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Fay, Samuel Phillips Prescott, 1778-1856.

An Oration, Delivered at Concord.

Cambridge, Hilliard, 1801. 20 pp.

MWA copy.



MR. F A Y's

Oration.



AN
French
Oration,

DELIVERED AT

C O N C O R D,

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4th, 1801.

BY SAMUEL P. P. FAY.

*“ La liberté n'est pas dans aucun forme de
gouvernement ; elle est dans le cœur de
l'homme libre.”* ROUSSEAU. EMILI.



PRINTED BY WILLIAM HILLIARD.

1801.

AT a meeting of a number of the Citizens of the town of Concord, Voted, That Messrs. EPHRAIM WOOD, JOHN WHITE, THOMAS HEALD, ABIEL HEYWOOD, and JOHN RICHARDSON, be a Committee to wait on Mr. SAMUEL P. P. FAY, and thank him for his truly ingenious and pertinent Oration, delivered to a respectable audience in the Meeting-house in Concord, on the 4th July 1801 ; and likewise to request a copy for the press.

GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE,

HAVING written the following pages under circumstances unfavourable to the display of even the small abilities I possess. I had determined not to submit them to the press. Your request is however, flattering ; and alas, my vanity is more eloquent than my judgment !—The manuscript is at your service.

With the proper sentiments,

I am, Gentlemen, yours, &c.

S. P. P. FAY,

EPHRAIM WOOD, Esq.
Mr. JOHN WHITE,
THOMAS HEALD Esq.
ABIEL HEYWOOD, Esq.
Mr. JOHN RICHARDSON. } Committee.

AN
ORATION.

CITIZENS,

THIS day closes the twenty-fifth year since the declaration of American Independence. We are assembled to celebrate the anniversary of that august act, which gave us freedom, and a rank among sovereign and independent nations. This occasion, so deeply interesting to freemen, furnishes equal cause of gratitude, serious reflection, and unreserved joy.

ON this short festival, agriculture shall suspend its labours, commerce shall resign its cares, and the meaner considerations of private interest, and party heat shall repose under the broad shade of liberty and peace.

IF there be any man among us, whose groveling spirit aspires not to the privileges of freemen; who is willing to renounce the rights he received from the impartial hand of nature, and bend his neck to the yoke of an hereditary master; let him go hence; let him shut his ears to the voice of joy and exultation, that this day echoes through our land. To that man this must be an hour of melancholy and chagrin! He will remember, that this jubilee is sacred to him, whose blood frolics at the name of liberty;

who feels adequate to the office of thinking and acting for himself; whose bosom swells with honest pride at the glorious achievements of his fore-fathers: and who will expose his life in defence of the rights they have transmitted him. Let such pour out their hearts in devout thankfulness to the Parent of all good: let them remember the immediate authors of their happiness with gratitude, and rejoice in possession of the blessing. We will, for a few moments, cease troubling ourselves with those imaginary evils that exist only in the prolific brains of ignorant or designing politicians, to congratulate ourselves on the real benefits we enjoy. The discordant tones of civil dissension shall not be permitted to interrupt the harmony of the scene, and the green-eyed monster, faction, shall sleep undisturbed on this annual union of sentiment and joy.

THE part which has been assigned to me in the rites of this sacred anniversary, is conspicuous and honourable. Invited by a number of respected fellow-citizens to the discharge of this office, pride, gratitude, and duty forbid my declining the attempt. Should I have the good fortune to contribute to the pleasure or utility of this commemoration every wish will be attained. I shall not trouble the audience with apologies for my want of abilities, or with solicitations for their candor. I disdain the contemptible hypocrisy of the first, and the last would imply an insult on those feelings which ought to characterize this occasion. In awakening the dignified and patriotic feelings of other times, I will endeavour to be useful; and I shall utter my sentiments with that honesty and freedom, which becomes a republican.

WE are not now to perplex ourselves with the political controversies of 1801; the events of 1776 furnish a more noble, useful, and interesting subject. It will be our duty to sketch the history of liberty; to turn our recollection to the origin of our glorious revolution; to pay our tribute of gratitude and applause to the brave and patriotic actors, who graced that august scene; and to congratulate ourselves on the fortunate issue. We are to con-

template the new duties and relations we assumed with independence ; we shall examine the republican character, and remark the errors and dangers that lie in ambush for our happiness.

IN the accomplishment of man, liberty, like the Promethean fire, was necessary to give activity to the human mind, and a moral qualification to human actions. Political liberty, of which we now speak, has had, from the early ages to the present time, the most romantic and interesting vicissitudes of fortune. In Greece and Rome, for some centuries, her reign was auspicious, and her character supported with more dignity and splendor, than at any other period in the annals of civilized man. Under her influence all the great and ennobling virtues there flourished in their highest luxuriance. There shone, with unobscured lustre, that simplicity of manners, that invincible integrity, that hardihood of character, and that heroic courage, which are still the admiration of degenerate posterity.

FOR more than eighteen hundred years, the greater part of the civilized world has been enveloped in a continued night of despotism ; while liberty, like the moon, has but occasionally glimmered on man through the transient opening of the cloud ; or, like the midnight flash of lightning, has only made his situation more dreadful, by sometimes rendering it visible ! In most countries of Europe, the fetters of slavery seemed fast rivetted on the human race. Liberty was a persecuted vagrant, and scarce found a spot, that could yield security or repose. She occupied but few places, and her influence was feeble. The small republics of Italy she held by a precarious tenure, and in the United Provinces of the Netherlands, she enjoyed but a divided dominion. Her most valued asylum was chosen in the impregnable mountains of Switzerland. It was to be expected, that, on the ice-bound tops of the glaciers, her hardy sons would find undisturbed tranquility and freedom ; that their simplicity, their poverty, and their mountains could have offered no temptations to the lustful

eye of avarice, or the distempered appetite of ambition. But "Alps on Alps" oppose no effectual obstacles to those scourges of human happiness!

DISSATISFIED with her narrow possessions in Europe, liberty sought a retreat in the new world, from the corruptions and miseries of the old. This country, from the ruggedness of its soil, and its remoteness from the intrigues and vices of courts, seemed equally propitious to rearing a brave and spirited race of men, as to the culture of the republican virtues. Animated with the souls of freemen, and disgusted at the political and religious intolerance of their native countries, our forefathers here sought liberty and peace. Thus was a new empire peopled, and such the origin of the destined assertors of freedom.

GREAT BRITAIN, (who claimed this country as her right, with no other reason, than that she had seen it,) when she saw our youthful colonies thriving and prosperous, treated us with kindness and attention. While we were yet young; while too weak for resistance, and too tender for oppression, she established a dominion over us, to which her only title was her power. Lest we might be unable to govern ourselves, she generously supplied us with magistrates of her own appointment. She even permitted us the liberty of fighting our own battles with the Indians; and the honour of aiding her in the conquest of Canada from the French. But her kindness carried her a step too far, when she undertook to save us some trouble, by taxing us without our concurrence! Then her politeness became officiousness, and her goodness a grievance. Neither her rights, or our obligations, were a sufficient authority for a submission to that illegal measure; and pretence wore too thin a veil to cheat the eagle-eye of Americans, jealous of their rights and their liberties. But Britain had too little delicacy to disown her real designs because they were detected; and henceforward our chains were prepared without disguise. We felt the injury, but we sought our remedy in the mild methods of petition and memorial. In vain were we told that we were Brit-

ish subjects, and blessed in the enjoyment of British liberty ; that liberty was seen to be a thing of "shreds and patches," and Americans found but a poor shelter under its mantle.

GREAT BRITAIN from a series of successes in war, and an unparalleled extent of commerce, had become rich, powerful, luxurious and corrupt. She had attained a degree of corpulence little short of disease. She became careless of her duty towards her children, and arrogant in her pretensions towards all. Too illiberal to allow us any merit, too proud to make herself acquainted with our spirit and resources, too unjust to listen to our complaints or apply the remedy, she cancelled all obligations by her oppression and contempt. Her language was that of power and arrogance ; that of her colonies conciliatory and respectful. We sought not a separation from her government, we wished only the redress of certain grievances, and the equal privileges of English subjects. We would have flown into her arms, but she turned from us with disdain ! She was deaf to our remonstrances and blind to her own interest. Thanks to her impolitic counsels, thanks to her headstrong measures, they gave us our freedom !

YES, the ties of affection were broken, the bonds of filial duty were loosed, and the child stood on equal grounds with the parent. America now felt herself able to walk without leading-strings, and she resolved to free herself from their constraint. We did not want a pretext—Hostilities had begun the bloody business of war, and the moment of reconciliation was past. The empurpled fields of Lexington, Concord and Charlestown, dissolved the charm that held us in suspense ; affixed the bloody seal to the instrument of our separation ; and gave to resistance, unanimity and effect. At this moment, to waver was to submit ;—to submit was to become slaves. No doubtful "cast of thought then sicklied o'er the healthful face of resolution ;" all was energy and action. The fate of freedom was now to be determined. Arbitrary power was grasping at universal dominion, and the destruction of those rights, which are the birth-right of all, was the object of her efforts. Liberty seemed already to

have yielded her last struggle, and the tomb to have closed over her forever. But guided by reason, the genius of America, "like the resurrection angel, rolled back the stone from the sepulchre, loosed the cerements of slavery," and the celestial form of liberty rose on the enraptured eye of Americans. From her countenance beamed beneficence and love, and she was hailed with affection and joy. The people, governed by the same impulse, flocked to her standard, and solemnly pledged themselves to each other and to the world in her support. At her altar, they devoted their lives and fortunes to her service, and challenged death or victory in her defence. The moment of action was arrived, and to act with effect required the collected spirit, the united exertions of all.

THE conduct of our patriots was dignified and firm. They spoke in the manly and impressive tones of injured right and determined resentment; while conscious rectitude gave strength to the voice of honest indignation. Fired with the same sentiment, they rose with all the sublimity of soul, and solemnity of manner, inspired by the great resolve, the glorious act they were about to execute. The destiny of the American people was now to be sealed; the great question, between liberty and slavery, to be finally determined. This country had sought reparation for her violated rights by every peaceful method.— In vain; her complaints were not to be listened to by a corrupt judge bribed on the other side by interest! No; America was necessitated to do herself justice; she was driven into the high court of national appeal; her cause was to be tried in the face of the world; her points to be argued in the conclusive logic of iron and gun-powder; and the decision to rest with the Judge of Heaven.

IN the presence of all nations, the United States abjured their allegiance to the crown of England, and declared themselves a free, sovereign and independent state. Recoiling Britain paused in amazement at the boldness of the design, and at the steadiness and unanimity with which it was pursued. Surrounding nations were struck with equal astonishment at the daring spirit of the attempt, and

admiration at its unexpected success. That these United Provinces, without an organized government, without money, without discipline, and almost without arms, should be able to resist the power of Imperial Britain, commanding an irresistible navy, veteran troops, and an exhaustless treasury, was a political paradox not to be explained by the distorted and ill-founded maxims of European statesmen. No, it was impossible that any should calculate our resources, but those, who had felt the sacred fire of liberty; who had witnessed the heroic actions performed by freemen, fighting for the security of their rights. Britain confided in her gold, her mercenary armies and well-stored magazines — America trusted in the valor and perseverance of her sons, in the justice of her cause, and in the favor of the God of battles.

THE 4th of July, '76, when a new empire struggled into life, was a day of anxiety and dismay. On one side, the English Herod sought the destruction of our infant state, with all the violence of power, armed with all the machinery of death. On the other, the intrepid votaries of freedom opposed their bosoms in its defence, with all the magnanimity of resolution and despair.

MANY, now present, will remember with a sigh, the emotions and sufferings of that hour. To paint them with truth and feeling is above my powers. The distress of a mother, rendered childless by the barbarous hand of war, and in helpless age mourning the lost solace and support of filial kindness:—The agony of the wife, while she sees the partner of her joys binding on the long disused implements of death, and quitting the loved scenes of domestic life, to seek a hapless fate on the blood-stained fields of battle:—The shrieks of the fond maid, whose ardent hopes of happiness expired in the last embrace of her departing lover: these are subjects, that require the pencil of a master. Here imagination reaches not the colouring of reality, and description falters at the threshold of its theme!

AFTER the continued bloodshed, sufferings and horrors of seven years of war, victory declared for liberty and America. This joyful and glorious event justified our hopes,

and repaid all our sacrifices and toils. Peace, like the freshened sun from the ocean, once more shed its cheerful beams on our shores, and gave auspicious promise of a new and happier day. From the ravages of war our country presented a most affecting picture of devastation and ruin. But although destitute and naked, we were free, and could repair our losses! British vengeance, like the burning lava of a volcano, had poured destruction on our people, and desolation over our land; but like that, it was only to render our labours more productive, to give a new fertility to our soil, and increased luxuriance to the flowers, that again bloomed in our fields.*

It is time to pay our tribute to those patriotic heroes and statesmen, who in this struggle, so nobly devoted their lives and talents to the necessities of their country. Did our limits permit a particular eulogy on the merits of each, it would be unnecessary. Their names and services are fresh in the recollection of all. Their actions are the highest panegyric on their characters, and an everlasting monument to their fame. One only will I mention, and to mention will be sufficient. The pages of history already emblazon his deeds; and the admiration of the world is the unequivocal evidence of his greatness. Trenton, Princeton, York, and Monmouth are the indelible records of his valour; but his virtues and services, are written in the glowing characters of gratitude on the hearts of his countrymen. He is now a saint—He has quitted this earth, and a nation has wept at his departure. All doubtless anticipate me. Shall I say more? He was our political saviour, our father:—His name—WASHINGTON!

In our labours for independence, we were not without assistance from foreign states and foreign individuals. Of the latter, it would be ungrateful not to mention those two illustrious volunteers in the cause of liberty, Fayette and Kosciusko. Their services here, and their sufferings in Europe will be ever remembered by Americans with a tear of gratitude and sympathy.

* It is a well known fact, that those places which have been deluged by volcanic eruptions, have gained a fertility of soil, much exceeding what they originally possessed.

FROM certain nations we also received important aid and support. At the time, filled with sincere and generous gratitude, we disdained to question the motives of that assistance, which relieved us in a moment of distress. But time and reflection have placed the nature and degree of our obligations in a more just light; and we have ample reason to conclude, that, at this day, all favors from foreign states are repaid. Such as we still feel, we will not hesitate to acknowledge. For our independence, we owe thanks to the injustice and folly of Great Britain; we owe thanks to the ambition of France, and her enmity to England; we owe thanks to Holland for her money and good will; and lastly, thanks to God, that all other obligations are cancelled. America, then, at this hour, is truly and unconditionally free!

WHEN our states were acknowledged sovereign and independent by the courts of Europe, *the recording angel of heaven enrolled a new name in the list of nations.* Happily for us, the Architect of the world, separated our country, by three thousand miles of ocean, from the complicated intrigues and politics of the eastern continent. Thus situated, it is in our power to baffle their influence, elude their designs, and preserve our neutrality and independence. Our foreign relations have been a subject of political difference: but the interests of a distant republic, that is fully competent to its own protection, appear very plain; and the principles which ought to dictate her conduct towards other governments, very simple. Treaties, whether of alliance or commerce, can have no other object, than political advantage. Those for the regulation of commerce are perhaps necessary; but treaties of alliance, founded on friendship, are but toils, spread to ensnare our peace and freedom. To talk of friendship among nations is absurd. It is a word not to be found in the catalogue of national passions, and we might as well talk of national love, or national matrimony. It never did or ever can exist, except in the splendid theories of visionary enthusiasts, or in the fanciful construction of a political romance. The policies of different nations are so various and fluct-

uating, and the violations of national engagements so frequent, one is ready to conclude, that leagues and conventions are the mere play-things of sovereigns, of which the sole object is to shew their dexterity, and amuse their admiring subjects;—that their promises in these covenants, like the polite language of a man of fashion, mean—nothing. We hope America may never be “entangled in alliances” with any nation. With a monarchy, such a connexion would be unnatural and absurd; and with a government founded on principles similar to our own, unnecessary. No; Americans, the best security for the justice, respect, and good faith of foreign states, is an “equal conduct to all,” a fervile complaisance and concession to none; union among ourselves and a constant preparation for war. Our well-mounted batteries, our brave seamen, and intrepid militia, will ever be found of more importance to our safety, than a thousand treaties.

FROM the moment our independence was declared, we were no longer to be British, French, German, or Irish; we were to become Americans. We were to assume a national character, as peculiar and distinct as our constitution and sovereignty. We have been the subjects of a king, we are now the sovereign people. We have become the citizens of a new government, and have incurred new duties and relations. We have framed for ourselves a constitution on the just and eternal basis of reason, liberty and equal rights. A man here knows no restraint, but that of law; and law is here no other than reason, acting under the authoritative sanction of government. The spirit of man is now free, the shackles which confined him are broken, and his faculties are once more allowed to expand in the broad luxuriance of native liberty. The human character is unveiled, and the philosophic painter may now pourtray its features with accuracy and truth. Man is again his own master, the uncontrolled governor of his own actions, and it is now to be seen, of what he is, as well as of what he is not capable. The great question is at length to be decided, whether man can support a government, whose fundamental principles are liberty and equality; or, whether

he be constitutionally a slave ; whether he must, as the last sad alternative, seek a sanctuary from the turbulence and obliquities of his nature, in the fearful temple of despotism.

THE love of liberty is one of the strongest affections of the human breast, and yet in the world there is scarcely a free people. This is a truth at which the mind recoils, and whose solution cannot fail to degrade the human character. The few popular forms of government, that have yet appeared have had, comparatively, but a short duration. Without an exception, the civilized nations of the world have ever been unable long to maintain sufficient knowledge and virtue to perceive their interests and to pursue them. The history of states is but a continued tissue of human greatness and human folly ; and, since the disaster of our first parents, mankind seem ever to have needed a guardian ! Monarchical government, by taking all exercise of sovereignty from the people, favours that natural indolence in men, which has so often induced them to relinquish those advantages they could not preserve without labour and attention. Thus have they purchased the indulgence of their passions at the expence of their rights and liberties. Thus they have sold their best privileges to kings, to buy a precarious and destructive protection for the remainder !

NOTWITHSTANDING these discouraging reflections, this country has made one more effort to rescue the human character from disgrace, by uniting in the support of a free and rational constitution. We are now making a last experiment, and, with the experience of three thousand years to direct us, if we fail, the friends of humanity must despair. Liberty sees the last act of her drama ; if she finds America without spirit to protect her, she must return to her mansion in heaven, till returning chaos announces the dissolution of the universe, and the promised regeneration of man.

OURS is unquestionably a government of the people's choice ; but to choose is not enough. Let us not