

*Edward T. Ch*

AN

**ORATION,**

DELIVERED

**JULY 4, 1817,**

AT THE REQUEST OF THE SELECTMEN OF THE TOWN OF

**BOSTON,**

**IN COMMEMORATION**

OF THE

**Anniversary of American Independence.**

==  
**BY EDWARD T. CHANNING.**  
==

**Boston :**

PRINTED BY JOSEPH T. BUCKINGHAM

Congress-Street.

## VOTE OF THE TOWN.



At a meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of Boston, assembled at Faneuil Hall, on Friday, the 4th day of July, A. D. 1817, 9 o'clock, A. M. and then adjourned to the Old South Church,

VOTED, That the Selectmen be, and hereby are, appointed a committee, to wait on EDWARD T. CHANNING, Esq. in the name of the town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited Oration, this day delivered by him at the request of the town, upon the Anniversary of American Independence, in which were considered the feelings, manners, and principles, which produced the great national event, and the important and happy effects, general and domestic, which have already, or will forever, flow from that auspicious epoch; and to request of him a copy for the press.

Attest,

THOMAS CLARK, Town Clerk

## ORATION.

---

**T**HE stillness of the world, and the spirit of conciliation that prevails throughout our own country, have taken from the orators of this day the usual topics of excitement and declamation. And, instead of lamenting that we are no longer engrossed with broils at home or desolations abroad, we should rejoice, that we have leisure once more, after the heat and blood of so many years, to visit the graves of our fathers, and refresh ourselves in the cool of their virtues. We have had novelties upon novelties long enough, and are willing now to renew our intimacy with our early history ; to examine, for a moment, the *peculiar growth of our nation and its character*, the *peculiar spirit of our revolution and our liberty*. Especially, as it appears more important on this occasion to point out the safeguards than the blessings of freedom, it may be well to recollect the founders of our nation. If the liberty they have left us be indeed costly and worth saving, their spirit and example may best tell us how to protect it.

In turning back to the origin of our nation, we see at once that there is nothing old here, but creation, and the character which our ancestors brought with them. It was not our fortune to go through a political infancy, share the wildness of the solitude around us, and see the landscape soften with the subduing of our own natures. Our characters are not natives here. We cannot point to monuments of an early age; to ruins, that have been darkening and crumbling for centuries, which might connect children with their forefathers, and make the present race mingle itself proudly with all the generations that are buried. Every thing seems new and fresh, as if we had made it ourselves; the heart and imagination find no home in our antiquities. We did not rise up slowly, in a land of our own, to greatness and refinement, purified by conflict, and retaining, in our milder and finished character, the grandeur and originality of a vigorous barbarism.

Our country exhibits a new order of things, a new growth of society. A race of intrepid adventurers, of persecuted puritans, had come for shelter, from the storms of liberty and religion in England, to this wilderness beyond the waters. They had been used to the arts and laws and refinements of Europe, and here you might see them mingling the improvements and pursuits of civilization, with the customs and expedients of a rude life. The same men were hunters and warriors, theologians and statesmen. Their habits, and the wild solitude around them, tended constantly to keep their orig-

inal character in full vigour, to swell their love of freedom, and make the religious feeling more deep and powerful. They were sustained by inward strength, and a spirit that was sure to be happy, so long as it was left free ; without caring that they were beyond the world's notice, or wishing that what passed for glory in luxurious nations, should take the place here of substantial comfort and independence of mind. They must indeed have felt that they had taken the start of every thing about them, but they were wise and practical enough to make the most of their condition ; and without thinking it worth their while to turn barbarians, for the sake of growing up a new and distinct race, they went on gloriously with their old feelings and character.

This is the old American character, of foreign growth indeed, and a strong one. But I trust that no man will think we offer a dangerous homage to England, when we long to see this character retained by us in full life, and spread over the whole land, at least till we are able to put it aside for a better. We need not speak of our ancestors as Englishmen, if we are not yet old enough in our sovereignty, to talk safely and proudly of English freedom and virtue : only let us feel the early character of our own countrymen. Though our nation be young, and its establishments recent, though it be unfurnished with the decayed grandeur or lumber of antiquity—we have still an old and honoured character to study and be proud of ; we are connected with the oldest supporters of enlightened freedom in Europe, and are accomplishing here

their great work of raising the nature and condition of man. We have long and proud remembrances to refresh and exalt us ; and the empires of a thousand years have not older *virtues* and *feelings* to glory in, than are recorded upon our brief annals.

We have every inducement, which can be found in national pride, or the security of our institutions, to cherish the remembrance of our fathers and study their example. On this day, however, it concerns us most, as guardians of our liberty, to mark the influence of their character and principles in the establishment of our independence.

But, while we extol the spirit that prevailed here during the revolution, we never mean to deny that weakness, depravity, and even violence were mingled with the better feelings and principles of our nature. We set our own nation by the side of others, that have been driven to resist oppression and establish independence, and it is then that we are proud of our country and of human nature.

The war of the revolution was peculiar in its spirit. It began in no calculations of mere worldly policy, of selfish revenge, or vulgar ambition. You did not see about you a set of greedy adventurers, who had nothing to lose by failure, and every thing to win by success ; nor of cold, long-sighted politicians, busy in their closets with the state of the world, the chances of foreign aid, the weakness of the enemy and our own strength. The statesmen of the revolution did not stop to determine the weight, so much as the injustice of their grievances, the *spirit* of oppression which their rulers manifested, and the power which oppression would slow-

ly gain by gentle and unresisted encroachments. They did not stop to reckon the amount of sacrifices they were to make, for they felt that no sacrifices could equal the privileges, which their rulers were putting in jeopardy. They were not compelled to practise arts upon the multitude, to kindle them into rebellion; for the case was a plain one, so that every man in the country could look into it and comprehend it; and there appeared on every side the spontaneous, untaught enthusiasm of a moral, high minded and injured people.

Their voice was heard over the waters. Their spirit found sympathy and favour with the purest statesmen of England, their own brethren. Good men looked with grief upon their wrongs, and with admiration upon the virtue and fearlessness of their resistance; for the hopes of enlightened, well-adjusted freedom, were resting mainly on the event of the controversy. England, which had struggled so many centuries, to clear her old liberty of feudal restraints, and of the encroachments of her own arrogant sovereigns, and which had so recently secured her rights at home, by asserting the very principles, which brought our fathers to this wilderness—England was now seen disputing with them, about their title to the same privileges; as if the ocean had drowned their birth-right, or as if breathing another air, or roaming a wilder region, had made them less worthy of the rights, for which they were content to die.

A war was approaching, for which the minds of our countrymen were slowly but immoveably made up. Let the blow be once struck, and there could

be no more talk of conciliation, no half-way compromise, no peace, that should come short of their utter sovereignty or slavery. They were not a crowd of hot-headed boys, who longed to turn their masters from school, that they might sit for a day or two in the places of power, laugh at subordination, grow wild with sudden freedom till they were tired of it, and return to their duty, after a little concession and wheedling promise. They were men of great soberness and forecast, who felt the awful responsibility of their condition, and approached it without fear, for they were in the straight road of duty and honour. They brought strong and determined feeling to the aid of high purposes and pure principle; and after all, there is no struggle so terrible and decisive, as that of firm and upright men, who look upon giving over the fight as a desertion of duty and faith.—The freedom they so eagerly sought after was calm and reasonable, fitted to their condition; such as raised the nature of man, and enabled him to be more useful, while it made him more happy. It had nothing to do with the licentiousness, which throws off all restraint from itself, but tramples on the rights of others. It was a steady, generous, moral freedom, which, without repressing enthusiasm and fervour, appealed more to men's sober convictions, and to their consciences; inspiring the purest hopes, and the coolest heroism.

Perhaps no other nation on earth could have safely received independence, in the fulness and suddenness with which it broke upon us. But we had been brought up to freedom, and knew how to enjoy it profitably. We were used to looking after



our own affairs, and providing in the wilderness for our own safety. The government we acknowledged was so distant, that we could drop our allegiance as easily as a burden ; and such were our habits, that we should only work the better for being rid of the incumbrance, instead of running into the madness of freedom, or wasting our vigour in noise and outrage. So that an example was here set, of an entire revolution brought about, without making a ruin of the state ; of the highest intellectual energy in steady and cautious operation, altering and repairing as it went along. We see statesmen and warriors fitting themselves to their condition, bearing with the weakness and caprice of the different sovereignties, into which the country was divided, and maintaining throughout a sound judgment and profitable common sense, in all the changes of affairs, and amidst all the variety of feeling and opinions of men about them.

A high purpose was ever before them, and they suffered neither joy nor despair to break their steady course towards it. The time was too solemn for exultation, and the cause too vast and sustaining to let the heart droop in disaster. Men, governed as they were by principle, and fighting for principle, struggling for another generation and even the whole world, rather than for themselves, must have been lifted far above the rashness or fears, which are the lot of selfish ambition. In victory or defeat, they seemed to feel equally their own might, and an unbroken assurance, that the result would one day turn out on the side of mankind and not of oppression. They could listen without despair to the testimony

of ages, how republics, one after another, had been swept off, amidst the shouts of strengthened despotism, and the groans of disheartened virtue ; as if every attempt to raise the character and importance of men, and give them room to glorify their whole nature, must needs come to derision ; as if God had indeed set kings over fallen man, to grind him in the dust till he was bright again. They looked far onward, with joy and assurance, to a fairer trial of freedom, in a new and magnificent region, by a young, vigorous and moral people, kindled with high and just hopes, and brought up in good principles, which had not yet lost their popularity.

I have spoken of the spirit of our revolution, and of the singular union, which was then displayed, of ardent love of freedom, with practical good sense, and a cool, sober estimate of the principles of human nature. The devotion of our fathers to liberty was entire, but without fanaticism or romance. Happy would it have been for us, had the temperate maxims, which they drew from wide experience and profound observation, retained their ascendancy.

But there were men here, good men too, who fell into strange dreams, about the destinies and influence of our country, instead of resting satisfied with our goodly land and large immunities, and leaving the nation to go along, its own way, to greatness and stability. A new system of liberty, fairer than had yet been seen, was to be framed here, under the eye of sound politicians and severe patriots ; and an example was to be set of a great people, after throwing off the restraints of an old government,

deliberately imposing upon themselves a new one, which should embody all the wisdom of former statesmen, and secure all the liberty, which men could safely enjoy in society. Now was the time for the world to take note, and awake to freedom. The dull forms of royalty, its costly parade and humbling courtesies, were to give place to the frugal simplicity and cheerful deference of a plain republicanism. There was something thin and yet glorious in these visions. They were grateful and exalting, and marked a noble nature, though they might not prove our knowledge of man, nor our carefulness of judgment. It seemed as if the warm, disinterested spirit, that breathed through all our land during the war, was now turned into a wide philanthropy. The heart was refreshed, that the tired despotisms of old were going off, with the rest of ancient corruptions and incumbrances—that man was now to rise, as if from sleep, with the vigour of youthfulness, and the wholesome remembrance of long injuries and abuses. There was to be no more oppression or excess, no waste of intellect in ministering to the pageantry of kingdoms, no chilling of the heart, in abject obedience to sovereigns by inheritance or divine right. Man was now to walk over the earth, as the garden that God had planted and given him ; and his nature was to begin a growth, that should quicken and thrive even to perfection.

Thank heaven, we had still left amongst us a race of calm, practical thinkers, who had not caught the infection of the times, nor lost that sober judgment and vigilance, which alone can effect reform.

and secure freedom. They were not cold-hearted, and indifferent to the true dignity of their race. They loved the glory of human nature, and held it as dear as any thunderer about the rights of man. But they knew very well, that society, as well as nature, must have its growth ; that violent reform, though it begin in just resistance and the purest feelings, is too apt to outrun calculation or control ; that those, who are most prompt in overturning, may be the very last to build with strength and proportion, and that no nation but our own had learnt the last of all lessons, how to be virtuous in revolution. They knew, that the mob might follow in the track of reform, and take upon them to cleanse a nation of corruption by washing it in blood, and end with leaving it fouler than ever. They might demolish the old walls of ornament or defence, hew down the cool and sheltering forests, level every green mound, and fill up every fen and ditch—and after all, they might only lay the land bare, to a scorching sun, and the wasting whirlwind.

Our old statesmen had formed a calm estimate of freedom, and of the duties and employments of men, who had taken upon themselves the work of reform and self-government. It made no part of the spirit, in which our independence was brought about, that freedom released men from serious labour and deliberation, or that we were fighting here in the expectation that the whole order of society was to be changed, and men become good and keep so, as a matter of course. Our revolution had been nothing more than the well-ordered, successful efforts of honest men, to secure rights which were as old as

society itself, however they might have been abused or persecuted. The nature of man was not thought to have altered here—it probably would not essentially alter. He would still retain his old passions, and need restraints, quite as much, perhaps, as he deserved liberty. He was indeed entitled to that freedom, which opened a wider field of usefulness, and gave him the assurance of his dignity and high destination. And this was already secured to him, by the establishment of our independence. We are not surprised, therefore, that the sober statesmen of our country were anxious to repress the visionary enthusiasm of liberty, which spread so widely amongst us soon after the peace, and especially upon the breaking out of the revolution in France. They felt, that it was best for us to stay at home, and regard our independence in its domestic bearings, and secure all its blessings, instead of turning politicians of the human race, and longing for the emancipation of kingdoms, where submission had become so worn into the very natures of men, that sudden liberty might be death.

The French revolution itself, which was hailed by thousands of honest freemen as another era of liberty, went in full justification of all the alarms of our old statesmen, and shewed that freedom may have its mischiefs and illusions, and that none but a calm, moral and enlightened nation can bear to be free. It broke out in an age of refinement, of political wisdom, and pretended to proceed upon a just estimate of the character and rights of men. It followed hard upon our own deliberate struggle for wholesome liberty, and was thought by many to go

along in our almost bloodless footsteps. And yet it led as directly to despotism, as if a despot himself had been its conductor. At first, we could hear of nothing but the charms of liberty, the fair morning of the world, the glorious level, on which we were all to stand, since freedom, like death, had promised to bring us all together at last. You would have thought that life, and all its sober cares and concerns, were turned to playthings, and the men of this world to children, and that we were to go along to the grave, prattling about liberty and equality and the rights of man. We certainly see in this but little of the spirit of our own revolution, and the contrast will hold good throughout. The French republicans began with throwing out their awakened strength in mere violence, with the wasteful activity of delirium, and ended by yielding their strength, with the obedience of machinery, to the direction of over-reaching masters. They sent forth constitutions of liberty so thickly, that their chamber of legislation, might have been taken for a great political ware-house, to which every nation was cordially invited to come, and provide itself with a government for nothing—and after all, they were mere spendthrifts of freedom, and the usurper was at hand, to take into keeping the rights they were so ready to part withal. Now, they were drunk with their liberty, and warm with the blood of their rightful sovereign—and a little after, they walked joyously at the foot of a throne of violence, prating about philosophy, and the glories of a military despotism.

We are not to wonder then, that the statesmen of our revolution, with all their love of well-ordered liberty, should have warned us so often and so feelingly of our perils. They loved the generous freedom and glorious institutions of their own country so well, that they were unmindful how far they risked their popularity, in telling us of our dangers and duties.

The time has been, when our excitement on this occasion came wholly from our calamities and those of Europe. But the world is now almost still again. Thrones have been set upon their old foundations. Kings have returned home from exile, to spend their old age with their own people. The spirit and vigour of men are running in wonted channels, and the principles, which once lay at the bottom of society, are slowly regaining their place, and spreading their wholesome influences.—This is the time for us to gather round the institutions of our country, with pride and gratitude, for they have weathered the hardest storms, and sheltered us, when other nations were naked and friendless within the grasp of a merciless despotism. Our country has always been faithful to us, and will yet bless us, so long as we are faithful to her. We are still free and tranquil; and there will be no bounds to our growth and importance, while we remain moral and enlightened, with fields to plough up and oceans to traverse.—We are to remember that there is a great experiment of freedom, still going on in this country. It is committed to our care, and we must keep in mind, that not only the generations which follow

us, but the whole world, have an interest in the result.—It should never be accounted the glory of a country like this, that we can safely amuse ourselves every day, with pulling down and building up political fabrics, changing our whole policy, and speculating upon disunion, as lightly as we should upon the idlest theory. If we want a permanent character and long life, we must have a steady policy, and act as if we were indeed to live, as if all that is done in our day were to reach and affect all who are to come after us.

If our nation would be awful and majestic in its character, it must have feelings that have grown old in the heart, institutions that have gathered strength and honour from endurance. It must shrink from sudden changes, as it would from parting with virtue. We must “approach to the faults of the state, as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude,” not to mangle and destroy, but to heal and restore. We must have objects of universal interest, which shall bring men together in feeling, when they divide on every thing else, inspire all with noble generosity and forbearance towards each other, and make them serene and thoughtful, when adventurers are disturbing the foundations of society.

When we look back upon the earlier history of our country, we should associate our continued happiness with what is settled and venerable; learn the value and soundness of our institutions, from their having blessed us so long; grow more and more fond of good examples, because they have



been the glory and defence of the land; and feel that the oldest blessings are not immortal, but need our solicitude and care in the quietest seasons. We must set so high a value upon our privileges, as to regard commotions and revolutions as the last of evils, not as giving a healthy play-time to our passions, and a generous violence to our sluggish natures. If called into novel circumstances or threatening tumults, we must go in the armour of our experience and principles, looking for guides and restraints rather than excitement; striving for restoration and stability, rather than overthrow, and returning to our former state, our quiet homes, to enjoy them more than ever.

To-day we are celebrating our independence, in the midst of the blessings it has poured upon the land. We have had leisure to call up virtues and remembrances that have slept too long—to think of that age, which forms the main glory of our short history, and as bright as the world can unfold,—the age of WASHINGTON. We are honoured with the presence of men, who were witnesses of his virtues, and his companions in the glorious work of establishing our sovereignty. We are honoured with the presence of the Chief Magistrate of the Union. He has been called to discharge the most important functions, to protect the most valued interests of the country he helped to make free. He will perceive with pleasure, that the free spirit of our institutions is consistent with that respect for authority, to which government must owe its security, and the laws their power. He will perceive that

there is no division of opinion, as to the duty of receiving with respect the Chief Magistrate of the Union, the representative of this great nation. We wish him the rare glory and felicity of uniting the hearts of a free people ; of illustrating and establishing those enlarged, impartial views of administration, which can alone bind together and bless this wide country, and under which we shall gain worthy conquests by extended husbandry and commerce, and obtain new glory by the developement of mind, the achievements of genius, by the arts which embellish, and the virtues which exalt society.

# ADDRESS

## *TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,*

Delivered, in behalf of the Town of Boston, on his arrival at the Exchange Coffee-House, July 2, 1817, and annexed by direction of the Committee of Arrangements.

---

SIR,

THE Citizens of Boston, by their Committee appointed for that purpose, beg leave to offer you their cordial and respectful salutations upon your arrival in this metropolis.

The visit with which you are pleased to honour them, recalls to the recollection of many their interview with your illustrious predecessor, the Father of his Country, on a similar occasion. They remember with great satisfaction, the hope, the confidence, and the fond anticipation of national prosperity which his presence inspired; and it is now, Sir, a subject of congratulation to you and to themselves, that, after thirty years of eventful experiment, during conflicts and revolutions in the old world, which have threatened all, and subverted many of its ancient governments, the Constitution which was adopted under the auspices of that great man, has acquired vigour and maturity, and that in a season of profound peace his successor is permitted, by the prosperous state of public affairs, to follow his example, in visiting the extensive country over which he has recently been called to preside.

While this journey affords to many of your fellow-citizens the opportunity and advantage of commencing with you a personal acquaintance, which is always desirable between a people and their rulers, they rejoice at the same time in the belief, that the local information relative to the great and various interests of the United States, which you will derive from actual observation, will facilitate your arrangements for their defence and security; and enable you to apply in practice, with additional confidence, and success, those principles of an elevated and impartial policy, which you have been pleased to promulgate as the basis of your intended administration.

Called to the service of your Country at an early period of life, and distinguished in the arduous struggle which obtained its independence, your subsequent occupations in successive important offices and various departments, at home and abroad, have afforded you the means of becoming conversant with the foreign and domestic relations of the nation; and with these qualifications you are now raised to the highest dignity which can be conferred by a free people.

These public claims to consideration and attention, from all descriptions of your fellow-citizens, are cheerfully admitted by the citizens of Boston; who are also desirous of evincing their respect for the unblemished tenor of your private character, and their sense of the urbanity and hospitality which peculiarly characterized your deportment towards all those of your Countrymen, who, during the period of your foreign embassies, were so fortunate as to come within the sphere of your civilities and protection.

It is therefore with real satisfaction, that they receive you within the precincts of Boston; and they pray you to be assured of their earnest solicitude to contribute by all the means at their command, to your comfort and enjoyment during your residence in this town.

They also, confiding in the rectitude of your intentions, and trusting that the powers vested in you by the constitution, will be exercised with a sincere regard to the welfare of the people, whose precious interests are committed to your charge, avail themselves of this occasion, to express their ardent hope, that the favourable circumstances which attend the commencement, may with the blessing of heaven, under your guidance, concur to promote the advancement of our beloved country, to the highest possible condition of prosperity.

With these sentiments, they unite their best wishes for your health and happiness: and that the course and close of your administration may entitle you to the gratitude and affections of your constituents, and the respect of posterity.

*By order of the Committee,*

CHARLES BULFINCH, *Chairman.*

## PRESIDENT'S ANSWER.

---

FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE kind reception which you have given me, on the part of the Citizens of Boston, and which their conduct has so fully confirmed, has made a deep and lasting impression on my mind, which you will have the goodness to communicate to them.

As no person is more willing than I am, in the discharge of my duty, according to the fair exercise of my judgment, to take example from the conduct of the distinguished men who have preceded me in this high trust, it is particularly gratifying to me, to have recalled, by this incident, to the memory of many who are now present, a like visit from the illustrious commander of our revolutionary army; who, by many other important services, had so just a claim to the revered title of father of his country. It was natural, that the presence of a citizen, so respected and beloved, who had so eminently contributed to the establishment of this government, and to whom its administration in the commencement, had been committed, should inspire an enlightened, a virtuous and free people, with unlimited confidence in its success; and it is a cause of general felicitation and joy to us all, to find that thirty years successful experiment, have justified that confidence and realized our most sanguine hopes in its favour. Yes, fellow citizens, we instituted a government for the benefit of all: a government which should secure to us the full enjoyment of all our rights, religious and civil; and it has been so administered.— Let us, then, unite in grateful acknowledgements to the Supreme Author of all good, for extending to us so great a blessing. Let us unite in fervent prayers, that He will be graciously pleased to continue that blessing to us, and our latest posterity.

I accepted the trust, to which I have been called by my fellow citizens, with diffidence, because I well know the frailty of hu-

man nature, and had often experienced my own deficiencies. I undertook this tour, with a view, and in the hope of acquiring knowledge, which might enable me to discharge my various and important duties, with greater advantage to my country. to which my whole mind, and unwearied efforts shall always be directed. In pursuing objects so dear to us all. I rely with confidence on the firm and generous support of my fellow citizens. throughout our happy union.

JAMES MONROE.

\*\*\*\*\*