

A N

O R A T I O N,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

The INDEPENDENCE of the
UNITED STATES of *America*.

DELIVERED

In the *Baptist* Meeting-House in PROVIDENCE,
July 4th, 1793.

1745-1803:

By ENOS HITCHCOCK, D. D.



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1793

ON the Fourth of *July* inst. being the anniversary of the declaration of the Independence of the *United States*, the following ORATION was delivered, in commemoration of that event, and is now published at the request of the inhabitants of this town.

Providence, July 8, 1793.

D. M.

8 N. O.

Recat. 1797 Apr. 24/30

An O R A T I O N.

THE return of this Anniversary hath remind-
ed us, my respected Fellow-Citizens, of an event
full of wonders, and pregnant with consequences
important, not to this country only, but to man-
kind. Called again to felicitate you on this mem-
orable day, I feel myself secure in your candour
to those sentimental effusions which the occasion
may suggest. There is a pleasure in the idea of
addressing a free and an enlightened people, on
the blessings they enjoy, and on the happiness of
their condition. Americans! this day recognizes
your emancipation. It is your jubilee. It is the
birth-day of your independence, of your national
existence! Let it never be forgotten, that, on the
fourth day of July, one thousand seven hundred
and seventy-six, forth issued from the illustrious
and patriotic Congress the following unanimous
declaration:

‘ We, therefore, the Representatives of the
United States of America, in Congress assembled,
appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for
the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name
and by authority of the good people of these Co-
lonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these
United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, *free
and independent States.*’

THIS

THIS declaration was accompanied with the reasons which compelled them to make it, and which were deemed sufficient to justify the measure in the view of the world. It was nobly made at the most eventful period of the war, when your country was bleeding at every pore, without a friend among the nations of the earth. God alone was her friend ! The justice of her cause was registered in the high chancery of heaven. The stars fought in their courses for her ; and the event justified a step which had so astonished the world.

To retrace the steps which led to the accomplishment of the revolution, and the causes which prepared the way for it, would be to enter into a field of discussion too large for the present occasion. It would be to repeat what has already been done in a thousand forms. Historians have collected and arranged the great mass of materials. Orators have marked, in polished periods, the great outlines of the revolution. Poets have sung its praises, and, stretching forward on the prophetic wing, the vocal muse hath assigned to it every good of which so great an event can be productive. The subject, however, is not exhausted. Sentimental gleanings still remain to be gathered through the extending field, by those whom you shall annually appoint to celebrate ' this memorable event.' * New subjects will be continually arising

* *At a Town-Meeting of the Freemen of the town of Providence, held on the seventh day of April, A. D. 1793.*

RESOLVED, That his Excellency the Governor, Messrs. Joseph Nightingale, Ephraim Bowen, jun. Jeremiah Olney, and Welcome Arnold, be a committee to make choice of a person to deliver a suitable Oration on the fourth day of July next, to commence at twelve o'clock at noon, in commemoration of the independence of the

ing out of the improving condition of our own country, the progress of society, government and manners, in the world, which will result from the revolution, and from the establishment of our independence:

Our Oration now turns to view the advantages of the natural situation, and political freedom, which we, as a people, enjoy.

THESE are suggested to us by a recognition of the independency of the American Republic. To what purpose could be the possession of the former, without the enjoyment of the latter? In both respects, our lines have fallen in pleasant places; and we have a goodly heritage. What nation on earth can boast of such a territory, in extent and fertility of soil, situation and variety of climate? The situation and extensive territory of *the United States* are favourable for a great variety of productions, and convenient for commerce. Extending from the thirty-first to the forty-sixth degree of north latitude, and averaging at more than one thousand miles in breadth, they comprehend such a variety of soil and climate, as to be capable of almost every kind of production, either necessary or convenient to man. The prolific soil will reward the cultivator's labour, and furnish an ample supply for its increasing inhabitants. It is not usual for any of the casualties, whereby the fruits of the earth are at any time cut off, to pervade so extensive a space at the same time. While one part

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the United States: That said committee provide a place for the delivery of such Oration; and that an Oration on said memorable event be continued annually.

A true Copy:

Witness, DANIEL COOKE, *Town-Clerk.*

is pinched with drought, or devoured by insects, others have a superabundance to supply their demands. Bounded on the Atlantic ocean by a vast extent of coast, they enjoy every advantage of foreign and domestic commerce. Intersected by many rivers, at distances favourable for internal navigation, or to supply artificial canals, the inhabitants enjoy an easy transportation for the exuberant growth of their fertile banks.

THIS soil is distributed in such portions amongst the inhabitants, and holden by such a tenure, as afford the greatest security to the continuation of a free government. 'Most free states have studied to find out means of preventing too great an inequality in the distribution of landed property. What tumults were occasioned at Rome, in its best times, by attempts to carry into execution the Agrarian law? Among the people of Israel, by direction of heaven, all estates which had been alienated during the course of fifty years, returned to the original owners at the end of that term.' It is beyond a doubt, that the fee simple of the soil generally resting in the cultivators of it, and that general mediocrity of condition which follows from it, are circumstances most favourable to a republican form of government. Virtue and industry, talents and knowledge, will form the principal distinctions; and the motives to these will be increased, while the opportunities for vice are rendered fewer.

IN such a state, the hereditary demagogue, and the cringing sycophant, are alike unknown. Protected by laws of their own framing, the people cannot be oppressed. Enjoying an equal government,

ment, which has no lucrative sinecures to bestow, there will be no great scope for ambitious intrigue. —Such generally is the state of this country, whose inhabitants consist principally of independent and hardy yeomanry, mostly trained to the use of arms, instructed in their rights—reaping and enjoying the fruits of their own industry.—Happy the people that are in such a state! all the blessings of secular and political enjoyment lie within their reach, unendangered from the rapacious hand, of neighbouring powers, jealous of their growth, envious at their prosperity, and avaricious of their spoils. It is among the principal advantages of our situation, that we are not surrounded by such petulant and encroaching neighbours. Of the evil of such a situation, we may form some idea from what we suffer by the vicinity of the savage tribes.

FROM the natural situation of this country, and the peculiar circumstances of its inhabitants, arise many political advantages; for the enjoyment of which we are indebted to the revolution. The features of our policy have a strong resemblance to the magnificent and well-proportioned features of our country. No longer do we subscribe to the absurd doctrine of the divine right of kings, no longer bow our necks to the galling yoke of foreign legislation. Independent of these servilities, we enjoy the *divine right* of governing ourselves. In the exercise of this right, we have seen a complete political revolution; unawed by surrounding enemies, and uninfluenced by their intrigues. We have seen a constitution of civil government formed under the influence of reason and philanthropy, which meets the approving
voice

voice of the ablest politicians. Much has been said of its excellence by the greatest civilians. It is granted on all hands, that the safety of the nation is the object of all government; and that the will of the people is the supreme law in all republican governments. But the arbitrary power of the many will produce anarchy, as that of an individual does despotism. It is necessary, therefore, that the *social will* be collected, and concentrated in one form or constitution of government; no state having yet appeared, where the people at once govern themselves without representation. This constitution, like the combination of organs that form the constitution of the human body, must contain within itself sufficient force and energy to carry on the necessary functions.' 'The head *dictates* the laws, and the other members *execute*. It is essential that the *head*, which represents the legislative and judicial powers, should be calm and deliberate in its decrees; and that the *arm*, representing the executive, should have promptitude and force.'

EVERY good government must exist somewhere between absolute despotism, and absolute democracy. In either of these extremes, neither liberty nor safety can be enjoyed. It will follow, that a constitution wherein the three powers, legislative, executive and judicial, are most perfectly combined for the prosperity of the people, is the best. Indeed, the great Montesquieu has made it appear, that these three powers exist, in some degree, in every form of government, even the most absolute. As these powers display their co-operative influence, in a greater or less degree, in the governmental machine, they have received their

their name or title. The name of aristocracy is given to the government of those states, where a permanent senate governs all, without ever consulting the people. 'Such is Venice, which is also called a republic; it is a pure aristocracy in this sense, that the three powers are in the hands of the nobles. That state, in which the will of an individual is most frequently a law, and decides on the life or death of the subject, is called a despotic state. Such is the Turkish empire. But it is not true, that the Sultan is absolute master; his power finds limits at every step he advances, and he is obliged to respect them. This empire, then, is between aristocracy and despotism; but inclines towards the latter. The state in which the will of an individual is sometimes absolute, but where co-legislative bodies always join in the exercise of power, is called a monarchy. This species of government is between despotism and aristocracy, but inclines towards the latter. The state where the people choose their magistrates for a fixed period, and often assemble to exercise the sovereignty, is a democracy, and is called a republic; such were Athens and Rome, and such are the *United States of America.*'

AMIDST the various shades between the primitive colours in which different governments have been cast, these *United States* have wisely cast their's in that mild form which is most congenial to the rights of man, and the enjoyment of equal liberty—that liberty, which to *independence* unites *security*—which to *the most ample elective powers*, unites *strength and energy in government.*—You will permit me here to felicitate you on the re-election of two of the first political characters in the world,

to the two first offices in the *American Republic*; and on the honour your electors have done themselves by their unanimity in the election.

THE present flourishing condition of these States, affords the best comment on the excellence of our constitution. All useful theories are practicable. The most perfect model of government that imagination can form will be useless, if the state of mankind renders it impracticable. Already has experience taught us, that our government is fraught with many blessings. The same internal causes that led to independence, and national existence, have guided the people of these States to a wise and deliberate choice of persons, to whom the powers of government might safely be entrusted. To the wisdom of their elections, and to the judicious appointment of officers to the several departments of state, are they to ascribe their present flourishing condition. Under the happy influence of their wisdom, fidelity and industry, we see our credit restored abroad, and established at home—our deranged finances reduced to system, and made productive beyond the calculations of the most sanguine. Although the revenue laws may, in some respects, operate unequally at present, yet the object of the government being the distribution of equal justice, such alterations and reforms will doubtless take place, as to produce all that equality which the nature of the case will admit. Who does not see reason to rejoice in the provision making for the current of justice to run pure through the Union,—who but the dishonest and fraudulent debtor, or the criminal offender? The dignity, candour
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and impartiality, displayed from the judicial bench, augur well to the rights of individuals, and to the peace of society.

HERE property is rendered secure, by the equality of law to all; and every man, being master of the fruits of his own labour, enjoys the right of property—no arbitrary imposition of taxes or of tythes, no lordly exactions of rents, chill the heart of industry, nor repress the cultivator's exertions—no mercantile corporations, with exclusive rights, damp the ardent spirit of enterprise. Hence we see a trackless wilderness, in the short space of one hundred and seventy years, converted into a fruitful field; and, in the space of ten years, we see trade and commerce, no longer limited by parliamentary restrictions, nor distressed by war, extending to all parts of the globe, from the straits of Magellan to the inhospitable regions of Kamskatka. Hence also we see the American genius springing forward in useful arts, projecting great and astonishing enterprizes, *tearing down mountains and filling up vallies,** and making efforts unknown in those countries where despotism renders every thing precarious, and where a tyrant reaps what slaves have sown.

A POLITE and ingenious European traveller, (Dr. Moore) tells us, 'The chilling effects of despotic oppression, or the benign influence of freedom

* Mr. JOHN BROWN, Merchant, of this town, has already gone far, since March last, towards removing a hill of about 400 feet in length, 180 in breadth, and 60 in height—amounting to 250,000 tons of earth; which, when completed, will raise useless flats into 6 acres of useful building-ground, which will be connected with the Massachusetts by an elegant bridge, now building by the same gentleman.

The Author hopes Mr. BROWN will pardon this liberty, as reference was evidently had to it.

freedom and commerce, strike the eye of the most careless traveller.' And, speaking of the disorders incident to free governments, says, 'The temporary and partial disorders which are the consequence of public freedom, have been greatly exaggerated by some people, and represented as more than an equivalent to all the advantages resulting from a free government. But if such persons had opportunities of observing the nature of those evils which spring up in absolute governments, they would soon be convinced of their error. The greatest evil that can arise from the licentiousness which accompanies civil liberty, is, that people may rashly take a dislike to Liberty herself, from the teasing impertinence and absurdity of some of her real or affected well-wishers; as a man might become less fond of his best friend, if he found him always attended by a snappish cur, which without provocation was always growling and barking.

'WHAT are the disorders of a free government, compared to the gloomy regularity produced by despotism? in which men are obliged to the most painful circumspection in all their actions; are afraid to speak their sentiments on the most common occurrences; suspicious of cherishing government spies in their household servants, distrustful of their own relations and most intimate companions; and at all times exposed to the oppression of men in power, and to the insolence of their favourites. No confusion, in my mind, can be more terrible than the stern disciplined regularity and vaunted police of arbitrary governments, where every heart is depressed by fear, where mankind dare not assume their natural character,
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where the free spirit must crouch to the slave in office, where genius must repress her effusions, or, like the Egyptian worshippers, offer them in sacrifice to the calves of power; and where the human mind, always in shackles, shrinks from every generous effort.'

THERE is a point of depression, as well as exaltation, from which human affairs naturally return in a contrary direction, and beyond which they seldom pass, either in their decline or advancement. The present is a crisis, in human affairs, that teems with great and interesting events. Long, long has the old world been sunk in ignorance, superstition and bondage. But the period of her emancipation appears to be rapidly approaching. What a mighty combination of events is now conspiring to the general spread of knowledge and freedom! Judging from what we have seen and experienced, we may conclude that the measures now taken to crush the rights of mankind, and to overturn the altar of freedom, will be productive of the contrary effect. Indeed a dark cloud at present veils the fair countenance of liberty in France. Inexperienced in the science of a free government, and unprepared for the enjoyment of it by a previous course of education, of intellectual improvement, and moral discipline, they have tarnished their glory by excess; and, in the paroxysms of their zeal, have carried excess to outrage.

It is the misfortune of men struggling for liberty, that they are apt to be carried too far, *as we have been taught by experience*. The more the human mind hath been depressed, the greater will be
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its extravagancies, when it bursts forth from the shackles of tyranny into the full light of freedom. Like the vibrating pendulum, it flies from one extreme to another; and, like that, must have time to regulate itself. Shall we reject the cause of human liberty, because anarchy attends the first efforts of a people to gain it, or because ferocity marks some of their steps towards it? Or shall our confidence in its progress be overthrown, because threatened by hostile confederacies? As Americans, we must either renounce that which is our boast and glory, or warmly wish success to the great principles of the French revolution—principles founded on the equal liberty of all men, and the empire of the laws. As rational beings, and as Christians, we should recollect, that from partial evil, it is the glory of the Supreme Ruler to bring forth general good; and that, as inspiration expresseth it, ‘He makes the wrath of man to praise him; but the remainder of wrath will he restrain.’

THE present war in Europe has a further object than the subjugation of France. It is a war of kings and despots, against the dearest rights and the most invaluable privileges of mankind. Should the combined powers succeed against France, and the re-establishment of monarchy there exist among possible events, what security have we, that the same attempt will not be made to restore monarchy in this country? Has not United America led the way? And may she not boast, with an honest pride, of the influence of her example in exciting the attention of many nations to their natural and civil rights? With what freedom of thought—with what enlightened and ardent

ardent philanthropy, has she inspired many of the nations of Europe ! What would be her condition, if subjugated by the confederates against freedom, we may learn from the state of Poland, lately made free by a voluntary compact with its King; but now subdued by the ferocious power of the north, divided among her jealous neighbours, and the people sold with the soil, like the animals that graze upon it.—Let the generous feelings of human nature rise indignant at the abhorrent idea of part of itself being thus degraded. Whatever may be the fate of France in the present contest, the great principles of the revolution will eventually find advocates in every part of the world, even among those who are now most inveterate against the conduct of the French. The doctrines of hereditary powers—of the divine right of kings—of their inviolability, and incapacity to do wrong, are fast declining, and will soon be exploded. They are solecisms of the same nature with their divine right to do wrong; and will, in future, more enlightened and liberal days, be read of with astonishment.

How often doth a hand unobserved shift the scene of the world ! The calmest and stillest hour precedes the whirlwind ; and it hath thundered in the sereneest sky. The monarch hath drawn the chariot of state, in which he had been wont to ride in triumph ; or been dragged to a scaffold, by the misguided zeal of his late admirers ; and the greatest who ever awed the world, have moralized at the turn of the wheel. Such, O Louis, has been thy untimely fate ! At thy urn, let pitying nature drop a sympathetic tear ! Cease, thou sanguinary demon, any longer to support thy bloody standard !

standard! May the milder genius of true liberty, and more enlightened policy, speedily pervade the councils, and bless the people of France!

OUR attention now returns with delight to contemplate that portion of religious and scientific freedom which our country enjoys. To the early care of our ancestors to establish literary, and encourage religious institutions, are we much indebted for the accomplishment of the late revolution, which shows us the vast importance of paying great attention to the rising sons and daughters of America, by giving them an enlightened and a virtuous education. Here the human mind, free as the air, may exert all its powers towards the various objects laid before it, and expand its faculties to an extent hitherto unknown. It has been the policy of all monarchical governments, and of some religious institutions, to keep the people in ignorance, the more easily to dazzle them into obedience by external marks of greatness, and of native superiority. Knowledge and true religion go hand in hand; When the former is obscured, the latter is mutilated, and enveloped in the shades of superstition and bigotry. And whenever the civil power has undertaken to judge and decide concerning truth and error, to oppose the one, while it protected the other, it has invariably supported bigotry, superstition and nonsense.

* ANAXAGORAS was tried and condemned in Greece, for teaching that the sun and stars were not deities, but masses of corruptible matter. Accusations of a like nature contributed to the death of Socrates. The threats of bigotry, and the fear
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of persecution, prevented Copernicus from publishing, during his life time, his discovery of the true system of the world. Galileo was obliged to renounce the doctrine of the motion of the earth, and suffered a year's imprisonment for having asserted it.' Many other instances of a similar nature, and much later date, might be mentioned; the tendency of which has been to cramp the human powers, to destroy in some measure the end of education, by directing the current of thought into a narrow channel. Hence the doctrine of the revolution of the earth round the sun, would have been as great a stumbling-block to the prejudiced Jews, and as apparent foolishness to the learned Greeks, as that of a crucified Jesus to be the Saviour of the world.'

By the constitution of the UNITED STATES, no man is abridged of the liberty of enquiry—no religious test is required—no bait is thrown out by government to encourage hypocrisy, or exclude the honest and deserving. In this respect it possesses a liberality unknown to any people before. It must give pleasure to every generous mind, to hear 'the children of the stock of Abraham' thus addressing our beloved President: 'Deprived as we have heretofore been of the invaluable rights of citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of all events) behold a government erected on the majesty of the people—a government which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance, but generously affording to all liberty of conscience, and immunities of citizenship—deeming every one, of whatever nation, tongue or language, equal parts of the governmental machine.

This so ample and extensive federal union, whose basis is philanthropy, mutual confidence, and public virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the great God, who ruleth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.*

In this view of the subject, may we not consider these as the dawn of brighter days, of a brighter sun than ever blessed the world before; as a commencement of the golden age, that introduces a better system of religion than most of those which have been hitherto professed in the world; a religion that enforces moral obligations, not a religion that relaxes and evades them; a religion of peace and charity, not of strife and party rage? The importance of religion to the peace and order of society, is unspeakably great. Every thing is replaced and established by religion. It surrounds the whole system of morality, resembling that universal force of physical nature, which retains the planets in their order, and subjects them to a regular revolution. But as to all decent modes and outward expressions of it, the rights of conscience remain untouched. Here all religious opinions are equally harmless, and render men who hold different opinions equally good subjects, because there are no laws to oppose them, no force to compel them. The use of arms, and the military art, of which we have this day so agreeable and elegant a specimen, are directed to a very different object, the defence of freedom, and as a bulwark of the State.

MAY

* Extract from an address presented President WASHINGTON by the Jews at Newport, when on his tour through the eastern States, August 1790.

MAY we ever show ourselves worthy of the blessings we enjoy, and never tarnish the bright lustre of this day, by any unbecoming excesses.— Americans ! think of the many privileges which distinguish your condition. Be grateful for your lot ; and let your virtue secure what your valour, under God, hath obtained ; and transmit to latest posterity the glorious inheritance. May the political edifice erected on the theatre of this new world, afford a practical lesson of liberty to mankind, and become in an eminent degree the model of that glorious temple of universal liberty which is about to be established over the civilized world.

