

AN
ORATION.

PRONOUNCED AT

HARDWICE.

JULY 4th. 1812

BEING THE THIRTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence.



BY FESTUS FOSTER. A. M.



“Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, the jealousy of a free people, ought to be constantly awake — Real patriots, who may resist the intrigues of a favourite [nation,] are liable to become suspected and odious ; while its TOOLS and DUPES usurp the applause and confidence of the people to surrender their interests.”

WASHINGTON.



BROOKFIELD,

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July 4th. 1812.

HARDWICK, JULY 4th, 1812

REV. SIR,

THE citizens of Hardwick and the adjacent towns, who attended the celebration of AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE, in this place, appointed the undersigned a Committee to present to you their thanks for your eloquent and patriotic ORATION, and to request a copy for publication.

We are, Sir, with much respect,
Yours, &c.

REV. FESTUS FOSTER.

THOMAS WHEELER,
SAMUEL LEE, JR.
HENRY PENNIMAN,
NATHANIEL JONES,
THOMAS EGERY,
SAMUEL EASTMAN.

HARDWICK, JULY 6th, 1812.

GENTLEMEN,

THE Oration, which was written at your request, is submitted to your disposal. Should it in any degree, incline ingenuous minds to relinquish their attachment to party names and party measures, and consult the great and common interests of our country, it will afford me pleasure to have contributed my mite to so laudable an object.

Accept my thanks for the respect you have shown me, and believe me yours,

F. FOSTER.

Maj. THOMAS WHEELER,
Gen. SAMUEL LEE, JR.
Col. HENRY PENNIMAN,
Maj. NATHANIEL JONES,
Capt. THOMAS EGERY,
SAMUEL EASTMAN, ESQ.

} Committee.

AN

ORATION.

WE Assemble, fellow-citizens, not to vaunt of our military achievements, as though our dangers were past ; not to surrender our rights and liberties to the defence of our excellent constitutions, as though they would prove impregnable without our care ; not to pay a servile homage to the men in power, as though they were, *ex officio*, infallible ;—but to bring into view the principles upon which our constitutions and union were founded ; to test the wisdom and sound policy of past and present administrations by the effects which their measures have produced ; and to ascertain by facts, and by arguments drawn from experience, the means by which we may hope to perpetuate the freedom and independence of these United States.

The return of this eventful day carries our thoughts back to that memorable era, from which our nation dates its birth. It was impossible in the nature of things, that a country like this, of such vast territory, of such salubrious climate and fertile soil, should long remain dependent upon the nation from which it was peopled. Here was every allurement to emigration ; and the means of subsistence so easy as to produce a rapid increase of population. Whenever these colonies became sufficiently

powerful to protect themselves, it was easy to foresee that they would disclaim all allegiance to their parent country, and form a separate and independent nation. The science of civil government, which had been explored by English Statesmen, and which the first Settlers of this country had learned from them and taught to their children, prepared their minds to resist the first attempts of tyranny and usurpation. For our fathers were not descendants from the Turks, Arabs, or Tartars, where the will of the despot was the supreme and only law. They descended from a nation which had made the highest attainments in the theory and practice of civil government; where the liberties of the people and the powers of rulers were so well defined, and so carefully guarded, that any attempt of the king to trample upon the rights of his meanest subject, might have cost him his crown and his life! Our ancestors, born and educated under the most free and equitable constitution in the known world, duly appreciated their rights and their liberties. One cardinal principle in the constitution and laws of England was, that no subject should be taxed without his consent, or that of his representative in parliament. The British ministry, jealous of the future strength and greatness of these colonies, resolved to impede their growth and secure their subjection, by imposing upon them taxes for the use and benefit of the mother country. The first requisitions were so small that there could be no apprehensions of their producing a revolt. But it was a violation of *right*, and therefore, not to be endured by the free-born Sons of Britain. It was of no avail to argue to them that it was easier to pay the tribute than to resist it. It was the *principle* which they contested; against this they remonstrated; they petitioned for redress; they claimed the rights of British subjects: they desired no more. Finding their petitions and remonstrances rejected, and themselves put out of

the protection of the laws, they declared it to be "their right and their duty to throw off their allegiance to such government, and to provide new guards for their future security." They appealed to the great and only ARBITER of nations for the justice of their cause and the purity of their motives; they took up arms; they fought; and they triumphed.

A new government was now formed upon the most free and equitable principles, recognizing the political and religious rights of all men, and securing the exercise of these rights to each individual. This form of government was voluntarily adopted by the several States, and its various departments filled with the wisest and worthiest of our countrymen. The man who had led our armies to victory, and acquired the highest military fame, was unanimously chosen to preside in our national councils, and dispense law and justice to a free people. At that period we were a spectacle to angels and to men. A nation appeared to have been born at once. A form of government, differing in many respects from any in existence, embracing a territory equal to half Europe, uniting in one common league thirteen independent States, providing for the formation and admission of other States, liable to any amendment or alteration which future exigencies might require, elective in every department, giving energy to rulers and securing freedom to the people.—Such a form of government, produced and carried into operation, without any civil commotion, by a people who were lately colonies, excited the wonder and admiration of the world. For years we were viewed as prodigies. Our rulers observed justice and maintained peace with all nations; our ministers made treaties and our Presidents ratified them; our merchants sent their ships to every coast and harbor; our farmers returned from the market with merry hearts; our mechanics and seamen found profitable employment; our national debt was

annually diminished ; our treasury well replenished ; an increasing navy protected our commerce and our coasts ; the arts and the sciences were cherished ; and our happy country appeared to be rising by steady and sure steps to glory and to greatness.

But free governments have never been known long to exist without factions. When our national constitution was proposed to the several States for their ratification, though it met the general approbation of the people, there were some in every State opposed to its adoption. Mr. JEFFERSON, then in Paris, wrote home that he had objections—*strong* objections. Mr. GERRY raised his hand and his voice against it. But the opposers, finding themselves unable to prevent its adoption, thought it not prudent, to hazard their popularity by any hostile resistance to the will of the people. They chose rather to smother their disaffection in their own bosoms, until some unpopular measures should furnish them with the means of alienating the affections of the people from their rulers, and inducing them to change the administration, and commit the constitution to the custody of its enemies. For eight years they sought an opportunity to affect their purpose, but found none. The man who then presided over the nation, had rendered such important services to his country, and gained such entire possession of the confidence and affection of the people, that it was no easy task to convince honest men that he was deficient in wisdom or patriotism. Any opposition to his administration must have been unsuccessful ; for all the people believed him to have been their temporal Saviour.

After serving his country through a seven year's campaign in the capacity of commander in chief ; after presiding over these United States eight years, and making a fair and full experiment of our new system of government ; WASHINGTON retired from his public labors, and the blessings of his country

men followed him. As he knew how to unite the hearts of the people and attach them to their constitution and country, so he knew how easily they might be divided and alienated from their government. He, therefore, gave them his parting counsel and benediction. He admonished them of the delusions to which they would be exposed, and the divisions into which they would fall. He lived to see in part, that his fears were not ill-founded, nor his admonitions needless. The opposers to our constitution, who insidiously watched for an opportunity to excite the resentment of the people against their rulers, viewed the retirement of WASHINGTON as a favorable omen. They hailed it as a NATIONAL JUBILEE! They knew that the constitution must now be administered by men whose character and influence could not, like WASHINGTON'S, bear down all opposition.

Besides the change in our own administration so favorable to their views, the state of European nations presented new difficulties for our government to encounter, and furnished new courage to the disaffected. The character of the French revolution began now to be better understood; and instead of being any longer viewed as a laudable effort for the restoration of civil liberty, it appeared "a monster, fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell," hurling thunderbolts and death among the nations. Every republic in Europe was already prostrate in the dust, and the strong thrones, "the repose of Princes," trembled before it. Our government, warned by the fate of other nations, resisted her seductive arts, and like Joseph from the wife of Potiphar, escaped pollution. But their innocence was no security to their reputation. They were falsely accused to the people, who suffered their ears and their hearts to be polluted with the vile representations of the rejected minister, GENET.

The time, so long, wished for by the enemies of the constitution, had now come. The watch-word was accordingly given and the alarm sounded from Maine to Georgia. The people were called upon and conjured to save their dear-bought liberties from the imminent danger to which they were exposed. The disciples of WASHINGTON, who achieved our independence and framed our constitution, were represented as *torics, aristocrats and monarchists!* Mr. ADAMS, the now "Venerable Sage of Quincy," was a "HOARY HEADED INCENDIARY;" and had he not experienced a political regeneration, could never have been admitted to the intimate communion and fellowship of the "*Swinish multitude.*" The army of which GEN. WASHINGTON was commander in chief, was destined to DESTROY OUR REPUBLICAN LIBERTY, and on its ruins to erect a MILITARY DESPOTISM! Every art was employed to excite the fears and jealousies of the people, and create a disaffection towards the government. To effect this object, inflammatory and libellous papers and pamphlets, thick as locusts, were sent through the land. DUANE and GENE' wrote and harrangued; GALLATIN risked his *precious life* and his *sacred honor* at the head of an insurrection; and the great and good Mr. JEFFERSON did not think it beneath *himself*, to tender his *countenance* and his *purse* to aid the pious work! The united exertions of French emissaries and disaffected Americans, continued through four long years, produced those divisions of which WASHINGTON admonished us, and effected a change of administration to the great joy of the French nation and of the enemies to the constitution.

Mr. JEFFERSON'S accession to the presidency formed a new era in our political history. The doctrine of political toleration, which had so long been the favorite song of the opposers to former administrations, was practically exemplified in hurling from

office every man who had not supported and advocated the dominant faction. That system of policy under which our nation had enjoyed unparalleled prosperity, was discarded for the abortive experiments of a visionary philosophy. The internal taxes, which were laid to augment our naval establishment, were suddenly repealed, and our ships dismantled and abandoned. For our new philosophers considered a navy worse than useless ; and dreaded a full treasury, lest it should tempt the cupidity of foreign nations and involve us in war. Congress were called upon, in a presidential message, to devise ways and means for the expenditure of our surplus revenue. To relieve our government from this burden, and quiet their fearful apprehensions. France humanely accepted FIFTEEN MILLIONS for " a string of land," without title and without boundaries. The gun-boat system, so well fitted for our defence both upon land and water, reduced our treasury a few millions more, and left Congress nothing to fear from an invasion. European nations smiled at our folly and seized our defenceless commerce. Our merchants petitioned to government for protection ; our government remonstrated to the belligerents who knew our weakness, and were insulted. Under the pretext of avenging our wrongs and insults, our whole commerce was suddenly annihilated ; many of our merchants made bankrupts ; our seamen left to beg their bread or flee their country ; and the whole community made poor in the midst of plenty. That a measure, which injured us more than all other nations, should be adopted and persevered in by our government, against the loud remonstrances of half the nation, is a mystery which yet remains to be explained, unless " the hand of NAPOLEON was there." And let not the circumstances, which led to that extraordinary measure, be *concealed or disguised.*

In Nov. 1806, BONAPARTE formed his "Continental System" and published at Berlin a decree prohibiting, all commercial intercourse with Great Britain. The object of this system was to destroy the commerce of England, that vital source of her power, and bring his most formidable foe to his feet. The nations of the continent, over whom he sways his iron sceptre, were obedient to his will. America, as a neutral power, continued to carry on an extensive and lucrative commerce with England, so that she felt little inconvenience from that system which was to drive her "fast-anchored isle" from its moorings. The Emperor saw that she had escaped his snare, and in his rage ordered our neutral and lawful commerce to be seized and confiscated, with as little ceremony as though we had formally acknowledged his jurisdiction. When our minister at Paris, required an explanation of this wanton violation of treaty and of the law of nations, he was answered that the execution of this decree, in order to be effectual, must be *complete* and *universal*—that the Emperor was determined to have *no neutrals*—and that we must assume the positive character of *allies* or *enemies*. This information was communicated to Mr. JEFFERSON by a special messenger, and within *four* days after it was received at Washington, an Embargo without limitation was recommended to Congress and passed the Senate the same day. It deserves particular notice, that at this time our government had no knowledge of the Orders in Council, or the decree of Milan. I ask then, for what purpose was this Embargo? And why was it laid immediately after our government had received despatches from France? Was it not, in the courtly stile of Mr. MADISON, because those despatches "presented to the United States the alternative of bending to the views of France against her enemy. or of incurring the confiscation of their property?" Our government chose to "bend to the views of

France ;” the Emperor saw it and his wrath was appeased ; he professed to “ love the Americans,” and declared that we were actually at war with England. The Embargo was not only approved by France after it was laid, but it was known in Paris that such a measure was about to be adopted, before Mr. JEFFERSON recommended it to Congress. Can any one who impartially views these facts, doubt, for a moment, who originated and imposed upon us that destructive system ? Do you wish to know who has annihilated neutral commerce and barred you from the ocean ? Ask France. Do you wish to know why the importation of British goods into these United States has been prohibited by law ? Ask France. Do you wish to know why and by whom you have been driven into a war with England ? Ask France. *Her* continental system has become the basis of our maritime law. The Embargo, under which we so long groaned, and now groan, is *her* offspring. *She* dictates to us with whom we shall make peace, with whom war. We bow submissively to her imperious mandates, and yet contend that we are free !

That England, as well as France, has preyed upon our unprotected commerce, insulted our flag, and in some instances impressed our seamen, none will deny. How far we might have obtained remuneration for past injuries, and security against future aggressions, by fair and honorable negotiation, has not yet been ascertained. Mr. JEFFERSON hastily returned a treaty made by his ministers, and the British cabinet rejected an arrangement entered into by theirs. The honorable reparation made to our government for the attack upon the Chesapeake, and the proposition that all impressed American seamen shall speedily be restored, leave us not without *hope* that an impartial and magnanimous administration might yet conclude a treaty to the satisfac-

tion and interest of both nations. But so long as their mortal foe demands of us that we shall *not be neutral*, and exercises the right of sovereignty over us by declaring that we are actually *at war* with them, and while we silently and practically *consent*, an accommodation is not to be expected. It must be painful and humiliating to every honest American, to witness the gross partiality which has characterised our government in their intercourse with foreign nations, and to view the deplorable condition to which their servile policy has brought our once happy country. Upon the conditional promise of the French Emperor, whose faith is worse than *Punic*, that the Berlin and Milan decrees should cease to operate upon a given day, our government enforced and continued the nonimportation Law against Britain, although France, from that time to this, has committed every outrage upon our commerce which those edicts authorized, and the Emperor and his ministers repeatedly declared that they were "the fundamental Laws of his empire," and should remain in full force until the repeal of the Orders in Council. Great Britain has uniformly expressed her readiness to repeal her retaliatory orders whenever it appeared by any authentic document that France had revoked the decrees upon which they were founded. The Prince Regent has declared by his royal proclamation, that whenever France by any public act shall expressly and unconditionally repeal her decrees, the orders in council shall wholly and absolutely cease. They become a dead letter the moment the decrees are rescinded. But instead of demanding of the French government a public renunciation of their unjust edicts, and thereby opening a free trade with the whole world, our ministers, in violation of the declaration of the great Emperor and proclaimed, that "we are actually at war with England." A prudent and victorious peo-

ple will surely pause before they give their countenance and support to a measure involving their dearest interests.

“ War (says a celebrated writer* upon the law of nations) is so terrible in its nature, so destructive in its consequences, that it should never be undertaken without the *strongest* reasons. Humanity is shocked at a sovereign who lavishes the lives of his most faithful subjects, who exposes his people to the havoc and miseries of war, when they might enjoy an honorable and salutary peace. If this imprudence, this want of love for his people, be accompanied with injustice towards those whom he attacks, what guilt does he incur: or rather, what a series of crimes does he commit! Besides the misfortunes drawn upon his own people, for which he is accountable, he is guilty of those miseries he brings upon the nation whom he invades. The slaughter of men, the pillage of cities, the devastation of provinces, are his crimes. He is responsible to God and accountable to man, for every life that is lost. The violences, the crimes, the various disorders attendant on the licentious tumult of arms, pollute his conscience and blacken his account. May this faint sketch (continues our Author) affect the hearts of the leaders of nations, and in military enterprizes suggest to them a circumspection, proportional to the importance of the subject.” The same Author, speaking of the just motives and objects of war, says, “ I do not place among the objects of offensive war, *conquests*, or the desire of invading the property of another. This is not the object of lawful war, but of robbery.” “The unjust motives are those which have no tendency to produce the good of the State. Such are the arrogant desire of command, the ostentation of power, the thirst of riches, the avidity of conquest, hatred, and revenge.”

* VATTEN.

But our government tell us, they are not going to war for riches, conquest, or revenge; and likewise, that they "will not fight for commerce." What then can be the object of the contemplated war, which, we are told, demands the *whole strength and resources* of the nation? Why, truly, my countrymen, it is to be a war of "HONOR:" and Congress, as if the representatives of a nation of duelists, are to obtain satisfaction for us upon that nice point. Upon this subject a distinguished moral and political writer† thus remarks. "It ought to be recommended to those who conduct the affairs of nations, never to pursue national HONOR, as distinct from national INTEREST. The DIGNITY of his CROWN! the HONOR of his FLAG! the GLORY of his ARMS! in the mouth of a Prince, are lofty and imposing terms; but the ideas which they inspire are insatiable.—The pursuit of *honor*, when set loose from the admonitions of prudence, becomes a wild and romantic passion. Eager to engage, and gathering fury in its progress, it is checked by no difficulties, repelled by no dangers. It forgets or despises those considerations of safety, ease, wealth and plenty, which in the eye of true public wisdom, compose the objects to which the renown of arms, the fame of victory, are only instrumental and subordinate. The pursuit of *interest*, on the other hand, is a sober principle. It computes costs and consequences: is cautious of entering into war; and careful to bring it to a timely close."

When we look back upon the past measures of our administration, and discover by what means we have been brought into our present difficulties and embarrassments with foreign nations; when we look round upon our country and behold that cessation of noise and motion which indicates an approaching tempest; when we see the men to whom

we have confided our safety and our lives, and in whom we ought to find protection, summoning us to a needless war, in which we have every thing to loose and nothing to gain; it becomes impossible to express our astonishment. Look at your discordant councils—your divided countrymen—your exhausted treasury—your national debt—your defenceless ships and coasts—your new loans—your ruined revenue—your approaching tax-gatherers—your produce perishing without market—your brothers and sons who are to be dragged to the camp. These are the effects of novel experiment—these are the first fruits of our new philosophy—these are the preparations—these the resources of war. View next its dire effects. See the smoke from your cities and coasts wrapped in conflagration, and hear the shrieks and lamentations of the inhabitants. Go to the plains of Abraham, and perform the funeral rites over the rising mound, which shall cover your mangled friends and countrymen. Should your undisciplined troops be vanquished:—go and kneel to the haughty foe, beg him to restore your captive sons and tell him your nation fought for “HONOR.” Should you prove victorious;—hear the thundering chariot of NAPOLEON, hail your mighty Emperor, and kiss the chains that bind you. Are these mere phantoms and frightful ghosts, which have no existence but in a disordered imagination? Ask the nations, once his *allies*, now his *slaves*; they shall tell you. Are you prepared to surrender your Independence, and subscribe your name to that long catalogue of nations, whom he has first divided then destroyed?—No my countrymen, we will not consent to become the vassals of France. We will not break down the only barrier against her universal empire. We will soon terminate the ruinous war into which she has driven us. We will raise our voice to such a note

of remonstrance, that its authors shall stand aghast and return the drawn sword to its scabbard. These states never united for the purpose of offensive war. The constitution, that bond of our union, has vested no authority in our rulers to expend the blood and treasure of the nation to make foreign conquest. It forbids their marching our militia beyond our borders. Your reason, your interest, your religion, revolt at the idea of a war of *honor*. Your fellow citizens, in their elections, and in the resolutions expressive of their sentiments, have loudly testified against it. If the men now in power will not regard the voice of the people : if they have “ pledged themselves to France,” and will pursue *her* interest and not *yours* : let them know that it is your *right*, and will ere long become your *duty*, to change the administration, and invest those with authority who will guard your rights and spare your lives : Are there not men in your country, who are divested of foreign attachments and partialities, who have wisdom to plan and firmness to execute, who can preserve our nation’s peace and honor, and raise her to glory and virtue ? Is there not among us a *second* WASHINGTON, who would issue a Proclamation of strict neutrality, and frown indignantly upon the mightiest Monarch, if he dared to call him *ally* ? Where are the patriots of our revolution ? Where are the sons and disciples of WASHINGTON ? Where are the authors and friends of the constitution ? Bring them from the obscurity into which they have been driven by the folly and phrenzy of modern times. Bring them from the dens and caves of the earth, and place them in the councils of your nation. When your best men are exalted to posts of honor, power, and trust, your nation shall rejoice. Under their administration you shall sit under your vines and figtrees, and the noise of war shall not again disturb your repose.

Though in the eastern hemisphere, nation rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: though the powers of the old world be shaken: though their waters be crimsoned with blood and their fields whitened with human bones; you shall dwell in safety. That **ALMIGHTY PROTECTOR**, who conducted your fore-fathers through the perils of the sea and of the wilderness, who crowned with victory your unequal contest with a foreign nation, who has so often made bare his arm in your defence, will still be a wall of fire round about you, and a glory in the midst of you. Succeeding generations shall keep this day as a political Sabbath, and unborn millions shall offer grateful incense to heaven, upon the consecrated altar of **AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE**.

E. L. N. S.