

AN  
ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE

*The Citizens of Stephen-Town,*

WESTCHESTER COUNTY, STATE OF NEW-YORK,

JULY 4th, 1803,

In Commemoration of the  
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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By The Rev. JOSIAH HENDERSON,  
Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Bedford.

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*“The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad.”—Psalms 97. 1.*

*“The Lord stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of the waves, and the tumults of the people”—Psalms 65. 7.*

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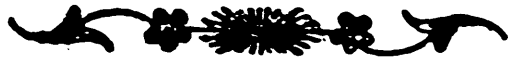
# To the Public.



*The author of the following sheets, flatters himself that the few thoughts which he has thrown together will be received, with candor and indulgence by an impartial public, when they consider that he had but one week's notice before delivery, and had also to prepare two sermons for the Sabbath;—it is therefore submitted to the public without undergoing any alteration from the original copy in which it was delivered.*

**THE AUTHOR.**

# ORATION.



**A**LL the memorable events which we meet with, whether recorded in sacred, or profane history, respecting the rise, progress, declension, and final ruin of nations, are very interesting, and instructive to mankind.

The calling of Abraham the father of the Jewish nation—of Jacob and his family into Egypt—of Moses their leader to conduct them back again to their native land—of the Covenant graven by the finger of God on tables of stone—of the divine Law promulgated upon Mount Sinai—of the introduction of kingly government, and the various kinds of corruption and idolatry, which laid the foundation for a train of national calamities, which unhappily have continued in a greater, or less degree from that period to this; all of which are very instructive and memorable events, and convey to us the absolute certainty of a *national providence* which superintends, and presides over all the affairs of men.

*A doctrine* no less consonant to reason than consolatory to the human mind, and of course must afford us the highest satisfaction to find *this truth* confirmed by the sacred writers in the clearest and strongest terms. The word of God is full of the most gracious promises to all righteous nations,

and also of the most dreadful denunciations against all wicked and impenitent kingdoms:—and it is well known to every person of reading and reflection that these promises, and these threatnings, were intended not as vain amusements, but as proper excitements to national virtue and felicity.

For the history of the Jews alluded to in a special manner, is scarce any thing else than the sacred history of God's providential interposition to punish or reward them accordingly as they obeyed, or disobeyed his *divine Laws*. Although we should admit that on account of the peculiar circumstances of that nation, and the unexampled forms of their theocracy, their case cannot be exactly drawn into a parallel with that of all other nations:—Yet there are not wanting some others which may admit of a just parallel. I mean *those four celebrated empires* of antiquity which rose up one after another, and in their turn successively filled the world with astonishment and terror, were nothing more than the mighty engines in the hand of God to execute his various dispensations of mercy or justice on the Jewish nation, and other civil communities; and gradually to prepare the way for the introduction of another of a very different nature, and infinitely superior to them all.

The rise, progress, declension, and final destruction of these kingdoms were predicted in the sacred writings long before they existed.\*

“And those very extraordinary personages Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Vespasian, and Titus, were, though unknown to themselves, the agents of the Almighty, raised up at certain

\* Daniel 7 and 8th chapters.

and appointed times, and furnished with every requisite qualification "to perform all his pleasure, and fulfil his vows." "I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth the earth by myself, that frustrateth, the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish, that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the council of his messengers. I form the light, and I create darkness, I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things."

Thus it evidently appears that what is considered as the common vicissitude of human affairs, peace and war, pestilence and famine, political changes, and national revolutions, all the passions of the wicked, the machinations of the crafty, the virtues of the good, the errors of the weak, the prudence of the wise, the shining qualities of the great;" in a word every thing that the world calls accident, chance and fortune, are all in a peculiar manner under the immediate controul of an invisible and over-ruling hand, which without the least violation of the laws of nature or the freedom of human action, renders them subservient to the gracious purposes of divine wisdom in the government of the world.

We see this divine truth exemplified in the most striking manner in the instance already adduced of the four great monarchies, forming as it were one vast map of divine providential administration, delineated on so large a scale, and marked with such legible characters, as that they cannot well escape our notice.

Altho' this is properly exhibited for the particular observation of mankind in general, yet there are other instances, which to us may be infinitely more interesting of a national providence, which presides over all our affairs.

The citizens of the United States of America have been most remarkably favoured with the visible protection of heaven. In our own history are recorded many plain and unequivocal marks of divine interference, which if we do not acknowledge we may justly be denominated the blindest, or most ungrateful people on the earth.

Suffer me then to call your attention to a few of the most remarkable instances which dignify the annals of our country; and then direct your thoughts to some of the most proper incentives to virtue and patriotism.

Our separation from the kingdom of Great-Britain, were we to recite the history at large, would be a long train of repeated injuries and usurpations, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over the United States of America, from which we were happily delivered; and that too at a time according to human appearance when we had but little hopes of gaining our freedom and Independence.

After repeated exasperations to the utmost, by the proceedings of parliament; and when all petitions and supplications to that high court failed— we come firmly and decidedly to this resolve on that ever memorable 4th day of July 1776, to renounce all connection with her, and declare ourselves a free and independent people; to prove *this* we not only submitted our decisions to a candid world, but also to the judge of all for the rec-

itude of our intentions ; and as a Free Independent People we declared ourselves to have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and perform all the other acts which a free and independent people have an undoubted right to do—and to carry this resolve into effect, we mutually pledged to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our honour.—Till at length on the 3d. day of September 1783, peace was negotiated on the part of Great Britain, and the definitive treaty was signed on the part of the United States : all of which was brought about by a concurrence of the most surprising incidents co-operating at that critical moment on which the whole depended with the noblest efforts of true patriotism.—Thus ended a long and arduous conflict, in which Great Britain expended nearly an hundred millions of money, with the loss of an hundred thousand of lives, and gained nothing.

America endured every cruelty, and distress from her enemies, lost many precious lives, and much treasure, but gloriously delivered herself from a foreign dominion and gained a rank among the nations of the earth.

Let any contemplative mind now seriously consider these remarkable facts selected from a multitude of others scarce less extraordinary,\* then let reason, and conscience deny if they can, the evident traces which they bear stamped upon them of some superior power.

Although it may seem to some as if the very

\* The reader may see these remarkable facts stated at large in Winterbotham's history of the rise, progress, and establishment of the independence of the United States.

times to which the present Anniversary carries back our thoughts, were a contradiction to the doctrine of divine providence here advanced.

But it is to be expected that throughout a long conflict for liberty, there should be one uninterrupted course of prosperity and success? For have not private as well as public afflictions a natural tendency to awaken, to alarm, to instruct, to humanize, to meliorate the heart of man?

And may they not be ultimately attended with other very important, and beneficial consequences to civil communities? Undoubtedly this was in an eminent degree the case in that critical period which we are now commemorating. Into what convulsions were our citizens then thrown? What did these agitations then appear to be, but the consequences of a disordered constitution? Which by shaking off some of its most malignant humors, it acquired in the end a degree of health and soundness entirely unknown before.

Surely then we have the strongest reason to conclude that there is a power on high which watches over the fate of all nations, and which has in the most peculiar manner, plainly distinguishable from the ordinary course of events, and the common effects of human policy and foresight, preserved the United States of America in the most critical, and perilous circumstances.\*

Does not this then afford us some sure ground to hope, that if we sincerely endeavour to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will

\* Those observations I apprehend are strictly applicable to the several instances of a national providence, or of the *invisible direction* which I have here advanced.



still be extended to us; by a speedy, and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove, or at least lighten those heavy judgments which our iniquities seem to be drawing upon us?

Though this language may be treated with sovereign contempt by those who please to compliment themselves with the name of modern philosophers. Let them enjoy their triumph, and also let them allow us, who think christianity the truest philosophy, to console ourselves amidst all the gloom, which may surround us, with those reviving hopes which the belief of God's providential government of the world presents to our view. My fellow-citizens if this be superstition, it is so delightful a superstition, that to deprive us of its enjoyment would be inhumanity indeed.

We know in whom we have trusted, and we are constrained to believe, that this comfortable truth rests on a foundation which cannot be shaken.

It rests as we have already seen, not only on the express declarations and promises of sacred writ, but on the many remarkable instances of supernatural agency, which continually occur in the history of mankind, and especially in that of our own.

In every one of those extraordinary deliverances alluded to, the dangers which then appeared to threaten this country, were of a much greater magnitude and wore a more formidable aspect than those which now seem to alarm us.

May we not then again indulge ourselves with the same comfortable expectations? For do not a series of past favours naturally beget within us a strong presumption of their future continuance? And will it not also be wholly imputed to the laudable partiality which every honest and virtuous

citizen entertains for his own country, if we give way to a firm persuasion, that God will still continue his accustomed goodness to this highly favoured land ?

Let us then soothe ourselves with this belief, that a nation which has rendered herself so distinguished as we are, will not be at this time deserted by our gracious benefactor, and protector.

Here my fellow citizens civil liberty has fixed her throne ;—here the religion of Jesus finds its firmest support ;—here the divine principle of toleration is established and supported ;—here is the *asylum* for the stranger, *the citadel* for the oppressed, and the vineyard where the living God in an eminent manner hath delighted to own, and bless. In a word, here are laws equal, wise, and good, through which the streams of justice flow with a purity unknown in any other country.

We have not only the happiness of enjoying these unspeakable advantages ourselves, but they also flow to many others. Is it then my fellow citizens a vain thought, a delusive imagination, that after having been made the chosen instruments of divine providence, for such noble, and beneficial purposes, there is still some degree of felicity in reserve for us ;—and that the illustrious part we have been appointed to act on the great theatre of the world, is not yet completely accomplished.

What may be in the councils of infinite wisdom ;—what mighty changes may now be meditating in the great system of human affairs, God alone can best tell.\* But in the midst of such awful suspence,

\* With regard to the mighty changes which have taken place in the system of human affairs since the period of 1776, not only in America but also in Europe, I need not inform the reader.

while the fate of empires hangs trembling on his resolves,—of one thing at least we are absolutely certain ; that it is infinitely better to have God for friend, than our foe. Whether he will be our friend, or our enemy, depends much upon our future conduct.

For if by our impiety, infidelity, libertinism, ill-timed gaiety, and wanton profuseness, in the very face of public calamity, we should audaciously insult the divine administrations, and brave God's utmost vengeance ; what can we reasonably expect, but that every thing which ought to be the means of our stability, will be converted into the instruments of our destruction?

This immense dominion of territory of which we now boast, we shall then be no longer worthy of holding ;—but will gradually be sent away from us ;—nay it may be necessary for the well-being of mankind to cut off all our future communications with distant countries, lest they should be infected with the contagion of our national sins.

But if on the other hand we revere the judgments of God, which are abroad in the earth, and return again to that rightful allegiance which we owe to him ; and again put ourselves under his divine protection ; we still have strong reason to believe, (as he has often done) that he will dispel the clouds which seem to hang over us ;—or if for wise reasons best known to himself, he should suffer them to gather thick, and darken upon us,\* he may in the end render this conducive to our real welfare.

\* The reader will please to observe, that what I mean by the clouds which seem to hang over us, is our political distractions.

For there are no calamities either private or public, which under the gracious guidance of the Most High, may not eventually prove a blessing.

My fellow citizens, we have no real losses to fear, but that of God's favour ; to be cut off from this, ought to sink us into despair. There is such a spirit in freedom, such an energy in virtue, and such a confidence in religion, as will enable all those who possess them, to rise infinitely superior to every disaster.

However necessary to national greatness and public prosperity, boundless extent of territory may be ; yet they are not essential to national felicity.

For the true wealth and security of a kingdom consists in frugality, industry, moderation, temperance, fortitude, probity, piety, and unanimity.

Suffer me then to call your attention to moderation in all your wishes, fortitude in all your actions, and unanimity in all your deliberations, as the sure road which leads to virtue, honour, and national felicity.

If your wishes terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness, or earthly happiness, you have undoubtedly missed the road which leads to felicity ; you have likewise greatly dishonoured the native dignity of your immortal souls, by suffering your imagination to rove in a land of shadows, and by deceiving yourselves with unsubstantial forms.

Or can you seriously imagine that all are happy who have attained to those summits of rank and distinction, to which your wishes seem eagerly to aspire ? Alas ! how often has experience proved, that in the very place where roses were supposed

to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew up? How often has reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, all that the world calls great, would have been gladly exchanged for the possession of a humble station, with which you are now so much dissatisfied? How hard is it to make men believe that there is an irreversible degree of vanity pronounced upon every thing below the Sun?

It too commonly happens, that the most celebrated stations of life are incident to the greatest calamities; while those in the more humble stations of life remain unhurt amidst the violence of the storm.

Retract then with all possible speed from those pernicious, and extravagant desires, to those which are more rational and attainable. And in future endeavour to train up your minds to more moderate views of human life and happiness.

Indeed it is no less beneath our dignity to be moderate in all pursuits, and sober in fixing all our aims, and beware of being lead aside from the plain paths of sound, and moderate conduct, by any false lights which may be hung out to allure us aside from the path of virtue and integrity. For by aiming at a mark too high we may fall short of that which was in our power to have reached; and instead of attaining to that eminence to which we ardently aspire we expose ourselves in the end to derision, and bring upon our heads many disasters. Let every man that is among you take the reasonable caution of the great apostle of the gentiles, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think soberly."\*

\* Romans 12. 3.

Whatever the aims of the ambitious may be, as well as that of others, there is one exercise of moderation, which ought to be enjoined upon those of great abilities, that is however amidst the warmth of pursuit, never to transgress the bounds of moral duty, but submit themselves to the proper restraints which religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, which a regard to reputation justly impose upon them. Never one imagine that there are no barriers which ought to stop your progress in the pursuit of any object.

For it is from a violent and impetuous spirit, that all the evils, and calamities which imbitter human life are too often found to accompany ambition.

And also in all public contests the peace, and well-being of nations, have been too often sacrificed to the ambitious projects of the great. Those who are moderate, and temperate in all their wishes, are also regular and virtuous in all their pursuits. Conscious integrity to them is far more valuable than success.

Their inclination is not so great to accomplish any design, as their fears are, in taking a dishonorable step in the acquirement. When disappointed they always exercise a christian patience; and by their gentle and gradual progress, they are far more likely to succeed in the end than those who exercise violence, and the impetuosity of temper. By such a strict line of conduct they approve themselves to the wise, virtuous, and discerning, and happily escape those dangers to which all other persons of an opposite temper of mind are continually exposed. Wherefore I presume you will not think it unreasonable if I exhort you also to moderation in all your expectations. However flourish-

ing the course of events in divine providence may seem to be around you, never suffer your minds to be vainly puffed up, nor ever flatter yourselves with high prospects from the increasing favours of this vain world. Nor ever suffer yourselves for a moment seriously to think that your mountain stands sufficiently strong, and that you have nothing to fear of ever being removed. Suffer not yourselves to be deluded with such vain imaginations, for in so doing you are laying a foundation for disappointment and misery. By building your houses upon so dangerous a foundation, you are preparing yourselves for a great and ruinous fall. For the Almighty beholds with displeasure all those who are intoxicated with prosperity, and forget their dependence on him who raised them up at first. And his divine government of the world has never been rendered more conspicuous, "than in bringing down the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud imaginations of their minds."

But moderation in all our expectations is the best safe guard to the mind in this transitory life, for it will enable us to pass through it in the most agreeable manner, and when we justly rise in the world, it will greatly contribute to our elevation, and should we at any time chance to fall, it will render it the easier.

So also is moderation in all our pleasures a very necessary virtue.

For it is an indisputable truth, that every pleasure when carried to excess, converts itself at length into deadly poison; and that which was intended for a cordial to cheer the life of man, through want of moderation is often turned into the instrument of death.

The want of moderation too often bring men to an untimely grave, and till they arrive at the house appointed for all the living, it pursues them close with an innumerable train of evils. Here I might paint to your imaginations the deplorable state of faded youth, premature old age, an enervated body, and infeebled mind, together with the long and black catalogue of diseases which the indulgence of vicious appetites and passion have introduced into our world.

But I shall dismiss this part of the subject by calling your attention to this exercise of moderation in all your passions.

The exercise of this virtue is peculiarly necessary, because there is no passion of the human mind considered of itself but what has a natural tendency to run into excess, if not properly guarded against, and especially that of anger and resentment, the excess of which is obviously dangerous to all around you, and calls aloud for moderation.

If we give up ourselves without restraint to the impetuosity of passion we are universally condemned by the world, and cannot with any good sense be accounted rational creatures.

Let moderation then accustom us to wait until all the fumes of passion are spent, then we shall be able to determine between good and evil, truth and error, sin and duty.

Never once imagine that true strength and fortitude of mind are displayed by violence of passion; this is so far from true fortitude of mind, that it is the pusillanimity of children.

True strength and fortitude of mind are always displayed in governing our unruly passions, and acting on the most trying occasions according to the



true dictates of conscience and the temperate exercise of our reason. True fortitude of mind is not only necessary to the enjoyment of life, but also for the proper discharge of its most important duties. For he who is of a dastardy mind is a slave to the world. "He can never stand the clamor of the multitude, nor the frowns of the great. The wind of popular favour, or the threats of power are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose." But the man of virtuous fortitude closely follows the dictates of his own heart unembarrassed ;" having once determined what is fit, and proper for him to do, no threatening can shake, nor dangers surprize him.

Though he may be lifted up with pride, and seduced by pleasure, yet if he is guarded by conscious integrity, he is safe in the midst of public calamity.

Without this temper of mind no man can be a thorough christian, nor even a good states-man. As a sincere christian it requires him to rise above the fear of man, which bringeth a snare, and at all times to be prepared, if called to lay down his life in the glorious cause of religion, and truth. As a patriot to his country he ought to rise superior to every intrigue, and if need requires to stand forth with his life, and fortune, for the support of his fellow-citizens.

All the distinguished servants of God as well as benefactors of men, in the most perilous times, have acted their part with such peculiar honor, as to render their names immortal through succeeding ages, have all been remarkable for this capital virtue, fortitude of mind.

I shall produce one example of fortitude or constancy of mind which may serve instead of ten thou-

and others. I mean that of the great apostle of the gentiles, when called to go up to Jerusalem, to encounter the violence of his enemies.

His own words speak the firm, and undaunted resolution of his mind.\* “Behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there ; save that the holy ghost witnesseth in every city saying that bonds, and affections abide me, but none of these things move me ; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” In a word true constancy, or fortitude of mind is a good conscience, and a firm trust in God.

Great difficulties in a special manner call for great talents, and great virtues to be exercised. And do not the very times in which we live call for those noble examples of self-denial and public spirit, which will speak in the clearest terms the greatness of the human mind, which have upon the most trying occasions saved kingdoms, and immortalized individuals. Let all the wise and good citizens in every part of our vast territory stand forth in the present situation of affairs, as one man, to advise, direct, assist, and befriend each other.

Let every one now give up their favourite prejudices, systems, interests, resentments, and connections if need requires, for the preservation of their country. For the Lord’s sake let us not waste that precious time allotted for acting well our part on the theatre of life, by taring and devouring one another with internal broils, and angry divisions.

\* Acts 20, 22, and 6.

But in future let us employ our time, and our talents in the service of God, and in promoting the general good of our country.

As men, as christians, and as able politicians, never give way to unjust suspicions, uncandid interpretations, mutual reproaches, and endless altercations, for they can answer no other purpose, but to imbitter our minds, and multiply the very evils we wish to remove. From beginnings, such as these, arise all the calamities which imbitter human society; to remove them ought to be the great object of this anniversary solemnity.

Can we possibly conceive of a stronger motive to moderate our dissensions, and compose our passions, before they grow too big, and turbulent for us to manage, or controul, than seriously to consider for a moment that we are all embarked upon the same bottom, and if, in the midst of angry contentions the vessel should perish, undoubtedly with it, we must all likewise perish.

It is not only our common interest, but our common duty, to unite hand and heart against such dangerous, and fatal events. There is no danger of mistake, but from unguarded conduct of ourselves. The most formidable enemies we have to fear, are our own personal vices, and political distractions.

Let harmony then inspire our *councils*, and the purifying religion of Jesus sanctify our hearts, and we have nothing to fear.

Peace abroad is undoubtedly a very desirable object. But there are two things of infinitely more importance to us, peace with one another, and peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Animated by a strong belief of the justness of our cause, and a protecting God.

The feeble may have a just ground to believe that they shall wax stronger and stronger, and finally despise all sufferings and death itself. How often have handfuls of men defied hosts that were encamped against them, and finally gone forth conquering, and to conquer?

The sword of the Lord, and Gideon, have justly called forth a valour which astonishes the world, and which can never be exerted but by those who fight under the divine banner.

Finally let no discouragement, danger nor suffering ever deter us from pursuing that which is right.

Let us preserve fidelity to our God, to our saviour, and to our country, through honour and dishonour, through good and evil report, though an host should encamp against us.

Let us begin all things from the pattern and example of Christ, carry on all things with and through him, and let all things aim at, and terminate in Christ.

