

A N

# ORATION,

DELIVERED ON THE

*Fourth of July, 1801,*

IN THE TOWNSHIP OF OYSTER-BAY, IN QUEEN'S  
COUNTY, BEFORE A NUMBER OF REPUBLICAN  
CITIZENS ASSEMBLED TO CELEBRATE  
THE ANNIVERSARY OF OUR  
**NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.**

[Published at their request.]

---

BY ADRIAN HEGEMAN,  
ATTORNEY AT LAW.

---

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY DENNISTON AND CHEETHAM, AT THE OFFICE OF  
THE AMERICAN CITIZEN, No 142 PEARL-STREET.

.....  
1801;

Checked  
May 1913

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.  
1900.

N. Y. PUBLIC LIBRARY  
FORD COLLECTION

# AN ORATION, &c.



**T**HE anniversary of our Independence cannot fail to be interesting to every American — the birth of a free and great Empire must ever be beheld with complacency by the admirer of rational liberty. Our hardy and enterprising predecessors had forsaken the rich soil and luxuriant fields of Europe, to tread the rough deserts and uncultivated wastes of America. Having braved the perils of the ocean, and landed safely on this western hemisphere, the gloomy prospect lies full before them. A wide extended wilderness whose awful arches resound with the dismal howlings of ravenous beasts of prey, apprizes them of what they have to encounter; but the sturdy oak soon falls by their stroke, and the tall pine is laid low with the ground. The face of nature becomes changed, and the desert is made to “blossom like the rose.” — The thick forest is converted by the hand of industry into verdant fields, with intermingled groves; instead of the howling of wolves is heard the lowings of the fattening herd — The humble cot gives place to the mansion house — Proud cities erect their towering spires, and the rivers teem with vessels — Commerce is extended to foreign climes, and richly rewards both the merchant and the husbandman.

This unparalleled rapidity of improvement attracted the attention of foreign nations. Britain ever attentive to her aggrandizement, devised

means of turning to her own advantage the prosperity of this country. The plausible pretext of being the mother country, presented a temptation too strong to be resisted. She accordingly laid restrictions on our trade, and directed our commerce through such channels as would finally redound to her benefit. Instead of a free communication with the world, our intercourse was confined to such nations as would least injure her immense traffic—When notwithstanding all these obstacles we still continued to prosper, recourse was had to other means of impeding the rising greatness of the colonies. Duties were imposed on merchandizes which enabled *her* merchants to undersell the colonists, or prevented the latter from reaping the same profit.

The interests of our country being thus sensibly affected did not fail to create the discontent and murmurs of an injured people. Remonstrances were made; but, instead of a redress of grievances, our humble intreaties were spurned with indignity. It now became too evident that open resistance by force must be resorted to, or we must abide with unconditional submission, the dictates of the parent State. The former was viewed with horror by a peaceable people, but to think of the latter was death. An appeal was therefore made to the great God of battles, and the event committed to the justice of heaven.

The termination of this contest was as glorious to ourselves as ignominious to our adversaries. But we are not assembled to blazon forth our own achievements, nor to rekindle the last glimmerings of expiring vengeance. Although it be difficult to recollect without mingled emo-

tions of pity and indignation, the inhuman murders of the brave and pious, the innocent and unprotected, and the indiscriminate carnage of Boston's dreadful night; yet it is generous, it is noble, to pardon and forgive. Let us therefore draw a veil over scenes of infamy and horror; and let the recollection of butchery and assassination be hidden in eternal oblivion.

It will naturally be expected on this occasion that the observations of the speaker will be rather of a political nature than otherwise. Far be it from me, however, to increase the rage of party violence with which unfortunately we are already too much distracted. It might have been expected that I should entertain you with congratulations on the rapid march of Republican principles. That I should notice the attempt made to thwart the public will, not only in the individual States, but in the National Legislature—That I should dilate with heart-felt satisfaction on the issue of our late elections, in the happy choice of Congressional Representatives in the different states, the Governor of this state, and particularly in placing “the man of the people” at the head of the general government. But I waive the consideration of these things to call your attention to a subject dear to all who value the happiness of man, and in a peculiar manner dear to every American.

When we consider the situation of man enjoying the blessings of liberty, and compare it with his situation under a despotism, the swelling breast is filled with the alternate passions of joy and sorrow. Despotism, enslaving the body and mind, brings man into the lowest state of hami-

liation, disgrace and misery. The strong arm of power dealing its bolts of vengeance in every direction, no one knows on whom they may fall. Neither virtue nor innocence can shield; neither strength nor speed can save from destruction. Hence the fear of incurring the displeasure of the despot becomes universal, and the influence of this passion damps the ardor of enterprize, without which, mankind might remain in lethargy and stupefaction for “ages of hopeless end.” The fervor of youth becomes nipped in the bud, and the free expansions of the soul confined within the smallest compals. Genius being thus clogged and crippled, cannot soar aloft to those regions of light, which direct our steps to the pinnacle of happiness and grandeur.

Here it may suffice to notice the contrast between ancient Greece and modern Turkey. The Grecians possessing a free government, produced men of the most exalted eminence in every high department. Their philosophers, statesmen, warriors, orators, poets, and scholars deep read in every branch of science and literature, rendered them the wonder and admiration of the world—But mark the difference! The Turks enjoying the same soil and climate, and breathing under the same propitious sky, are nevertheless reduced to the most abject and degraded state—Instead of spirit and activity, is found a careless listlessness, and loitering sloth and indolence—Instead of the bright luminaries of science, mental gloom and darkness prevail. All is enveloped in the mists of ignorance and superstition. But the government of Turkey has long been despotic.

Notwithstanding all that has been said by the adherents of monarchy about the tumultuous tendency of popular elections, the violence of party animosity and factious combinations of individuals, and the continual agitation of the passions, it must necessarily be conceded that a free and equitable representative government is best calculated to promote the interest and happiness of a nation. This form of government offers every laudable inducement to the exertion of our faculties to the utmost extent; and when tempered with a proper degree of energy, affords the fairest opportunity of elevating man to the highest situation of true dignity and importance, his nature is capable of sustaining.

If any American express a desire for the establishment of a throne in *this country*, he should be marked as one who either does not understand the true interests of the people, or who would sacrifice them at the shrine of false grandeur—He should not for a moment enjoy the confidence of a single citizen, but neglected and forsaken should be suffered to sink into obscurity.

Some there are, who, from a laudable principle, entertain doubts respecting the stability of our Constitution. The downfall of ancient republics has probably produced a fear that we in our turn are to experience the same melancholy catastrophe. But let such bear in mind, that besides an essential difference in the Constitution itself, many circumstances combine to assure us of its duration.

The government of Sparta, as established by Lycurgus, was an incoherent mixture of monar-

chy, aristocracy and democracy. A senate for life, possessing the whole executive power, and the exclusive right to originate all laws, is a body of men so formidable that it is almost impossible to provide a check sufficiently strong to restrain them within due bounds. So much power thus vested, must inevitably place the liberty of the people on a precarious and dangerous tenure. Besides, the severe regimen prescribed by the legislator rendered the habits of the citizens totally different from ours. Warriors indeed they might become; and in this the chief end of the institution was answered; for the regulations of Lycurgus appear to have been made principally with this view. He wished to make his country powerful, that it might at any time resist the encroachments of its neighbors, and considered a nation of hardy, robust, athletic men, best calculated to effect this purpose.

As the Spartan government was too aristocratical, Solon, on the contrary, made that of Athens too democratical. An unwieldy assembly of the people it must be acknowledged is not well calculated either for the purpose of general legislation, or the management of the executive and judiciary departments; yet to such an assembly was committed the supreme power, in all cases legislative, executive and judicial. Thus the government was not only defective in blending together those departments which it is the pride and boast of modern polity to keep separate and distinct, but in uniting them in a popular assembly of all the citizens.

The unsettled and fluctuating government of Rome, vibrated at one time towards monarchy,



at another towards aristocracy, and at another towards democracy. But whatever form it assumed it was far from arriving at any considerable perfection. Many defects similar to those already noticed continued to exist. From the foundation of the city to the expulsion of Marquin, we find the nobles striving for the highest honors. The subsequent struggles between plebeians and patricians place the want of good regulations in a clear point of view. The fall of such governments is therefore not surprising. They carry within themselves the poison which is finally to destroy them.

Similar defects might be noticed in other republics, as well ancient as modern : and as our Constitution differs materially in many important points, from those of all republican governments heretofore known, their instability cannot be a proper criterion by which to test its probable continuance.

But the best possible form of government is not of itself sufficient to perpetuate the liberty of a nation. To transmit this blessing unimpaired to succeeding generations, the co-operative assistance of the citizens is at all times necessary. The first great requisite to this end is, the dissemination of knowledge and virtuous principles. These are the main pillars by which good government is supported ; and if they are suffered to decay, the whole superstructure must tumble into ruin. A huge unwieldy pile, of monstrous aspect, will then be erected in its stead ; for government of some sort is necessary, even though it should assume the most hideous form.

When knowledge is represented as the prin-

cipal support of free government, it must not be understood that all men should become philosophers and statesmen; this would be impracticable. Few are destined to attain the lofty heights of science. But all that is requisite is within the power of most men; so much of the natural rights of man as to know where freedom ends and oppression begins; and a true idea of the relative duties of good citizens. Where these are inculcated and well understood, despotism will not dare to wield a lance—There undaunted freemen will ever assume the majestic port of independence, and the erect attitude of defiance.

As good government is nurtured by information, tyranny on the contrary delights to sport its horrid gambols in the gloomy shades of ignorance. Hence the vigilance of tyrannic potentates in extinguishing the lights of science and keeping their subjects in profound darkness. Avaricious of unjust power, and conscious of the enormity of their guilt, they shrink from the light of truth, like the assassin from a noon-day sun. Captivated by the tinsel glare of unreal grandeur that shines within their courts, they strive for its perpetuation to their latest descendants. But there is a point, beyond which oppression's self may not advance. It is written in the book of fate "thus far shalt thou go, and no further." If, blinded by the lust of power and domination, it attempts a further stride, the consequences become terrible. The struggle of desperation ensues; the iron bands of slavery are burst asunder; the yoke of oppression is broken in pieces like a potter's vessel; lordly tyrants with all their pomp and pageantry, are hurled

from their high stations into undistinguished ruin.

Though what is here said applies only to despotic states, yet it should be recollected there is a natural tendency in all governments towards arbitrary power; and the depraved nature of man is such, that he will generally exercise power whenever he feels it. The propriety—the necessity of keeping a watchful eye upon government, is therefore obvious. But whilst we are jealous of our rights and privileges, we should observe a due respect for those in the administration of government. Our jealousy should not lead us to consider them as enemies; until they evince a hostile disposition. If this should at any time take place, negligence on our part would then become criminal; for it is the duty of good citizens to oppose unlawful infringements of their liberties, and encroachments on their rights. But it is in extreme cases only, that any other opposition will be necessary, than that of a free vote on the day of a new election.

A stronger attachment to principles than to men, is also necessary in a Republican government. A too great partiality for those whose sentiments are congenial with our own, and inveteracy against those who differ from us, will sometimes induce us inadvertently to overlook the errors of the former, while we turn a deaf ear to the just reasonings of the latter. Here we cannot be too much on our guard, in proving the conduct of all men by the severe test of true principles; if they cannot bear the scrutiny, they should be cast off as unworthy of confidence.

An evil hath crept in amongst us which ought to be eradicated. I allude to the folly of being so much guided in our politics by European occurrences. Why are we continually so impatient for a new arrival from abroad? Why is all anxiety and solicitude? Why is expectation on tip-toe, as if the battle of Aboukir or Marengo was to decide *our* fate? What is it to us whether Egypt be in possession of the French or the English? What is the sailing of an English or French fleet, or the march of a Russian army? What is it to us whether the armed neutrality terminate in favour of the allied powers or of the haughty mistress of the seas? You will say, we revere the principle on which a party combats.—But let me ask, are you quite sure that you can always know with certainty the real motives and views of the belligerent parties? when we recall to mind the finesse, the secret intrigues, the bribery and corruption of European cabinets, we should at least hesitate before we interest ourselves in their behalf. The practices of those courts appear so unaccountable and enormous, that it is almost impossible to believe what is related of them, from authority which must not be questioned.—And shall we, notwithstanding, feel those lively hopes and strong desires on their account? Shall we be elated with the success or dejected by the disasters of those whose designs are inscrutable and whose friendship is but a broken reed.

But you will still say, we feel the interest and welfare of this country at stake in the contest.—Are we then to suppose that France and England are lavishing so much blood and treasure to

determine who shall have it in their power to benefit us the most? For really the conduct of some would almost warrant a conclusion of this sort.—Are we yet to learn that self interest is the *primum-mobile* of nations? From our experience of the conduct of nations we might reasonably infer, that we have but little to expect from their friendship except when it accords with their own advantage. Is it not therefore most absurd and ridiculous to take so active a part in foreign politics, as to be distinguished by a French and English party? This is a circumstance of the most humiliating and degrading nature; it is a shame and reproach to our national character.

In a free government it is to be expected there will be a difference in political sentiment. This is not of itself an evil; on the contrary it arouses the ingenuity of man, and is a strong stimulus to the mind. But opinions should be advanced and supported with mildness and moderation. A wandering from this into the rough fields of bitter asperity, will endanger the very liberty we wish to preserve. This is the error into which we have fallen. The country has been divided into two great parties drawn out in hostile array to each other. The vocabulary of opprobrious epithets has been exhausted and lavished, indiscriminately, because all could not think alike. The peal has been rung on one side with aristocrats and tories, and on the other with jacobins, disorganizers, and friends of anarchy and confusion. But we have a noble example of moderation and dignity in the inaugural address of our executive chief; an address

the most mild and conciliatory, and breathing the principles of republicanifm in all their native purity. An address which evinces that the author of that declaration of independence which you have this day heard, can still be great when occasion requires—An address which probably was never excelled from an executive chair. From his high example then, let us learn charity and forbearance towards our political antagonists. Let us lay aside all inveterate language and party animosity. Herein consists the security and perpetuation of liberty and independence.

Could we view the condition of all nations on the globe and compare it with our own, we should find great cause of satisfaction with our situation. Liberty, the greatest of all blessings is better understood and enjoyed here, than in any other country. Our citizens are robust, hardy, active and enterprising. Seminaries of learning abound in the land. Our national councils are unrivaled for wisdom, virtue, patriotism and splendid talents. In the learned professions we are second to none. In phyfic we have made new discoveries and improvements, which have been read with avidity by the most eminent professors in Europe. In law and divinity, the thunders of our eloquence would well grace either the Roman forum or the Gallic pulpit. Our public buildings are capacious and magnificent—And when we take into view the plans laid for the improvement of our roads and rivers, the opening of canals for inland navigation, and the rapid increase of our population, we contemplate the rising greatness of our country with peculiar complacency.

In taking this view of our situation we should not forget through what means it has been obtained. The foundation of our prosperity was laid in the declaration of independence whose anniversary we are now celebrating. On this we have built the fair temple of liberty ; and on this let us continue to rear its columns till the top stone of glory shall reach the skies.

By reflecting on the origin of our national existence, and recurring to first principles, we may imbibe a portion of that spirit which animated those departed worthies who sealed it with their blood. This day we therefore consecrate to patriotism and to virtue. Proclaim it aloud "in the highways and on the house tops," Let all America with one voice join in the grateful tribute. Sacred be the memory of those who fell in the glorious cause—Nor will we forget the services of those living patriots whose exertions were then made either in the council or in the field. This day will we rehearse their virtues and heroic achievements. But let highest praises be given to the memory of HIM whose virtues and valour were our shield and defence in war. Let the rapturous strains dwell on each tongue with sweet accents. Unfurl the banners of liberty—throw wide her everlasting gates, and throng the sacred temple. There whilst every bosom glows with patriotic fervour, let us revive our solemn engagements at freedom's shrine. Thus shall we transmit our liberty and independence unimpaired to remotest ages. And although remote from the bloody conflict of imbattled hosts, may we anticipate with joy the time when war and carnage "shall cease from the earth.