

AN
ORATION,

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DELIVERED IN THE
BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE
IN
PROVIDENCE,

JULY 4, A. D. 1795,

AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE NINETEENTH
ANNIVERSARY OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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PRESIDENT OF RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE.

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TO THE

WORTHY INHABITANTS

OF THE TOWN OF

PROVIDENCE,

THE FOLLOWING

O B A T T O N

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

AND VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

J. MAXCY.



A N

O R A T I O N.

THE citizens of America celebrate that day which gave birth to their liberties. The recollection of this event, replete with consequences so beneficial to mankind, swells every heart with joy, and fills every tongue with praise. We celebrate not the sanguinary exploits of a tyrant to subjugate and enslave millions of his fellow-creatures; we celebrate neither the birth nor the coronation of that phantom styled a king;—but the resurrection of liberty, the emancipation of mankind, the regeneration of the world. These are the sources of our joy, these the causes of our triumph. We pay no homage at the tomb of kings, to sublime our feelings—we trace no line of illustrious ancestors, to support our dignity—we recur to no usages sanctioned by the authority of the great, to protect our rejoicings;—no, we love liberty, we glory in the rights of men, we glory in independence. On whatever part of God's creation a human form pines under chains, these Americans drop their tears.

A DARE

A DARK cloud once shaded this beautiful quarter of the globe. Consternation for a while agitated the hearts of the inhabitants. War desolated our fields, and buried our vales in blood. But the day-spring from on high soon opened upon us its glittering portals. The Angel of Liberty descending, dropped on WASHINGTON'S brow the wreath of victory, and stamped on American freedom the seal of omnipotence. The darkness is past, and the true light now shines, to enliven and rejoice mankind. We tread a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness; and view a new heaven, flaming with inextinguishable stars. Our feet will no more descend into the vale of oppressions. Our shoulders will no more bend under the weight of a foreign domination, as cruel as it was unjust. Well may we rejoice at the return of this glorious anniversary; a day dear to every American—a day to be had in everlasting remembrance—a day whose light circulates joy through the hearts of all republicans, and terror through the hearts of all tyrants.

Liberty is the birthright of man. It is coeval with his existence. It is a privilege wrought into his constitution, accommodated to his situation, and proclaimed his own by the concurrent voice of nature and reason. Who shall rob man of this privilege? It was given him by the Almighty. Man, though made free, was made to be governed by laws. These however cannot be obligatory, unless founded in reason and justice. Liberty consists not in exemption from the control of laws, but in acting according to laws; laws just and equal, established by the unanimous consent of the community.

WHILE

WHILE uncivilized man roams through the wilderness, he enjoys the liberty of nature. His bed is the earth, his canopy the sky. Uncontrouled by the force of human institutions, and unacquainted with those delicate obligations which render men slaves in the social stat., he acknowledges no power but that of his own arm, and submits to no decision but that of his own will. But no sooner does the necessity of mutual relief and protection involve him in the relations of civil society, than his liberty assumes a new form; better accommodated to his capacity, because more limited; more useful, because subjected to the laws of order. This new situation of man originates a multiplicity of rights, obligations and duties. To secure him in the peaceful and inviolable enjoyment of the first, to stimulate and compel him to the punctual and invariable performance of the last, these are the highest objects of civil government. That system of administration under whose operation these objects are most expeditiously obtained, and most permanently secured, must be deemed the most perfect. The more effectually the persons of men are guarded from injury, and their property from unjust spoliation, the less will they be liable to contention, more happy at home, more happy abroad; more humane, just and benevolent; more industrious, wealthy, virtuous and enlightened. What then must be our opinion of that system of politics adopted and pursued by the founders of all despotic monarchies? What incomparable lessons of wisdom would they inculcate upon us? They teach us, by their doctrine and practice, that millions are created for the use and pleasure of an individual, who is amenable to

to no human tribunal; who can infringe the rights, dispose of the property and destroy the lives of his subjects. Sentiments these, which lay the foundation of that great political maxim, that the safety and happiness of the community are the highest ends of civil government. Had mankind known, that there was but one being in the universe of sufficient wisdom and goodness to be invested with unlimited power, they never would have submitted to dominion founded in usurpation, supported by cruelty, and administered by injustice. The first object of men in the career of ambition, is to render themselves independent; the second, to subject and oppress others. Monarchical governments, however limited, have never secured to the people the enjoyment of their rights. A crown, it has been said, is too splendid a price to be conferred on merit. If so, surely it is too splendid a price to glitter on the head of arrogance, or hereditary folly. The ambition of kings has never known any limits. Dazzled by the splendour of crowns, and infatuated by the possession of supreme power; flattered on every side by the servile compliance of courtiers, and deluded into a belief that the determinations of their own wills ought to be inviolable laws of conduct for their subjects, they have fancied themselves the vicegerents of God, born and designed for no end but the exercise of unbounded authority. Rapacious of wealth, and ambitious of power, they have never failed to encroach on those intermediate authorities constituted by the people, and designed by them as an impregnable barrier against regal invasion.

ARISTOCRATICAL governments, though they
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may be more favourable than monarchical to the peace and security of the people, yet they do not secure those important objects which ought ever to be kept in view in all systems of civil policy. When the supreme power is vested in a number, the chance for wisdom, virtue, and impartial administration of justice, is greater than when the supreme power is vested in an individual. This may be expected to be the case, when the members succeed to their places by some possessions, qualifications or inheritance. But the advantages accruing to government from that wisdom and experience which are to be expected in a permanent council, will be counterbalanced by the evils of dissension unavoidable among men invested with equal power; men whose privileges will render them oppressive, and whose ambition, unawed by a superior, will hurry on their passions to the most desperate extremes. Deplorable indeed must be the situation of a people, whose rights are perpetually exposed to the capricious insolence of combined aristocratical power. Prudence would dictate the sufferance of one, rather than a thousand tyrants; but reason and common sense forbid the sufferance of any.

If we would secure the interest and tranquility of a community, we must have recourse to some form of government, where the supreme power is collected, lodged and preserved, by the voluntary choice of the people. When this is the case, civil liberty, secure from the grasp of a despotic tyrant, and the ambitious pretensions of a haughty nobility, will exist in the greatest perfection, and diffuse its salutary influence through the whole circle of society. Man, in a

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state of improvement, subjected to the regulations of political administration, must relinquish so much of his natural liberty as is inconsistent with the good of the community. He must not consult and gratify private inclination at the expence of the public. He must not indulge a haughty spirit of self-direction and independency, but cheerfully submit to the controul of just and equal laws. In doing this, he secures and enjoys the only liberty desirable in any state but that of solitude. Did all the members of society indulge their own dispositions, aim at their own objects, and gratify their own passions, without any regard to the consistency of their conduct with the general interest, they would be involved in so many difficulties, from a mutual interference of private pursuits, that they would enjoy but a small share of that liberty and happiness which are secured by submission to good government. The condition of men, their connexions and dependencies in civil society, are such, that all laws ought to be deemed salutary and just, which restrain the will and curtail the liberty of each individual, whenever the indulgence of that will, and the enjoyment of that liberty, would contravene the operation of those means instituted for the security of public happiness. Union of men in society, of necessity diminishes their natural liberty: But each one ought to consider, that he gains vastly more by the diminution of other mens' liberty, than he loses by the diminution of his own. — In every species of civil government, there exists a supreme power, from which there is no appeal. The rights of the people will be most effectually secured, where this power is deposited and restricted in such a manner, as to afford no prospect

prospect of success to ambitious designing men. This end is obtained with greater ease and certainty in a republic than in any other government. The first principle of genuine republicanism is, that all men, as to rights, are equal. From this plain undeniable position it follows, that all power not originating in the consent of the people; all power not exercised according to their direction, and subjected to their controul, is usurpation, injustice and tyranny. If an enlightened nation cannot enjoy happiness under a government formed and administered by her own consent, she never can under any. If under a monarchy men are liable to oppression, exaction, and military domination; if they are liable at all times to be involved in unnecessary wars, to gratify the caprice of the reigning prince, or a favourite minister; if they are constantly liable to insecurity of their persons and property, through the instability or deficiency of salutary regulations; if under an aristocracy men are liable to suffer the pernicious effects of combined ambition, or the horrors of dissension, among rulers clothed with equal authority; if men are liable to these things, it is because they are deprived of their rights by privileged orders, and subjected to the controul of laws enacted and enforced without their consent. All the inconveniences resulting from arbitrary power lodged in the hands of an individual, or of a number, are obviated by the first principle of free government. If all men are born equal, surely all have an equal right to a voice in the enactment of laws; all have an equal right to suffrage in the election of men into places of power and trust. Possessed of these rights, the people can always manifest their will, and establish

blish regulations accommodated to their situation. Their exigencies can always be known, and always relieved. But in governments where the administration of public affairs rests in an individual, or a few; where offices are disposed of by caprice, or sold to the highest bidder; where the right to govern is claimed by hereditary succession, and descends to folly as often as to wisdom; where these things occur, what can be expected but ignorance in the rulers, with respect to the real condition of the community? What can be expected but servility and fear in the people, haughtiness and audacity in the magistrates? What can be expected but the desolating peevishness of exorbitant avarice and unbounded ambition? That spirit of wisdom and benevolence so conspicuous in the constitution of the United States, levels all the pompous distinctions of rank, opens the way of honour and promotion to all who are worthy, and affords ample security to the persons and property of the whole community. The circumstances attending the settlement and growth of this country, till its dismemberment from the government of Great-Britain, tended directly to pave the way to liberty and independence. The facility with which landed property was acquired, and the certain enjoyment of the productions of their industry, inspired the inhabitants with disgust for a state of dependency, and love for a state of freedom. The manner in which they were trained up from youth to manhood, taught them their rights. No usurping tyrant here fixed the standard of despotism, and awed them into a state of vassalage. No haughty nobility engrossed the soil, and reduced the people to the necessity of starving, or submitting

ring to the drudgery of slaves. Each man was his own master, walked on his own ground, reaped the fruit of his own toil. Could it be expected that such men would peaceably cringe under the lash of a tyrant? Could it be expected that such men would suffer their rights to be infringed by privileged orders, or the produce of their industry to be decimated by ecclesiastical oppression? Was the Parliament of Great-Britain so ignorant of the state of this country, as to imagine that the people, whose daily experience taught them their liberties, would sit still till they were bound in chains? By what authority could the British government impose laws on us without our consent, or tax us without allowing us the right of representation? With what success their arbitrary designs were crowned, let the late revolution declare. Let this joyful anniversary of our independence announce it to remotest ages, and stand an eternal monument of the escape of Liberty from the harpy fangs of Despotism.

THE political situation of our country, resulting from the admirable constitution and administration of our government, puts us into possession of many blessings, and opens upon us many prospects, not enjoyed by any other nation under heaven. No favoured orders can here claim the exclusive right of legislation. All stand on the same level, enjoy the same freedom, and submit to the same laws. Places of honour, profit and trust, are equally open to all our citizens. No particular set of men is here supported in idleness and extravagance, at the expence of the community. No unnecessary taxes are imposed on the people, nor is it probable there will be, because they affect the legislators as much as the citizens.

Property

Property cannot be more effectually secured than it is in the United States; for no man here can be deprived of it but by the operation of laws established by the whole community. The lives and fortunes of all the Americans are on board one vessel; it is therefore the duty, interest and happiness of all to take care of it. The present situation of our country is peculiarly favourable to the cultivation of genius. Great capacity and extensive acquirements are indispensibly necessary to qualify men to manage with success the political concerns, and to discharge with reputation the important duties annexed to the governmental departments of these States. Important objects are exposed to the attainment of all,—objects calculated to arrest the attention and fire the ambition of all who are disposed to render themselves meritorious of public esteem. That political equality and general information which prevail under our government, bring forth genius from every class of citizens. This circumstance renders it probable, that happiness will here be enjoyed in a greater degree, and in longer duration, than it has been under any government since the institution of civil society.

The freedom of the press, so essential to the preservation of liberty, is here enjoyed in its greatest latitude. The conduct of every citizen invested with authority, all occurrences foreign and domestic, are presented in one view to the whole nation. Such is the light diffused through the whole mass of the people, that none in places of trust can escape the most accurate inspection. The freedom of the press converts united America into an enlightened congress of politicians.

How

How can our liberties be subverted, while the people are universally acquainted with the conduct of their representatives? These are elected into office for certain periods, at the expiration of which they must revert back to their former places as private citizens. Are they not under the greatest degree of responsibility? Are they not under the greatest inducement to distinguish their conduct with rectitude and wisdom? Will they be likely to adopt regulations injurious to the community, when they themselves must soon feel their operation? The situation of this country indicates its original destination to independence. How could it be expected that such an extensive continent, at such a vast distance from the old world, would not be inhabited at some period by men capable of governing and defending themselves? Who in his senses could imagine, that a country like this, replete with all the necessaries of life; a country whose ports open to every quarter of the globe, and whose fleets will one day cover the ocean; who could imagine that such a country, inhabited by men fond to excess of liberty, would pay submission to the petty island of Britain? We might almost as reasonably expect, that the sun and all the planetary worlds would rush down from their shining spheres, to gravitate round a pebble. By the appointment of heaven we stand by our own strength, disconnected from foreign influence and foreign power. This circumstance undoubtedly gave birth to that calm deliberation, which reflected so much honour on the Americans, in forming and establishing the federal constitution. From our local situation, we enjoy in a superior degree the advantages of neutrality. Had we submitted to the rapacious

pacious demands of Britain, how deplorable must have been our situation? How disgracefully should we have been led off by a foreign master, and plunged in all the horrors of war! How many Americans must have breathed out their lives on the plains of Europe! How many of our hands must have been employed in the drudgery of kings, to undermine the fair temple of liberty! The great Parent of the universe has peculiarly distinguished the Americans, in encouraging them to assert, and in enabling them to defend their rights. These however have been most atrociously violated by that supercilious overbearing conduct, which has usually marked the British ministry. They, regardless of the rights of neutrality, have committed spoliations on our property, at which uncivilized barbarians would blush; spoliations attended with that rapacious meanness and contemptible insolence, which no pretences however artful can conceal, no evasions however plausible can excuse.

AMONG the numerous advantages enjoyed by the inhabitants of these States, we may rank the exemption from ecclesiastical establishments. The incorporation of these with systems of civil policy, has never failed to promote bigotry, hypocrisy and oppression. The requirement of subscription to particular articles of faith, as an indispensable qualification in candidates for offices of public trust, is a most flagitious intrusion on the equal rights of men; an intrusion which screens ambition and avarice under the mantle of religion, converts religion into a mere engine of state, patronizes vice under the pompous ceremonies of worship, levels all moral distinctions, and damps that voluntary ardour of piety which alone is acceptable

ceptable to the Supreme Being. What right has the arm of the magistrate to intrude itself into the field of religious opinion? To what order of men has the Almighty delegated wisdom and authority to prescribe modes of faith? None but voluntary worshippers are acceptable to God. Those who choose to worship him, will do it without the constraints of civil law. All others are hypocrites. Who then can advocate the necessity of religious establishments, without betraying a want of sincerity? Religious liberty exists in these States, but not without some restraints. These restraints have originated in an unjustifiable interference of civil authority. To the everlasting honour of Rhode-Island be it said, that her legislature has never assumed the authority of regulating ecclesiastical concerns. Religion here stands, as it ought to, on its own basis, disconnected with all political considerations.

A SLIGHT view of the condition of mankind in other quarters of the globe, will at once convince us of the superior privileges and blessings enjoyed in America. Imagination can scarcely depict the wretched state of the people inhabiting the immense regions of Asia and Africa. There human nature, enveloped in darkness, is degraded to the condition of brutes, transferred like them from one owner to another, and pressed under the load of arbitrary power. Their hearts never expand under the enlivening beams of liberty. In many parts of Europe the condition of the people is more tolerable. The spirit of oppression however predominates, and rears up its hideous form to oppose the progress of liberty. France, in breaking her chains and seizing her freedom, has

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experienced all the horrors of war. Its desolating calamities have rolled over her fertile plains. Her armies, animated by that ardour which first glowed in America, have triumphed over all opposition. Despotism has been shaken to its lowest foundations. Brave Frenchmen! your cause is the cause of all nature; your victories, the liberties of the world!—

TURNING off our eyes from the bloody fields of Europe, we may rejoice for the happiness of the United States. In a full persuasion of the excellency of our government, let us shun those vices which tend to its subversion, and cultivate those virtues which will render it permanent, and transmit it in full vigour to all succeeding ages. Let not the haggard forms of intemperance and luxury ever lift up their destroying visages in this happy country. Let œconomy, frugality, moderation and justice, at home and abroad, mark the conduct of all our citizens. Let it be our constant care to diffuse knowledge and goodness through all ranks of society. The people of this country will never be uneasy under its present form of government, provided they have sufficient information to judge of its excellency. No nation under heaven enjoys so much happiness as the Americans. Convince them of this, and will they not shudder at the thought of subverting their political constitution, or suffering it to degenerate into aristocracy or monarchy? Let a sense of our happy situation awaken in us the warmest sensations of gratitude to the Supreme Being. Let us consider him as the author of all our blessings, acknowledging him as our beneficent parent, protector and friend. The predominant tendency
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of his providences towards us as a nation, evinces his benevolent designs. Every part of his conduct speaks in a language plain and intelligible. Let us open our ears, let us attend, let us be wise.

WHILE we celebrate the anniversary of our independence, let us not pass over in silence the defenders of our country. Where are those brave Americans whose lives were cloven down in the tempest of battle? Are they not bending from the bright abodes? ~~A voice from the altar cries,~~ "These are they who loved their country, these are they who died for liberty." We now reap the fruit of their agony and toil. Let their memories be eternally embalmed in our bosoms. Let the infants of all posterity prattle their fame, and drop tears of courage for their fate.

THE consequences of American independence will soon reach to the extremities of the world. The shining car of freedom will soon roll over the necks of kings, and bear off the oppressed to scenes of liberty and peace. The clamours of war will cease under the whole heaven. The tree of liberty will shoot its top up to the sun. Its boughs will hang over the ends of the world, and the wearied nations will lie down and rest under its shade. Here in America stands the asylum for the distressed and persecuted of all nations. This vast temple of freedom rises majestically fair. Founded on a rock, it will remain unshaken by the force of tyrants, undiminished by the flight of time. Long streams of light emanate through its portals, and chase the darkness from distant nations. Its turrets will swell into the heavens,
rising

rising above every tempest; and the pillar of divine glory, descending from God, will rest forever on its summit.

