

AN
ORATION,
PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE
FRANKLIN SOCIETY,
AND A RESPECTABLE
ASSEMBLY OF CITIZENS,
IN THE
CITY OF HARTFORD,
4TH JULY, 1816.

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1816.

AN ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT, BROTHERS, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

WE have assembled to celebrate the glory of our Fathers, and commemorate their matchless achievements, their virtues and their fame : to hail the day on which a people, rising in the majesty of power, bursting the bonds of oppression, and bidding defiance to despots and tyrants, enrolled their name on the catalogue of nations. This grateful tribute of the heart has long been sanctioned by the custom of civilized society. Nations, from time immemorial, have acclaimed the actions of their worthies, and perpetuated the names of their benefactors and friends. In memory of heroes and sages, pæns have been sung, and eulogiums pronounced. Conquerors have been crowned with laurel, and the orator, historian, and the poet, have conspired to render them immortal. Joyful eras in history have been commemorated by days held sacred to festivity and joy.

This practice is not the result of vanity and vain-glory ; it is not the effusion of a heart swelled with pride and arrogance ; but the homage paid to depart-

ed worth, dictated by reason, and principles of justice and sound policy. It is a just, though inadequate compensation for great virtues, and a splendid lure to entice others in the paths of glory. To invite them to actions alike noble and exalted, with the prospect of a like reward. While the hero's praise is sung, and his triumphs sounded with loud acclamations of applause, the spirit of emulation spreads like the electric spark, and every bosom glows with ardor.

Though the virtuous primarily demand the meed of praise, and deserve honor and applause; yet the welfare of society demands that reverence be paid to those who have proved themselves useful in any eminent station; that events pregnant with advantage, be perpetuated and held in remembrance. On this principle, other nations have held festivals in honor of their conquests; they have lauded the warrior who had subjugated provinces and overturned empires; they have preserved the memory of their statesmen who were famous for their intrigues and political craft; who raised them to wealth or power, and taught them to triumph over their rivals. But we have fairer subjects than these to eulogise. We boast not the destroyer of kingdoms, nor the ravager of realms; we boast not the hero crimsoned with the blood of the innocent and defenceless; we glory not in the conquest of empires, nor the subjugation of a world by our arms; we pride not in the depths of political chicanery, nor the intrigues of courts; but we celebrate the deeds of a band of patriots who nobly dared to stem the torrent of oppression; roll back the mighty tide of corruption,

and purchase freedom to their country with their blood. We commemorate a day which gave to a numerous nation their equal rights, and freed them from servile dependence. What subjects more glorious than these, ever employed the tongues or the pens of a people? What events more capable of awakening the nobler passions, than the early history of our country records? than our struggle for independence produced, or the wisdom and sagacity of the first congress unfolded?

The festivities of other nations, are mingled with superstition, and their early histories are clouded with fiction and fable. In tracing their rise and origin, the mind is bewildered in the mazes of uncertainty, and lost in vague conjecture; imagination wanders in unknown labyrinths, and is sickened with fulsome accounts of the exploits of gods and demi-gods. But the history of our country is known. We can trace our nation to its origin, and mark its regular gradation to maturity. We can follow the course of our ancestors in their flight from their mother country, whence they were driven by the intolerance of theological zeal. We can perceive that under the reign of ignorance and delusion, when the nations groaned beneath the iron hand of despotism, when the gloomy ensigns of superstition waved terrific o'er the world, and the mind and conscience bowed obeisance at her awful shrine; a few dared to think for themselves, and propagate doctrines in opposition to the established church. Then was the spirit of intolerance roused. The arm of the secular tyrant was united with religious power, and their interests were combined. Persecution was

adopted. Fire and faggot carried dismay through the land, and bigotry was glutted with the blood of martyrs to conscience.

Then, to secure their principles and their lives, our fathers fled, exiles from their homes, and committed their fortunes to the winds and waves. They crossed the waste of ocean ; they landed on unknown shores, and fixed their habitation in a howling wilderness, desolate and frightful as imagination can picture. Though hostile savages opposed their settlement, though they threatened extermination to their feeble colonies ; yet the mighty Guardian of virtue, made bare his arm for their protection, and supported their sinking cause. Soon was the dreary waste cheered with the smiles of civilization ; soon bloomed the wilderness as a garden of flowers, and the wilds of nature retreated before the hand of industry. Cities rose over the haunts of savages, and towns and villages gladdened the spacious domain.

But our ancestors were not long allowed to enjoy in peace the asylum their fortitude had founded. The sceptre of tyranny was still suspended over them ; oppression again hovered around their borders, and threatened to blast their fondest hopes. Their dearest rights were invaded, and their remonstrances trampled under foot.

Unable to reconcile or appease their haughty tyrants ; unwilling to resign their birthright, or forfeit the boon which heaven gave them ; reluctant to yield their freedom, and aid in riveting chains on their posterity : they appealed to arms. They submitted the justice of their cause to an impartial world, and relied on the support

of an overruling Power. Fearful were the odds that opposed them. Formidable were their foes, and skilled in the art of war. Their fleets and armies were numerous, and inured to toil and victory. But the warriors of freedom were few, and untutored in the field. Unlearned in the science of human butchery, they had only cultivated the arts of peace. Their forces were scattered over a vast extent of country, incapable of concentrating to a point, or acting by general impulse.

In this alarming crisis, the immortal Washington was called to the field. Washington, at whose name the heart of every patriot bounds with joy, was placed at the head of our armies. But long had he to struggle with disaster. His troops, unused to discipline and subordination, were long unable to oppose the torrent of British invasion. They retreated before the foe; overpowered, though not conquered. The merciless invader ravaged and pillaged the country; cities were enveloped in flames, and the flying path of the peaceful inhabitant, was illumined by the conflagration of his own dwelling. On one frontier the ruthless savage raised aloft the tomahawk and scalping-knife, reeking with the blood of innocence. On the other, the red-cross flamed on high, and lowered destruction on all opposed. Rapine stalked abroad; and War, with his iron chariot, drove reekless through the land. The domain of the husbandman was fattened with human gore. His lovely daughters were ravished before his face; the mangled corpses of his infants pained his sight, while the bones of his sons were bleaching on the field of battle.

Darkness and gloom pervaded all ranks, while the hearts of the feeble sunk within them.

But the eloquence and firmness of the first congress, reanimated their drooping spirits, and revived their waning hopes. This august assembly, steadfastly bent on their own vast plans, reconciled the jarring interests of the several states, and united the disjointed exertions of the country. Their councils were marked with deliberation and wisdom ; and guided by justice and truth. When they saw that redress could be expected from the mother country ; no indemnification for the past ; no guarantee for the future ; they pronounced the allegiance of the United States absolved, and declared to the world their right and title to independence. This solemn act was received with rapture by the people. It inspired them with courage for the contest, and they determined to support the declaration, or seal it with their blood. It nerved the arm of the soldier, and made him desperate in fight. Under the auspices of Washington, they rallied to the standard of liberty. And though often obliged to retire before the superior skill and experience of their enemies, yet their patience and perseverance was at length crowned with success. The foe was driven from our borders ; our independence was acknowledged, and peace once more smiled upon our land.

To prevent all future jealousies and rivalships between the different states—each being separate, sovereign and independent—a general convention was called, to establish a form of government, which should

unite the interests of all, and guarantee liberty and security to its several members. This arduous and important duty was discharged with fidelity, and our present happy constitution was matured and presented to the several states for adoption. It was put in operation, and our beloved Washington placed at its head. Experience proved the wisdom of the framers and realised their fondest hopes. It surpassed all precedent and example, and fairly solved the political problem, *Can a people be ruled, and yet be free?*

It has yet existed unimpaired amidst the convulsions which have shaken the world; though nations have since sunk to oblivion; though empires and kingdoms have ceased to exist, and monarchs have been toppled from their thrones; yet our happy constitution still survives and promises a long continuance of its blessings. But this must depend upon the virtues and information of the people. If the stern virtues of our fathers be cultivated; if public morals be preserved, and knowledge generally disseminated among the people, it may be perpetuated to the latest ages of time. But if public and private virtues decay; if our morals be corrupted, and luxury and intemperance prevail; if learning be neglected, and ignorance spread through the land, we may pronounce the day of its subversion at hand. In proportion as the nation is involved in darkness, party spirit and faction will rage. The people will easily be duped by the artful and designing; and some aspiring leader, who unites courage with artifice, will wrest the sceptre from the hands of the people, already enervated by luxury, and rear a dynasty on the ruins of his country.

The freedom of Rome was not subverted till Romans were unworthy of freedom. Luxury had usurped the place of temperance ; self-interest of patriotism ; and order was converted to confusion. Opposing factions convulsed the state, while the foul spirit of party brooded over their counsels, and turned all their wisdom to madness and folly. The ambition of Cesar, aspired to absolute dominion ; and the power of the Republic withered before him. In despotic governments this principle is reversed. The arm of the tyrant may be strong while the land is veiled in ignorance ; superstition may aid in his designs, and assist in riveting the chains of slavery. His throne remains unshaken, while it is shrouded in darkness and gloom ; but dissipate the sombre clouds which envelope the land ; pour a flood of light upon the benighted mind, and his empire vanishes like mists before the rising sun.

In the dark ages of the world, when learning was unknown, and man reposed in more than Egyptian night, despotism was prevalent. But when the sun of science rose majestic over the horizon, dispensing his genial rays, and scattering the thick mist of ignorance and superstition, the proud systems of tyranny successively crumbled, and governments of a milder nature, were established. As learning increases, the power of despotism is diminished. And in whatever nation knowledge is scattered among all ranks of people, there is liberty enjoyed.

BRETHREN OF THE FRANKLIN SOCIETY,

YOU are just now entering on the broad theatre of the world, and must soon take part in the active scenes of life. Soon will duty prompt you to exert those powers which the constitution of our country has placed in your hands. As a constituent part of the people, you will soon hold, in common with your fellow citizens, the sovereign power of the nation, and the control of her destinies. On persons now of your age, must she, at no distant time, look for support, and be indebted for happiness and glory. It is of vast importance that you enter upon these duties, with a judgment ripened by reflection, and passions subdued by reason; with minds enriched by the precepts of the learned, and matured by the experience of others. On these circumstances will depend, not only your happiness, but in a degree, the welfare of those with whom you are connected.

Although you are to enter into society divided by opposing parties, inveterate through ambition; yet you are not, as were the citizens of ancient Athens, compelled by law, to enlist under the banners of either. Although every honest and virtuous citizen must necessarily form private opinions upon men and measures; yet they will not tenaciously adhere to these, against the force of truth, nor endeavor to propagate them till they are well assured of their correctness. It is not a mark of patriotism to engage in parties without the sanction of ripened judgment, nor oppose them while unknown, except in name. To engage our feelings

and affections ; to enlist our passions and prejudices in any cause before the judgment is ripened by some reflection and experience ; is an act of the greatest imprudence, and of lasting evil. In such cases, the contest between parties becomes a war of passion, unbridled by reason, and unrestrained by a spirit of justice.

Although your number is not extensive, and your sphere of action limited ; although you are not, to appearance, destined to fill the higher stations in life ; yet society must, to a certain extent, be affected by your influence, and your country be benefitted or injured by your conduct. Therefore, if you wish to perpetuate our glorious constitution ; if you wish to transmit to posterity those blessings which were bequeathed to us by our fathers ; cultivate and improve the mind. Enrich yourselves from the inexhaustless stores of learning, and expand your ideas in the broad fields of science. It is this which will enable you to unravel the designs of the ambitious, and resist the wiles of faction. It is this which will enable you to immortalize yourselves, and perpetuate your memories in the hearts of your countrymen. But the name of the partizan shall be forgotten ; the politician shall sink to oblivion ; monuments and thrones shall crumble beneath the awful power of fate ; while the glory of the learned and virtuous shall still survive, nor diminished by the lapse of ages, nor obscured by the revolutions of time.