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DELIVERED TO THE SOCIETY

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C I N C I N N A T I

O F T H E

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,

July 4th 1787.

By JOHN BROOKS, Esq;

BOSTON: PRINTED BY EDMUND FREEMAN,

OPPOSITE THE NORTH DOOR OF THE STATE-HOUSE.

M,DCC,LXXXVII.

AT a Meeting of the Society of the CINCINNATI of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts held by adjournment at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern in Boston. July 5th, 1787.

VOTED unanimously that Capt. Samuel Nicholson, Brigadier General William Hull, and Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Rice be appointed a Committee to wait upon the Honourable Major General Brooks and present him the Thanks of this Society for his ORATION delivered to the Society yesterday and request a Copy thereof for the Press.

A true Copy.

THOMAS EDWARDS, *Secretary.*

Medford, July 10, 1787.

GENTLEMEN,

IT would be impossible for me, after having received by your hands the Vote of the Society of the Cincinnati of the 5th instant to decline a compliance with their request.

With every sentiment of Respect and Esteem,

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient Servant

JOHN BROOKS.

To Capt. Samuel Nicholson,
Brig. Gen. William Hull,
and Lt. Col. Nathan Rice, } Committee, &c.

A N

O R A T I O N.

AS illiberality is the offspring of weakness and of ignorance— as the great and the good are ever possessed of candid minds, the present speaker presumes he has less to fear from the severity, than to hope from the candour, of this enlightened and respectable auditory. He may, therefore, venture, notwithstanding his own inability, to proceed in attempting to discharge the duty assigned him by the society of the Cincinnati.

AGREEABLY, then, to their expectations and the dictate of the day, we shall turn our attention to the American Independence.

THE desire of pleasing is a principle in human nature. But as this passion can never be virtuously indulged at the expence of truth and sincerity, an attempt to catch the popular ear, or flatter the reigning prejudices of the day, forms no part of the present design.

THE American revolution is an event illustrious in itself, and important in its consequences. To rear and establish an empire was an enterprize bold and arduous. The attempt awakened all the active powers of the human mind, and seemed to add fresh vigour to its native elasticity. America friendless and alone, but collected within herself, setting at defiance the power of Great Britain, presents us with a most dignified and majestick picture of true greatness. In considering the rights of human nature, in contemplating the respect which she owed to herself, she was elevated above the sense of danger; and so intent was she in investigating the policy, that she seemed to forget the power of her oppressors. While Britain, on the other hand, dazzled with the lustre of her own greatness, lost sight of one of those invaluable rights for which she herself had often and profusely bled. To secure the rights of property, and the safety of their persons, against the depredations and outrages of lawless power, Englishmen had plunged their swords into the breasts of Englishmen, and their soil had been freely watered with their choicest blood.

BUT in their conduct towards this country they were guilty of a treacherous inversion of their own maxims.

The right, not only of *taxing us without our consent*, but of *binding us in all cases whatsoever*, though at first only secretly whispered in their cabinet, was at length openly claimed in the face of the world. America, at once saw the force of the principle, while as yet it existed but in theory, and had too much wisdom and spirit to submit to the ignominious experiment. Her resolutions was not, like that of the United Netherlands, the impulse of despair, but the result of cool deliberate reasoning. Banished from the blessings of the British constitution, resistance became the only alternative ; and the precarious events of a war were preferred to certain servitude.

THE situation of America for some time after the commencement of hostilities, from opposing the power of the King of England while she recognized his sovereignty, was extremely ungraceful. But so equivocal, though necessary line of conduct did not comport with the dignity of her spirit and genius. As, while she acknowledged herself to be a part of the British empire, she would have no rational hope of foreign assistance, and was herself, indeed, contending without an object, a formal, and an explicit assumption of sovereign power, was the dictate of wisdom and of prudence.

ACCORDINGLY, on the auspicious day we now celebrate, the illustrious fathers of our country, by a most solemn act, announced to the world, the claims of America to Independence and empire. A day never to be forgotten ! An act ever to be admired ! An act which for conciseness and precision, for majesty of expression and loftiness of thought, stands unrivaled among the literary productions of this, or any former age—an act, it is but just to add, which does infinite honour to these bold and generous patriots who gave it their sanction ; and which cannot fail to transmit their names with increasing applause through all succeeding time.

As magnanimity, and boldness of mind, had thus marked the American councils, the further prosecution of war was evincive of her persevering firmness, sound wisdom and military prowess. From her own bosom she was able to call forth, both for the Senate and for the field, such characters as her situation demanded. And while she can boast the purity of her cause, she can boast also of patriots and heroes who added lustre to the cause itself. None of the various vicissitudes of her fortune were able to shake the resolution she had taken to establish her liberties, or to check the efforts of her freeborn soul ; but, supported by the virtue and patri-

otism of her sons, she persisted in the long and arduous conflict, till, at length covered with glory, and unequalled in fame, she rose in triumph superior to all her enemies, and effected an honourable, a glorious peace. A peace, transcending her expectations, and equal to her most sanguine wishes. Happy moment ! when the din of arms and the toils of war should yield to the peaceful pleasures of domestick life !

IN the full possession of peace, liberty and independence—remote from the seats of foreign empires—unentangled with their politicks and uncontaminated with their vices—masters of a grateful soil in a healthful climate, to what heights of grandeur and felicity might she not have aspired ! Could any one have conceived that a people who had given such signal displays of fortitude and patriotism, under circumstances the most distressing—who for eight long years had supported a war of virtue, should soon, very soon, so far forget their own dignity and interest, as to abuse their liberty, and prostitute it to the vile purposes of licentiousness ? Yes : the comprehensive genius of a WASHINGTON foresaw, and his honest patriotism pointed out,* the humiliating danger.

* Vide circular letter.

NOTWITHSTANDING the national spirit that discovered itself during the war, we are now compelled to believe that the union of the states, during that period, was the effect either of a momentary sense of danger, or, at best, of a transient glow of patriotism. A review of the temper and manners of the people of this Country, through the various stages of their progress from dependence to empire, compared with the present, forces to confess that the ascent to greatness, however hazardous, is more pleasing to the great mass of mankind, than the practice of those virtues, which can alone secure respectability in the calm season of peace.

As the States had one common enemy, they had one common interest ; the force of which rendered them insensible to a variety of separate, inferior interests, which peace alone could unfold and bring into view. So soon, therefore, as the impulse of foreign force was removed, the little politics of each state engrossed the publick attention—federal ideas were obscured, and the national character has been falling a victim to local prejudices. Ever since the war the states have been receding from each other, and from their common center, till the power of political attraction has become almost imperceptible.

How these states are to be re-united, and the unity of the national character and government preserved, are questions already highly momentous ; but are daily becoming more interesting, as they are rapidly advancing to a practical decision. A federal system, differently modified from the present, may probably be adopted with a view to effectuate these immense objects. But how far a government *meerly* federal is calculated to answer these purposes,—how far such a government, is, in the present state of things, practicable, time alone will fully determine. Reasonings founded in the nature and general principles of government: will not satisfy the mind on this subject, as coercion, the great animating principle of every government, is, and perhaps must necessarily be wanting.

ANCIENT Greece was divided into a great number of independent republics. They had, however, their federal constitution, and their council of amphyctyons. But was their confederation capable of controuling those jealous, proud, aspiring states ? The reverse is manifest from their perpetual and depopulating wars. What, though the arms of Persia might for a time unite them, this danger removed they cordially returned to their too common employment, the butchery of each

other. The analogy between those celebrated republics, and our own, is strikingly obvious; and their history, painful as it is in the perusal, is replete with instructions to this our country. They rioted in their wild tumultuous liberty, till the enterprising Philip put an end at once to their convulsions and to their freedom.

THE Helvetic league in modern times, has assumed the appearance of consistence and of union. But to their poverty, and their mountains—the jealousies and the continual pressure of surrounding nations, may not this be ascribed, rather than to the efficacy of their federal constitution?

NOR can we predicate any thing more favourable from the intricate system of the United Netherlands. Although they are surrounded by potent neighbours, by whose arms they seem liable to be overwhelmed, their constitution is too feeble to preserve them from those violent political agitations, which are inconsistent with an efficacious, well-organized government. The Hollanders themselves, indeed, by dispensing in times of danger, with their usual and constitutional forms of legislation, implicitly acknowledge the preposterous nature of their national system of jurisprudence.

To these instances may we not add the testimony of our own experience. We have been witnesses of the decline, and almost utter extinction, as well as of the rise and progress of a federal system—sufficient, perhaps, to convince us of the necessity of a great national constitution of government, formed with all those powers, those checks and balances, which may be necessary to give it energy, on the one hand, and to secure the liberties of the people, on the other. What indeed can preserve the publick liberty but an efficient, energetick government, founded in just principles, and dispensing equal laws? So far is such a government from endangering the liberties of the people, that it insures to them the highest possible degree of protection. The extremes of almost every thing in the moral and political world are nearly allied. The excess of virtue is vice; and the extremes of liberty border on despotism.

MONEY is the sinew of government as well as of war. To call it forth with certainty—in such quantities and in such only as the public exigencies demand, and in a manner most easy to the people, is the perfection of legislation. But to effect these important points, is it not essential that one undivided, integral, though balanced, government should be established, the influence of which

should operate directly upon the individual constituents of it without the intervention of local, or subordinate legislatures ?

AMONG the various causes of the present distress of our country perhaps none has been more capitally influential, than the want of a well-toned, national government. The levity and disrespect with which many of the recommendations and requisitions of Congress have been received, by some of the states, has had an extensive effect on the publick mind. Mankind at large do not always reason : they are prone to imitation, are susceptible of injuries, and in their political conduct are generally, governed by their feelings. It was impossible therefore, for the legislature of any one state to trifle with the dignity of the federal government, without, sooner or later, hazarding their own.

BUT whatever may have been the cause of the publick distress, nothing can justify the wild and irrational methods which have been adopted for relief. To every honest patriot it must be highly painful, to see our free constitution, that work of time and of blood, suffering the insults and outrage of the profligate and abandoned. To you, Gentlemen of the society of the Cincinnati, who

have been wont to consider the honour and the happiness, the disgrace and the infelicity of your country as your own, it must be humiliating indeed.

It has fallen to your lot, Gentlemen, to act a dangerous, though honourable part in the American revolution. For eight long years you have trodden together the rugged paths of military life. The return of this anniversary must call up to your recollection the various interesting scenes through which you have passed, and tend still further to cement those friendships, which have been formed under the pressure of the same distress, and while participating one common danger. On this day it will be natural for you to recur to that period, when the military connection of those men, who, by the united voice of their country, had been recognized as the patriot army, was about to be dissolved. The moment was peculiarly calculated to awaken all the generous affections of the mind, and to excite the finer feelings of friendship and humanity. The idea of bidding a final adieu to each other was too painful to be supported; and the most virtuous affections that ever warmed the human heart gave birth to your institution. On this day, therefore, you will recollect that friendship, and charity form the great basis of your association. And while you dwell with pleasing satisfaction on the

connection that now subsists among those, whose pride and glory it is to have defended the same illustrious cause, the memory of those of your brethren, who have sealed their patriotism with their blood will crowd upon your sympathetic minds, and call forth fresh tears for their early fate. Hail ! Ghosts immortal, of unfading fame ! Your names shall grace the poet's verse ! The historick page to latest times shall proclaim your worth ! While your memory, dear to us your friends, shall be embalmed in the bosom of your grateful country !

By your institution, Gentlemen, it is yours to solace and support, as far as in your power, *such of your unfortunate companions, as have seen better days, and merited a milder fate.* It is yours to wipe the tear from the eye of the widow—to succour the fatherless—to rescue the tender female orphan from destruction, and to enable the son to emulate the virtues of his father. Pleasing delightful task ! To communicate happiness to others while you increase your own.

CONSIDERING the temper of the times in which you live, the part you have to act is confessedly difficult. For although, as a society, friendship and benevolence are your great objects, yet, apathy in you, with regard to the publick welfare, would be construed into disaffection, and uncommon sensibility into design. It is impossible for men, whose great ambition it has been to de-

serve the approbation of their fellow-citizens, to view with indifference the reproach which has been cast upon your institution. But there is a degree of respect due from every man to himself, as well as to others; and there are situations from which one may not recede, without the unavoidable imputation of weakness, or of guilt. While, therefore, a consciousness of virtuous and laudable views will prompt you to cherish the benevolent principles which first induced you to associate, you will be lead to respect that spirit of jealousy, which always characterises a free government, and, when not carried to excess, is useful in its support. Time, which places every thing in its true light, will convince the world that your institution is founded in virtue, and leads to patriotism.

BESIDES the motives you have in common with others, to seek the publick welfare—a regard to the consistence of your own character—that sense of honour, which has raised you superior to every temptation, and to every distress—the reiterated testimonials you have received from your country of their sense of your patriotism and military merit, are ties that must forever bind you most sacredly to her interests.

PROSECUTE, then, with resolution, what you have instituted in sincerity. Make it the great object of your ambition, as you have shone as soldiers, to excel as citi-

zens. Treat with just indifference the insinuations which envy may be disposed to throw out against you. Silence the tongue of slander, by the rectitude of your conduct, and the brilliance of your virtues. Suffer not the affected jealousy of individuals, to abate the ardour of your patriotism. As you have fought for liberty, convince the world you know its value. As you have greatly contributed to establish these governments, teach the licentious traitor, that you will support them—and as you have particularly fought under the banners of the union, inculcate in your several circles, the necessity of preserving the unity of the national character. Fortify your minds against that foe to integrity, that bane of republicanism, an immoderate thirst for popularity.

SUPPORT the majesty of the laws of your country. Reverence the publick institutions of religion. Practice the whole circle of private virtues ; and disseminate, to the utmost of your power, the seeds of useful knowledge.

Thus, approving yourselves to heaven and your own minds, you will do honour to your institution, to yourselves, and to your country.



ERRATUM, 5th page, 7th line from the top for *resolutions* read *oppositions*.