

Daly

PRACTICAL LIBERTY.

AN

ORATION

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CITY AUTHORITIES OF BOSTON

IN THE

TREMONT TEMPLE,

July 4, 1848.

BY JOEL GILES.

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CITY OF BOSTON.

—
In Common Council, July 6, 1848.

Resolved, That the thanks of the City Council be presented to JOEL GILES, Esq., for the very able and appropriate Oration delivered by him before the Municipal Authorities of the City, at the recent Celebration of the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Independence of the United States of America, and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for the Press.

Sent up for concurrence.

BENJAMIN SEAVER, *President.*

In the Board of Aldermen, July 10, 1848.

Read and concurred.

JOSIAH QUINCY, Jr., *Mayor.*

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TO THE MAYOR OF BOSTON:

SIR,

Agreeably to the request of the City Council, I place at their disposal the manuscript of the Oration delivered before them on the 4th instant.

With great respect,

J. GILES.

*Boston, July 11, 1848.*

# ORATION.

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IN Eastern fable, the world is a harp. Earth, air, fire, water, life, death, and mind, are its seven strings. When breathed upon by the gentle winds, its music is love and peace. But, at set times, a mighty angel flies through the heavens, and strikes this harp, and its quivering strings send forth those ever-recurring pulsations of good and evil, which characterize the destiny of man. At one time, there are tempests, and floods, and earthquakes in divers places; at another, the earth becomes as ashes, and the heavens as brass,—the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken at the fountain,—destruction wasteth at noon-day, and the mourners go about the streets. Anon, the grass springs up, the fields blossom, the flocks cover the hills like morning clouds, children look out at the windows, and laughter rings again upon the glad ear of Hope. Then, suddenly, we have wars and rumors of wars;—mischief upon mischief, rumor upon rumor, and distress of nations with perplexity. But at last the silver trumpet sounds, and Liberty is

proclaimed throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof; and beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.

Such is the fable. The moral is plain. The course of time is marked by recurrent eras; those points of light in the darkness of the past, which shed on the present, visions of the future, and around which are grouped the great men, the noble acts, and the disappointed hopes, of our race.

Time is full of eras. Every nation, family, and heart even, has its era. Our first love, — our wedding day, — the death of our first-born, — the last farewell of a lost friend, — form the green islands and the dark rocks in the river of life, around which Memory loves, in joy or in sorrow, to linger, as she wanders back to the home of our youth, that sacred spot on which forever rests the golden light of innocence.

“There is a land, of every land the pride;  
Beloved of heaven o'er all the world beside;

. . . . .

There is a spot, of earth supremely blest,  
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest.

. . . . .

Where shall that land, that spot of earth be found?

. . . . .

O thou shalt find, howe'er thy footsteps roam,  
That land *thy* country, that spot, *thy* home.”

There are times when God confers on men birthday blessings; and there are times when men do to themselves more good in an hour, than in years be-

fore. When the angel strikes the spirit-string in the harp of fate, and the mind is full of courage, and the heart is full of faith, and the tide of events is taken at its flood, then great men act, and suffer, and triumph in life or in death ; and the foundations of the temple of liberty are laid amid the songs of the people.

Such an era we this day celebrate. Seventy-two years ago, the Declaration of Independence was read in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia ; and the question was, shall it be adopted ?—and the ayes had it. And that vote instantly changed the political character of this western world. It gave us a national entity. It secured for us the admiration, and sympathy, of the best men, in all nations. It made us *free*, as well as independent, and aroused into action those productive energies which have caused the wilderness to blossom like the rose, and covered the seas with the white wings of commerce, and filled this broad land with industry and happiness.

What then is it, which, more than all the rest of that Declaration, has commanded the applause of the civilized world ? It is this :—that the people “have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do.”

Practical Liberty ! This has made us what we are, and will make us what we shall be. This has made the whole country a free school, and all the people scholars, and has stamped the national mind with the superscription of common sense. And it is this, if



any thing, that will regenerate Europe, and bring to a successful issue its present agonies. It is a principle of power, of heroism, of danger, and of hope. Let us hope.

The spirits of men are ever tempered to their work. If you would be great, you must be free. You can never have in your souls, either poetry, or eloquence, or patriotism, or heroic goodness, without the light and glow of liberty. God has made you so.

“T is liberty alone that gives the flower  
Of fleeting life, its lustre and perfume,  
And we are weeds without it.”

Action without responsibility dwarfs the mind. Exalted duties inspire corresponding virtues. Give then to the masses, organized and responsible liberty, and look for generous action, and you shall not be disappointed. That people which actually performs all that free and independent states may of right do, will soon be distinguished for magnanimity and success. Their soldiers and sailors will be invincible; their farmers will be intelligent and thrifty; a spirit and a skill that cannot know defeat will characterize their merchants and mechanics; their press will be fearless, their forums and pulpits will be eloquent and true; the honor and energy of all will be concentrated in each one, and nothing can withstand their united and onward march.

All this, and more, Practical Liberty has done for us. It has fixed our national character, and given to us our exponential men, and achieved for us what of

glory we possess ; and such have been its fruits in all ages and nations, when enjoyed without abuse. To it, the world owes its heroism. Let us then briefly trace its characteristic action, from the earliest dawn, to the present time.

From the fifteenth to the eleventh century before Christ, the Jewish Government was a federative republic ; and that was the heroic age of that chosen people. Then it was, that the Israelites east of Jordan, being oppressed by the children of Ammon, sent for Jephtha, and, in an assembly of the people, made him their head and captain. And Jephtha, in the strength of the popular will, sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying "What hast thou to do with *me*, that thou art come against me, to fight in my land?" And Jephtha vowed a vow unto the Lord, — alas, for his beautiful daughter! his only child! — and so he passed over and smote the Ammonites from Aroer to Minnith, twenty cities, to the plain of the Vineyards, with a very great slaughter ; and Faith and Liberty, like twin sisters, wept and rejoiced together upon the mountains of Judea.

Solon, in the sixth century before Christ, established Practical Liberty at Athens. The people had power to deliberate upon public affairs, choose their magistrates, and confirm the laws ; and their impetuous spirit rushed like a mountain torrent into every field of human enterprise. Their eloquence, poetry, politics, commerce, and daring arms, soon rendered inevitable a conflict between Western liberty and



Eastern despotism; and the battle of Marathon was the result. There again Liberty, with her ten thousand citizen-soldiers, triumphed over Despotism with her hundred thousand veterans. That victory immortalized Athenian impetuosity, and taught all succeeding ages that a citizen soldiery, animated with the unquenchable spirit of freedom, and fighting for their homes, are Liberty's cheapest and best defence.

From the fifth century to about thirty years before Christ, the Roman people were partially free. They voted upon the choice of magistrates and the making of laws, and exercised some of the highest functions of sovereignty; and that was the heroic age of that heroic nation. In it flourished all those stern virtues which have made the Roman name a republican watchword. The spirit of the masses was infused into all their public affairs, which were managed with admirable wisdom by the Senate. Their growing power and martial fame soon brought them into collision with the Carthaginians, who, during the first part of the same period, by reason of the popular element in their government, had become the leading maritime nation of the world. And now came a trial of strength between the equally free. Energy characterized the Carthaginians; it carried Hannibal and his army over the Alps; and, directed by skill, it gave him the victory at Cannæ, where fifty thousand Romans perished by the sword; and the scale of those rival republics, for a moment, trembled in doubt, and many a dame wept her knight in the Eternal City. But Roman

fortitude, in the end, prevailed; and that determined people, fourteen years afterwards, under their great Scipio, the model Roman, gave their rival, Carthage, her death-blow, at the battle of Zama, in Africa.

The whole soul of Roman Liberty, sprung from the chaste blood of Lucretia, and nerved by the vicissitudes of four hundred years of conflict, was concentrated into one noble maxim,—“Never despair of the Republic.” And that is the great lesson which Roman Liberty has left for us:—Never, never give up; the same sentiment which, two thousand years after the battle of Cannæ, burst from the dying lips of the gallant Lawrence,—“Do n’t give up the ship!”

In modern times, the Italian Republics, whose independence was reëstablished by the treaty of Constance, in the twelfth century, preserved the spirit of Liberty, which afterwards became diffused over Western Europe. Their many deeds of light, and of darkness, with judgment due, are shadowed forth in that national work, the ‘*Divina Commedia*’ of Dante, which will spell-bind the hearts of men as long as they shall be interested in the spirit land of the mighty dead. And the lesson we derive from them, is,—Honor the poets, who make the songs of the people.

In 1648, the independence of the Republic of Switzerland was acknowledged by the treaty of Westphalia; and Liberty once more dwelt in peace with the brave, in that romantic land, where, amid the the vine-clad valleys and the snow-capped mountains, she has ever

found the Swiss heart glowing with the love of Freedom and of home.

In 1639, the Republic of Holland, under the invigorating influence of popular freedom, had become a respectable power on the land, and, with a hundred ships of war, bade defiance to every rival on the seas. Van Tromp, her national hero, destroyed the Spanish fleet in the Downs, sinking and burning fifty ships. This noble captain, in whose fall, the sovereignty of his country fell before the freer spirit of England, which had now become a commonwealth, achieved for his country that heroic epithet, "Dutch Valor." In the great action between the Dutch, with one hundred and twenty ships, and the English, with eighty-five, commenced, August 6th, 1653, on the second day, Van Tromp, having pierced the enemy's centre with his own ship, was surrounded, and, while fighting with desperate valor, he fell by a musket shot, exclaiming, before he died,—“Take courage, my lads; I have run my course with glory!”

English Liberty was now in the ascendant, and Blake was its champion upon the ocean. He was an inflexible republican; and, in the might of the greater Liberty, he conquered Van Tromp, and broke the power of the Dutch, and drove their fleets out of the sea. He first inspired seamen with that boldness which taught them what mighty things they could do, if they were resolved. He nailed to the mast-head, England's cherished virtue, British courage, and made it to be respected throughout the world.



**“Ye mariners of England!**

. . . . .

**Where Blake and mighty Nelson fell,  
Your manly hearts shall glow,  
As ye sweep through the deep,  
While the stormy tempests blow.”**

As early as 1656, a hundred and twenty years before the American Revolution, nearly all of the leading principles of popular liberty, as now practiced in this country, were well understood, ably discussed, and freely published in England.

In the Colonies, from the May Flower compact, in 1620, to the Declaration of Independence, in 1776, the spirit of Liberty, native to the English mind, had been constantly gaining strength by exercise, in free organizations, such as the Church, the School, the Town, the Militia and the General Court.

During the War of the Pen, as it has been called, from 1761 to 1775, the freedom of speech and of the press was fully enjoyed, and abundantly used.

On the 19th day of April, 1775, the first serious conflict of arms occurred at Lexington, between Old England and her American Colonies. From words the parties had come at last to earnest blows; and England was at war with English Liberty! But who of us can adequately describe that bloody contest? The haughty oppression, the over-weening contempt, and the pride of empire, on the one side; and on the other, indignant suffering, sympathetic and determined freedom, and, withal, a tender reluctance to snap forever

the golden cord that bound so many hearts together on either shore of the home-dividing sea. We know the battles, the sufferings, and the glories of the tented field; we know the high resolve, and the impassioned eloquence of freedom's halls; but who can tell us of the heart, where the flowers of life were crushed in the blossom, and in the bud, by the hail of contending passions? None but a tory or a whig of '76.

But the right prospered. Liberty triumphed, and we are here. Let a single fact suffice to mark the heroic achievements of Practical Liberty in half a century. The battle of Bunker Hill was fought on the 17th day of June, 1775, and, on the same day, sixty-three years afterwards, the Great Western, an English steamship, but an American invention, arrived at New York, a city of 350,000 inhabitants, and the capital of only one of our then twenty-eight free and independent States.

Washington was the hero and model patriot of the American Revolution. A true man, whose fame, unequalled in his own day and country, will descend to the end of time, the pride and honor of humanity. Uniting in himself Jewish faith, Roman fortitude and British courage, he won our independence, established our liberties, and left to us the national heritage of an invincible prowess; an heritage which was nobly vindicated by our gallant army and navy, in 1812, and again in 1847, by Taylor, Scott and Perry, with their sons of liberty, at Buena Vista, Vera Cruz, and Chapultepec.



France, in 1789, was the first, in the old world, to feel the electric shock of that Practical Liberty which had become so active in the new. She was then laboring under a crushing inequality of taxation and political rights. Her clergy paid one-fourteenth, her nobility one-sixth, and her people two-thirds of their income, in taxes. Vengeance against the upper classes was therefore the first movement of the French Revolution of that period, and Robespierre was its model man. Its second movement was that of military ambition, and Napoleon was its champion. Its history is written with blood, and is a stain on human nature.

From 1810 to 1820, the Spanish Colonies in Mexico, and South America, under the influence of our successful example, threw off the colonial yoke, and declared their independence of old Spain; and, since that time, they have made frequent attempts to imitate our activity and our organizations; but Catholicism, the mother of dependence, has deprived their efforts of the vigor essential to entire success. Bolivar, however, was a true friend and supporter of his country's liberty, on which, after the death of his young and beautiful wife, he bestowed his whole heart and fortune.

In 1830, France made another effort for liberty, and secured enough of her sun-light, under the shadow of the wings of monarchy, to prepare for the Republic of 1848,—which, may Heaven bless, as it cares for the happiness of thirty-five millions of souls. And in 1832, England, moved by the impulse of the times, in

favor of liberty, passed the Reform Bill, which has saved London from the barricades.

And now, in 1848, the mighty Angel has swept again the strings of the mystic harp, and old nationalities rise, like the ghost of Samuel, to frighten kings. France, Italy and Germany, are become the centres of intense political excitement. Liberty is there, and the Press, her giant champion, is unbound. Free suffrage is there. The people elect, and are elected. France has a National Assembly, and nine million electors. Germany has local assemblies, and a general parliament. Italy has a lay council of state, and a Pope who is an equal friend of peace and of liberty, though he did threaten Rome with excommunication.

The undertow of the French Revolution of 1789, was a current of blood, and the memory of its horrors brings suspicion and distrust upon the new-born Republic of 1848. But the false current of the present revolution runs, not against life, but against property; and fearful, indeed, has been the sacrifice of all that kind of wealth which depends for its value upon confidence in existing laws and governments. Still it is better for men to lose their incomes for a season, than their heads. We may therefore rejoice that the excesses of the revolution are no greater; and, when we call to mind transactions in this city prior to our own revolution, we may well exercise charity towards the sons of Liberty in Europe. Besides, it is our duty, and, I trust, our pleasure, to hope for the best issue; and, for one, I say, God speed the free ballot and the free

press, the world over; and other things will take care of themselves.

The influence of Practical Liberty is fast becoming paramount throughout the civilized world. It is the steam that drives our activities, at a dizzy speed. It is the breeze which fans the popular mind in the British Provinces on our northern border. It is the spirit which preserves the fermenting republics in South America and Mexico. It is the new sense which bewilders its possessors in France, Italy and Germany; and it is the life of the body of English liberties. And shall this, too, pass away? Is our race forever destined to relapse into the bogs of despotism? Is there no recuperative spring in man or the word of God by which he lives? The faithless think so. Disgusted with the abuses and frequent failures of popular freedom, they are ready to forswear all attempts to alleviate man's political servitude. But let such remember, that, notwithstanding man fell from his original uprightness, and has continued to fall for six thousand years, God still creates him a free agent.

Practical Liberty is essentially active. In 1633, it induced the passage of a law that no person should pass his time idly or unprofitably, under pain of such punishment as the court should think meet to inflict; and, since the Declaration of Independence, it has hewn from the primeval forest, seventeen new States, and filled them with happy millions. It must have something to do, and a way to do it: and, to act with safety and effect, it must be organized. The Mississippi



must have its banks. The ballot must be instituted. The natural presumption of right in favor of majorities must have its controlling weight, until rebutted by trial. The legislative power, which is supreme and indestructible, must be balanced by the divine organism of triple coördinates. Hence the necessity of constitutions, laws, charters, societies, and parties, of which our country is full; and through which, the sovereignty of the people becomes intelligent and responsible.

Constitutions are the political brain of the people. Each of our thirty States has one, and our glorious Union has another, by which unceasing action is maintained upon all rightful subjects of government.

Men are governed by three principles,—reason, love, and force; and without these there is no government worthy of the name, human or divine. The Constitution of the United States is the organ of the sovereign reason of the people. This is the field for giant minds and patriot hearts; and its hero,—for it has a hero, unrivalled and alone, in his chosen domain,—is the people's Webster. And do you ask for heroes of the heart, with power to acquire wealth, learning and influence, and a will to use them all for the people's honor and the people's good? Go to your scientific schools, your institutes, and your libraries, and read the honored names of their founders. Go to the missionary rolls, and admire the number and the devotion of your Christian martyrs. Force, too, that dire necessity of fallen man, and of nations, has its heroes,

a small and charmed band, whose martial fame, like the forked lightning, dazzles the eyes of the people. May they ever be few in number, great in action, and worthy to tread in the footprints of the immortal Washington.

Preserve, then, your constitutions, your corporations, your societies, your towns, your cities, your free schools, and your churches. They are organisms for the exercise, discipline, and efficient action, of Practical Liberty. And especially, preserve your militia. It is the legal organization of force; the right hand of all government, the ultimate protector of all the fruits of liberty, and a terror only to evil doers.

The people are, by the constitution of the United States, armed; and, by every principle of liberty, they are supreme. Force always resides in the masses. Armed, but unorganized, it is a sleeping lion, ready to spring upon you at any moment of famine, or of passion. Then train it,—train it; and it shall lie down with the lambs in the green pastures of peace and tranquillity.

Even parties are useful organizations of Practical Liberty, which might otherwise fall into anarchy in the exercise of its elective functions. And in a country so free as this, no administration can stand without the support of a dominant party, embracing, for the time being, a majority of the people. Be not frightened, then, at parties; but prove them all, by the test of Practical Liberty, and hold fast that which is good.



There naturally spring out of the excitement, energy and success of Practical Liberty, an impatience of restraint, and a desire to accomplish at once, and by force, many things which require wisdom and the noiseless hand of time. There are some things which the people may not of right do. They may not, in the exercise of their liberty, violate their constitutions; for that is suicidal. They may not violate nationalities, and force others to be free; for that is doing evil, that good may come. They may not prosecute foreign and aggressive wars, for the success of which it becomes necessary to silence the freedom of speech and of the press, at home; for that is wounding the daughter of Zion with a deadly hurt, and breaking the golden bowl at the fountain. And they may not lay the iron hand of law upon personal and private rights. They may not prescribe to me, what I shall eat and what I shall drink, and wherewithal I shall be clothed; nor the time, nor the place, nor the compensation, of my labor. All that is my business. Let my rights be forfeited, before they are sacrificed. Never let the individual be crushed by the mass, for liberty overdone is tyranny outdone; and never let a sovereign people be guilty of an unjust or a mean thing. And, in a country like ours, where the utmost freedom of the press, the endless social organizations, and the network of rail-roads and telegraphs, render liberty so impulsive, let the people cultivate an instinctive and spotless honor, that shall make all their conduct true and without reproach.

Practical Liberty has, in about half a century, raised this country from colonial insignificance to the rank of a leading power. In population and resources, present and prospective, we would not exchange conditions with any nation. In science, literature and art, we have genius, and time will give us execution. Our military and naval power has proved itself competent to all the exigencies of peace and war. For boldness and ability, our diplomacy is unrivalled; and our popular industry has no equal in the world. We are a downright, positive people; negatives are out of their element here. Every man and organization is full of actualities. Every energy is intent on something to be done. Life is a practical school; and the problems to be solved are not, as in books, hypothetical, but present and real. The young are to be married, and for love too, for more people marry for love in this country than in all the world besides; and the question is, how shall they win their Genevieves, their "bright and beauteous brides?" The middle-aged must acquire wealth, and take care of their responsibilities; and the question is, how shall it be quickest done? This party, and that party, and the all-and-singular party, has each nominated its favorite candidate, and the question is, how shall he be elected? The whole country has something to do, honorable and right, and the question is, how shall it discharge its whole duty? This requires thought, and the people think; decision, and the people resolve; action, and the people *do it*; and, as a crowning virtue, the people

compromise their differences, and keep good natured, and will not be hung on abstractions.

Our fathers founded this beloved Republic. It is ours,— a labor no less god-like,— to exercise and preserve it. What, then, are the great problems before us as a nation? That war is ended, which ought never to have been begun. By it, we have won more glory than we deserve, and acquired more territory than we want. For monopoly is against divine intent, and cannot prosper in the long run. It is not for one man, or one nation, to do every thing. The same law, which makes individuals, families, tribes, tongues, and races, divides among them the regions of the earth, and the labor to be done therein.

We occupy a central position, fronting on two seas. Of land and water we have our share, and enough. Our boundaries, at last, are fixed by treaties of peace; and cursed be he who again disturbs our land-marks.

Our military position cannot be improved. With a neutral nation on either wing, our Atlantic and Pacific fleets on either front, and a nation of freemen in the centre, we shall ever be invincible to all foreign foes; and, in case of war upon this continent, the centre commands the wings.

Let us therefore be content. We have thirty States already, and territory enough for forty more as large; and beyond them, the boundless commerce of the Pacific, with China and Japan; — a glorious and sufficient field for all the peaceful energies of our Liberty, mighty as they are. And into this Union those States



will surely come. Shall they be free? Yes, they shall be free. Let peace abroad and union at home be our policy, and our watch-words of Freedom; and Slavery shall vanish from our land, like night before the sun.

The history of our State and City should inspire us with grateful affection for the memory of our fathers. What spots are more consecrate to Liberty, than Faneuil Hall, Bunker Hill and Lexington Common? What names shine brighter on their country's roll of patriots, than OTIS, QUINCY, WARREN, ADAMS, HANCOCK, and FRANKLIN? What city has surpassed Boston in doing good? Her praises shall soon be as cooling water, on every tongue.

The nation has recently mourned the death of Massachusetts' most distinguished son. His history is that of his country. He was a true champion of Liberty, and the free, of whatever age or nation, in all time to come, will call him blessed. Happy is that land which he called his home. In grateful memory of his exalted virtues, let us, in the spirit of that Liberty, and the peace of that Gospel, which he so much loved, do as he did, with our might, whatsoever our hands find to do in the service of our country.

The charms of that Liberty which we enjoy, so grateful to the aspirations of all men; the unexampled success of our political and social organizations; the space which we fill in the affairs of the world, and the influence of rising power, have assigned us a conspicuous position among the nations of the earth. We cannot, if we would, avoid the responsibility of affect-

ing the welfare of millions of our fellow-men. The commands of Heaven are upon us!

Jewish faith, Grecian impetuosity, Carthaginian energy, Roman fortitude, Swiss patriotism, Dutch valor, British courage, and our father's invincible prowess, are all our rightful heritage, as sons of the purest Liberty; and we are bound, in Christian honor, to make them tell, in the glorious fields of peaceful enterprise for the head, the hand, and the heart, which God has opened before us.

The duty is great, but the promise is greater; for the Redeemer of our race, whose gospel is the foundation and guaranty of all our liberties, has said, that if ye continue in my word, then shall ye know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

And may faith in God, faith in man, and faith in union, knit together the hearts of this great people in the golden bonds of love, and the iron might of action, till time shall be no more!