

AN ORATION

PRONOUNCED ON THE 5th OF JULY,

AT THE NEW THEATRE,

BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON SOCIETY

OF MARYLAND,

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ORATION &c.

Again are we assembled to celebrate the day which first beheld our national independence. On an event which gave liberty to millions, and which millions yet unborn shall triumphantly hail, where is the man that is insensible to the joy inspired by the occasion? Who is the American that is not proud of the country which gave him birth, or whose bosom does not glow with gratitude and veneration to the heroes and patriots who achieved so inestimable a blessing?

If this great epoch in our affairs ought to awaken a generous pride in Americans, how should we also rejoice, my countrymen, in reflecting that, whilst for years we have been contemplating the fall of principalities and powers in the old world, it is still our happy, our envied lot to be here convened in commemoration of an event which gave birth to a nation destined to form perhaps the greatest and most stupendous empire of which the records of history can boast.

It is of the illustrious men who have rendered this day dear to us that we are now met to celebrate the praises. It is here that we shall have to admire all that is enthusiastick in the love of liberty, all that is honourable either in point of fortitude, moderation, or humanity. To speak of such men in those lofty strains of panegyrick to which their exalted virtues so eminently entitle them, is arduous even beyond the most daring efforts of genius.—O! if I

were endued with that ethereal spirit, that spirit of beauty, strength, and majesty in thought and expression which can **alone** qualify for the task of commemorating this glorious anniversary; if by the **glowing** words of a sublime eloquence, I could kindle in your bosoms the emotions of patriotick rapture and enthusiasm which swelled the hearts of our fathers upon the promulgation of our independence as a people, then might I hope to do justice to this great subject, to fill you with the holy inspiration of publick virtue, and, (may I presume to say) in some slight degree, humbly to participate myself in the immortal glory which encircles and irradiates this memorable day. But this is a task which I feel is impossible. It would require a degree of eloquence more than human to present a discourse suitable to the greatness of this occasion: to **speak** of this subject as it deserves, demands the **ripened** powers of consummate wisdom.

Shall we then cease to celebrate this day, because the efforts of the orator must unavoidably fall greatly short of perfection? Shall this the brightest era in the annals of a nation be obscured by neglect, or lost in oblivion? Shall the torrent of time waft on its bosom to posterity no memorials of the **enthusiastick** love of freemen for an event fraught with the **most interesting**, the **most** endearing recollections? An event which first gave them a distinguished rank among the nations of the earth? No genius, it may be said, can diffuse the charm of novelty over so trite a subject: and from thence it will be concluded that the pleasure heretofore arising from it must be extinct. Not so—the pleasure, which attends the contemplation of extraordinary examples of human excellence, will never be extinct: it will be as lasting as that heaven from whence those examples are so resplendent an emanation.

In taking a retrospect of the great causes of our present rejoicing, what principally strikes us with admiration as the leading cause of this national festival, is the spirit of liberty. This noble spirit is still cherished by the present race of Americans. It glowed in the hearts of the great authors of our Independence. It burned in the souls of our English progenitors, the first settlers of these United States. These progenitors, my countrymen, thanks to God for giving us such progenitors! serve for the most part to dignify and ennoble our origin as a nation: they may proudly challenge a comparison with the founders of any state, ancient or modern. Unlike the founders of other countries which have been the unceasing theme of celebration to the poet and the historian, unlike these founders too often the sons of rapine whose lives have been polluted with every species of abomination, our ancestors exhibit unspotted examples of all that is heroick in enterprise, pure in morality, and pious in religion. Trace them to the land of their nativity, and you behold them loyal, yet free. In them good government found liberal, enterprising and useful citizens: arbitrary power dreaded them as its most formidable adversaries. Their just rights were neither to be ravished nor stolen from them. No tricks of a designing minister seeking his own elevation upon the ruins of the publick weal, no sophistical exposition of legal antiquities, no quirks of law could impose upon their plain, masculine understandings. They were neither to be cheated nor reasoned out of their rights. As the devices of a court could not delude, so neither could its splendours allure them from the nobler objects of their pursuit. No, neither the pomp of courts, nor the glare of royalty, nor the trappings of office, nor the gew gaws, with which little minds are so extravagantly smitten, had ever charms enough to tempt them to abandon the intrepid vindication of their civil and religious liberties.

To have resigned these at the footstool of power, they were sensible, would have brought upon them the contempt of an observing world: if they relinquished these, they well knew they would incur the reproaches of their own honest hearts. They would draw down upon their guilty heads the never ending execration of an innocent and a suffering posterity. But, above all, they would offend against the great Giver of these rights and of every other good gift, to whom they held themselves especially accountable. Animated by these considerations we see them on all proper occasions stand forward as the asserters of freedom, as the determined foes to oppression. Having in defiance of persecution raised an unconquerable spirit of liberty in their own country, we see them as guardian angels wing their flight to these shores, here to cherish and to rear that beautiful child of heaven. What dangers and what terrors here encompass them! the vicissitudes of the climate, the howlings of the wilderness, the yells of savages, added to a thousand other terrifying circumstances, could not appal men actuated by their noble views. Their words with liberty they preferred infinitely before all the ease and comforts of a life purchased at the price of honour.—This glorious spirit of liberty adorned and fortified with the brightest of manly virtues, they have left to us, my countrymen, as a precious inheritance. This is the spirit which was destined in after-ages to frown arbitrary power into insignificance, and to break the chains its minions were forging for us. These are the virtues which were ordained to form the ground-work of our federal republican constitution; the boast of Columbia, the envy and admiration of mankind: which, when faithfully administered, promises longevity; but, whatever may be its fate, I know you will join with me, my countrymen, in the wish that it may flourish and endure to the end of time.

Illustrious ancestors! ever-to-be-venerated forefathers! It is to them, my countrymen, we owe our present felicity. Like the covenant of the Almighty with Abraham, their simple and virtuous lives have been the means of shedding upon us their descendants the unnumbered and invaluable benefits that flow from equal laws, from good government and from rational liberty. The patrons and promoters of national corruption, the pseudo-philosophers of our country whom this teeming age has brought forth, how ought they to blush at their unhallowed attempts to demolish the work of such hands! How ought they to mourn for even harbouring the wish to pull down that they might behold in unsight-ly ruins that beautiful fabrick of morals and of politicks which their labours have so eminently contributed to erect!

With such examples before their eyes, it is not surpris-
ing that the descendants of such ancestors should imitate,
should emulate them. The flame of liberty which the lat-
ter had kindled was kept alive by the former with the most
religious care, with the most sacred vigilance. In the
peaceful pursuit of their blameless avocations they never
lost sight of the great objects for which their forefathers
had migrated to this then uncultivated region. No dread
of power could subdue, no love of ease relax the energy of
men determined to hold property and life itself by no other
tenure than that which liberty and law prescribed. From
the spirit of freedom which they breathed and which they
evinced on all important occasions, it was easy to foresee
that, when the destroyer came, he must retire in confusion
and disgrace: that their elevated minds would not stoop to
a compromise between the secure and ample enjoyment of
every civil, of every political, of every religious right,
and their utter extermination from the soil where they had
planted themselves. Though beaten down again and again
to the earth, yet would they, like Antæus, gather fresh

strength from every fall, and renew the combat with redoubled vigour.

The spirit of liberty that continued to pervade and animate the mass of Americans, it was a spirit wholly unalloyed with licentiousness, retaining the purest love and highest reverence for the country from which they had borrowed their civil and political establishments. Upon the bosom of the mother country, from whence they drew nourishment and life, they reposed themselves with all the tenderness of filial affection. Unhappily for that country, most fortunately for hers as it has proved, and it will be the fault of Americans if it does not for ever prove, the political destinies of the former were committed to men whose eyes were blind, whose hearts were not attuned to the harmony which had resulted from this endearing relation. Going madly forward to the consummation of their ridiculous projects, they lost sight of the plainest maxims of the most ordinary reason: swayed by the infernal lust of domination, they chose rather to wave the sceptre of despotism over a land of slaves, than to bind its inhabitants as freemen to the rest of the empire by the tender chords of affection. Could the ministers of Britain have attained the summit of their wishes by coercion, they would have gained a country heart-broken, impoverished, ruined: instead of a people paying them the voluntary homage of grateful attachment for stretching to them the arm of protection, they would have had to reverse the picture, and contemplate a nation breathing hatred and vengeance towards the authors of its woes. But they were insensible to these considerations, they were deaf to the admonitions of their wisest statesmen, and their most enlightened citizens. The best and ablest men, too, in this nation, assembled in a body than which the ample volume of history can produce nothing more truly august, could neither bend them by supplication,

nor influence them by remonstrance. This patriotick band, enthroned in the hearts of their countrymen, soared above all other rulers with a prouder pre-eminence than kings and princes and potentates could command. Far different indeed was this assembly from their parliamentary opposers. In the deliberations of the former was seen an assemblage of the greatest qualifications which a popular assembly ever presented to the view of an admiring world: it was a union of the highest intellects and adovments with the rarest patriotism, of the greatest firmness with the sincerest desire of conciliation, of the most perfect moderation with the most unyielding spirit of liberty. Here too was Washington; who appeared, like an angel of light, to cheer, to animate, and to preserve. With such a man, and with such towering qualifications, is it surprising, my countrymen, that they should have united the hands and hearts of their constituents in opposition to the arbitrary pretensions set up by their enemies?

What an ample subject for admiration have we in the wisdom of this Congress, and in the unexampled patriotism of the people, when we see them making every sacrifice of what habit, convenience and fashion had rendered necessary. A simple recommendation coming from the former, met with a more willing obedience from the latter, than, in other circumstances, any law armed with all the penalties that legislative ingenuity could devise. A Congress how worthy of such a people; a people how worthy of such a Congress! To attempt the conquest of such a nation with such rulers, was to attempt an impossibility. No, my countrymen, as well, (to use the words of a great ancient,) might they have attempted to divert the sun from his course, as well might they have essayed to overturn the whole system of the universe as to subject a people resolved on liberty or death.

A new era now opens upon our admiring view. This day owes its importance to the enlightened and patriotick firmness of a body of men illustrious for the elevated spheres to which they moved, illustrious for the confidence reposed in them by their fellow-citizens, transcendently illustrious for those saving virtues with which a benign providence had endowed them for the benefit of their country. Never until the most debasing corruption shall have overspread the land, never, while virtue is in the least revered amongst us, shall we fail to pay the tribute of gratitude and veneration to the immortal Congress who proclaimed our independence; who, on the FOURTH OF JULY, one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-six, fearlessly burst asunder the bands of a connexion, no longer honourable to freemen, and indignantly hurled them upon the heads of their oppressors. Never again, my countrymen, shall we witness the prodigies of valour and patriotism which that eventful year displayed. In looking through the vista of our future history, we may see ourselves advancing with rapid strides to the perfection of all the arts that adorn and aggrandize a nation; but our infant exertions will never have a parallel. It was in that eventful year ever-glorious to America, ever-to-be consecrated by the patriotick mind, that peaceful citizens were seen to fly to arms at the call of their country. Then it was that thousands of shining blades gleamed over this land: blades whose horrid glare foretold the invader that the ardent warriors who grasped them would never consent to be the passive, unresisting victims of the arbitrary policy of a selfish and tyrannical minister.

To you, my countrymen, who were spectators of the sublime drama which was then acting upon this great theatre, to you, in particular, I now address myself. You are but too well acquainted with the calamities which then afflicted this unhappy land: calamities, in which more or less

you all shared. You saw, with emotions too big for utterance, the gloom which then overcast our political horizon. You saw how, in this year pregnant with the future destiny of America, the genius of liberty regarded, with a tender and mournful solicitude, the distresses of her chosen children: how the efforts of these children rose superior to those distresses: how, for a long time, every succeeding account surpassed in terour the melancholy tidings of the last: how the fortitude of your fellow-citizens, co-operating with that of their rulers, supported them under every circumstance of dismay and horrou; till the memorable battles of Trenton and Princeton announced to them the dawn of hope and life and liberty. Whilst contemplating, with emotions of indescribable delight these affecting incidents, you will tell your younger countrymen that these were the circumstances of their fathers; who, for their sakes, braved wounds, proscription, imprisonment and death, in order to transmit to them the unimpaired blessings of free government: and, whilst pouring into their bosoms the generous enthusiasm with which your own are overflowing, you will exhort them, come invasion from what quarter it will, foreign or domestick, never to surrender liberty but with life itself.

Here, my countrymen, let us pause but for a moment, and survey this interesting scene in contrast with others surely of no ordinary character. We may admire the grandeur of nations whose fleets and armies strike terour into surrounding states. We may feel admiration mingled with terour at beholding the shock of contending armies. Raising our views from these objects, we may be filled with wonder and astonishment at the cataract descending from the mountains, or the projecting cliff whose lofty summit challenges pre-eminence of the heavens themselves. Soaring yet higher in our contemplations, we may experience a

delightful stillness, we may be inspired with a sacred awe in reflecting upon the wonderful order and regularity of the planets, and upon the other celestial bodies which perform their operations throughout the unfathomable depths of space. But no object in all nature, no, not the whole imposing apparatus of national power and magnificence, not the shock of contending armies, not the mountain-torrent, nor the stupendous cliff, nor the vaulted monument, so gloriously embellished with all its vast profusion of unspeakable wonders, can present to the moral eye a spectacle half so interesting or sublime, as a young, brave and virtuous people, animated with the divine ardour which liberty inspires, tearing up in a just cause, with an immovable constancy, against the pressure of calamity, and greatly resolving sooner to perish than yield the glorious strife.

It was in the year one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-six, that our fathers declared their independence: and, in the same year, they achieved it. Posterior events, it is true, had a considerable influence upon the nature and progress of the contest. True it is, that the assistance of the great head of the House of Bourbon had its weight in the operations of our armies; but enough had been done in this year by our unassisted efforts to demonstrate that independence was attainable without the help of that illustrious monarch. Unfortunate Lewis! Little did he imagine that an attempt would be made to transplant the tree of liberty upon which the heroes and patriots of our revolution had bestowed so much culture in this land, and naturalize it in a soil foreign to its growth. Still less did he imagine that it would be watered with the tears and blood of him, of his innocent and persecuted house. But the day of retribution has arrived: Frenchmen have been long tasting the bitter fruits of their monstrous and shocking incontinence. In that ill-starred region, all is now subject to the iron grasp

a despotism, and the grave, which contains within its cold bosom, the remains of the noble and long-suffering Jew, has closed forever upon the liberties of a nation.

To return from this short digression:—The spirit of liberty then has been the parent of our national felicity. Let us, my countrymen, considering the tremendous example of France, guard against any mixture of despotism with the free spirit of licentiousness. Already, alas! is the bitterness of party conjured up its demon, which, unless expelled from amongst us, threatens the utter extinction of freedom. How should we shudder, and we that have a glimpse of the endless train of horrors and calamities that await us, if it be permitted to continue its wide-spread ravages; if, with a fatal surfeit, we submit to exert an undisturbed and desolating rage. Perhaps even now the enemies, whether foreign or domestick, of our happiness, breed with a fiendish delight over the dissensions that have hitherto distracted us, and flatter themselves that the period is not distant, when, amid the storm of opposite factions, freedom must be wrecked. Perhaps even now they view with an eye of jealousy whatever can tend to cherish a love of liberty, and would joyfully consign this day to oblivion. That this is the temper of tyrants, all history teaches us. What prompted the sanguinary Edward to the atrocious and inhuman massacre of the Welch Bards? The reason is obvious. Short-lived, indeed, would have been the advantages gained by him over their countrymen, but for the bloody destruction which he planned and executed. These sons of harmony, in the wild and unpolished, but noble and animating strains of their heart-true art, by infusing into their countrymen sentiment of high-minded independence and heroic constancy, revived the old heroic valour, inspired them with the generous resolution rather to die than be led into captivity by their brutal master, and

though finally unsuccessful, contributed more effectually to check the career of conquest, than all that arms and armies and the ensigns of battle could achieve. From this historical truth let us draw an instructive lesson. It does not require the gift of prophecy to foretell, that when some future Edward, pouring from abroad his myriads upon our smiling fields, shall overbear all resistance, or some domestic tyrant, starting up from amidst the corruption engendered by our intestine divisions, shall, with a mixture of fraud and force, snatch our rights and privileges away from us, he will begin with extinguishing, and will leave nothing undone to extinguish the spirit of liberty. He will soon perceive that to let even the institution of this solemnity remain, will be utterly incompatible with the preservation of his ill-gotten power. As its continuance would be a standing, bitter satire upon the slaves who forfeited their rights, so it would be at once the monument and the reproach of the guilty ambition of the tyrant who held these slaves in bondage. He would learn that the first condition of perpetuating his success, the best means of securing the fruits of his dishonest labour would be, to obliterate as speedily as possible all remembrance of the high, the happy estate from which we had fallen. He would quickly discern, and would not be slow to improve the opportunity afforded him of building up the fabric of his unprincipled dominion upon the utter oblivion even of the birth-day of liberty.

Turning from these gloomy anticipations, which prudence would however dictate to us not wholly to shut our eyes upon; let us contemplate, my countrymen, the great advantages that are within our reach, if we are but true to ourselves: agriculture, commerce and manufactures which make a nation rich, powerful and happy. Whilst commerce waits to us over the pathless ocean the conveniences and

luxuries of the most distant climes, it pours into our lap the riches that circulate throughout the body of the state, and impart to it health and bloom and vigour. It is commerce, my countrymen, that is one of the most powerful agents in promoting civilization, and in giving to other useful arts their proper aliment and their highest value. Without it, experience teaches us that agriculture languishes, and manufactures will not reach their ultimate stage of perfection. With it, they all conspire, as sister-arts in harmonious concert, to enrich, to strengthen and to civilize a nation.

These, however, are not all the advantages that flow from commerce. It prepares the way for the introduction of those liberal and elegant arts that give the last polish to a great and powerful people. When, from the regular operation of trade, there is a great influx of wealth, the transition will be natural and easy from the more useful arts to those which, judiciously cultivated, never fail to adorn and to refine. The age of poetry, eloquence and history, of sculpture, painting and architecture will arrive, and place America upon an equality with the great fountains of all that is grand or elegant in nature and art—with the justly celebrated republics of Greece and Rome.

Nor does its beneficial influence stop here. Commerce is the nursery of a hardy race of mariners, who, as in peace they are instrumental in executing the plans of mercantile enterprize, are found in war the willing and intrepid asserters of their country's cause.—It formed a most important part of the administration of a school of politicians, to whom was once committed the sceptre of authority, which, I need not declare, they swayed with unfading honour to themselves, with lasting advantage to their country, to cherish commerce: for which purpose they founded and patronized a navy as its natural and only protector. This

navy, though but in its infancy, though most cruelly strated in its growth, at one time smote the proud armies of France, and but yesterday humbled the giant navy of Britain. But its achievements are too well known to celebrate, it needs no commentary. They have illumined the ocean with the blaze of their edulgent glory. They have poured out a radiance, they have shed a lustre upon the immediate actors in those brilliant scenes, and upon the nation that sent such heroes forth to battle. Already have the sons of Columbia displayed upon the water: element deeds worthy of their sires, already has she produced men whose great exploits will swell the poet's song, as they will be recorded and panegyrized by the historian and the orator. What though disaster now and then befall her, what though she be not exempt from the vicissitudes that accompany every thing human, the day will arrive when, as before, her canvass will whiten every sea, when her flag will wave victorious upon every main. Rejoice Columbia: future ages shall yet hail thee mistress of the ocean and triumphantly exclaim

“Thy march is o'er the mountain-waves,
Thy home is on the deep.”

Transported with the view, the lover of national excellence and glory is strongly impelled to give vent to his enthusiasm in the inspiring lay of the great Bard of Mantua:

Falsa sæcla currite
———Stabili ratemina nubite.

Thus, my countrymen, with all the arts that adorn and aggrandize, with all the virtues that illustrate a nation, when time shall have matured us, we may present to future ages the rare and august spectacle of a great empire enjoying elegance without luxury, power without injustice, and liberty without licentiousness.