

AN

from F. E.

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED JULY 4, 1818,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN OF BOSTON.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

THE ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY FRANCIS C. GRAY, Esq.

Printed at the request of the Town of Boston.

BOSTON :

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1818.

VOTE OF THE TOWN OF BOSTON.

AT a Meeting of the FREEHOLDERS and other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston, held at the Old South Church, on Saturday, the 4th day of July, A. D. 1818 :—

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

ATTEST,

THOMAS CLARK, Town-Clerk.

ORATION.



THIS is a glorious, but a solemn day. Set apart for the celebration of **INDEPENDENCE**, a common object of enjoyment and solicitude to us all, it ought not to be disturbed by controversy, nor wasted in mere exultation. It should remind us of our high responsibility, as well as of our distinguished blessings ; and direct our attention to the origin of the national privilege now commemorated, since this, like others, can neither be appreciated nor preserved, without a knowledge of the principles on which it is founded, and the means by which it was established. This duty of recurring frequently to the establishment of our independence, fortunately perhaps for its performance, is also a triumph ; for there is not on record a revolution more sound in principle, more temperate in conduct, more beneficial in result.

The encroachments of the British government on the liberty of the Colonists were the commencement of our revolution. But these cannot be assigned as its cause ;

oppression not being of itself sufficient to produce liberty. Many nations have borne a heavier yoke than that, which it was attempted to impose on this, and uttered no murmur ; some have had the impatience to complain, without the courage to resist ; while a few have been goaded into desperation, only to waste their strength in ill directed and ineffectual struggles, and to fall at last, feebler victims. Nor are we indebted for independence to the peculiar talents of the individuals, illustrious as they were, who placed themselves in the front of danger, as the guides and leaders of the people. Men determined to be free, will never want a leader to freedom, and those willing to endure despotism will never follow one. Exhortations to resist, as well as commands to obey, are dependent for their effect, on the temper and character of those to whom they are addressed. It is undoubtedly the conviction of this truth, which has induced you to select for the topic of the orations annually pronounced before you, not the injustice of your enemies, not the talents and virtues of the great men, who occupied the posts of danger and of glory during the struggle for the establishment of independence ; but the FEELINGS, MANNERS, and PRINCIPLES, which led to that event. The consideration of these, accustomed as we are to them from infancy, does not recommend itself by its novelty ; but surely it cannot be devoid of interest, since they are the foundation of our prosperity, and

of our hopes. We shall become miserable indeed, when we cease to be familiar with the feelings, manners, and principles of our ancestors. or when our familiarity with them is accompanied by indifference. In order to display more distinctly their nature and influence, let me point your attention to their origin, and to some of their effects.

By the feelings, which led the Colonists to the declaration of independence, we are not to understand mere sensibility to insult, or the resentment excited by oppression, for these are common to all men ; but their settled temper, their established and peculiar sentiments. The most conspicuous were an ardent attachment to liberty, a proud consciousness of their ability to act and to suffer, an unhesitating reliance on themselves, on their own resources, and their own opinions. These sentiments naturally sprung from the character and condition of the first settlers in America, and were invigorated and expanded by all the subsequent events of its history. At the time when our ancestors emigrated from Europe, the spirit of the reformation, to which the christian world is indebted for much of its civil, and all its religious liberty, was abroad. It was not confined to theologians and scholars, to cities, and councils, and public institutions ; but had found its way to the cottage and the cradle, pervaded every class of the community. and animated the earliest efforts of the intellect.

Men began to argue, and the most common topics of discussion were subjects, which for ages had been considered too well established for controversy, and too sacred even for investigation. This inquisitive and daring spirit, though for some time zealously devoted to religion, could not be confined to it, nor deterred by power or custom from scrutinizing the foundation of every public establishment, from maintaining against all opposition the principles which it assumed, or from pursuing them, both in speculation and in practice, to their remotest consequences.

All the colonies were tinged with the temper of the age ; but it was most conspicuous, and most intense, among the puritans of New-England ; and accordingly we find in their annals the earliest, most frequent, and boldest assertions of their right of self-government. Before the emigrants to Plymouth set foot upon the shore, they made a solemn compact with each other the foundation of their social intercourse, as if they were then in a state of nature, and amenable to no superior. Turn to the ancient Statute-Book of the Colony of Massachusetts : its first words declare that the inhabitants are subject to no laws, but the acts of their own Assembly, and the word of God, themselves its interpreters.*

* In the modern collection of Ancient Charters and Laws, this act is chap. 4, sect. 1. p. 43.

The founders of the Colonies were distinguished, as individuals, by their courage and perseverance. The undertaking in which they succeeded, had been repeatedly made by others, and always defeated or abandoned. But they were not as other men, and could not be discouraged by small difficulties, nor intimidated by common danger. The nature of the enterprise displays their resolution, and its event their firmness. The obstacles and perils, which they actually experienced, exercised and increased their strength, while their ultimate success in almost every contest, and their rapid and vigorous growth, cheered their hopes, animated their courage, and increased their confidence in themselves ; till, by constantly encountering difficulties, and constantly surmounting them, they acquired that hardihood of character, which must conquer, because it will not yield.

Their attachment to liberty was increased by the form and nature of their political institutions. The representatives of the people constituted, in all the Colonies, a conspicuous and efficient branch of the government ; professing the utmost loyalty and fidelity to the King, but practically retaining in their own hands the legislative authority. They admitted, indeed, the power of Parliament to regulate commerce, it being evidently conducive to the public good, that the same commercial regulations should extend to all the Colonies. But the

laws which guarded their private rights and domestic happiness, which touched their persons and the property in their possession, were always made by themselves ; and the few attempts of their Governors to encroach on their authority, were firmly and successfully resisted. Who can wonder that the uninterrupted exercise and occasional vindication of this high prerogative had rendered it dear to them ?

The simplicity of manners, which distinguished the Colonists, and the freedom of social intercourse among them were highly favourable to the establishment and security of independence. In addition to the direct influence of religion, their professions of superior sanctity imposed on them an obligation to justify their pretensions by their practice, and thus enlisted their pride on the side of principle. The general diffusion of the rudiments of learning, by facilitating their intercourse with each other, promoted community of sentiment, and uniformity of manners. A circumstance which tended still more generally to maintain the simplicity of their manners, and which was in turn perpetuated by it, was the equal distribution of property. This arose from the peculiar situation of the country. Agriculture and the fisheries, the great sources of its wealth, were equally accessible to all, for the land was boundless, and the ocean inexhaustible ; so that industry and enterprise were the only measures of private prosperity. Covered with forests,

to be subdued, in order to make room for the rapid increase of population ; settled by emigrants, dependent on their own labour for subsistence ; and surrounded by fierce, subtle and implacable enemies ; this was not the land of indolence, or even of repose. Every thing was in constant action. Toilsome and perilous adventures were the discipline of youth, and the delight of men. Early accustomed to privation, and trained to labour, they could endure hunger, and thirst, and exposure, and fatigue, and difficulty, and danger, any thing but subjection. These feelings and manners mutually supported each other, and both contributed to establish that independence of condition and of sentiment in individuals, which is the only secure foundation of public liberty.

The political principles of our ancestors, as well as their forms of government, were derived from the land of their origin. They had learned the doctrines of the English revolutions, doctrines vindicated by the zeal of Hampden and of Sydney, by the reasoning of Locke, and the conduct of the nation. They maintained that government is established solely by the will, and for the benefit of the people ; that the assumption of any authority not delegated by them, is an invasion of their rights, which justifies resistance ; and that the attempt to maintain such authority by force, is waging war upon them. They considered it a fundamental principle of

their own constitution, that no taxes should be levied on them without the consent of representatives chosen by themselves. This was their darling prerogative, the great security of all their liberties, a constant check on the licentiousness of arbitrary power; and they felt that while they held this firmly, they were the guides of their own course, and the masters of their own destiny.

The effects of these feelings, manners and principles, on the conduct and character of the Colonists may be traced from the settlement of the country down to this very moment. But the occasion admonishes us to confine our attention to the interval between the peace of 1763, and the event, the anniversary of which we now celebrate. This was the period of the revolution. The first American Congress defied their bitterest enemies to trace the differences between the two countries from an earlier origin;* and the revolutionary war, being chiefly subsequent to the establishment of independence, was carried on for its defence, not for its acquisition. Great discontent had indeed been excited before the period first mentioned, by the severity of the commercial restrictions, and the harsh means proposed for their enforcement. Against these however, the Colonists sought no other security than the protection of the law; which was not denied them. But their vigilance was

* See the Petition of Congress to the King, 26th Oct.—the Address to the People of Great Britain, 21st Oct.—and the resolve stating their grievances, 5th Oct. 1774.

roused ; and when the Parliament afterwards endeavoured in various forms to impose taxes on them, a measure repeatedly suggested, but never resorted to before, they instantly perceived its motive and its tendency, and demanded by what authority it was done.

Well acquainted with their rights, and determined to maintain them, they were not to be satisfied, nor puzzled, nor silenced, by bold assertion, or by verbal distinctions and dialectical subtleties. They were told that the exercise of such a power by Parliament was necessary to the prosperity of the Colonies, in order that each might contribute in due proportion to the common defence. But how could it be necessary to their prosperity, when they had grown up and flourished beyond all example without it ; and had not only defended themselves, but subdued their enemies ? It was then said that they were taxed by a virtual representation, that is, by the representatives of other men ; and that in England many, who had no voice in election, had submitted to taxes imposed on them by Parliament, and thus assented to its authority. This statement however only rendered the colonists apprehensive that submission by themselves would be construed into acquiescence, and they declared that there had been no such assent in America ; and that their rights were not in the keeping of others. Again it was urged that the Parliament had always regulated commerce, and that there was no dif-

ference between commercial regulations and acts of revenue. Their answer was ready. The difference is this, the people consent to one, and not to the other. If asked why they made this distinction, it was a sufficient reply, that such was their will ; but their motive was the conviction that the power granted, was conducive to the public good, and less liable to abuse, than that which they denied. When it was at last asserted that the right of taxing them was inherent in Parliament, because that assembly was supreme and omnipotent : What, said they, does this mean ? That the will of the Parliament is the sole law, that the colonists have no rights, and no security ? Then they owe no allegiance, for that is the price of protection. Does it mean simply that the ministry and the Parliament have the power to enforce their decrees ? Let them try.

Observe the fearlessness of their resistance. What a spectacle : a number of dependent Colonies, scattered plantations in the wilderness, just grown up into notice, flourishing indeed, but indebted for their prosperity rather to the moderation of their wants, than to the abundance of their possessions ; without fleet or army, destitute even of weapons and of military discipline ; about to grapple with the empire of Great Britain, then, as now, the arbiter of Europe, crowded with inhabitants, laden with wealth, trained up to war for centuries, and flushed with recent victory. But the courage

of the Americans was not the rashness of ignorance, or of that desperation which shuts its eyes to the consequences of its impetuosity. They knew their own wants, and the resources of their enemy. They looked steadily to the future, and ventured on it, full of confidence in their own firmness, and in the justice of their cause.

Their constancy was no less remarkable. Resolved never to submit to British taxation, they early determined that their opposition to it should be merely defensive, in order that it might be unanimous. This was their vantage ground, and they could not be tempted from it by artifice or provocation. It was in vain that the ministry tried to deceive them, by calling the taxes commercial regulations, and by reducing their amount till it was contemptible ; to intimidate them by the display of military force, or subdue them by its exercise ; to cheat them of their rights by the name of conciliation ; or to disunite them by partial punishments, and by accusing the most zealous of aiming at independence. Notwithstanding all this, they would not abandon their system of opposition. Some among them indeed early saw that they had no alternative but independence or submission ; and it was the great labour of the enlightened men, who brought about the revolution, to convince the people of this truth. When that was done, the revolution was accomplished. The mass of the community were slow to be persuaded, for they loved the name of

Englishmen, and wished to preserve it ; but they loved liberty better. When therefore they found at length, that their rulers could not be moderated by time, nor moved by entreaty, nor restrained by justice, nor instructed by experience ; when they saw that the inexplicable knot of affection which had bound them to their mother country, was severed by the sword, that reconciliation was hopeless, that petition, remonstrance and argument, so long employed without success, must give place to weapons of a different temper ; and that independence, from which they had previously shrunk as from an evil, was the only armour sufficient to protect their rights, they buckled it on manfully, and stood on their defence.

The union of the Colonists was astonishing. Inhabiting various climates, engaged in different pursuits, professing religious opinions not only different but hostile, having little commercial intercourse or social connexion with each other, at the touch of oppression, they were animated by one spirit, and moved as one body. It was attempted to divide, in order to subdue them. In the prosecution of this design, corruption could not be forgotten, and some men, distinguished in the cause of liberty by talents and influence, were assailed by promises of honour and reward. The pretence of conciliation was also employed to break the union of the Colonies. But the most remarkable project was to display a dreadful example of ministerial vengeance, which

should either crush all opposition, or disunite the people, by stimulating the sufferers to some unjustifiable outrage, while it appalled the spectators of their sufferings. The unlawful violence of a few individuals afforded a pretext for the sacrifice, and this town was chosen as the victim. It was formally subjected to the pleasure, or rather to the wrath of the ministry, deprived of the protection of the law, and even of the means of subsistence.* Americans will not soon forget the services by which it had merited this distinction, or the intrepid dignity, with which it received the blow. And you will not forget, my fellow-citizens, the enlightened zeal, the ready sympathy, which impelled every town on the continent to make your cause its own. All these attempts to divide the colonies, united them still more closely.

But the glory of the assertors of independence was their moderation. It is true indeed that even in the beginning of the revolution, there were instances of popular outrage, which we cannot recollect without disapprobation and regret. But considering the oppression and contempt poured out upon the whole country, they were few ; and in this part of it, the most abused, and most insulted, they never touched life. These too were the crimes of individuals, and were disavowed at the

* By 14 George III. cap. 19. for stopping the port, and blocking up the harbour of Boston—cap. 39, for the better administration of justice in Massachusetts Bay—cap. 45, for altering the government of Massachusetts Bay.

time by the public assemblies. The temper of the people is to be learned from the measures systematically pursued by them ; for we must judge of communities, as of individuals, by the general tenor of their conduct. Let it not be said that the public proceedings confer honour on none but the delegates, with whom they originated. It was unquestionably honourable to the people to choose such delegates, and to submit so constantly and universally to their authority. The character of a nation is justly estimated by that of the men, to whom it yields voluntary and lasting obedience. At the present time, when the passions of that day have subsided, and the subjects of the controversy have almost lost their interest, you can look back on it, not perhaps without some prejudice, but at least without any violent excitement. Make the public measures adopted by the authority of the people, the standard of your judgment, and decide on their character. You will find the moderation of their virtues to be their distinguishing excellence. They were vigilant, but not jealous ; resolute, but not rash ; patient, but not timid ; not easily irritated, for they were conscious of their own strength, and irritation, if not the result, is always the evidence of weakness. They were anxious to command the respect even of their enemies ; but though their endurance was called cowardice ; their union, conspiracy ; and their firmness, rebellion ; they did not swerve from the line of duty, which they had laid down. They were never weary of entreaty,

and always unwilling to shed blood. It was after eleven years of patient attendance and exhortation, not for revenge but for security, in their own native land, which had been won by the enterprise, subdued by the toil and defended by the courage of their fathers ; at the very doors of their dwellings, for the protection of their property, of their liberties, of every thing dear to them, that they took up arms.

Reflect on their character, and on the nature of the contest, and you cannot wonder at its result. How could such men fail in such a cause ? Their success has however been followed by consequences, which may well excite your admiration. But these are so numerous, that the time would fail me to name them ; and so conspicuous and diffusive, that you cannot open your eyes, and not see them, you cannot live a day, and not feel them. I shall therefore confine myself to one of the consequences of independence, to that, which should be recurred to most frequently, and impressed on your hearts most deeply ; which you should study by day, and meditate by night ; I mean the responsibility which it casts upon yourselves. All these virtues were exerted, and all these sufferings endured, for you and for your children. And shall you do nothing ? Surely you can do no less than preserve the liberty so nobly defended, and devote it to those purposes, whose promotion gives it all its value. It can be preserved only by main-

taining the habits and sentiments in which it originated : and it is worth preserving only as the means of securing the rights, improving the condition, and elevating the characters of individuals. Happily, your fathers have left you an example, that you should follow their steps. The cultivation of their virtues will increase private happiness, and confirm public liberty. Their intrepid courage and unwearied constancy in the maintenance of their rights, their moderation in redressing their wrongs, their unwillingness to make any innovation, until its necessity was apparent, and their postponement of private feeling and local interest to the general good, cannot be too frequently proposed to you for imitation.

The preservation of their religious and literary institutions will conduce, no less than the contemplation of their example, to perpetuate their character, and the freedom of which it is the basis. To the early establishment and zealous support of these institutions, are to be attributed the peculiarities of New-England, all of them highly favourable to a republican government. What indeed can have a stronger tendency to control the impetuosity of passion, to promote sentiments of equality and mutual respect among men, to depress the presumptuous and elevate the humble, to unite them more closely with each other, and with other generations, than a deep sense of religion, a conviction that the consequences of their mutual intercourse will be perpetual ?

The literary institutions of our ancestors were calculated to give the rudiments of education to every individual, and thus to promote social intercourse and independence of sentiment among the people, to make them generally acquainted with their rights and obligations, and to excite emulation and enterprise. These institutions were humble, conforming to the abilities rather than to the desires of their founders. You, who have more copious means, and additional motives for their improvement, will not be satisfied with being their mere depositaries, and transmitting them unimpaired; but will mingle your own labour with that of your fathers, and strengthen and extend the literary establishments founded by them, that you may share with them the gratitude of your children. It is literature, which gives elevation and stability to national character, connects distant ages, and by preserving the memory of illustrious deeds, at once rewards the services of former generations, and confers a benefit on posterity. Its diligent cultivation is a duty to both.

Our political institutions also demand your care. Time has shewn them to be well adapted to our situation and character. The federal constitution, whose establishment was the most difficult, and its success the most doubted, derives from our veneration for its founders and our experience of its effects, an authority over public opinion, which increases its strength, and at the same

time displays the importance of its preservation. For if this fail, how can we expect any new form of government, which, at least in its origin, must want this authority, to be more durable? Let this constitution be scrupulously respected and preserved. Touch it not rashly and irreverently even for a good purpose. Let it be a holy thing; a common object of universal attachment; something fixed and stable, to be a rallying point in every disturbance, and to concentrate at all times the affections of the people. Rather than accustom yourselves to trifling innovations in it, submit to slight and temporary inconvenience. It is the part of wisdom to render even our prejudices, for men will have prejudices, conducive to our happiness. If it should not be lightly altered, still less should it be made the mere tool of convenience and expediency by forced constructions. This would expose it to contempt; and when it ceases to be respected, how can it be obeyed? It is your duty, not only to preserve the form of your political institutions, but to maintain their spirit, and to watch over their administration. The example of your ancestors will teach you to entrust the direction of public affairs, not to the men who prefer your pleasure to your interest, and their own aggrandisement to both; who rush into the front rank of popular impetuosity, that they may seem to be its leaders;

and rise highest in the whirlwind of passion, that they may have the glory of appearing to direct the storm ; but to those who seek to enlighten, not inflame, who merit confidence by their integrity, and wisdom and experience in public service, who respect the opinions, and the very prejudices of the people, but disdain to flatter either their passions or their vanity, or to make public duty subservient to private interest and ambition, who do not court office, nor solicit honour, but avoid no task, and shrink from no responsibility, properly imposed on them.

I have told you, my fellow-citizens, only what you must do, what you cannot neglect without disgrace. What you may do, should be shown by your actions. Spare no exertion to improve the arts, and extend the sciences, and polish the literature of America. Let not the space assigned to the history of this generation, be a blot or a blank in our annals. Interweave your fame with the virtues of the past, and the splendour of the future. Are any ready to exclaim, this is but a single town, what can it do ? It may do much by encouraging and rewarding ingenuity, by improving the moral and intellectual condition of its inhabitants, and more perhaps by the influence of its example. Has not this town been styled the fountain of good principles, and the cradle of independence ? Why may it not be the nurse-

ry of improvement, and the school of genius : If you fear that the envy of the present generation will deny you a reward, raise monuments, on which posterity may hang its garlands. Let this anniversary never return without beholding some new establishment calculated to outlive its founders, and to contribute to the ornament or security of our country.

You cannot fear that your exertions will be lost, and our republic destroyed before your useful projects shall be accomplished, when you consider how ancient and venerable, how broad, and deep, and solid are the foundations of our independence. If it had been established by a fortunate accident, you might apprehend that a turn of the wheel would subvert it. Were it the gift of a few distinguished men, other individuals of equal abilities and perverted ambition, might wrest it from us. Had it been acquired by popular passion, the return of tranquillity might loosen our hold on it, or another moment of passion cast it away. But founded as it is, on our condition and character, and supported by our ancient institutions, by the sentiments and principles which we imbibe in infancy ; while these remain firm, it cannot be shaken.

The conviction that the security of a free government is to be sought only in the situation, habits, and temper of the community, will deter you from the chimerical idea

of liberating other countries by force ; and teach you that the subversion of a throne is not necessarily the establishment of a republic ; that a nation trained up to servitude cannot be made free by breaking the bonds of government, nor derive lasting benefit from any revolution which does not begin in the character of the people ; and that the true deliverers of men suffering under long established despotism, are those who instruct them.

This conviction will also save you from many needless apprehensions, and enable you to guard against the real dangers, to which you are exposed. On the establishment of the government, you were told that this country was too vast for one republic, and would crumble beneath its own weight. But what is the fact ? It is consolidated. The existence of party-spirit has often been deplored as the omen of impending ruin. But party-spirit seems to be inseparable from republican governments, if not essential to them ; and is the evidence of freedom, if not its security. At one time, the parsimony, at another, the extravagance, of our various Legislatures, have been called fatal evils. Wherever these faults exist, they are indeed disgraceful and burdensome ; but they should excite alarm only when they are the symptoms of corruption. Many men, thinking, sometimes perhaps justly, this or that public measure to be erroneous, have exclaimed—our liberties are lost, the constitution is subverted—as if we were walking on

the bridge of Mahomet, and one false step would be destruction. Errors ought undoubtedly to be avoided, but you are not to despair of your government, because, like every thing human, it sometimes commits them. Would you know when you may despair? When the institutions of your ancestors are neglected, their example forgotten, their sentiments abandoned, their manners perverted, their principles betrayed; when religion and learning are ridiculed and despised; when all independence of sentiment is lost, and the rich trample on the rights of others from pride, or the poor from rapacity; when you dread the voice of truth, and have no ear but for your own praises; when men distinguished by talents, moderation, and integrity, are objects of suspicion; when disunion renders you a military people, and thus prepares you to submit to the dominion of force; or luxury bows your necks to the still more degrading yoke of corruption; then is your liberty destroyed, then are your constitutions a dead letter, then is the nation ruined. But I trust in God, that neither you nor your children will behold that day.