

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

JULY 4, 1805,

AT

ABINGTON;

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY BENJAMIN HOBART.

"WHERE LIBERTY DWELLS; THERE IS MY COUNTRY."

BOSTON:

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1805.

MS 253
SIR,

AGREEABLE to a Vote of a respectable meeting of Citizens, assembled at Abington, July 4th, for the celebration of American Independence, I have the honor, as President of the meeting, to present you their thanks for your spirited and patriotic Oration, delivered on that occasion, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

NATHAN GURNEY, Jun.

July 10, 1805.

Mr. BENJAMIN HOBART.

SIR,

YOUR favour of yesterday I have received, and shall furnish you with a copy of the Oration, as requested ; in doing which, I am regulated by the opinion of my fellow citizens, not my own.

I am your very humble servant,
BENJAMIN HOBART.

July 11, 1805.

To Mr. **NATHAN GURNEY, Jun.**

AN

O R A T I O N.

TO celebrate important, national events, is both the duty and safety of a republican people. The ancient Jewish passover was an institution of this nature. Other examples are no less Divine. The Sabbath serves to keep in remembrance, the great work of creation. The bow in the clouds denotes, that the world will never again be destroyed by a deluge. The pot of manna and Aaron's rod, deposited in the Temple, served to keep in constant view the dealings of God with His ancient people. Mordecai, on the deliverance of his nation from the bloody decrees of Haman, appointed the days of Purim as a lasting memento of their escape.

These examples of holy Writ, sufficiently prove the consistency of commemorating the day, which freed us from oppression's yoke, and enrolled the American name, among the independent nations of the earth. This anniversary serves to keep alive a spirit of patriotism, whilst it leads us to prize the blessings, which we enjoy, and to revere the Divine Source, from which they flow.

We have not assembled to fall prostrate before a despot, or to bow before a new-made Emperor : ours is not the servile task to pay homage to a host of lords and nobles ; nor to trumpet the praises of a President and Senate for life ; but to celebrate an event, which placed America, in a high rank among the nations of the earth.

None, then, will question the propriety of passing a few moments, in surveying the prosperity of our country, arising from our independence, and the principles and motives, which gave rise to the revolution, and led to the adoption of our excellent Constitution ; and in inquiring whether these principles, which all applaud, still actuate the nation, and are a rule of conduct to our rulers. Some of the means of our safety, may also claim our attention.

In portraying the happiness of our country, recurrence, to heighten the picture, is often made to the perils of our infancy and the horrors of our revolution. But these are events too well known, to need a repetition. Who has not heard, that less than two hundred years ago, this country, where now Villages and Cities are seen, and the hum of men is heard, was a dreary, howling wilderness, where Savages roamed and wild beasts sought their prey ? What American is there, who has not read the wonderful, the surprising history of our country, from the landing of our forefathers, on the Plymouth Rock, to the present period ? The revolution is within the recollection of many : its traces are still to be seen—The gigantic power of Great Britain, was in motion, to make Americans, “ hewers of wood and drawers of water.” But they

rose indignant, at the very thoughts of oppression; one spirit electrified the nation—the spirit of liberty. Hostilities commenced; the battles of Lexington and Bunker-Hill, and the conflagration of Charlestown, opened the great drama, which a Washington, not till seven years after, closed by the glorious battle of Yorktown. During this horrid period of British rapine and devastation; when our young men were sent headlong to the grave, and our old men met death in their houses; when the din of arms and the noise of battle, was heard in our land, and when our Cities and Villages, were delivered up to plunder and flames; a glorious Sound was heard; it reached from State to State; it echoed from Hill to Hill; “These United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.”

This glorious event, which forever separated America, from British thralldom, from her heavy debts and oppressive wars, and laid the foundation of all our glory and happiness, took place twenty nine years ago, *this day*. Since that period, America has arisen to a state of eminence and happiness, beyond a parallel. Our independence has not only extended the borders of our country, far into the wilderness, but opened a door for the most surprising advances in every kind of improvement. Our resources have multiplied beyond calculation, and are absolutely inexhaustible. Our commerce whitens on every ocean; it extends to all nations, and is a convincing proof of the flourishing state of our agriculture and manufactories. By commerce, our tables are loaded with the productions of various nations, vastly remote. Much of our ap-

parel is also from afar. We possess greater blessings, and have more promising prospects than any other nation in the world. Whilst the nations of Europe are involved in everlasting wars, and their ill-fated Inhabitants, are no better than slaves, upon whom are exercised the whims, caprice and despotism of Kings, Nobles and Emperors; whilst Asia and Africa, set in midnight darkness, and support not a being of the human kind, who is not either a slave or tyrant; America unites within herself, the blessings of all nations and of all climes. Our old men are more happy than kings; and our young men are more honourable than law-created nobles. What other nations have long sought for, in vain, through revolutions, blood and slaughter, is here enjoyed to perfection. To what source may we trace these blessings? The answer is, under Providence, to that glorious event, which proclaimed us, a free and independent people.

But what those principles were, which established our independence, thus beneficial to our nation, is an interesting inquiry. These being once known, they will enable us to judge of the rectitude of our own political sentiments; they will serve as a criterion, by which we may know, whether our rulers govern wisely or wickedly; for the principles, which gave rise to the revolution, and led to the adoption of our excellent Constitution, are universally acknowledged to be right. All parties, all orders of men, the tories excepted, were then united in sentiment. The same principles of liberty, the same principles of government, actuated the nation. Under their influence, "Our independence," as a celebrated Author ob-

serves, “ was found by those, who sought it not.” These principles led to victory ; they led to the establishment of a happy government and wise institutions, and have been the procuring cause of all our happiness—Let the same principles, still inspire the breasts of our Countrymen, and regulate the administration of our rulers, and America will long continue to be the residence of liberty, happiness and the rights of man.

One of the first principles of the revolution, was an acknowledgment of the authority and sovereignty of the people. The sentiment of Sidney, Locke and Montesquieu, that the strength of a nation, resided in the people, was universally adopted. “ We hold these truths to be self-evident,” says the declaration of independence, this day read, “ that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain, unalienable rights, among which, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The Will of the people, when properly expressed, was considered as a supreme law ; none might take from it, or add to it. They chose their own government, formed associations, maintained the rights of legislation, and were never afraid to trust themselves. The absurd doctrine of “ passive obedience and non-resistance,” was universally exploded. Rebellion against tyrants, was believed to be the will of God. Government was thought necessary, for the security of the rights and privileges of the people, and not for the aggrandizement of the rulers. Hence, they reprobated the absurd idea of privileged Orders and exclusive Rights. The trappings of Royalty and the pageantry of Courts

were not considered essential to liberty. They thought men, as they came from their Maker, sufficiently noble to govern themselves. Their idea of liberty, however, was not that of licentiousness; it was not savage freedom. It consisted in this, *that every man had a right to do, as he chose, provided it was not inconsistent with the same right in his neighbour, and the good of the whole.* To secure this natural liberty of man, when they were destitute of all government, one was immediately introduced. For the support of these principles, in opposition to Britons and Tories, they fought, they bled, they conquered.

But the nature of the government, adopted at the revolution, will give us a more extensive idea of the principles then cherished. Government and laws are as necessary in society, as morals in religion; liberty must be defined, and the passions restrained. Hence a nation is known by its government; accordingly as it is wise or foolish, the people will be happy or miserable. Monarchy and Aristocracy denote slavery; a government of the people, by their representatives, liberty. What, then, was the nature of our government? What were the principles it embraced? They were not the principles of a Monarchy. The people had no faith in kings; they did not wish to trust any one man with unlimited power. They had experienced, that the “tender mercies” of a king “were cruel,” and more bitter than death. Neither were they the principles of an Aristocracy: Lords and Nobles, alone, were not thought to be the most suitable guardians of liberty. The happy idea of a nobility “in a Hole” had not then occurred; and if it had, it would

have been to no purpose, for the very term, *nobility*, excited horror. Nor were the principles, which our constitution embraced, those of a *pure* Democracy. No man, perhaps, ever thought it prudent for the American people, to imitate the Athenians, and to assemble all together, for the purpose of legislation. What, then, were the true principles of our revolution, with respect to government? The real answer is, they were the principles of a balanced government, consisting of three branches, each branch under the control of the people; and thus organized, the better to prevent abuse of power, and to ensure calm deliberation and freedom from popular phrensy. Such a government by Civilians, is called “a *Representative Democracy*.” The state governments were of a similar cast. By a *Representative Democracy*, is not meant, that wild, loose, incoherent government, so much decryed by the opposers of our present Administration. It does not embrace the principles of a Turgot, a Condorcet, nor does it coincide with the modern ideas of “French liberty and equality.” It is a government, in which the influence of the people prevails. A stronger Executive or a Senate for life, would soon destroy their weight. Hence this part of our constitution, has always been highly offensive, to many aspiring, ambitious men; they hate the very name, *Democracy*, though qualified, because it favours the people. But, at the revolution, these principles were insisted upon; were interwoven into the constitution, and considered as the broad basis of our liberty and security.

These principles of Government, were supported by Washington, Franklin and President Jefferson: the

latter of whom, penned the admirable Declaration of Independence, and has spent a most useful life, in the service of his country. But others are found, and those too, who, of late, have been highly conspicuous in office, who always wished for more independence in the Executive, and less influence in the people. But such were not the principles of the revolution. The major part of those, who formed our constitution, which was universally adopted, chose rather, to give the people a preponderance in the constitution, than to arm a President and Senate, with weapons to annoy and oppress them.

Many other principles were cherished in the time of our revolution, and secured by our constitution, equally preservative of liberty, and honourable to the people. Standing armies, in time of peace, were deemed highly dangerous. An ambitious ruler might make an engine of them, to oppress and enslave his country. The attempt of George the third, to maintain a standing army in this country, met with the indignant frown of the whole Continent. Liberty of the press and freedom of speech, were held to be sacred. Should these privileges be violated, and men commanded to speak softly, or not at all, of their rulers, liberty would soon dwindle into a mere sound, and rulers would become secret oppressors. But the constitution interferes, and declares, that liberty of speech and of the press, shall not be violated.

But, besides these principles, interwoven into the constitution, others collateral with them, were held in high estimation. War was viewed as a calamity, not to be sought after, but, if possible, to be avoided. Men, in office, were required to spend their energies,

for the good of the public, and not for their private emolument. Private interest was freely sacrificed for the public benefit. Useless offices were not multiplied, and excessive burdens were not laid upon the people. A Continental House and Land Tax, was a thing unheard of, during our needy and distressing revolution. Whatever tended to tyranny and oppression, was firmly opposed.

Such were some of the glorious principles of our revolution. But here an important inquiry arises. Have those principles always been operative, and are they now operative upon the people and rulers of our country? The time has been, when we could not answer in the affirmative. The nation has been seized with a phrensy. Who has not heard of "the reign of terror?" The late federal administration, and its supporters, we believe, were not actuated by the principles of the revolution. The leading characters of that administration, wished for a stronger Executive and less influence in the people. The then President was loaded and intrusted with dangerous powers. An arbitrary Alien Law was committed to him. By this law he was empowered, at his will, to banish from our country, every Foreigner, who might seek here an asylum, from European oppressions. An enormous increase of Executive patronage, was also intrusted to him. A Sedition Law was made to render him sacred. Liberty of speech and of the press, was abridged, contrary to the constitution. In consequence of which, many Republicans were cast into prison. These arbitrary, unconstitutional acts, tended to render the President too powerful, and too independent of the people. They were perfectly discordant with the princi-

ples of the revolution. Had such measures been proposed then, by any man, however conspicuous, he would have been blasted, by the public indignation.

But these are not our only objections, against that Administration. A standing army was raised, in time of peace, to awe and terrify the people. A French Invasion was the pretence. But this was such a weak pretence, and so perfectly chimerical, that many of the federalists, themselves, ridiculed the idea. France, at that time, was so perfectly watched by British vigilance, that she could scarcely supply herself, with a mess of fish from the Ocean. How then could she invade America? Here is a federal mystery. For what was this expensive army raised? Republicans believe for the most nefarious designs: a new Constitution, a President and Senate for life, might be the object: Such a measure was very foreign from a spirit of the revolution.

Other measures also, of that administration, though less dangerous, were equally remote from the spirit of those times. Among these, we might enumerate a House and Land Tax—an Eight per cent. Loan—a Bankrupt Law—an enormous increase of Public Debt—and a host of useless Judges, appointed at midnight! But I forbear to proceed; these extraordinary and oppressive measures, are sufficient to prove, that the principles of the revolution, which all acknowledge to be just, did not then prevail.

This conclusion is confirmed by the disapprobation of the people. They rose indignant at the measures then pursued. A change of administration was made. But because the people were dissatisfied, and exercised their inherent rights and changed their rulers, *they* and the *men* of their choice, were basely calum-

niated and belied. They were branded, as a lively writer observes, “as atheists, deists, Jacobins, infidel philosophers, enemies to God and Man, and in league with Satan, Frenchmen and infernal spirits, to destroy all government, order and religion, and turn the world upside down.” It was sneeringly said, at the commencement of the present administration, that the nation would soon be involved in ruin; that religion would soon be banished from our country; that our Temples of worship would be burnt, and that Tom Paine would soon be proclaimed Priest of Dagon! All motives to industry were affirmed to be at an end. Our commerce was declared to be in danger. In imagination, our harbours were already seen to be blocked up by sand banks, and poverty and beggary to stalk over the nation; and the ending climax of all this was, “The post of honour, is a private station.”

But, my countrymen, these were false predictions, made by false prophets. The direct contrary of all which, has proved to be true. Unbounded prosperity prevails. We hear of no injustice or oppression. The United States were never in a more flourishing and happy situation. The sound of the hatchet and of the anvil, is still heard in our land. Our ships still traverse the Ocean, and are seen on the thousand shores of Europe, Asia, Africa, the East and West Indies. The foreign stranger, who visits our country, whilst surveying its prosperity, stops short, looks round, and inadvertently exclaims, “O happy America, thou seat of liberty! thou most blessed of all nations!—may thy glory and splendor be immortal!”

But here, let us return to the other part of our inquiry; are the principles of the revolution, now opera-

tive upon the people and rulers of our country? Upon the Republicans, who are seven eighths of the Inhabitants of America, we do not hesitate to express our full belief that they are. Late public measures and their general reception confirm this. As the acts of the former administration were such, as would not have been approved at the time of our revolution, they were blasted by a repeal. But what act of the present administration is there, which, if it had taken place in the time of our revolution, would not have been approved? Would not the disbanding* of an unnecessary standing army, have been highly commended in those days? Would not the repeal of an Alien Law—a Sedition Law—a Bankrupt Law—a Stamp Law—a useless Judiciary Law, have been highly applauded? Would not the spirit of those times, have approved of economy in government—a diminution of taxes, and, at the same time, a diminution of public debt—a lessening of executive patronage—a cultivation of “peace, commerce, and honest friendship, with all nations—entangling alliances with none,”—and a sacred regard for the rights of the people? In a word, would not the principles and spirit, which then actuated the bosoms of our Countrymen, have led them to approve all the measures, which have been adopted under our present, wise and patriotic Administration.

By these observations, it is evident that the republican party, in our country, have not departed from the principles and spirit of the revolution; and are the only men, who can cordially celebrate our Independence. Federalists may pretend to regard this day,

* The act, reducing the army, though it passed just before the close of Mr. Adams' Administration, was owing entirely to Republican Influence.

and be loud in their praises of our constitution, but they must be pretensions only. There is not a single principle of the revolution, which is not in direct opposition to their politics. They have associated with tories, who were the open enemies of our Independence. They revile some of the first Patriots of our revolution, who hazarded their lives and property, in our defence, and call them *Jacobins*. Even the ashes of the venerable Samuel Adams, Hancock and Franklin, have been insulted. To such men, the principles of our revolution, cannot be pleasing. This day, therefore, which brings them to view, is not, to them, a day of glad tidings. But with Republicans, it is a proud day, and they will remember it.*

Recurring to premises now established, we may draw the following short, syllogistic conclusion; viz. The principles of the revolution were right; republican principles coincide with them, therefore, republican principles are right, and ought to prevail—It becomes us, then, to applaud our rulers, who have always adhered to these principles, and to keep in perpetual remembrance, our hard earned Independence.

But though our country is now flourishing and happy, and each one can sit, unmolested “under his own vine and fig tree,” yet we ought not to forget, that this pleasing scene may be reversed. Prosperity is dangerous to nations, as well as to individuals. Riches and luxury produce effeminacy, and a disregard to

* These remarks are not meant to be applied, indiscriminately, to every individual of the federal party, but, particularly to the followers of Hamilton. Many of the federalists, doubtless, are real friends to their country and the republican cause; their association with our opponents, may be owing to prejudice or the want of accurate information—To such, republicans hold out the hand of reconciliation, and invite to a cordial union.

law and order. The people forget the days of their adversity, and riot in the lap of pleasure and dissipation. In this way, Lords will rule over them, and the Mighty will devour them. Many great, and noble Republics, once as free as America, have long ago tumbled into the dust. Many nations, that once were blessed with liberty, are now lingering under the scourges of a tyrant. What has become of ancient Greece and Rome? Where are their immortal Orators, and renowned Statesmen? Alas! they are sleeping in the ruins of their countries, which have been extinct for ages. What has become of the once famed liberties of the High and Mighty States of Holland? They are crushed by the despotic foot of an usurping Corsican. Where is the freedom of the Swiss? Where are their William Tells?—The same vile Corsican has destroyed all. Where is the Polish Nation? Russian, Prussian and Austrian Monarchs, have long ago, sung their funeral “*Te Deum.*” We might go on to speak of the wretched Irish, Scotch, Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese, but we have not assembled to weep over the ruins of man.

But shall this be the fate of our country? Shall the inquisitive traveller, in after ages, passing to survey other nations, weep, as he goes along, over our demolished Cities and departed honours? Must the question, “Is man capable of self government,” be forever answered in the negative? Must we leave another wretched example of the degeneracy of man, and the uncertainty of Republics? This degradation, under Providence, we hope, will never fall upon America—Let us imitate the example of our forefathers, and support our republican establishments; let us well

consider the causes, which have destroyed other nations, and if possible, avoid their destiny.

But it would not be improper, perhaps, to notice some of the means by which our liberties must be protected. Three important securities, among many others, claim our attention:—a well regulated Militia—general Education and a Divine Religion. We at present, enjoy these means in an eminent degree. Our militia is made up of ourselves. Its plan comprises almost every possible advantage. But a particular analysis of our system of defence, cannot now be attempted. Suffice it to say, it is worthy of the wisdom of our country, and is our glory and safety. It is a far more and better mode of defence, than any other which has been invented, either in ancient or modern times. This great security of our rights, deserves our utmost patronage and support.

Another important security of our civil privileges, is education; and its universal spread in our country is such, as to inspire patriotism with confidence, and to command the admiration of the world. No nation possesses universal knowledge, like America. Our age is the jubilee of science and the feast of knowledge. Here Kings and Nobles have not where to lay their heads; mental illumination detects their frauds, and sets at nought their impious wishes. Happy would it be for America, should this always be her situation. Should she relapse into ignorance and darkness, some intriguing despot, or a group of nobles, would soon climb to power and trample upon her liberties. It becomes Americans then, ever to encourage education, and consider it as the polar star of our nation. Individual exertions to this end, de-

serve our highest applause ; for he, who educates a child, often does as much good to his country, as “ he, who takes a city.” Education may be called the eye of a Republic to spy out fraud, ambition and wickedness, and to see that they are punished.

But besides arms and education, the *Jachin* and *Boaz* of society, we have a most benevolent religion, which all ought to acknowledge, to be the firmest basis of our safety. Without it, a government, which depends on the virtue of the people, would be as unstable as the waves of the sea. Property and life would be insecure, and man would become an exhausted swimmer, amidst the contending billows of faction. But a pure religion, unshackled by human laws, is Heaven’s best gift to the world, and forms the only sure foundation of order and government. It influences mankind by affecting their hearts, and “ operates as powerfully, when no eye beholds it, as when surrounded by thousands.” “ It places rulers and people always under the eye of Deity, and brings death and judgment to view.” It does not, however excite its disciples to climb to the house-tops, and exult over the passing multitude, and exclaim, “ We have all the religion, and all the virtue of our country !” The religion of such men, is declared to be vain. But that kind of religion, which will support morals, law and order in a State, enjoins benevolence, charity and brotherly love.

Our obligations to Divine Revelation are infinite. How much did the ancient Republics, experience the want of such a revelation ? The blunders and absurdities of their Stoicks, Cynicks, Epicureans, Platonicks and Scepticks, could never supply its place.

The gods, to whom Demosthenes, Cicero, and all the Sages and Heroes of antiquity, paid their sacred devotions, were no better than hypocrites and deified monsters. Their Jupiter has been denominated a debauchee ; Juno a scold ; Hercules a swaggerer ; Mars a braggadocia ; Neptune a profane seafaring captain ; Bacchus a drunkard and Moloch a tyrant. These superstitions, were most pernicious to society and government ; they were worse, if possible, than the superstitions of the modern Heathen, who now worship the grand Lama or the Arabian Prophet.

But for christianity, such might have been our situation. We might have been paying our devotions, like the ancients to departed Heroes or statues of brass ; or, like the modern Heathens, to deified Impostors or the works of nature. Where now stands our solemn temple, dedicated to the Ruler of the skies, the temple of Jupiter, the temple of the Sun, or the temple of Mahomet, might have been reared, and Americans, like the wandering Tartars, come yearly to do homage at their shrines. Instead of just ideas of virtue, moral obligation and futurity, we might have been lost amidst a jargon of philosophy ; and gods, Pluto and elysium, the foundation of our religion. But Divine Revelation has preserved us from this degradation ; it has reached our land, enlightened our minds and directed our thoughts to soar above the stars. Under its benign influence, America has humbled her enemies, established liberty and law, and immortalized her name.

Since then, we owe so much to the Christian Religion ; since it has distinguished us from all other nations, and promises to be our only safety, let none despise its sacred precepts. Nor ought our country

ever to be compared with the Ancient Republics. The lapse of two thousand years—the progress of science—the art of printing—increase of military, judicial and political knowledge—and above all, a pure Revelation from Jehovah, has rendered our situation far different from their's. This difference inspires us with the most consoling hopes, that here liberty, happiness and republicanism, will flourish in eternal youth.

But on the whole, by whom, under Providence, shall our independence, liberties and rights be maintained? The answer is, the people. Though often stigmatized as their own worst enemies and unfit to govern themselves, yet they, in every country, have been the real defenders of liberty, in opposition to Monarchists and Aristocrats. If a majority of the people, will ruin us, we must be ruined. In a republican government, “the majority are omnipotent.” The minority have rights, but are destitute of power. Our country, therefore, whenever the major part will sell themselves to destruction, will come to ruin, however firm, however unwilling, the minority may be. But is this the situation of our country? Is the present, great Republican majority of our nation, as often represented, on the side of *anarchy, confusion, and dissolution*? God forbid, we should indulge such a degrading thought. Though party spirit foment, though difference of opinion prevails, though ambition plots, yet we can boast, that a surprising majority of the people of these United States, are still firm, unadulterated, Republican Americans—On them depends our safety; if they are watchful and united, we are secure.