

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

SALEM,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY,

1812.

—
By BENJAMIN PEIRCE.
—

SALEM:

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1812.

SALEM, JULY 4, 1812.

DEAR SIR,

IN behalf of the Federal Republicans of Salem, we return you our sincere thanks for the excellent Oration this day delivered by you, and request you to have the goodness to furnish us with a copy for the press.

NATH'L BOWDITCH,
EBEN'R PUTNAM,
JOHN RUSSELL,
JOHN PRINCE, jr.
LEVERETT SALTONSTALL,
GIDEON TUCKER,
WILLIAM MANSFIELD,
Committee of Arrangements.

HON. BENJ. PEIRCE.

SALEM, JULY 4, 1812.

GENTLEMEN,

THE copy of my performance, which you do me the honour to request in so flattering a manner, is respectfully submitted to your disposal.

I am your most obedient servant,

BENJ. PEIRCE.

NATH'L BOWDITCH,
EBEN'R PUTNAM,
JOHN RUSSELL,
JOHN PRINCE, jr.
LEVERETT SALTONSTALL,
GIDEON TUCKER,
WILLIAM MANSFIELD, Esquires,
Committee of Arrangements.

AN
ORATION,

MY RESPECTED FELLOW CITIZENS,

GLORIOUS were the events and the termination of the revolutionary war. Glorious were the times, when the policy of Washington directed our national affairs. Ever sacred be the memory of those illustrious periods! May each successive anniversary of the birth-day of our nation faithfully recall them to the mind of every American. Never in the whole history of man have stronger claims existed to the richest offerings of the heart. Never was there greater propriety in the annual appropriation of one day to the celebration of past achievements.

Whether we regard the greatness, the splendour and the variety of those transactions, which marked the rise and formation of this western empire; whether we regard the unparalleled prosperity, which attended its early progress under the auspices of its immortal founder; or whether we regard the great characters, that were produced on this new theatre, and the exalted virtues, which were displayed by all classes of citizens; we at once assign to the infancy of our republic a rank with the most distinguished periods of ancient or modern times.

Thirteen small and distinct provinces, spread, and in most parts thinly spread, over a vast extent of country; unconnected by any permanent political association; discordant in their interests; unprovided with the appropriate means of war; abounding in no resources but those of intelligence, of valour, of patriotism, and of Providence; while the lukewarmness of multitudes was attempting to paralyze, and the

opposition of others was threatening to distract ; undertook the mighty task of defending their rights by the sword against the encroachments of a power, which, like the humble satellites of an immense orb, they had hitherto attended in her proud march among the nations ; and which had recently been raised, by a most brilliant and successful war with her great continental rival, to the very summit of human grandeur.

When we look back on a contest, apparently as unequal as that, recorded in the sacred volume, between the stripling of Israel and the towering champion of the Philistines ; we are astonished at the intrepidity, which dared to commence it ; at the perseverance, with which it was carried on ; and at the success, with which it was crowned. Begun without encouragement from abroad, it was prosecuted without foreign assistance ; until experience had demonstrated, that the colonies were of themselves able to maintain their liberties, and that fo-

reign aid was hardly necessary even to the establishment of their independence.

Without attempting to enumerate the several causes, which, by the blessing of Heaven, succeeded the noble efforts of the Americans in so wonderful a manner, it may be useful to observe that the war, of which we have been here speaking, was, to use the language of our excellent Governor, "a just and necessary war of self defence." Every thing was contended for, that is dear to freemen. It was consequently a popular war. It was a war, which came home to the bosom of every citizen. Each one felt himself immediately and vitally interested in its issue. One common sentiment, one common feeling, pervaded all classes of men ; and a spirit, a valour, an energy, and a determination, were displayed, which, we trust, will, under similar circumstances, ever be displayed by the people of this country.

But while we are admiring the virtues, the services, and the exploits, of our revolutionary patriots, let it never be forgotten, that the struggle, which they so pertinaciously and so gloriously maintained, was intended not merely for themselves, but for their posterity; and that the true way of bearing testimony to their merits, is to preserve unimpaired the rich inheritance derived from them. Those great and inestimable privileges, which are the offspring of liberty, form at once the chief good of the nation, that possesses them; and the sublimest monument to the memory of their brave defenders.

Never, since the establishment of our independence, has it been more necessary, that we should rally round these privileges, and exert all our powers in their defence, than at the present moment. Faction, that deadly enemy of free governments, now rages with unbounded license. It convulses the whole country to its centre, and threatens to prostrate the fair fabric

of our liberty. Power is the chief object of faction ; and in the choice of its means for the attainment of that object, it is restrained by no considerations of patriotism or of justice. Hence that narrow policy, which has been so extremely at variance with the best interests of the United States. Hence those repeated violations of our national and state constitutions. Hence the inimitable proceedings of the *republican* lordlings of this commonwealth ; and hence also (for faction is oftentimes too furious to be discreet) those egregious blunders, which have opened the eyes of the people to their real views ; which, we trust, will effectuate their removal from that branch of the legislature, which they have dared to usurp ; and long prevent them from regaining an unmerited ascendancy. To the same source may be traced those multifarious political manœuvres, that juggling, legerdemain policy, which have so remarkably characterized our national rulers. Irresistibly attracted by the charms of office and of emolument, they appear absolutely to have forgotten,

that there is such a thing, as the general good. In what other way, on what other principles, can we possibly account for their measures? Had the publick good been consulted, we are unable to believe, that *theory* would ever have usurped, in the manner it has done, the prerogative of *experience*; that unworthy, pusillanimous compliances would have been substituted for a dignified course of action; that proclamations would have been relied on for the defence of our sea-ports; that commercial restrictions would have been used to beat down the most powerful nations on the globe; and that in the room of a respectable number of frigates and men of war, we should have had, for the protection of a commerce second only to that of Great-Britain, little more, than a miserable swarm of contemptible gun-boats. Had the publick good been consulted, our rulers would never have cherished in themselves, and cultivated in the people, partiality to one foreign nation, and prejudice against another; they would not, by abject servility to France, and by hectoring defi-

ance to England, have increased the difficulties of our neutral situation, and courted a participation in their sanguinary contests. Had the publick good been consulted, our minister at London would have been authorized to renew that treaty, which had been negotiated by Jay, and approved by Washington ; a treaty, under which our commerce had flourished beyond all example ; a treaty, which we might have had at this very time, and it is said, with some melioration ; but which had been so much abused by Mr. Jefferson and his partizans, that they never could forgive it. Had the publick good been consulted, we should never have combined with other powers for the destruction of our own commerce ; we should not have exhibited the astonishing spectacle (however dignified in the view of a political dreamer) of a great maritime nation withdrawing suddenly and entirely from the ocean ; contracting and folding up her huge arms, which had encircled the whole globe, and united her with its remotest regions ; and, from pure hostility to the violators of her neu-

tral rights, abandoning all those immense advantages, which she might have continued to enjoy. Had the publick good been consulted, the United States in all human probability would not have been reduced to their present wretched situation. Do we wish to be satisfied of this? Let us then take a glance at the course, which has been pursued, since the establishment of the general government. That the administration of Washington was precisely the one, which the circumstances of the country demanded; that it was calculated to promote her best interests in the highest possible degree; cannot at this period require to be demonstrated. Enlightened and just and honourable, as it is now universally acknowledged to have been; fruitful as it was of blessings to the whole community; bright as its glories beamed upon the surrounding universe; it had, nevertheless, to encounter a host of internal enemies. Unable to prevent the adoption of the constitution; and perhaps enraged at the disappointment of their gloomy predictions concerning it; they laboured to

wrest it from the custody of its friends. To accomplish this nefarious purpose, every mode of attack was practised, which ingenuity and malice could invent. Their great engine was the press, which poured down an incessant shower of abuse and calumny. The principal functionaries of the government were denounced ; their designs were represented as dangerous to publick liberty ; every exertion was made to deprive them of the confidence of the people. Because an erect and dignified posture was carried towards foreign powers ; because energy and rigid impartiality attended the execution of the laws ; because those methods were resorted to, for maintaining the rights, the interest and the honour of the country, which have received the sanction of universal experience ; they were declared to be the friends of arbitrary power. Because President Washington invariably preserved the dignity of his station ; because on public occasions he always would appear in a decent garb ; because he delivered speeches, instead of sending messages, to Congress, at the

commencement of each session ; because for the sake of economizing his time, and devoting the greatest possible share of it to the service of the publick, he assigned certain hours of certain days to the reception of visitors, who then crowded his rooms in such numbers, as to bear some resemblance to the levees of the great in Europe ; for such *weighty* reasons he and his advisers were seriously branded as enemies to our republican institutions.

But the deadliest weapons were supplied by the French revolution. Upon the breaking out of the war between France and England, a neutral position was wisely chosen by our government ; and all its duties were faithfully and steadily discharged. But that attachment to France, and that hatred to England, which sprang up during the revolutionary contest, and which were sedulously swolen by the arts of designing men, bore down upon that system and upon its authors with incredible fury. Nothing but the unparalleled popularity of

Washington, added to his unshaken resolution, could have supported the government against the violence of the torrent. Supported by him, it remained immoveable. “The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon it; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.” Washington at length ascended to the skies, and (pardon the allusion) his disciples were scattered. Then commenced a new order of things. Philosophy took possession of the chair of state; her head teeming with sublime visions, which bade defiance to the maxims of common sense; which laughed to scorn the accumulated wisdom of ages; and to display the practical operation of which our country has ever since been the subject of one continued course of political experiments. Has economy in our public expenditures been the object of these experiments? The most thoughtless and extravagant profusion could not have been more injurious, than such an economy. It has indeed saved us the expense of a suitable naval establishment, and of

adequate fortifications on our seaboard. But it has greatly diminished the wealth of the country ; it has impaired our reverence for the laws ; it has impoverished our treasury ; it has ruined our commerce ; and, from his flight among the stars, it has brought the American eagle to the ground.

Foreign aggressions have been invited by our unarmed and defenceless situation. Neglecting to assume an attitude, calculated to command respect, we have become the scorn and opprobrium of the world. The spirit, formerly manifested when injuries and insults were heaped upon us by France, taught that nation a lesson, which, but for the subsequent obsequiousness of the government, she would have long remembered. Since that glorious period, far different counsels have prevailed. France was not long in perceiving the change. She soon found, that she could with impunity trample upon our rights and our honour ; and she has availed herself of the occasion to the uttermost of her

power. She has committed upon us outrages without number and without parallel. She has violated the most solemn engagements; she has robbed us of millions of our property; she has burnt our ships upon the ocean; she has imprisoned our fellow citizens; she has compelled other nations to adopt her system of violence and rapine; she has driven us from the ports of Italy, of Denmark, of Prussia; and by the war, which she is now carrying on with Russia, she aims a death blow at our remaining commerce to the continent of Europe. No circumstance of indignity, of injustice, of perfidy, has been wanting to aggravate her enormities. A nation, from which we have received such unexampled provocations, has yet had the address to turn our vengeance from herself, and to direct it against her enemy. Yes, fellow citizens, can it be realized? we are at war, not with France, but with Great-Britain! and this at a time, when we are wholly unprepared for war with that power; when our treasury is exhausted; when the mercy and the magnanimity

of the enemy are the only security for our sea coast ; when millions of our property, and thousands of our seamen, are abroad with nothing to protect them against the cruisers of the mistress of the ocean, but a force, brave indeed, yet too inconsiderable to deserve the name of a navy.

War with England—Alliance with France—
 What horrors are contained in these words !
 Our beloved country fighting the battles of the great enemy of the human race ! A free people combining with a ferocious tyrant to enslave the world ! A nation, which but yesterday repelled the daring violators of the soil, now dead to the unparalleled distresses of Spain and Portugal, struggling for their existence ! This nation must now assist the legions of their cruel and inexorable foe. We are to aid those hordes of infuriate ravagers, that, like wolves and tigers, pour down from the Pyrenees, scattering every where devastation and dismay. We are to aid a monster, who hangs over that ill-fated region, like the genius of destruction.

————— “What terrors round him wait !
 “Amazement in his van, with flight combined,
 “And sorrow’s faded form, and solitude behind.”

We are at war with the land of our fathers ; with the bulwark of our religion and of our independence. A fierce and bloody conflict is to rage between two nations, most intimately connected together by blood, by manners, by laws, by religion, by literature, by the freedom of their political institutions ; two nations, who in many important respects are mutually dependent on each other ; and whose true interests would be promoted in proportion as the relations of amity between them were cherished and maintained. These kindred nations are destined, by a destructive and deadly conflict with each other, to subserve the views of a power, which is the common enemy of both ; to aggrandize an empire to which they have no affinity, no resemblance ; an empire, which is the seat of irreligion, of profligacy, and of despotism. Let it not be said, that we are not yet in alliance with France. Whether in alliance with her or

not, we are fighting her battles. But, fellow citizens, an alliance with that nation must eventually take place. It is impossible for two powers long to contend with the *same* enemy, and perseveringly to decline the advantages which would result from concert in their operations. Neither reason, nor experience, would justify an expectation of such a course. We shall, therefore, sooner or later, be in alliance with France. We shall concur with the terrible Napoleon in the support of the continental system; and he in return will send us ships and soldiers. What use will be made of these French auxiliaries, whether to conquer Canada, or to keep us in subjection, may be best known to the infatuated men who have brought us into our present deplorable situation. One thing we all know, that every republick, which has been drawn by the seductive arts of France, into an alliance with her, has been enslaved. From their fate let us take warning. It is not yet too late to save the country. The friends of peace are unquestionably able to bring

this war to a speedy termination. It is a war against commerce ; as such it must, it will be regarded, by the people of the commercial states. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the northern and eastern section of the Union is opposed to the war. Let immediate measures be taken to place this fact before the eyes of our national rulers. Let the friends of peace come forth ; let them display themselves ; let them demonstrate, by their numbers and by their spirit, that the war, instead of being so popular, as its authors may have been led to believe, by the interested and ambitious men to whom they have lent their ears, is odious to a great majority in this part of the country ; and that *same* love of power, which occasioned the war, will produce an immediate peace.

Few, if any of us, fellow citizens, have ever witnessed a period so dark and disconsolate as the present. We are involved in a war, which we believe “unnecessary, unjustifiable and impoli-

tic." What disasters are to mark its progress ; when, and what, is to be its termination, are questions, which may well excite the most fearful apprehensions. Much blood will be spilt ; perhaps our own blood, and the blood of those dearest to our hearts. Multitudes in easy, and in affluent circumstances, will be reduced to indigence. Would to God that these evils, dreadful as they are, were the worst consequences to be apprehended ! But, fellow citizens, let us direct our views to that great and good Being, who was the never failing support of our pious ancestors in their times of trouble. Let us regard this awful calamity as an indication of his hot displeasure at our follies and our crimes. Let us by divine assistance immediately renounce and forsake them. Then will an indulgent God extend his arm for our relief ; and our sorrow will be changed into joy.