

ORATION

PRONOUNCED AT LITTLETON

JULY 4, 1805 ;

THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF

American Independence.

BY EDMUND FOSTER, A. M.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT LITTLETON.

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AN ORATION.

TO celebrate, annually, any remarkable deliverance ; the conquest over an enemy ; or the triumph of political principle is conformable to the customs of most civilized nations. On these subjects orators and poets have been equally emulous in displaying their talents. They have recorded important events, embellished the history of them, and rendered the heroes and statesmen of their times immortal. Their example is worthy of notice, and is imitated by the sons of Columbia. Causes, which involve the liberties and lives of a people must deeply interest them ; and when successfully terminated will forever be recollected with pleasing sensations. To private reflections on the dangers they have escaped, and the blessings they have secured, they will join a more public celebration of these events, that they may be proclaimed in the audience of all the people. By such public exercises, a knowledge of our country may be diffused among all classes of

its citizens. While the most experienced in the history of this nation will only feel their recollection assisted, and their memories refreshed, their children will be newly taught the valor and patriotism of their worthy ancestors ; will catch the spirit of liberty, and become ambitious to maintain and improve the blessings, purchased by their fathers.

Liberty ought to be valued in proportion to the hazard and the price by which it was first obtained. Estimating it by this rule, who can prize it higher, or who will guard it with more jealousy, than the people of America ? To them it is the price of labor and suffering, of treasure and of blood. While contesting the claims of our mother country, and struggling in defence of our just and unalienable rights, we were poor and yet oppressed. Our weakness and poverty, which ought ever to excite compassion and forbearance in the breast of a generous enemy, served only to invite insult and injury, and to inspire the invaders with full confidence of success.

Recollection will place in the view of many the lengthy struggle, the unparalleled dangers and hardships to which the Americans submitted in defence of their civil liberties ; and a brief history of them must give to all an exalted idea of the spirit and fortitude of the American people. The weak were provoke^d and urged to contend with the strong ; the undisciplined soldier with the skilful warrior. Yea, when destitute of resources within ourselves, and without a friend or ally abroad, we

were attacked by a nation, which had made all Europe tremble and yield to her power. Their oppressions filled us with indignation and zeal against them. The voice of liberty inspired us with enthusiasm and boldness in its defence. Conquer or die was the order of the day. A people thus wrought up in their minds cannot be subdued; and our successes were owing more to the spirit and feelings of the times, than to any other individual cause. A sense of common danger; a mutual care and concern for each others' safety and happiness form a stronger bond of union than can ever be experienced from the best code of civil laws where the people's views and affections are divided, and their passions are at war.

The effects of these fellow feelings, and the security they afford to property and to life, were realized by all, who witnessed the American Revolution. Then we had order without law; security without courts of civil justice; and credit without cash. If we had not found the philosopher's stone, which is said to convert all other substances into gold, we could turn our rags into money as fast as it was needed; and if this measure proved injurious in the end, it was of great temporary use and importance. If it ruined many individuals, it saved a nation. The measure was dictated by necessity; and it exalted the genius of America, by shewing, that it was ready at invention and equal to any difficulty which stood opposed to her cause. Press a nation hard and it will brighten its genius and sharp-

en its mental powers. Insult it, and its resentment will kindle into a flame. Oppress it, and it will arm in its own defence and brave the greatest dangers.

When the energies of a people are called forth and directed to a point, they will devise the best possible means for their own safety; and execute their plans to the admiration and astonishment of every beholder.

The rise and progress of the American war will verify these remarks. Then we looked to our wisest and best men for counsel, and placed our young men in the field. Wisdom and prudence characterized the one; fortitude and resolution the other. Exercise improved our councils and increased our martial vigour and alertness; till success turned in our favour, and the tumults and distresses of war gave way to the reign of peace. This little, oppressed band of Americans was crowned with laurel, and stood forth a spectacle to the whole world of man. They taught the tyrants of the earth how dangerous and fruitless it was to attempt to enslave a nation determined to be free. They had gained the victory. They held the prize of liberty in their hands; and it remained for them to provide a deposite for its safe keeping, that they and their children might enjoy it forever.

Liberty may be gained by the sword; but it must be preserved by law. Civil regulations are the sacred inclosure which must guard it from being encroached upon by the ambitious and powerful, or polluted by the violence of the wicked.

Our government was now to be of ourselves, and our rulers to proceed from among the people. To organize the body politic, and fit it to perform its various functions was a labour, which required great talents and virtue. But who should perform this needful and important public service? Might an individual, or any particular number of men assume the exclusive right to dictate and give laws to all the rest? Or ought the men to be appointed and empowered by the whole body of the people? This is the true point from which we should take our ideas of liberty and equality. The people then possessed an equality of rights, and were called by motives of duty and interest to provide laws for their own safety and happiness. No superiority, in this respect, was then either claimed or acknowledged by any, but what was founded in talents and virtue. Such superiority ever has and ever will exist and become visible in all communities of men. But this superiority is natural rather than political.

Power and right are distinct things. However well qualified a man may be by nature and acquirements, to be placed at the head, and to direct the concerns of a people, yet he can become their legitimate ruler only by their consent and suffrages. This was, unquestionably, the prevailing sentiment in America at the close of her revolution.

Notwithstanding some have endeavoured to ridicule and explode the principle as unfounded and dangerous, it is correct to say, that the power to originate government and laws was then inherent in

the people. If not, where and with whom did it reside? Government must proceed from some point; and from what source can it proceed with equal justice and safety, as from those for whose mutual advantage it is instituted? This doctrine early obtained universal consent in the American nation; and the practice of our wisest and best men sanctioned the theory. No one thought or presumed to make himself dictator. The public mind would have revolted at the idea; it would have been alarmed at the first attempt, and quickly have frustrated the ambitious and wicked design.

If any had acquired a weight of character and influence sufficient to encourage such an attempt, it was the man, who had led on our armies to victory, and with whose character and public services the people were enamoured to excess. Yet WASHINGTON, to his immortal honor, having accomplished the end of his military appointment, in the most handsome and engaging manner, resigned his commission into the hands, which gave it, and retired to the rank and life of a private citizen. He was in the number of those, who respected and supported the rights of the people; and he never after appeared in any public or official capacity until called by their suffrage.

Interesting and important was the duty resting on those who were first appointed to devise and settle a form of civil government. To lay a safe and permanent foundation, and give dimensions and proportion to the political fabric, required great wis-

dom and circumspection. For the manners and habits, the private comfort of individuals, the public peace and prosperity of a people, depend much on their civil regulations ; and not only their own interest and happiness, but the destiny of millions was involved in the work. In consulting the general interest they had the wisdom and experience of ages before them. The various forms of government, which had ever been devised and put in operation presented themselves to their consideration. They wisely gave a decided preference to a republican form. While it is not without its defects, it is, on the whole, more congenial to the feelings, and better suited to the nature and happiness of man, than any other. It merits our esteem and preference from a variety of considerations. It secures to us the possession and enjoyment of civil liberty ; guards us against oppression ; affords the easy and certain means of obtaining a redress of any grievances to which we may occasionally be subjected ; encourages industry by the hope of honest reward ; gives scope to enterprize ; is friendly to the arts and sciences ; leads to free enquiry ; excites in all a generous emulation to excel in useful knowledge, and to recommend themselves to public notice and favour. These are advantages which never can be equally enjoyed under a monarchical or aristocratical form of government.

As civil liberty is uncircumscribed by laws, and may be enlarged or abridged, as they shall vary, it may be equally enjoyed, for a time, under any form of

government ; but cannot be equally secured to the people.

A law is just the same in its nature and operation whether it be made by one man, by a select number, or by all the people in general convention. But should a despot give a law, friendly to the liberty and happiness of his subjects, where is their security for its continuance? They are entirely dependant on his arbitrary will for all their civil blessings ; and when he changes his measures and oppresses them they can have no remedy against the evil. They must ever be the sport of his passions and the victims of his resentment and revenge. In all monarchies, whether simple or mixed, where an undue proportion of power is vested in the king and his nobility, the people of the realm are exposed to similar evils and sufferings. By looking over the nations where such governments are established, and noticing the conduct of those in power, and the condition of the people, we find ourselves presented with a disgusting spectacle. If admiration is excited, ambition raised, and the senses of the spectator gratified at viewing the splendor of the court, this pleasure must soon be abated by turning the eyes, and beholding the miseries and sufferings of the people. They occasionally, at least, feel the weight of tyranny and oppression ; the burden of enormous and useless expenses ; taxes which absorb the greater part of their hard earnings, and which are demanded perhaps in support of wars unnecessarily and wantonly waged. To utter a complaint is vain, and hazardous ; for a military force is at hand to silence

the murmer. Men thus humbled by poverty, and bound as in fetters of iron, will generally be tame and manageable. Habit may render their condition familiar and easy to them ; but to men of independent feelings and habits it would be intolerable.

Comparing the condition of a people under one form of government, with that of another, may be advantageous. Those who gain by the comparison will find their feelings gratified. They will feel in their own breasts a settled contentment and a warm attachment to those civil institutions, which procure for them these favourable distinctions.

With a view to these good effects in the breasts of my fellow citizens and countrymen, I have introduced the foregoing remarks, and briefly sketched a comparison between different forms of civil government, which is applicable to ourselves and to the occasion. The civil regulations of this country are founded in so much wisdom and fitness, and have such a friendly aspect on public and private happiness, that there is no nation on the earth but must suffer by a comparison with us. Our federal constitution defines the powers of our public rulers, and marks the bounds of their authority in visible lines. It describes the duty of every branch of the government, that no one may intermeddle with or encroach on the rights of the other. It guarantees to every state in the union a republican form of government. They have independent and separate powers. They may manage their internal concerns at their own discretion and will. They enact their own laws ; establish courts of justice ; and give

support and maintenance to institutions of learning and religion. The power is reserved to the people of electing at fixed periods all the rulers in their own state and in the government of the union. Under such constitutions, where the people by their representatives enact their own laws, and levy contributions or taxes on themselves, they cannot long be burdened and oppressed. And in proportion as a people have an agency and influence in the government, they must feel an attachment to its interests and a zeal for its support. In providing for its continuance they will naturally adapt the means to the end. They will give every encouragement to education ; cherish a spirit of free inquiry, that knowledge may be diffused, and the whole body politic be full of light. They will also form in themselves and in their children habits of industry and economy, knowing, that these simple manners and virtuous habits lead directly to wealth and honour, to comfort and usefulness. If we reflect that in a free elective government, the first honors and emoluments of a nation are not hereditary, that they are not so properly at the disposal of a few as they are the gift of the whole ; and that they are designed to be conferred on those of greatest merit wherever found ; it will be easy to perceive the effects, these considerations will produce in noble minds. When the prize is held forth on such liberal terms, it will command attention and raise desire. If all cannot succeed, many will become adventurers. The stronger the incitement, the more vigorous will be the pursuit. Men will spare no

pains in informing their minds and improving their manners, if hereby they can but merit the esteem and possess the confidence of their fellow citizens and countrymen. Parents will have different views in educating their children, and bringing them forward into life; and they will engage in various pursuits. But, as knowledge and virtue form the character of the private citizen, as well as of the statesman, they will attend with diligence to the cultivation of their minds, and to the improvement of their hearts.

Knowing that ignorance and vice degrade the man, and fit him only for a slave; that the wise and virtuous only can be free, parents will, if possible, be more careful to provide their children with the means of maintaining their liberty, independence, and importance in society, than to inculcate upon them prudence and economy, that they might preserve their estates.

For these reasons we look for a more general diffusion of knowledge among a people living under a free government, than in any other; and may expect, that such a nation will produce some of the greatest scholars and statesmen in the world.

Causes and effects go together. Change the condition of men and you reverse the scene. Leave a people nothing to preserve, but just their lives; nothing to labour and seek after but a morsel of bread from the hand of a lord and master; give to their ambitious no other object, and to their pursuit no higher reward, and they will become careless, indolent, and stupid; will resort to the most trifling

and insipid amusements ; will give themselves up to mere animal gratifications ; will plunge themselves into debaucheries and excesses, and sink in ignorance, vice, and misery.

The very structure of our government promises farther advantages to the whole community. Reserving to the people the right of suffrage has a friendly effect on the public sentiment and manners. It guards against that pride, overbearing insolence and contempt with which men of superior wealth and power are wont to treat the commonality of the people. They who have something to give will always meet with attention and respect from those, who hope to receive and participate in their favors. This mutual dependence among men will produce in the more opulent a civility and courtesy of manners never to be expected from men in absolute power. Wherever power belongs to a few, and is fixed and uncontrolable, the possessors quickly become domineering masters, and the rest cringing slaves.

There is nothing in which men are more apt to deceive themselves and err from the truth, than in estimating their own importance, and in depreciating the usefulness and worth of others. A man of wealth and ease, who gives employment to many, is apt to think, that those, in his service, are a parcel of useless and troublesome dependants, who are every day of their lives indebted to him for their support ; whereas they are daily lessening his labors, and increasing his wealth. It requires the labors and services of many poor, to minister to the

wants and gratifications of one, who is rich. And it is not so true, that the rich supply the poor with bread as, that the poor support the rich in their splendor and luxury. Mutual wants and mutual dependance among men are founded in nature ; and the design was wise. If this truth was properly realized and improved, it would soften the asperity of some, and mitigate the sufferings of many. Poverty may be softened and made supportable by attention and kindness ; but its miseries are increased by insolence and contempt. Nothing so much imbitters the lives of the most needy and dependant, as the neglect, abuse, and affronts to which their condition exposes them. Those civil regulations therefore, which set the strongest guard against these evils, and which are best calculated to mitigate or remove them, deserve to be remembered among the wisest and most benevolent labors of man.*

A republican government is also friendly to the peace and internal improvement of a nation. Wars have often been wantonly and wickedly waged, and the lives and property of millions consumed, to gratify the pride, ambition, and revenge of an individual. But in a nation, where the power of declaring war is vested in the legislature thereof, the people are secure from these vile and ruinous practices. So long as they value their lives, liberties, and possessions, they will never put them to hazard without a sufficient cause. Against invasions they will keep a vigilant eye, and be ever ready to make

* Vide Paley's Mor. Phil. 346, 347.

a vigorous defence. Instead of intermeddling and involving themselves in the broils and contentions of other nations, they will be attentive only to their own interests and concerns. While other nations are distressed, impoverished, and humbled by wars; they will give beauty and strength to their own, and furnish themselves with the means of public tranquility and private happiness.

To those advantages of our republican form of government we may add the friendly and patriotic feelings, which it is calculated to excite between the members and the head of the body politic. By our social compact a covenant relation is formed between the people and their rulers solemnized and sanctioned by an oath. This bond stipulates mutual duties and directs them all to the public good. It ought therefore to inspire them with mutual confidence and respect.

Our rulers do not usurp any civil authority, nor are they imposed upon us by others. They derive authority from our consent and suffrage, and must therefore receive these tokens of honour and esteem with sentiments of gratitude and respect. Their responsibility will check in them the spirit of pride and ambition; and their independence will give full scope to their best exertions for the public good. They will listen attentively to the real grievances of the people, while they will be deaf to the unprovoked clamors of the restless and discontented. They can have few if any temptations to burden and oppress the people. They must ardently desire, that the nation should be free, prosperous, and happy,

to whose interests they devote all their talents and labour ; and, if successful, they must feel a peculiar pleasure in reflecting, that their administration poured health and vigor into the whole body politic.

How wisely are the members of a republic fitted and joined together ? What mutual honor and support do they give to each other ? A government thus constructed and constituted will, by its designed operation, produce the greatest sum of public and private happiness. A true republican then, has no more cause to be ashamed of his politics, than a christian has of his religion. The one dignifies the citizen ; the other perfects the saint. The one secures the blessings of liberty and order in this life ; the other of peace and joy in the life to come.

To these advantages however, some dangers and evils stand opposed. Free governments are liable to instability ; to dissensions, divisions, and tumults. In great bodies there will be a variety of opinions, and opposite interests. From party interests arise party names ; and these names may be used, more to stigmatize and reproach, than to discriminate. They excite hurtful prejudices, alienate the affections of men from each other, and set their passions at war. These measures have already been carried to criminal excess by the people of these United States. Such evils proceed not so much from liberty, as from the abuse of it. We are taught by these examples, that the richest blessings may be perverted to the worst of purposes.

Sufficient has been this kind of abuse ; and fruitless many of the designs intended by it. And we ought ever to guard our minds against this delusion and political witchcraft. Our privileges are too important to be thus trifled away.

Americans boast, that they are republicans ; that the appellation is derived from the very form of their government. Let them adhere then strictly to the principles of their constitution, and they may preserve their liberties, and render the name republican respectable.

To whom much is given, of them the more will be required. And in proportion as the government originates in, and flows from the people, they are responsible for its continuance and prosperity. Let us then study our duty as citizens, and mark its boundaries, that we may know how far to proceed, and where to stop. It is the privilege of the people to elect their own rulers ; and it is for the honour of the nation at home and abroad and for their own safety and happiness, that they select men pre-eminent for wisdom, integrity, and patriotism. In the discharge of this duty the powers of the whole are committed, for a season, to a chosen few. What we have delegated to others, we do not retain. All dispute concerning who shall rule is now at an end. It is as much the right and duty of the legislature to enact laws according to their best wisdom and discretion, as it was for the people to appoint the legislature.

In the act of election, a perfect unity in senti-

ment and suffrage cannot reasonably be expected. A majority of votes, fairly and legally taken, is the rule of decision. By this rule let the citizens abide peaceably. If men will not give up their opinions, yet they ought to resign their wills. If individuals are not pleased, the majority are ; and the lesser must yield to the greater. Our rules are founded in our own agreement, and are excellent. It remains to be proved, from time to time, how far we will govern ourselves by them. Happy would it be for this people, if they would peaceably conform to them, and suffer no temptation to lead them astray.

As the people are not so properly the government, as the source of it, it is of importance, that elections be free and uncontrouled ; that the act be performed with deliberation and prudence, and guided by wisdom and pure patriotism. If the fountain be pure, the streams will be healthy. If the root of the tree of liberty be sound, the branches will be flourishing and fruitful.

When the government is organized, let us respect it as the work of our own hands, and strengthen its operations. We are bound by motives of duty and policy to be tender of the reputation of our rulers, and to defend their characters from vile aspersions. To dishonor the head is virtually to dishonor the members of the whole body. Slander is a poison, which vitiates the blood, and effects the vital parts of the community. It excites jealousy, and produces fermentations, which tend to the des-

truction of order and harmony. He, who has been the object of slander, knows the power of its malignity, and how it must effect men in every condition in life. Would the people receive from their rulers the treatment, which some men give to them? If public rulers should express against the whole people a small portion of the slander and abuse, which they often receive from them, they would probably excite insurrections, and endanger their heads.

But this is not the work of the whole people, but of a few; of men, possibly, who may have been disappointed in their political pursuits, and have sworn revenge; or who have some point of interest to gain. Fruitless will be the attempts of any to rise to public importance by falshood, and to build themselves on the ruins of the innocent. They who have never learned to respect others, will not long be respected themselves.

Let us turn our attention to our own duty and interests. This day, fellow citizens, is friendly to the best feelings of the heart. To feelings social, liberal, and patriotic. It is the thirtieth anniversary of American Independence! The day on which our venerable patriots had the boldness to assert those civil rights, which their fellow citizens have had spirit to maintain and secure. We will mingle our mutual congratulations on this occasion. The child may now look up to the parent with veneration and thankfulness for the precious fruits of his labors, which he hopes ever to enjoy. The parent will feel grateful to providence, that he

has been enabled to procure for himself and for his children so rich an inheritance. The waste places are repaired, and our nation is in peace and prosperity.

When the aged, warworn soldier reflects on his labors and sufferings for his country, he may feel anxious for its future protection and safety. But he may be ready to close his eyes in peace, at beholding our young men all clad in armour, and in readiness to defend what he has purchased. We are prepared for war only, that we may have peace. Under its reign shall America prosper, and be for a name and a praise in all the earth.

TOASTS,

*Given at Littleton on the celebration of the 4th of
July, 1806.*

1. *The day we celebrate.* May the principles which guided the asserters of our Independence be found in the breast of every American.

2. *The President of the United States.* May wisdom, integrity, and true patriotism ever guide his administration.

3. *The Governor of Massachusetts.* May his moderation and prudence be imitated by the violent, and applauded by all.

4. *The United States of America.* May a union of political sentiment more generally prevail.

5. *The memory of George Washington.* “The political saviour of our country.”

6. The memory of general Warren, and all those heroes, who fell in defence of their country.

7. *General Eaton.* The pride of our country, and the terror of its enemies.

8. *The people of Massachusetts.* May they be less influenced by party names, and more by correct political principles.

9. *The memory of John Avery.* Whose integrity and virtues procured him the confidence and esteem of all parties.

10. *Agriculture, manufactures, and commerce.* The three permanent sources of wealth and comfort.

11 *The Federal Constitution.* Wise in its structure ; happy in its tendency ; may Americans cherish a warm attachment to it.

12. *The freedom of the press.* May it never be prostituted to the vile purposes of scandal ; but be made the channel of correct information.

13. *The freedom of elections.* May undue influence meet the frowns and contempt of every true American.

14. “ *Union of all honest men.*”

15. *The arts and sciences.* May they ever be encouraged in this western world.

16 *The fair daughters of Columbia.* May we have the patriotism to protect them, and their smiles be our reward.

17. *The rights of mankind.* May they be enjoyed throughout the globe peacefully.