore made to the great God of battles, and the event committed to the justice of heaven.

The termination of this contest was as glorious to ourselves as ignominious to our adversaries. But we are not assembled to blazon forth our own achievements, nor to rekindle the last glimmerings of expiring vengeance. Although it be difficult to recollect without mingled emo-

tions of pity and indignation, the inhuman murders of the brave and pious, the innocent and unprotected, and the indiscriminate carnage of Boston's dreadful night; yet it is generous, it is noble, to pardon and forgive. Let us therefore draw a veil over scenes of infamy and horror; and let the recollection of butchery and assassination be hidden in eternal oblivion.

It will naturally be expected on this occasion that the observations of the speaker will be rather of a political nature than otherwise. Far be it from me, however, to increase the rage of party violence with which unfortunately we are already too much distracted. It might have been expected that I should entertain you with congratulations on the rapid march of Republican principles. That I should notice the attempt made to thwart the public will, not only in the individual States, but in the National Legislature—That I should dilate with heart-felt satisfaction on the issue of our late elections, in the happy choice of Congressional Representatives in the different states, the Governor of this state, and particularly in placing “the man of the people” at the head of the general government. But I waive the consideration of these things to call your attention to a subject dear to all who value the happiness of man, and in a peculiar manner dear to every American.

When we consider the situation of man enjoying the blessings of liberty, and compare it with his situation under a despotism, the swelling breast is filled with the alternate passions of joy and sorrow. Despotism, enslaving the body and mind, brings man into the lowest state of hami-

liation, disgrace and misery. The strong arm of power dealing its bolts of vengeance in every direction, no one knows on whom they may fall. Neither virtue nor innocence can shield; neither strength nor speed can save from destruction. Hence the fear of incurring the displeasure of the despot becomes universal, and the influence of this passion damps the ardor of enterprize, without which, mankind might remain in lethargy and stupefaction for “ages of hopeless end.” The fervor of youth becomes nipped in the bud, and the free expansions of the soul confined within the smallest compass. Genius being thus clogged and crippled, cannot soar aloft to those regions of light, which direct our steps to the pinnacle of happiness and grandeur.

Here it may suffice to notice the contrast between ancient Greece and modern Turkey. The Grecians possessing a free government, produced men of the most exalted eminence in every high department. Their philosophers, statesmen, warriors, orators, poets, and scholars deep read in every branch of science and literature, rendered them the wonder and admiration of the world—But mark the difference! The Turks enjoying the same soil and climate, and breathing under the same propitious sky, are nevertheless reduced to the most abject and degraded state—Instead of spirit and activity, is found a careless listlessness, and loitering sloth and indolence—Instead of the bright luminaries of science, mental gloom and darkness prevail. All is enveloped in the mists of ignorance and superstition. But the government of Turkey has long been despotic.

Notwithstanding all that has been said by the adherents of monarchy about the tumultuous tendency of popular elections, the violence of party animosity and factious combinations of individuals, and the continual agitation of the passions, it must necessarily be conceded that a free and equitable representative government is best calculated to promote the interest and happiness of a nation. This form of government offers every laudable inducement to the exertion of our faculties to the utmost extent; and when tempered with a proper degree of energy, affords the fairest opportunity of elevating man to the highest situation of true dignity and importance, his nature is capable of sustaining.

If any American express a desire for the establishment of a throne in *this country*, he should be marked as one who either does not understand the true interests of the people, or who would sacrifice them at the shrine of false grandeur—He should not for a moment enjoy the confidence of a single citizen, but neglected and forsaken should be suffered to sink into obscurity.

Some there are, who, from a laudable principle, entertain doubts respecting the stability of our Constitution. The downfall of ancient republics has probably produced a fear that we in our turn are to experience the same melancholy catastrophe. But let such bear in mind, that besides an essential difference in the Constitution itself, many circumstances combine to assure us of its duration.

The government of Sparta, as established by Lycurgus, was an incoherent mixture of monar-

