

AN  
ORATION,  
ON  
THE ANNIVERSARY  
OF  
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

PRONOUNCED AT

*BUXTON, DISTRICT OF MAINE,*

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1808.

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BY ASA BROWN.

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1808.

# ORATION.

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VALIANT CITIZENS,

DEEPLY impressed with my inability to equal your expectations, and sensible of my own unworthiness to ascend this consecrated rostrum ; yet happy in complying with the request of this polite and patriotic audience, and equally with you inspired with the love of liberty, and that divine enthusiasm which animated the bosoms of our venerable ancestors, and kindled the holy flame of FREEDOM in the breasts of many at this moment present ; and heartily uniting with a magnanimous assembly in sincerest congratulations on this joyous festival, I am incited with some degree of confidence, that the sensibility of this respectable auditory will indulge me to step aside from my vocation, and assume for a moment the character of a public speaker.

Notwithstanding this pleasing, this animating and delightful theme, the pride and glory of every true American, has, long since, become tautology, yet it is of that kind, never to wax disgustful ; but like the glorious luminary of heaven ever appears new. It has been, and we believe it ever will be, a laudable custom among all nations, and at all periods, to commemorate glorious events, and momentous national achievements.

And when we consider the important causes that impelled the venerable and intelligent sons of '75 to proclaim to the aggregated hosts of tyrants, an eternal separation from their slavish fetters ; when we contemplate the inefficacy of our strength to encounter an unrivalled and hostile enemy ; when we view the resources of our country to maintain a perilous and

doubtful conflict, and the feeble and undisciplined condition of our little band of spirited soldiers, we may, without the least shadow of ostentation, or vain glory, unite in celebrating this glorious anniversary; the BIRTH DAY OF LIBERTY; *the day of our political existence as a nation*, and devoutly pour forth the most fervent ejaculations to ALMIGHTY GOD, for his protection vouchsafed to an infant and defenceless country; who cleft asunder the red sea for our armies, and from the flinty rock supplied their thirst, and safely delivered us this American Canaan, flowing with the richest bounties of nature.

This day accomplishes the thirty-second year, since the combined wisdom of the colonies ventured to assert their rights, and throw off the shackles of a transatlantic despot, and assume the character of an independent nation. The God of armies heard our prayers, and was graciously pleased to interpose in behalf of a suffering people, and crown their efforts with his approbation, and with success.

At no period was there ever a greater consistency in calling to our recollection the price of our liberty, than at the present important crisis. Let us take a retrospective view as far as '75, and there may we see foreign combinations formed for the hellish purpose of riveting the chains of despotism, and subjecting this rising empire to their demands "in all cases whatsoever." It was the love of liberty and an equal distribution of justice, the offspring of an ingenuous heart, that inspired the *free-born sons of Columbia* in the most desponding times; and it was the same holy zeal and attachment to this righteous cause, that bid them persevere, and patiently submit to all the privations, and cheerfully bear all the dangers and fatigues of a distressful war.

The plains of Lexington shall ever admonish us of the dismal hour! The ghastly visage of the beloved Warren rises to our view, and in accents more

than human declares, I died for you! Venerable Prescott views from his tranquil tomb our situation, and warns us of latent dangers; Montgomery's remains, from remote Québec, speaks to us in language never to be forgotten, and conjures us to be ever mindful of foreign influence. The long catalogue of brilliant heroes, who fell a sacrifice to British pride at New-York, with those who spilt their blood on White Plains and Saratoga, entreat us to remember their deaths with a becoming gratitude. But I must pause here—You, ye venerable supporters of THE RIGHTS OF MAN, are best able to tell, and transmit to succeeding generations, what were the emotions of your souls at that eventful period. But shall we in the full enjoyment of prosperity, and amidst the profusions of nature's God, forget the sovereign hand, that has for so many years dealt out his liberality in such ample manner to these United States? And shall our liberties be suspended on the brittle thread of party passion? I trust the enlightened citizens of Columbia are too wise to permit party spirit, animosity, and internal divisions longer to have any dominion over them. At no time since we were emancipated from the insolent hand and all-devouring jaws of tyrants, there never was a louder warning than now, to exercise every effort in support of *union*. It is high time that the base and self-degrading epithets, *Democrat, Disorganizer, Aristocrat, Anarchist, Monarchist, &c.* were forever abolished and buried in eternal oblivion, that the name of AMERICAN should be imprinted on our foreheads; that universal philanthropy and attachment to our own government, should evince to the gazing world, that the sons of good order will never change their glorious republican form of government, for the base and galling fetters of monarchy. You are too well acquainted with human nature not to know, that in-

ternal divisions, party animosity, corrupt, evil principled and wicked motives, must be ruinous, must ultimately be fatal to any free people. It is the safest ground for our enemies to put confidence in, and the most deadly and destructive that we can build upon. This is opening wide our doors to foreign influence, and giving our foes aid in the most effectual manner. It is only our once more uniting in the glorious cause, for which so much of the choicest blood of America was spilt, will baffle the devices of our enemies, and frustrate their most enthusiastic purposes. There must be a sovereign power preserved in the Union, or a dissolution will take place, which will be nothing less than inevitable destruction to the whole empire.

The constitution is silent with respect to State Legislatures interfering with the grand resolves of the nation. This is a delicate point—I choose to make no comments, but will here cite the words of the illustrious and patriotic Washington. In 1787, speaking of the fatal consequences which must necessarily result from distinct sovereignties and unconstitutional State interference with the Union, the immortal Washington says, “It is only in our united character that we are known as an empire, that our independence is acknowledged, that our power can be regarded, or our credit supported among foreign nations. The treaties of the European powers with the United States of America, will have no validity on a dissolution of the union. We shall be left nearly in a state of nature, or we may find by our own unhappy experience, that there is a natural and necessary progression from the extreme of anarchy to the extreme of tyranny, and that arbitrary power is most easily established on the ruins of liberty abused to licentiousness.”

The judicious counsels of the deliverer of America can never be too well heeded. Under all cir-

cumstances, amidst the complicated embarrassments, accompanying a long and alarming contest, he remains the same; firm as a rock; steadily adhering to the principles of liberty and justice; disclaiming groundless apprehensions; submitting to all the horrors and calamities of war, and persevering through the whole unnatural struggle without a murmur, on his own personal account, like the soldier, the patriot, and the general. His language is the voice of truth. We must depend upon our own intrinsic unanimity, if we expect to be regarded as a nation abroad. We must be better, we must be *well united* at home, or we shall *never* be respected abroad. We shall never obtain redress of our grievances by prayers and tears. Great nations aspire after self-promotion, without strictly observing the equity of the means they use to accomplish their purposes. Let us be well united, and we shall continue a great people; we shall obtain every claim of a wise and just government. If we wish for energy in our government, let us accord in supporting it, and not vilify the members without the most just cause; but constitutionally discard them, and fill their places with men of integrity, talents and patriotism—not with such as are willing to lend a listening ear to faction. If we would be honored as a great empire, it must be because we are prepared to face the foe with the cannon and point of the sword. There cannot be unshaken firmness in a popular government, when the people refuse their aid. I would not encourage a blind and servile concurrence in any administration; and I would be equally circumspect not to vilify and slander our rulers.

It is time that adulation and smooth words were discountenanced, and that truth and a real state of things should be brought home to our doors. The momentous exigency of the times, and the critical

posture of our national affairs, will, I hope, extenuate for the liberty I have taken to be thus plain. It is far from my design to advance a single idea that shall personally point to any in this assembly.—“United we stand, divided we fall.” Again our great statesman says, “the unity of government, which constitutes you one people, is also dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquillity at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize.” Speaking of the baneful effects of party spirit, he justly observes—“It serves always to distract the public councils, and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms; kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection.” At this conjuncture and alarming crisis, we are invited by interest, we are admonished by the dangers that menace our destruction, and the blood of our heroes slain, to be in a preparation to confront danger, and even death itself. France on one hand, with a vigilant eye, watching every resolution of Congress, using every nefarious device congenial to her nature; holding out a lure in one hand, while in the other is secreted the deadly weapon of our peace as a nation and individuals—endeavoring by all the insinuations which treachery, self-interest and malignity can suggest, to persuade us to co-operate with her in the inhuman custom of butchering our fellow beings. While on the other hand we are equally oppressed, and deprived of our most essential rights and privileges as a neutral nation.

England will defer a treaty with our executive as long as possible, in hopes of a change of administration, cherishing an idea that she may be the better able to bring about her overbearing and wicked

schemes. The insolent and haughty spirit of Britain only waits a safe opportunity to burst forth like a torrent against these United States, and mar their tranquillity forever. It is not an imaginary evil; we all feel the iron hand of the all-grasping powers of Europe. But thanks be to God, the stability and inflexible firmness of Congress, the united wisdom of our rulers, and penetration of our sages, we trust, will never suffer the dear earned glories of our flourishing country to be thus contaminated in the view of nations, and to the eternal infamy of ourselves. Be firm; be undaunted; be united; trust in the God of battles, who caused the sun to stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon to stay her course in the valley of Ajalon, to behold the high hand of an overruling Providence. God, who sent his angel and slew in the Assyrian camp an hundred four score and five thousand, is able to deliver us from the millions who secretly boast our fall—But let us ever be mindful that Jehovah fought for a righteous, not for a perverse and gainsaying people. Our government is undoubtedly the best that ever was fabricated by human ingenuity. The very genius of it is safety; but it demands the wisest administration to execute its design.

Let us turn back the historic page, and indulge ourselves for a moment to dwell on ancient republics. Athens and Lacedemon were the most celebrated republics in all Greece. They took their origin from a mode of thinking, and species of reasoning excited by oppression and slavish government, and for a time rapidly progressed, from the encouragement and comforts that free people participate from an equal distribution, under equal laws, of the blessings of nature. They were founded by the most sagacious characters of that age, and administered by wise and judicious men—but their reign was short, and their end eternal disgrace.



And why? Because they were divided among themselves. Their origin was glorious, their advancement encouraging, but their destruction infamy. "As the pilot," says Cicero, "is to steer his vessel happily into its port, the physicians to preserve or restore health, the generals of an army to obtain victory, so a prince, and every man who governs others, to make the utility of the governed his view and motive, and to remember that the supreme rule of just government is the good of the people, *salus populi suprema lex esto.*" Lyeurgus, the great legislator in Greece, had no other motive in view than the good of his people. "The end which he proposed in the establishment of his laws, was to render his subjects happy by making them virtuous. He banished idleness and voluptuousness from his state, and with them luxury and vicious pleasures, the fruitful sources of all vice." There is an excess of liberty which leads directly to an arbitrary government—there is a medium between monarchy and despotism, and we have the greatest reason to be filled with gratitude to heaven, that our government is founded on this happy mediocrity. People never so readily submit to any government as that in which they have neither too much nor too little freedom. Men are not possessed of powers to subsist together, while under no restraint, and they are as equally incapable of bearing complete subjection. The diseased patient is more anxious to find a remedy and again be restored to health, than to seek the causes of complaint; but the physician searches for the causes, that he may be the better able to effect a cure. Now, if we will but cure our hearts of prejudice, and turn a deaf ear to unprincipled and designing men, we may easily see, that the same causes which have produced the evil must be abandoned, or no medicine will ever accomplish a radical cure. Small strifes and divisions engender greater

ones, and the larger they are, the more rapid will be their progress, and surer their baneful consequences. Virtue and morality, integrity and unity in public sentiment, moderation in our desires, and economy in our dealings, is the only sure basis on which we can erect the superb edifice of a federal republic. The Grecian republics differed essentially from ours, both as it respected their constitution and manner of administering them. Their checks on each other did not always answer the desired success. Sometimes the whole people assembled at one place, and little else than vociferation was the result of their counsels.

Our prosperity has been great; it has attracted the envy, the jealousy and hatred of foreign powers. We have been for years reaping the full harvest of neutrality; but our successes have been the strongest invitations to foreign influence and aggression. Although the scene is somewhat reversed, there is no cause of despair, if we will but cease to be our own aggressors. We, your sons, who have long enjoyed the milk and honey of the land, the fruits of your toil and blood, take pride in our relation to you. We will, through divine agency, preserve the glories you so dearly purchased, untarnished; and never suffer our fathers to become slaves to the pride and lust of domination. You, who sacrificed your time, your talents, your property, yea, your little all in defence of our liberties and lives; who invincibly defended the rights of man with the points of your bayonets and drawn swords, shall never, never have cause to weep with your hands bound in chains of slavery, nor your feet shackled with the galling fetters of tyrants. We revere the mothers who gave us birth in a land of liberty, under whose maternal care we have been nurtured in the school of virtue and religion, whose memory shall cease only with our existence. We promise to follow

your salutary counsels, and let no tyrant rob us of so precious a treasure—but will spill our blood on the field of battle in your defence (should the occasion call) to discharge the debt of gratitude justly due you. Amidst the vicissitudes of fortune, should the clouds which are now gathering in our horizon collect into a tempest of war, we swear to unsheath our swords and face the cannon's mouth in honor of our beloved sisters, and never return them to their scabbards again 'till victory shall be achieved. Be not dismayed; your expectations shall be justified. We know you deprecate all the horrors of war becoming the fair daughters of Columbia—but we believe you would, like females of yore, traverse the ground of battle and there weep over your bleeding brothers, with a gentle hand supporting their declining heads, rather than behold them groaning in bondage and subjection.

Let Europe and all belligerent nations fight, spreading carnage and devastation far and wide, to gratify an insatiable and wicked desire for domination; let them cover their plains with lifeless corpses; with the dead bodies of husbands and sons; let them wield the sceptre of empire in their own regions, but be cautious how they disturb the sons of peace. Let *them* boast of *conquest*, may *we* boast of *peace*. Let them shed their blood for barren rocks, and inaccessible mountains, but if we spill ours, let it be in defence of our country, our liberties, our lives. I behold your countenances this moment fired with ardor, with that holy enthusiasm which characterizes the patriot and the soldier—filled with that honest love of freedom, which alone is capable of rendering life desirable.

Too much cannot be urged in support of union. Concinnity in our deportment, and an inviolable attachment to government, is the ark of safety, the palladium of freedom in a popular government; and

we, who cherish the virtues which you have taught us, will ever keep watchmen on the walls, and never suffer the din of war to echo through our land from internal divisions. We should blush to behold our country so desolated as to join the tribe of Benjamin, and lie in wait in the vineyards, and to see and behold if the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance in dances, to issue from our lurking places, and to catch every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh. We will never suffer foreign insinuations and smooth complexioned adulation, fair promises and plausible pretexts, to captivate our judgments and steal our reason; nor on the other hand will we be affrighted at glittering armor, or the menacing aspect of insolent, supercilious and haughty kings. We can place but little confidence in foreign powers, notwithstanding they promise never to slay us by the sword, when their avowed purpose is to bury us alive.

Equal vigilance must be exercised against flattery and oppression. Luxury, voluptuousness, licentiousness, avarice, extortion, vicious pleasures, and intemperance must be banished from our habitations. No modern Absaloms shall have audience, who daily stand waiting at our gates, saying, "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" Nor the deadly kisses of a Judas shall have a reception in Columbia. And while we guard our internal foes, will \* be equally vigilant, that foreign influence pervade not our union, and that we suffer no foreigner, whose baneful influence has hitherto been disseminated both into church and state, to send spies throughout this American Israel, saying, as soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, my empire is established in fair Columbia. No, God forbid, that we should ever be so unwise. We will yet show to the wondering world that we love *ourselves*, and are the invincible defenders of the *Rights of Man*.

\* This, and many of the like expressions are to be explained, we must, &c. if we would preserve our dignity as an independent nation.

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