

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT DORCHESTER,

JULY 4, 1815.

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE INDEPENDENCE

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

BY SHERMAN LELAND, ESQ.

BOSTON :
PRINTED BY ROWE AND HOOPER,
AT THE YANKEE OFFICE.

.....
1815.

THE Republican Citizens of the towns of Roxbury, Dorchester and Milton met to celebrate the anniversary of our National Independence,

Voted unanimously, That the thanks of the meeting be presented to S. LELAND, Esq. for the patriotic and appropriate Address, delivered by him this day, and request a copy for the press.

EBEN. SEAVER,
JOHN HOWE,
AMASA STETSON, } Committee.

Dorchester, July 4, 1815.

Roxbury, July 5, 1815.

GENTLEMEN,

WHILE I acknowledge the civility of your flattering request, I comply with it, with that diffidence which is always a concomitant of conscious inability.

Your much obliged fellow-citizen,

SHERMAN LELAND.

HON. EBEN. SEAVER,
JOHN HOWE,
AMASA STETSON, Esqrs. } Committee.

ORATION.

WHILE the principles of civil and religious liberty are held in just estimation, the 4th of July, 1776, will be, an illustrious epoch in the page of history. A retrospective glance fixes the attention of the lover of emancipated freedom upon that time, and presents to his view, a scene, wherein oppressed humanity asserts its rights, and, in successive struggles, disenthral itself from the restraints of despotism. Yes, my friends and fellow citizens, Republican America, alone, has the felicity of viewing her origin and progress, unconnected with those fabulous tales, and disgraceful realities, which becloud and degrade the primitive character of most nations. Her early character is not marked by that savage ferocity, and wild insubordination, which refuse obedience to the restraints of salutary laws: nor is her fame sullied by that lawless rapine, which riots upon the spoils of the broken bonds of society. Patriotism, unwilling to behold her favorite sons bow in silent submission to the dictates of arbitrary power, flew like an electric shock through the land, and fired the breast of every friend of liberty, with a holy zeal in his country's cause. Common dread of bondage, and love of liberty, collected a council of sages, distinguished for wisdom, courage, magnanimity and love of country. They, with hearts glowing with patriotic fervor, and in defiance of exasperated majesty, declared the bonds, which had bound the United States to their mother country, broken, and that they were of right free, sovereign, and independent. And the successive efforts of sagacious enterprise, prudent concession, inflexible fortitude, and patriotic devotion, were crowned by the establishment of systematic liberty, protected by free constitutions.

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In the early part of the 17th century, the oppressive hand of religious and political persecution, expelled a band of worthies from the land of their nativity. They encountered many perils, both by sea and land, and, at length, found a retreat from their toils and dangers upon the uncultivated shores of America. These pious adventurers, relying upon the protection of Providence, were patient under every hardship, resolute in every danger, and orderly under every temptation. They increased and flourished until the jealousy of their cruel parent attempted to cramp their growing prosperity, by encroachments upon their rights. One infringement followed another until the cup of forbearance was exhausted. They addressed the throne, in successive order, by humble petition, respectful remonstrance, and ultimately, by spirited, yet dignified, demand of right. All these expedients being unavailing, United America, relying upon the justice of her cause, and confiding in the protection of Heaven, girt on her armor, and boldly entered the lists, determined to live free or die.

The sufferings of America, during the contest are fresh in the recollection of many of you. And you will indulge me in calling your attention to some of the interesting scenes of that memorable period, that those of us, of modern growth, may see that the indignation which warmed the bosom of every American, was not without cause. Whose heart feels untouched, when he recollects the aspiring flames of Charlestown, or the conflagration of Falmouth? Whose breast does not burn with a resentment almost defying the power of charity, at the recollection of the horrid and deliberate murder of those unfortunate Americans, whom the casualties of war had disarmed, and placed in captivity on board British prison ships? Who can call to mind the Indian tomahawk and scalping-knife, put into the hands of the savages for an indiscriminate massacre, without an emotion of horror?

Are these atrocities always to be remembered, and never to be forgiven? They surely should be forgiven,

but never be forgotten. They should be remembered, as aggressions, repeated without provocation, as outrages, abhorrent to the feelings of humanity, and as monuments of cruelty, always to be avoided.

After eight years' unparalleled sufferings, victory perched upon the American banner, and haughty Britain to escape impending ruin, reluctantly acknowledged our sovereign rank; and the other nations of Europe, justly appreciating our enterprise and valor, bid the United States a cordial welcome into the great family of nations.

Unexpected difficulties were now presented to view. The confederation which had been strengthened by common danger, was found insufficient, longer to bind the states together. The free sons of America just emancipated from a foreign yoke, jealous of their liberties to an extreme, and dreading that arbitrary power which they had with so much toil and blood thrown off, were strongly inclining to that extreme of liberty which submits to no restraints. It required the utmost efforts of prudence and patriotism to prevent all from being lost. Untried experiments in the art of legislation became necessary. The American genius loathed the pomp and pageantry of royalty, and her sagacious statesmen perceived the dangers of the freakish and cabalistical disorders of ancient democracy. A complicated system of government was formed, embracing the fundamental principle of democracy, so balanced and checked, by different departments, as to combine both energy and freedom. All power exercised under it, is derived from the people, and all officers are their agents and responsible to them for their conduct. It may truly be called "An edifice founded upon an adamant rock, the hearts of the people." Its strength has been tested by political storms and convulsions. It has passed the ordeal, and been found sufficient.

The illustrious hero, who had directed our armies in the field of battle, received a renewed testimonial of the confidence of his fellow citizens, in his elevation to

the first office in the gift of his country, with the unanimous approbation of three millions of people. This wonderful man took an early interest in the American cause. His merits soon raised him to the honourable rank of the chief of her army. The successful issue of his command, together with his moderation and disinterested patriotism in resigning it, with a refusal of all compensation for his services, made a most powerful impression upon the grateful hearts of his fellow citizens. His auspicious administration affords abundant evidence that his talents were adapted to the duties of the cabinet, as well as of the field. At the end of eight years' presidential services, he declined a re-election, and voluntarily retired to private life, with undiminished popular confidence. Such repeated instances of disinterested moderation, in any one man, perhaps, are without a parallel. In two different capacities was he clothed with the highest authority, and in possession of every opportunity to make himself absolute master of the liberties of his country. But what moderation! What magnanimity! What love of country! Although he has paid the debt of nature, and gone to another and better world to receive the rewards of his merits; yet he lives in the affections of his country, and his memory will be cherished and revered so long as virtue is rewarded.

He was succeeded in the presidency, by a statesman of penetration and ability, to whom much credit is due for his services in the American cause. His administration was ushered into power, under a great excitement of political fervor, resulting from a triumphant increase of party friends, at the congressional elections immediately preceding. The current of popular opinion set so strong as to sweep him along in its course, and while he struggled against its force its velocity appeared to be increased. Unfavorable appearances exposed him to much unmerited censure. But an impartial world must now be satisfied that his country's welfare was always near his heart, and that the principles which were his guide, in moving and advocating the measure we this day celebrate, were never abandoned by him.

The political demise of this venerable, but unfortunate patriot, was succeeded by the elevation of a man, whose name is so intimately associated with the declaration of independence, that the duties of this anniversary would be in part only, discharged, without some notice of his merits. The sagacity of his mind, and ardor of his patriotism, have long been conspicuous in the numerous stations of public life which he has filled. His capacious mind, fervent patriotism, republican principles, and practical knowledge, admirably qualified him for the presidential chair. His election to that dignified office was one of the happiest events in the American annals. Disappointed ambition, raging with madness, at the defeat of its projects of aggrandisement, and ascribing to him the principal agency in foiling them, put in operation the most vile system of detraction to blast his fair fame. Quiver after quiver was exhausted, but the arrows of slander either fell harmless at his feet, or rebounded to the discomfiture of the assailant. His successful administration, and voluntary retreat to private life, with increased popularity, furnish the best comment upon the effect of this system, and, at the same time, the most powerful illustration of his political axiom, "That error of opinion may be safely tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

Our present worthy chief magistrate, who was inducted to executive power, on the retreat of the illustrious Jefferson, is by no means without powerful claims upon public confidence. The diplomatic character of the United States is much indebted to his talents and labours for its present distinguished rank. The high honour of our country, atchieved by the brilliant success of her arms, is attributable to the measures of his invincible firmness and wise forecast. Whether you view him in a subordinate station, managing a perplexing controversy with a foreign minister, at the helm of state, executing the civil commands of his constituents, or clothed with belligerent power, wielding the warlike destinies of the nation, you are sure to find unerring wisdom, incorruptible integrity, unsullied

patriotism and inflexible firmness. The identity of his principles with those of his predecessor, while it makes him obnoxious to similar slanders, forms not the least worthy trait in his character. We take pride and pleasure in maintaining the principles of Jefferson and Madison, and feel the strongest assurance that history will never be ashamed of their merits.

The origin and progress of our country are so intimately connected, that it would seem an omission of duty, not to notice the latter, while we commemorate the former, so far as to review some of the prominent features of our relations with foreign countries, trace the causes of the late war, and recount some of its illustrious deeds.

Soon after the close of our revolutionary war, a most furious and bloody conflict commenced between the principal nations of Europe. The struggle, at first, was on the one hand for the rights of self-government, and on the other, for the divine right of kings. The divinity of a king's right to enslave his subjects was called in question by the French people. They asserted their right to govern themselves. And the sovereigns of Europe combined to chastise them as daring innovators upon established order. They supported their principles against the whole royal power of Europe combined, and extended their practice upon it to such unwarrantable lengths, that safety from their revolutionary scenes of slaughter, blood and carnage, could be found only, in the establishment of a government in many of its features, as despotic as that which they had overthrown.

Dominion, now became the bone of contention. France, inflated with the pride of success, and yielding obedience to the dictates of inordinate ambition, caused kingdoms to rise and fall as suited her convenience ; bound down the sovereigns of Europe by the chains of an iron despotism, moulded their governments according to her will and pleasure, and closed the ports of Europe to the commerce of the world, to cramp the British trade.

Great-Britain, intoxicated with the pride of power, and jealous of her rival's strength, affecting to be the champion of the liberties of the world, usurped dominion over the seas, claimed contributions of men and money to support the general cause, impressed seamen from neutral vessels as well as her own, and seized upon all commerce, embarked in trade with her enemy, as good prize of war.

While these potent nations, in their struggle for ascendancy, trampled upon the rights of man, insulted the dignity of nations, innovated upon established usages and made the commerce of the world subservient to their ambitious purposes. America severely felt the effects of their rage and folly. But thanks be given to the disposer of all events, for the impartial policy of our rulers. Pacific appeals were made to the justice of both nations, until it appeared that their love of justice was superceded by their passion for plunder. They mistaking our love of peace, for want of spirit of resistance, "pressed us to the very wall." Longer parley would have been at the expense of honor. Duly impressed with these considerations, our faithful depositaries of power, made a manly and dignified stand, and declared these are our rights of commerce, and these are our rights of person; and you shall no longer, with impunity, violate the one, or trespass upon the other.

Notwithstanding the flagrant aggressions of both nations, those of Great-Britain appeared more systematic, and assumed an aspect more imposing, and threatening to our sovereignty, than those of France. Hence was she selected as a declared enemy, while France was admonished that a change of policy was indispensable to a long continuance of the relations of amity.

Inasmuch as the justice and expediency of the late war have afforded fruitful topics of public debate and private animadversion, I shall consider no apology necessary, for embracing them in this day's address.

I should think myself wanting in deference to your intelligence and judgment, should I attempt to prove

that justifiable causes existed for the declaration of war. Whoever understands the state of our relations with Great-Britain in 1812, and doubts that we had then just cause of war with that country, is not to be convinced by reason; all argument with him would be fruitless. His prejudices have usurped dominion over his intellects, and demonstration would not remove them.

The expediency of a measure is known, only by its events, and tested by a just comparison of the advantages gained with the expense of acquiring them.

While the contest was pending, and the enemy, with augmented means, was waging a most wanton and destructive war upon our defenceless coast and unprotected towns, destroying in his course, monuments of arts and sciences, depredating upon private property, rifling our tombs and sporting with the sacred ashes of the dead, laying waste the country, and satiating the brutal lust of his victorious myrmadons, upon ravished female honor; and whilst vindictive opposition now grown bold in the enemy's cause, was sowing the seeds of disaffection amongst us, extolling the magnanimity of our foe, degrading our government, slandering its officers, discouraging enlistments, crying down public credit, celebrating the victories of the enemy and refusing to rejoice at our own; the issue of the war presented a question of deep interest, and of difficult solution. Then the patriot might be balanced between his hopes and fears. But who is there now so lost to sense of honor, as to doubt the wisdom of the late war? Who would be willing to barter the high character his country has acquired, for the few taxes the war has made necessary? Who would sell the redeemed honor of his country, for a reimbursement of the small contributions he may have made to support the war? Who thinks our naval glory not worth the blood and treasure it has cost? Who would exchange the renown of our Army for the expense of the three campaigns?

None but a servile wretch would sell his country's honor for gold.

What elevated pride we feel in reviewing the scenes of the late war. The brilliant success of our arms has humbled the pride of Great-Britain, and excited the astonishment of the world. "The conquerors of the conquerors of Europe" have felt our prowess and yielded to the valor of our arms. The fresh wreaths of laurels, gathered upon the fruitful fields of Spain and France were plucked from the brows of British veterans upon the ensanguined plains of Chippewa, Bridgewater and New-Orleans, by American heroism. Our achievements upon the water have dispelled the charm of British naval invincibility, and given to that haughty nation fatal proofs of its vulnerable points. The blaze of glory which encircled her name is eclipsed by the splendor of our Naval deeds.

These are some of the fruits of the war, and true it is that the elevated honor of our country was not achieved without cost. Some of the best blood of the nation has been poured out as an oblation at the shrine of victory. But to die is allotted to all men, and "he who nobly dies in the cause of his country, lives forever in fame." The memory of Pike, Lawrence, Covington, Burrows, Allen and other departed worthies, will be held in grateful recollection so long as virtue and courage are esteemed and rewarded.

Most cheerfully would I pass in silence over the transactions of this Commonwealth, during the war, and exhort you to consign to oblivion those scenes of frantic rage, impotent madness and abortive folly, which have disgraced too many of its inhabitants, were not the frequent repetition of them, the most salutary admonition to others, to avoid the abyss of contempt into which the principal actors, in this delusive drama, have fallen.

The recollection of that rancorous spirit of animosity, whose only uniform characteristic was vindictive opposition to the general government, which assumed every imaginable shape to allure the unwary and frighten the timid, to aid its hostile and wicked pur-

poses, inspires the mind with contempt for its folly, regret for its turpitude, and joy for its weakness.

The descendant of our persecuted forefathers, may feel a wound upon his pious conscience when he calls to mind the gubernatorial allegation, that the instrument of his ancestor's oppression is the bulwark of his faith.

Christianity, whose attributes are charity, benevolence, brotherly-love, forbearance and tenderness, on recollecting the conversion of her altars into *rostrums*, and her ministers into partizans, to propagate slander, excite hatred and ill-will, and inflame the passions of men, may weep for the danger of her cause, lest wicked men taking all who assume her name for her friends, should be furnished with additional pretexts for saying that religion is a cheat and its ministers impostors. Liberty, in reviewing the perils she has passed, feels a pervading gloom when she recollects the attack made upon her charter, and mourns, that her degenerate sons should declare the palladium of her safety unfit for peace or war.

But let us be consoled—such madness and folly cannot endure long. There is a redeeming spirit among the people. Silent treachery is retiring from the land. Clamorous and vindictive opposition is drooping its head and calling to mind its past conduct, as a specimen of that experience, by which it may correct its errors for the future.

On this anniversary, my friends, we have unusual cause to rejoice. The hoarse note of war, and harsh din of arms, which have, for a long time grated our ears, have given place to the sweet and melodious accents of peace.

Our independence has been rescued from the perils which surrounded it, and preserved from impending danger, by the valor of our arms.

The honor of our country which was at stake upon the issue of the contest has been redeemed.

Unmatched heroism, and unparalleled success have elevated our national character to a high pitch of glory.

The energies and resources of the country, before unknown, have been developed, and found sufficient for every emergency. In almost every conflict with the enemy, victory has been with us.

The naval power of Great Britain, supposed invincible, has received deep and lasting wounds.

Her armies, long accustomed to victory, and unacquainted with defeat before, have met with repulse, defeat and disaster.—All these deeds of wonder have been performed by America, alone. In the revolutionary war we had allies to assist us, and the wishes of all Europe were for our success. In the late conflict not a bosom in Europe dared beat in our behalf. If a hope for us existed it was stifled.

Although the terms of our treaty may be general, can a peace be dishonorable under these circumstances? The history of the Constitution, United States, President, Essex, Wasp, Hornet, Peacock and Enterprise, and the recollection of Erie, Niagara, Plattsburgh, Champlain, Baltimore, and New Orleans, will be a better security against future encroachments, than any treaty could give.

Our commerce is extended over the ocean, without danger of being trammelled again by British orders in council, or French imperial decrees. If any of our seamen should again be impressed, the names of Hull, Bainbridge, Decatur, Porter, Perry, Mc'Donough and Stewart, are an ample security, for their immediate release.

We have not only triumphed over our enemies in the field of battle, but we have also crushed that political monster, Faction, which has appeared amongst us under different names, and threatened so much evil to the country. It is a foe to all freedom, and like fabled Proteus, can assume any shape it pleases. It has grown up in this country upon the calamities of foreign aggression, and has always discovered a remarkable sympathy for Great Britain. When she prospered, it smiled. When her fortune was reversed, it repined. When she triumphed, it rejoiced. When she made

war against the United States, it co-operated in her hostilities. When she declared that our president ought to be expelled, it repeated the declaration. When she attempted to sever the United States, it manifested its readiness to assist. When she discovered grief and anguish at her defeats, it declared it unbecoming a moral and religious people to rejoice at our victories. When she was beaten and compelled to give us an honourable peace, it sickened, declined and died.

Many of the idolatrous worshippers of this departed deity, in the ardor of their devotions, have been haunted in imagination with spectres of hideous portent, which their disordered fancies represented to them, as messengers of a secret correspondence between our government and that of France. But that course of events which transferred the archives of France to other hands, broke the magic charm, and dissolved these ominous spirits into pure, thin, light air.

Among all the records of Napoleon not a trace could be found of any such correspondence.

It is unmanly to triumph over the feelings of a vanquished foe. Let us throw the veil of oblivion over the errors of those who have been honest in opposition, and endeavour to heal the wounds inflicted upon our country, by political divisions—Let us cover the faults of our adversaries with the mantle of charity, and, unless forbidden by evidence, suppose their motives pure. Let a sincere desire of union among the American family be cherished. Whatever difference of opinion we may have entertained, let every honest heart beat to harmony of sentiment.

But while we feel these dispositions to harmonize, let us make no unworthy concessions. Let no vital principle be sacrificed upon the altar of reconciliation. Scrupulously adhere to the fundamental principles of your government; and consider the union of the States as the ark of your safety. Ever yield your cordial support to the doctrine that all power is in the hands of the people—that public officers are only their agents,

and responsible to them for their conduct—that the will of the majority, constitutionally expressed, is the law of the land—that the minority must submit to the will of the majority. And when your opponents are ready to meet you, in the work of reconciliation, upon these grounds, let no considerations of past conduct, retard the happy union. But should these reasonable terms be rejected, refuse all fellowship with them. Discard them, not only as your enemies, but as the enemies of your country.

The injunctions of Christianity, the principles of morality, and the dictates of policy, require us as far as possible, to forgive the injuries of our enemies. It will become us, therefore, to permit the unauthorized irregularities, and incidental calamities resulting from the late war, to be shrouded from invidious scrutiny, in magnanimous silence. Let the keen edge of animosity, made sharp by the asperities of war, be blunted by the enlivening beams of peace. We should treat Great Britain like other nations —“In war as an enemy, in peace as a friend.” No tribute due to her gallantry or generosity should be withheld.

But we should be unmindful of the duty we owe ourselves, and treacherous to posterity, should we suffer the savage barbarity, wanton cruelty and causeless burnings, authorised by her, to escape from our remembrance. Their recollection should not be cherished, to foster inglorious antipathies, but that they, together with the humanity, liberality and generosity of America, may be transmitted to posterity, that our children may appreciate our character by the noble contrast apparent in the conduct of the two countries. On the part of America we perceive a uniform compliance with the established usages of civilized warfare. On the part of Great Britain, the usages of modern warfare, superseded by the re-establishment and practical execution of the most savage and barbarous rules of antiquity.

How honourable to our country is the contrast! America, distinguished for her heroism, is no less illustrious for her humanity and generosity!

While we contemplate the wretched state of Europe, deplore the slavish and degraded condition of the subjects of monarchy, reeling under an accumulated load of taxes, imposed without their consent, doomed from their infancy to submit to the terrific empire of tyranny and superstition, unconscious of the dignified rank given them by nature, and habitually taught to ascribe absolute perfection to the hand that oppresses them. And while we deprecate that principle sacrilegiously called divine, which has stifled every thought of self-government, driven liberty from Europe, and arrayed a world in arms to prevent a nation from saying who shall be its king. What cause have we to rejoice that our lot has fallen in this favoured land, where government is founded upon the broad basis of free suffrage—where law is only another name for the will of the people, and merit the only criterion of distinction. Where religion depends for its support upon the evidence of its own intrinsic worth, and where the rights of conscience are unrestrained.

America, thou hast done thy duty. By the valor of thy arms, and the wisdom of thy councils, thou hast achieved and preserved thy liberties.