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ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

FREEPORT,

On the 4th of July, 1807.

BEING THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

.....

BY THOMAS BARRIS.

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ORATION.

Friends and Fellow Citizens of every name,

THE propriety of commemorating remarkable events, by attending to the birth days of the same, is generally granted in all civilized nations ; both in their religious and political systems. The passover and other institutions by the command of Jehovah, were celebrated for an everlasting memorial of the emancipation of the tribes of Israel from Egyptian bondage, on the 15th day of the month Abib. The reason of those institutions were ordered to be told by the Jews to their succeeding generations ; and the christian church unites in assembling to celebrate the Christmas day, as an evidence of their faith in the gospel.

Certainly then it cannot be superstition nor enthusiasm that prompts a happy nation, enjoying the natural rights of freedom and liberty to celebrate the birth day of their national Independence.

This day presents to our view inestimable blessings bestowed by the Father of mercies upon the United States of America ; blessings in which every citizen has an equal right.

My respectable auditory will excuse me if I deviate from some of my fellow citizens, who have delivered orations on the anniversary of our Independence, who instead of entertaining their hearers with a retrospective view of the virtue and zeal of our valiant heroes, in contending for a free republican government, have displayed their talents in expatiating upon those political disputes which have arisen under our present form of government.

Had I the vanity to think myself a competent judge of the public affairs of our nation, under the present administration of our general government, and was capable of pointing out the errors of presidents, governors, counsellors, judges, and representatives, I should not think it my duty to engage in the task on this auspicious day. I have no objection to the liberty granted by our liberal constitution, of the freedom of speech, or the liberty of the press, by which we may freely express our opinions respecting the government under which we live; but I wish not to use this liberty for any occasion of offence or abuse of characters.

It becomes us as a free, sovereign, and independent nation, to unite in heart and voice with solemn praise, to the giver of every good and perfect gift, who inspired the hearts of American patriots with ardent zeal in guarding against that tyranny and oppression, which was exercised in our American colonies, by the aristocratical government from which we revolted.

We ought to embrace this present opportunity to stir up the pure republican mind by way of remembrance, and reflect with united applause on the memory of those heroes, who for the freedom of their posterity, rolled their garments in blood on the field of battle.

When we consider the feeble state of America in the year 1775, almost entirely destitute of the means of defence, both by sea and land, we must acknowledge the faith of those patriots who ventured to step forth and publicly oppose the power of his Britannic majesty, to be equal to the faith of Moses, who by faith forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.

Is it possible, for the serious christian, to attend to the historical account of the providential care

and tender mercies of Jehovah, towards that favored nation, without confessing the case of America to be similar in many respects to those peculiar people of God ; and with a spirit of animation repeat the words of the sweet singer of Israel : he hath not dealt so with any nation : praise ye the Lord.

There are in this assembly those who entered into a solemn covenant to unite their feeble force under divine providence, and risk their lives and fortunes at the mouth of the cannon and the point of the bayonet, rather than submit to the galling chains of slavery, or yield a peaceable submission to a despotic tyrant.

Our wisest and best statesmen forwarded humble petitions to the king and parliament, for a redress of certain grievances ; but all in vain ; we were treated not only with neglect but with contempt and abuse. The lives of some of our citizens became a prey to the British soldiers, who were stationed at Boston, under pretence of suppressing rebellion and preserving peace in his majesty's colonies.

The Americans perceiving the intention of the tyrant, to secure to himself the few pieces of cannon, and the small quantity of ammunition we had then in our custody, they took care to prevent the loss of those valuable articles. But the British attempting to visit the town of Concord, in search for some cannon, about nineteen miles from Boston, in passing through the town of Lexington they met with a number of what they scornfully called yankees, and ordered them to disperse immediately, and give up the road to the king's soldiers. These yankees considered themselves freeborn Americans, and would not submit to the orders of that power

which was about to deprive them of their dearest rights.

The Britains then commenced the bloody scene which spread through our continent, and was attended with eight years destructive war, in which time a number of towns were burnt, valuable farms and plantations were laid waste, our young men fell by the sword, and our mighty in the war. Lamentation, mourning, and woe was the fate of the widow and the fatherless.

To point out the horrors and distresses of war may indeed look discouraging to some, even to make a manly defence of their lives and property, and contend for their natural rights and privileges.

But when we contrast these horrors with the galling chains of slavery, and cruelty of tyrants, we readily leave our fields and mechanical employments, and seize our weapons of defence, and choose rather to hazard our lives in the hottest battle, than to die a lingering death under the rod of merciless tyrants.

This noble resolution appeared to be fixed in the minds of the Americans, in the beginning of our revolution, except those who were attached to the government of Great Britain, and some through fear of our failing in the contest; and also a few of the denomination of professed Christians, called Friends, who conscientiously abstain from the use of the carnal weapon.

The zeal of the Americans in contending for liberty, and the small degree of knowledge we had at that time in the art of war, made it very difficult to make those arrangements, and establish the regulations in our army, which were necessary for the safety of our country. At this critical period the Lord of Host raised up a WASHINGTON, who was appointed General and Commander in Chief, of the

American armies, on the 15th of June 1775, whose name, virtue, and talents, will remain in the annals of history as long as America is able to preserve their records, or any civilized nations are capable of reading historical accounts of the most important transactions on the terrestrial globe.

My respected auditory will join with me this day, in reflecting with pleasure on this illustrious character, whose love for his country has been proved with incontestable evidence ; I refer to the history of his life for the proof of his faithfulness in our cause, in the greatest trials, and under distressing embarrassment, which attended the command of our army. A great number of which were inexperienced soldiers, and many of them were collected from new towns and plantations, where they had but little or no advantage in military discipline. We find our faithful hero managing all those affairs, committed to him to transact, with the prudence, wisdom and patience, which no man could have exercised without a supply of wisdom from above.

Fellow citizens, when we consider the disadvantages we labored under, at the time of the declaration of our Independence, we are astonished to find it has been supported ; yet, notwithstanding the exertions of a powerful nation to subject us, and the intrigues of internal enemies to ensnare and destroy us, we have been remarkably preserved, when almost brought to despair. The treachery of the infamous Arnold was timely discovered, and the enterprising Andre was detected in his craft, in trying to discover the situation of our army. Lieutenant General Burgoyne, who had boasted (before the British parliament) of his confidence of the subjection of America to the government of Great Britain, was obliged to surrender himself a prisoner, with his whole army, to the American arms, on the

October, 1777 ; and Cornwallis, with a large number of the British army were defeated and made prisoners of war, in the state Virginia, on the 19th of October, 1781.

It is impossible in a short oration, to speak of all the remarkable occurrences which attended our struggle for the liberty we now possess and enjoy. Our attention is this day called to consider the blessings attending our Independence, and publicly to acknowledge that power, which rules in the armies of heaven above, and governs the inhabitants of the earth.

We are a free, independent and happy nation. We are not engaged in war with any of the European powers ; we are free from insurrections in our national and state government, and when any disturbances of that nature have arisen, they have been happily suppressed. The attempt made by Daniel Shays and his associates, to stop the administration of the laws of our state, in the Judicial Department, soon vanished like the morning cloud before the rising sun. And the insurrection of the whiskey boys was but of short duration.

We are also, in a great measure, free from any contention with the aboriginal natives of our country. The treaties between our government and the Indian tribes appear to be sacredly observed on both sides. We are also happy under the liberal constitution of the United States, in our right of suffrage ; our rulers are placed in office by a majority of the votes of the people ; and each state have a right to form their own constitutions, make their own laws, choose their own officers, and govern their own internal policy, in all cases wherein they do not intrude upon the constitution and laws of the general government.

When we contrast our present situation with our former circumstances under the British government, in which officers were imposed upon us without our consent, taxes levied and duties collected without the voice of the people, and what privileges we then enjoyed, were liable to be taken from us by that government where the voice of the common people had no influence.

We feel happy under our present form of government, we enjoy our liberty in the full exercise of religion, according to the dictates of our own consciences; but under the government from which we revolted, a man must be a member of the Episcopal church before he could hold a commission in the civil or military department in the island Great Britain.

Under our liberal constitution, no religious test is required of any man to render him legible to any office of the general or state government; and in the third article of the Bill of Rights in this state, it is declared, That no man shall be molested in his person or property for worshipping God according to the dictates of his own conscience, provided he doth disturb others in their religious worship; and it is further added, that no subordination of any one religious sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.

From these liberal establishments it consequently follows, that our rulers are of ourselves, and all our officers in the legislative, executive, and judicial department, are chosen by the people at large. Every qualified voter having a right to elect or to be elected into any office in the town, district, or plantation where he dwelleth and hath his home.

From this fountain of blessings (which my pen cannot describe, neither is my tongue able to utter)

spring forth rivers of pleasure in our political habitation ; the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage.

How pleasant is the prospect of the traveller who passes through those towns which have presented the distressing scenes of war, but are now repaired ; and in the place of warlike tents and forts he finds a peaceable habitation ; with elegant houses convenient for the accommodation of families, and also convenient and elegant buildings for public worship, colleges, academies, school-houses, &c.

The population of our country, since the close of the American war, exceeds our most sanguine expectations. The prosperity of our trade, commerce, and fishery, the addition to our navigation, the acquisition of territory, and the establishment of new and flourishing states in our union ; together with the rapid increase of agriculture, and the flourishing of arts, sciences, and many more inestimable privileges which we now possess and enjoy, proclaim aloud the happiness of a free republican government.

Shall we then assemble on this day to celebrate the birth day of our Independence, and to commemorate these attendant blessings, in which we all have an equal right, and forget wherefore we are come together, and spend our time in speculating upon each other's faults, and speaking of their infirmities. God forbid.

Let us attend to those important matters which relate to our political welfare, and stand fast in that liberty which our worthy patriots have obtained under divine providence, at the expense of blood and treasure. Let us guard against every appearance of tyranny, and be careful to admit no political wolf in sheep's clothing ; remember the second beast had two horns like a lamb, but he spake as a

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The opinions of mankind are so different, both in their religious and political sentiments, that it is not to be expected we shall be exactly agreed in every particular respecting the administration of government under our present situation. Especially as it respects our methods of defence against the invasions of foreign nations, and other important matters, in which the best of men have exercised all their wisdom, and yet have erred in judgment.

But the present situation of our national affairs is, I think, a sufficient proof that we live under a good administration of government.

When we compare our present situation with that of the European nations, and view ourselves under our own vines and fig-trees, and none to make us afraid ; while others are engaged in destructive war, where the fair sex, with broken hearted accents burst into tears, while the tender husband and the beloved son are obliged to repair to the field of battle. We may apply the words of a certain poet to their distressed circumstances.

Alas, from peace we now must cease,

* Rev. xiii. 11. 12.

...ers of America enjoy the pleasures of society and peace. I trust they will not forget to join this day with every true patriot in commemorating the happy situation of peace and tranquillity, in a fertile country, free from the alarms of war.

Your affectionate husbands are not forced from your embraces to the field of battle. Your beloved sons are not called upon to endure the fatigues of tedious campaigns. Your little children are not slain before your eyes, nor your infants torn from your breasts; a serious consideration of the goodness of God, who has bestowed upon us the blessings of peace, health and competency, and will unite us in true republican principles, and in brotherly affection among all denominations of the children of men.

Finally, let us persevere in the exercise of pure religion, and use all lawful endeavors to check every party spirit in ourselves and others. Who can tell but our American nation will be the first that shall enter into that millennium state, where the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and the nations learn war no more; which may God grant for his mercies sake. Amen.

FINIS.