

Boston
Charleston Banker Hill
1818

AN
ORATION,
PRONOUNCED AT
BATH, IN THE DISTRICT OF MAINE,
ON THE
FOURTH OF JULY, A. D. 1808,
IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY BENJAMIN AMES.

Wm. Hill

“Nihil tam inimicum, quam injustitiam civitati, nec omnino, nisi
“ magna justitia, geri aut stare posse rempublicam.”

SCRIPTO. *Wm. Hill*

PORTLAND :
FROM THE ARGUS PRESS.....1808.

Wm. Hill

BATH, JULY 5, 1808.

SIR,

WE have been desired by the Republicans of Bath, to tender you their thanks for the correct and patriotic Oration, delivered by you on the 4th instant, and request a copy thereof for the press.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of our respect and esteem.

DAVID STINSON.
ROBERT BOSWORTH.
J. WINGATE, jun.
Committee.

BENJAMIN AMES, Esquire.

BATH, JULY 6, 1808.

GENTLEMEN,

IN complying with your request, and the desire of the Republicans of Bath, I am sensible I subject myself to the eye of criticism. But, as I love my friends, and value the cause of Republicanism, I should do injustice to my own feelings by refusing to gratify the wishes of the former, or withholding my feeble testimony to the excellence of the latter.

I remain, Gentlemen, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

BENJAMIN AMES.

Messrs. DAVID STINSON,
ROBERT BOSWORTH,
and J. WINGATE, JUN.
Committee of the Re-
publicans of Bath.

ORATION.

FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

TO recount and perpetuate by honest commendation the great and glorious deeds of a nation is a sure mark of a grateful and magnanimous people, while it preserves to the living a rich legacy in the example of the dead, and is the only acceptable reward that man can offer the departed worthies of his country. Hence originated the custom among those nations, most famed in history and rich in glory, of commemorating by public celebrations those important events, which evidently gave birth to the fairest features of their national characters. England, France, Rome, and Greece, have marked in their annals days which ever received their solemn remembrance. Some of their celebrations brought to recollection the daring character, the mad career, the wild exploits of their favored tyrant. Some brought again to view the crimsoned field, grown higher with the dead, over which they travelled to reach their imaginary point of glory; while others awake the memory of some religious, but false, enthusiast, whose infuriated mind was reconciled only by the misery of those, who differed from him in opinion. As such have been the causes of ancient celebrations, and such the men, who were deified among the inhabitants of the old world, whose statues after death attracted the admiration of the gazing multitude—shall the birth day, not only of our nation and Independence, but of our political salvation, pass in silence? Would not our fathers, whose heads have grown grey in defence of their country, but whose souls are still animated

with the divine spark of *seventy-six*—would they not mourn the ingratitude of their sons; and would not such degeneracy be recorded on high, to prove us more savage than the tyrant, who oppressed us? Charity forbids even the inverted eye of jealousy and party prejudice, to point out a single individual, truly American, who does not welcome with pleasing sensations the return of this day, which freed us from oppression, enrolled us in the list of independent nations, stamped on us our own characteristic, and pointed us to eminence and glory.

The causes, which prompted our forefathers to quit their native land, the circumstances, which attended their settlement in this new world, the events, which led to the American Revolution, and the establishment of our independence and government, are facts well known to every enlightened American. They have been told with anxious, pleasing solicitude by the father to his son, and become the mother's lullaby to her lisping infant. But the name of WASHINGTON will always delight the American ear, and posterity will hear with rapture the history of their fathers, the story of battles, sieges, fortunes, and "disastrous chances," that they have passed by "flood and field" for the purchase of freedom. With your leave then, I will a "plain unvarnished tale" relate of all our fathers suffered, and we acquired, by our revolutionary struggle, and the establishment of our Independence; and in this nothing "extenuate or aught set down in malice."

From the commencement of the reign of Henry the 8th in 1509, to that of William the 3d in 1689, the reformed religion of England and that of the established Church of Rome, continually disturbed the peace of the kingdom, and produced scenes of death and horror; each in its turn receiving the support of government, or the vengeance of holy malignity, of lordly pride, of barbarous dogmatism,

and relentless intolerance, just as the caprice of the moment, or frenzy of a bishop should influence the feelings of his *most Excellent Majesty*. Henry the 8th was a catholic, and murdered the protestants. Edward, his successor, was a protestant, and opposed the church of Rome and its followers, while Mary, Edward's successor, was a catholic, repealed all the ecclesiastical laws of her predecessor, and with the bones of the protestants erected a religious monument to perpetuate the memory of her reign. These changes continued through the succeeding reigns to William the 3d, and in their consequences prove, that no human depravity can equal revenge and cruelty, when covered with the mantle of religion. Thus denied the privilege of worshipping God according to the dictates of their own consciences, broken down also with the weight of taxes, and subject to the despotism of princes without control, whose fundamental principles of government sprang from usurpation, and were supported only by the strong arm of power, our forefathers left their native country, and in 1620 this new world hailed them the persecuted sons of freedom.

Many were the difficulties attending these bold adventurers. Untaught in the principles of self-government, they had no king to teach them civilization. Made of human materials, they sometimes slumbered, and had not the happy privilege of a task-master to drive the goddesses of rest from their weary limbs, and keep them from sloth. Lovers of liberty, they had no supercilious, hypocritical bishop to give their consciences rule. Imperfect, they were liable to err, and had no Pope to pardon their sins. But as substitutes for *these blessings*, reason was their guide in civilization, humanity their task-master, conscience their Bishop, and God the forgiver of their sins. Thus fortified, and apparently guided by the hand of some divine agent, they began the work of a nation; and although exposed

to hunger, thirst, heat and cold, without any protection to shelter them even from the elements of Heaven, they withstood every impending storm, broke down all opposition, and led the way to wealth, happiness, and national respectability.

This American child however had scarcely risen from the cradle of infancy, when England, struggling under the weight of a heavy and accumulating debt, saw in its features wisdom, strength, and manhood. France now claimed the privilege of trade from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, which was infinitely important to the interests of Great-Britain. The right was disputed, war ensued. England called; the Americans bled; and at the defeat of Braddock, Washington convinced the world that experience is not the perfection of a general.

What was the return of our *kind*, and *affectionate*, and *tender* mother for this signal act of favor and sacrifice of life? Did she pay us tribute? Did she send us the luxuries of her country, or one drop of the "milk of human kindness?" Yes! such luxuries as Cromwell offered Charles the 1st, death for submission. Grenville introduced in the British House of Commons the famous bill for taxing, on all occasions, the American colonies without representation in Parliament; a principle, in support of which no precedent could be found in English history. This child of deformity, this political monster of the royal family, conceived in madness and with folly begotten, was palmed, for support, on his Majesty's good subjects in North America. Memorials were presented from the colonies, denying the right of Britain to tax America; maintaining that taxation and representation walk hand in hand, "like twin-born babes, that never mean to part." These petitions were rejected with contempt, not being permitted to be read before the House of Commons; and the stamp act Bill received the Royal assent.

A general gloom now veiled the whole face of America ; signals of deepest distress appeared in every quarter of the country ; business was paralysed ; and the courts of justice closed. Our grievances were again laid before parliament, and Pitt, after ¹⁷⁷⁴ Lord Chatham (in gratitude to this great and good man be it spoken) in a strain of eloquence, perhaps never equalled, supported the American claim. The stamp act was repealed ; but duties imposed on glass, tea, paper and paints. A Board of Commissioners, consisting of British hirelings, was now established, our officers of justice made accountable only to the King ; and, to fill up the measure of British oppression, Boston became the head-quarters of a banditti, initiated in all the mysteries of carnage and murder. The system of taxation and bills of prohibition continued, and increased, till forbearance became dishonorable, and submission slavery. But Americans always reasonable, always honorable, always mild, knowing it better to suffer any tolerable evils, than to engage in war, in '74 assembled their first Congress at Philadelphia, for the purpose once more of stating their grievances, and petitioning their sovereign to redress them. They addressed him in the language of humility and peace, though with firmness and precision. They told him the hardships they had suffered, and the dangers they had encountered, that their children might have an inheritance where they could rest their heads in safety. They spake to him in the voice of reason, and plainly demonstrated the injustice and cruelty of his demand. The prayer was heard and the arguments treated, as would be those of a christian in favor of christianity, when addressed to a mahometan —with contempt, and the petitioners with injury and insult.

The awful, critical, and all important crisis had now arrived, and the dazzling splendor of the American morn

seemed to have risen to fet in darkness, calamity and blood. For a moment, difficulty, doubt, and uncertainty, palled the senses and puzzled the will. On one hand stood war, with all its concomitant evils and ill-fated consequences; on the other appeared the frightful vision of slavery,

“ Upon whose eye-balls murd’rous tyranny
“ Sits in grim majesty, to fright the world.”

The only inquiry was, shall not the soil of America nourish the tree of Liberty? Shall the fields, we have cultivated, become the residence of lords and task-masters? Shall we be doomed to eternal slavery, and drag the galling chain for life, or torn from our native country; from that soil where hope had promised every enjoyment from the cradle to the grave; from that spot, which was endeared to us by recollection that it once was the inheritance of our fathers, where every object brought to view the virtues that followed their grey hairs to the dust? Shall the mother be torn by the savage hand of some miscreant from her tender offspring, in whom her whole happiness centres? Shall she, whose heart with fond anxiety “flutters round the child she loves,” be separated from the only object that can endear existence? Be our plain answer this—the God, in whom we trust, was our fathers’ guardian; the goods we possess are the fruits of our own labour; and the liberties we enjoy are the natural rights of man.

Here the goddess of Freedom awoke from her midnight slumbers, and on every front was stamped *Liberty* or *Death*. One flame animated every breast—one motion moved the whole body—for their country’s salvation concentrated every soul to one point. They drew the sword, kneeled to the altar of Freedom, and to her swore eternal fealty. Deity witnessed the justice of their cause, and interposed in

their behalf; while the irresistible force of free-born Americans, and the vengeance of heaven, taught proud England the error of her ways—and Columbia was free.

Is there any father here, whose son bled on the heights of Charlestown? in honour to his memory we will tell posterity that he sleeps with WARREN, on Bunker's Hill. Is there any son here, whose father fell in war at Bennington? he died honorably in the field of battle, with other choice souls, and is buried in glory. Is there any mother here, whose darling child perished in the flames of Charlestown? we have tears for the mother, prayers for the sacrifice, but vengeance for the destroyer. Is there any one here, who lost a limb at the battle of Saratoga? it was a glorious exchange for the surrender of a British general. Is there any one here, who, barefoot and hungry, was in the famous retreat of the American army through the Jerseys to the Delaware? he was shaded by the laurels of WASHINGTON's brow. Are there any here, who fought in the siege of Yorktown? they were the brave associates of LINCOLN, who received the flag of Cornwallis, and terminated the American war. But how shall we sympathize with the dead, or express our gratitude for those departed worthies, who fought, bled, and conquered? How can we weep for them, when they have stolen away our hearts? How can we honor them, when they are the honor of our country? This bright constellation rose in honor, and set in glory.— Their funeral rites have been performed. So let them rest.

“ Lay the dead heroes graceful in the grave,
 “ The only honors they can now receive;
 “ And fragrant mould upon their bodies throw,
 “ And plant the warrior-laurel o'er their brow,
 “ Light lie the earth and flourish green the bough.”

What were the feelings realized at the approach of Independence, you who expected the chains of slavery, and

heard the loud trumpet sound the alarm of war; you, who saw the living lightning play, and heard the muttering thunder roll; you, who saw the crimsoned field, and heard the dying groans; you, whose garments were rolled in blood, can best determine. We, who have only heard the story from our fathers, and counted their glorious wounds, will ever cherish a filial gratitude for the invaluable blessings they purchased, and will reverence almost to enthusiasm, their venerable characters, and imitate their example.

In this situation we could not boast of genuine liberty; for freedom unqualified and without rule, will not aid the pursuit of happiness. On the 4th of July '76, whose anniversary we this day celebrate, the Declaration of Independence, conceived by the beloved, patriotic, immortal JEFFERSON, dissolved all political connexion between this country and the crown of Great Britain. "This declaration may be correctly denominated the birth day of our nation, when, as its infant genius was ushered into political existence, a lambent flame of glory played around its brow in presage of its future greatness." Articles of confederation and perpetual union had been formed and accepted by the several states, but by a fair experiment of several years were found insufficient for the purposes of a political compact. "By their suffrages, free as the vital air, the people select and delegate" the virtues, wisdom, and patriotism of the country to form the constitutional basis of their national government; and the result of this convention, produced by one of the happiest and most extraordinary efforts of united talents, at length appears. It was discussed, accepted—and we have a constitution,

Say, fellow-citizens, have you not prospered under a republican form of government? Have you not enjoyed

the dictates of conscience, and worshipped God in your own way? Has not the hand of industry filled the mouth of the laborer, and the American canvas travelled in the winds of every clime? Has not improvement in the arts and sciences exceeded former example? Have you not been "happy at home and respected abroad?" Judge of your own by the situation of other countries. Africa is mixed with the different shades of crime and degradation, whose inhabitants are the staple commodity of their country. The traces of Alexander, the pillar of Pompey, and splendid ruins, are all we have to venerate. Liberty has here no resting place. Ignorance and superstition intercept the light of reason, the chains of slavery are the mere rattles of the people, and the prophecy of Ezekiel is indeed verified.

As we approach the shores of Asia, we are met by the complaining spirits of those murdered by the wicked decrees of Impey, under the administration of Hastings. Ignorance, barbarity, superstition, and impiety, are their cardinal virtues. Their souls are black and debased, and their necks seem moulded to the yoke of slavery.

As we pass, duty requires, and our feelings dictate, the remembrance of Poland. We have tears for her. She was once powerful, generous, brave, and happy; but is now the "empty and bloody skin of an immolated victim." We reverence her generals, we pity her fate, and will call down the vengeance of Heaven, upon the robbers of her liberty.

Switzerland too, brave hardy Switzerland, demands our pity. But, should we stop to weep over the misfortunes of Europe, our tears would glisten in the rising sun and increase the dews of night. We hasten to Italy.

Here with astonishment we meet a Cæsar, there with admiration a Cicero ; here with respect due to greatness, we meet a Cincinnatus, there with veneration a Cato, and with love due to female perfection, we meet a Lucretia.— But the die is cast. Those northern barbarians, fired with ambition, hung over Rome like a cloud. Yet little did she think that this cloud, small to appearance, was charged with thunder and death ; for she was devoted to ease and luxury, while her enemies, invited by the splendor of wealth, saw her weakness, and by right of conquest claimed her empire. How do we feel and regret the weakness of human nature ; how ought we to triumph with proud superiority over every thing, which tends to debase our freedom, when with retrospective eye we behold a desolated wild, where once stood a flourishing city ; hear the savage croaking, where once the ear was charmed with the eloquence of Cicero ; and see the labors of those antient worthies, who were devoted to their country and God, now sunk in ruin ?

But, Americans, what say you of the two contending, mighty powers of Europe ? It is some time since England commanded “ you rebels,” to lay down your arms, disperse, and put on the chains of slavery. Are you not tired of a republican form of government ; and begin you not to whisper *monarchy* ? Or do you more admire the plain edicts or tame handed rule of Napoleon ? Is Bonaparte ambitious ; and did not the King of England in '93 threaten destruction to the very existence of France ? Was there then any alarming outcry or fearful apprehension about the balance of power ? Is Bonaparte cruel ? Does Jaffa bear testimony against him of poisoned, slaughtered soldiers ? But is there a single atrocity of Bonaparte in Italy, Switzerland, or Egypt, which is not equalled by Russia, Austria, or Prussia ; the then *dear* allies of George the 3d

in a war, as he termed it, for the restoration of religion and social order in the devoted kingdom of Poland?— Does Bonaparte “feel power and forget right”? Has not England the same sensation? What were her pretensions for war with France? In '93 the opening the Scheld was the ostensible cause. In '94 it was the restoration of monarchy; in '95 indemnity for the past and security for the future; in '96 the re-establishment of social order, and the relations of peace and amity; lastly the “*fine qua non*” of Lord Malmesbury! Is the government of Bonaparte corrupt and oppressive? So is that of Great Britain, whose elections are regulated by the plunderers of the east and the west; who by a new species of alchymy have transmuted into English gold the blood of Africa and the tears of Hindostan. But war, crime, desolation, and famine, are not our elements. From this country we hasten to our own, leaving our warmest vengeance for Bonaparte and George the 3d to divide among themselves.

Planted by the hand of God in this American Canaan, a land “flowing with milk and honey,” it seems a species of crime even to complain of evils. But the monster discord, has entered the temple of our peace, and grown rank on the vitals of our republic. The war of '93 between England and France, our late enemies and friends, awakened revolutionary feelings in the breast of every American, and “enlisted the strong passions of human nature against the one and in favor of the other.” Hence originated in this country the different applications of the terms federalist and republican; the former denoting a class in favor of England and her government, the latter those who were in favor of France, and republicanism. Were the republicans unreasonable in their attachment at that time to the French government? Hear the

voice of WASHINGTON, then speaking to the French minister. "I rejoice, said he, that liberty, of which you have been the invincible defenders, now finds an assylum in the bosom of a regularly organized government, a government, which, being founded to secure the happiness of the French people, corresponds with the ardent wishes of my heart, while it gratifies the pride of every citizen of the United States by its resemblance to their own." The Republicans, therefore, by this attachment were only admiring the principles of their own constitution, and when France rejected these principles, their attachment ceased. But the constitution of England is still the same, has the same charms, is still the same "stupendous fabric of human wisdom and invention." Federalists, therefore, have ever been its secret, zealous, and strong supporters; though, while in authority they did not dare in the face of the people to assassinate our own constitution, yet they were poisoning its very vitals, by laws calculated to render a change necessary or the people unhappy. But, fellow-citizens, we are assembled for the purpose of rejoicing. I will not mar the pleasures of this day by calling to recollection the British cockades, the Oxford army, the Stamp act, Sedition law, Land tax, the 8 per cent loan, and host of tax-gatherers; who, like a desolating pestilence, overspread our country in presage of returning slavery. Rather let us rejoice that in the dark days of federalism our liberty was protected by the united wisdom and patriotism of a Jefferson, a Madison, a Gallatin, a Dearborn, and a Lincoln; whose fair fame shall live unsullied in the memory of succeeding generations.

But in the ^{sweet}~~secret~~ remembrance of better days, we forget our calamities. O thou sage of Monticello! how soon has thy glory faded, and thy greatness fallen? Last week,