

O R A T I O N,

PRONOUNCED

JULY 4th, 1805,

AT THE

Request of the Inhabitants

OF THE

TOWN OF BRIDGEWATER,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence.

BY ASA MEECH.

**"TELL YE YOUR CHILDREN OF IT, AND LET YOUR CHILDREN
TELL THEIR CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN ANOTHER
GENERATION."**

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1805.

At the request of my Fellow-Citizens, this Oration again solicits the indulgence of the Public.

AN
ORATION.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

SINCE you have conferred on me, the honor of leading our contemplations; on this joyful and important occasion; permit me to place unshaken confidence in your candor.

The commemoration of remarkable events is a custom sanctioned by the universal practice of civilized nations, and derives a still higher sanction from the sacred volume. That the memory of great events may be duly perpetuated, men are commanded to tell them to rising generations.

“Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your Fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.” The mighty deeds, wrought by Jehovah, while he led Israel from bitter slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, to the enjoyment of the promised land, are frequently celebrated by the sacred pen of inspiration. Hence we have ample authority for the due commemoration of our National Independence.

Sure I am, that very few, among the unnumbered events which have diversified the history of

the human race, have ever occurred more important to the happiness of men, or more worthy of commemoration.

A frequent recurrence to those noble principles on which our laboring plan of State was originally founded, and to those sentiments and actions on which the glory and felicity of our nation rest supported, must be highly interesting. It gives our rising offspring opportunity, to imbibe the noble spirit of their Fathers, and to receive an important portion of happiness, which might otherwise be lost. Every true patriot must realize joyful sensations : and it is but a just tribute of respect to our most benevolent Sovereign.

Those principles and noble actions which led to, and produced the establishment of the Independence of our country, constitute the theme of our present Commemoration.

If we believe the word and infinite perfection of God, we must admit the connexion and harmonious operation of all events, for the accomplishment of the most noble and important ends. On this ground, we must admit, that the feelings, principles, and noble actions of our venerable Forefathers, stood connected with our nation's Freedom and Independence. The feelings resulting from oppression, a fervent desire for social equality, and the principles of eternal justice, moved them to conceive and prosecute one of the boldest enterprizes that ever engaged the mind of man. We may trace its origin, not to the lust of conquest, nor to the desire of gain, but to the love of Civil and Religious Liberty. And its prosecution, in every

step, was marked with an effort and constancy highly honorable to their name.

The pleasant and fertile fields, the affluence and splendor of the old world, were most cheerfully abandoned, for the sake of Liberty to worship their God without molestation. Hence when inspired with the sublime purpose, of seeking refuge from cruel oppression, in the wilds of America, and of converting her forests into the favorite mansions of Liberty ; Heaven looked on them with a smile.

Had they been criminals, making their escape from deserved punishment, concealment would have been their first object. And if permitted to cross the wide Atlantic in safety, it is very probable, they would soon have fallen, by the hands of their wild neighbors, or shared some dreadful calamity. But when they attempted the American colonization, their cause was just. They fled, not from the wholesome restraints of Government, nor with an expectation of that Liberty, which promises uncontrolled indulgence to the lusts and appetites of human nature.

But with a becoming displeasure, they left a country, which denied them the proper rights of christians and of men. He, who rides on the wings of the wind and governs the storm and raging tempest, protected them from the dangers of the boisterous ocean, marked out the place of destination, and landed them safely on these inhospitable shores. The divine protection was still necessary : for they were now in a wild and dreary wilderness, inhabited, by wild beasts and men.

While they faithfully applied every proper mean of safety and prosperity, innumerable difficulties were surmounted ; the omnipotent arm removed the heathen, and their settlement was made permanent.

The first emigrants to this continent were sagacious and enlightened men, cool and deliberate in discussion, firm and unwearied to maintain their rights ; and to carry into operation their rational system. A system happily calculated to place them and their rising offspring in the quiet enjoyment of solid Liberty.

Many of them were venerable for those endowments, so highly ornamental to the human character, and so happily conducive to the prosperity of a community.

Their plans, being the result of their united counsels, were executed by common consent, and the exertion of their combined powers. Hence to their joy, it was verified, that "two are better than one ; that a threefold cord is not quickly broken : and that in a multitude of counsellors there is safety."

As many of them were men of strong minds, and well taught in solid literature ; they were duly qualified to take the lead both in Church and State, to diffuse useful knowledge among the whole, and to lay a broad foundation for a great, respectable, and happy nation.

If you travel through some parts of this, and of other countries, and duly observe the manners and habits of the people ; you can scarcely discover the least trace of moral obligation, or evidence of

any suitable attention to the solid education of children. No places dedicated to the worship of God are to be seen. Nor can you believe, from what appears, that Religion is respected, or that duty is performed in any good degree.

But with pleasure we contemplate the very opposite in our venerable Forefathers. Doth Deity preside over, and direct all events in the whole universe to the best possible ends? They firmly believed it. With the noble spirit of patriotism, a lively sense of moral obligation found a constant residence in their hearts. And their conduct gave full proof of their supreme love to God and universal good will to men.

Protection against the attacks of the Indians, and the supply of their daily wants, required the constant and most vigorous exertion of every power. Yet public, private, and secret devotion were not neglected. Schools for the education of their rising offspring were formed, more public Seminaries of Learning founded; and Temples dedicated to the worship of their God. Their children saw examples of piety and order, and received religious instruction both in families, and in their literary establishments. To their honor be it said, that the poor children shared the benefit of education, with the rich, and that on a plan then new to the world.

Thus while the new world was opening, Colonization progressing, and the wilderness of Columbia becoming a fruitful field, important objects gave ample scope to all the energies of the human mind; and a broad foundation was laid for social

equality, for order, Liberty and happiness. The Colonies rose into respectability, and for a time, happily flourished under the Crown of Great Britain.

Had not the Sovereigns of that nation, unrighteously attempted to burden their Colonists, had they pursued the policy dictated by their own interest, and treated the Americans on the ground of equality, reciprocal affection might have been the happy consequence ; and perhaps they might have retained to this day, a durable and most important empire.

But their sordid souls were not contented with the lucrative monopoly of our trade. Hence they attempted to establish a durable system of internal taxation ; to bring the Colonies, who were not represented, to acknowledge the *perpetual right* of Parliament, to tax them in all cases whatsoever.

To give a favorable reception to this poisonous draught, it was at first urged as the price of their protection. But the enlightened Americans looked through the veil, fully apprehended the design, and objected with unshaken firmness. Not that they were unwilling to pay just demands. But they were unwilling to be slaves. Unwilling to submit to any proposition or act of Parliament which would establish the oppressive precedent, or sanction it as their right, to tax the Colonies at pleasure.

Fully possessed of the operations of tyranny, they disdained even an experiment on their liberties. Sensible that a yoke, already imposed, would be broken with the utmost difficulty, if broken at

all; they resolutely determined to prevent the imposition. Hence as often as the attempt was made, to carry their plan into execution, it met the bold and unshaken resistance of united America. No pretended friendship, no delusive plea, nor threatening moved them to hold still, and lose their eyes. Nor did the numbers and brilliancy of the most potent armies on earth, depress their spirits and awe them to submission.

But while obstinacy and cruelty progressed on the part of Britain, unshaken fortitude and resolution increased on the part of America: until the connexion between the two countries was completely destroyed by the violence of reciprocal hostilities: and our Representatives declared the united Colonies, Free, Sovereign and Independent States. This event stands high among the opening scenes of Providence. It has often engaged the attention, and frequently employed the pens, of Historians, Philosophers, Orators and Divines. And it will ever excite the admiration of all nations.

That was emphatically an eventful period, when our national existence commenced. To what an amazing height did the tone of heroism then rise in the minds of freemen? The importance of Liberty was sensibly felt. It was fully realized. Every other consideration was happily subordinated to the common good. The omnipotent arm of Jehovah was first sought and relied on, as our Shield and Defence. While the infinite importance of the public cause was felt by true Americans, union, solid union took place with all readiness. And independent ground was taken with unshaken firm-

ness and fortitude. They stood ready to meet their potent enemy in any combat; to venture on every daring enterprize; to execute every wise purpose; to endure every hardship; and to make every possible sacrifice for the sake of Liberty. For this indeed, the common good of their country, they were even forward to venture on all the "varieties of untried being," and to sacrifice life itself. Being few in number, untaught in the arts and without the weapons of war, and unfortified against a potent and unrelenting enemy; at that moment, when invaded by a brilliant and most potent army, and when that fleet the dread of all nations infested our coasts, even then, they dared to pronounce an eternal separation from our parent country, and to throw the gauntlet at the greatest power on earth. A long and bloody war ensued. But of this particulars will not be expected. Were it possible however, I would count, in your presence, all those millions of treasure expended during the whole contest. Then I would conduct you to Lexington, from thence to Breed's-hill, and from thence to all places where battles were fought; exhibit before you every plan and movement of American Heroes during the war; and dwell particularly on the great and noble actions of the illustrious Washington, who, under God, probably wrought more blessings for his country than any man. In immediate view of every engagement, I would open before you, every wound received by American soldiers, their blood flowing from their veins in crimson streams, and present you with their dying groans and agonies. Then with their graves open to view, I would disclose every motive from which they acted, and shew you

all their labors, hardships, sufferings and noble actions during the bloody contest. To this I would add all that was done and suffered by those who lived through the tedious war. And thus I would present you with the invaluable price of your freedom ; with all these feelings, sufferings and noble actions which were necessary to the maintenance of that Independence, for which, our venerable forefathers laid the foundation, and which was declared in Seventy-Six. Some present were active, while these stupendous scenes were passing. To them the most able description is only a revival of past experience. Few of us however had sufficiently advanced in life, to take an active part in the defence and salvation of that Liberty, which our fathers have bequeathed to us, for a glorious inheritance. We would fondly indulge the hope that the foundation of our independence will never give way ; that our country will never call us to those hardships, to those extraordinary and heroic exertions, which crown their names with glory. But should this fond hope be disappointed, and this solemn call reach our ears, it is presumed that full proof will be given, that their spirit happily rests on us ; by an actual display of that heroism and republican virtue, which shone so conspicuously in them. During seven years hostility, the British Government expended an hundred millions of treasure, foolishly sacrificed thousands of her veteran troops, to maintain a most *malevolent claim*. But was compelled to give up the pursuit, to leave the ground with disgrace, “ to bear the heavy load of accumulated calamity, and to close an inglorious war in which she had frequently been the object, but rarely the actor of a triumph.” Instead

of adding to national grandeur ; and procuring a fund for future corruption and extravagance ; she was clothed with shame, and left to bear her own ponderous burden without the help of Independent America. The history of our nation from that period to the present, is highly interesting. But to be particular on this, would carry me beyond proper limits. In the progress of events, the numerous defects of the Confederation were realized. Insurmountable difficulties, too many to be stated, rose to view, and forcibly taught leading men, that, to secure liberty and prosperity, the States must be connected by an indissoluble bond of union. The wisdom of the nation was summoned, and after four months mature deliberation, united in that most excellent instrument, the Federal Constitution. To say less were ingratitude ; for it is emphatically the master piece of human wisdom. Opposition to its adoption, however, in some States was formidable. But one State followed another, till eleven States were united in this happy bond. A President was then chosen. Happy for Americans that the man was raised to the exalted chair, who had led them through the distresses of war to the cheering beams of peace.

Though they placed unlimited confidence in him, and hence were less guarded, he did not disappoint their most sanguine expectations. Instead of lessening his fame, an important addition was made to his virtues and noble actions. By the adoption and execution of the wisest measures, the nation rose into respectability and grew in wealth and importance. Americans ! To what part of our country may we turn our eye and not behold

the happy fruits of that union? Do not the rich and the poor, learned and unlearned share the invaluable blessings of Liberty? Since the wheels of government have moved on this foundation, have not all the States seen and felt the infinite importance of that Constitution which is the solid link of their connexion.

Our Constitutions of Government happily combined Liberty with order, and the security of individual right, with the necessary energy of the ruling power. And is it not just and grateful to say, that the blessings of civil and religious liberty are here enjoyed to higher perfection, than by any people on the globe? Aside from African slavery, which stains the history of every nation where it is suffered, what description of men can produce a just complaint. Americans! happy Americans! Are our fellow countrymen oppressed? Are they compelled to devote the first fruits of all their labors to sovereigns of the land, to support them in extravagance; while they must live on the meanest food? No, no, fellow citizens, the blessings of Liberty are not made the exclusive right of a few, but are as diffusive, as the inhabitants of our happy land.

If you pass through the States, the city, town or village is not to be found, where oppression reigns. Provision is made for the security of life and property, civil and religious rights to every man. Even the criminal may not feel the weight of injustice, unless it be in opposition to the spirit of our laws and Constitutions of Government.

The door is happily closed against persecution. One religious sect is not made superior to all oth-

ers. Hypocrisy is not thus encouraged. But every denomination shares the inestimable freedom. All are protected while they worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. The means of instruction are open to all, and free inquiry is tolerated.

Happy Americans! On what part of the globe would you prefer to live? Where will you find such universal Liberty? Was it not infinite goodness, that gave you birth in this land?

Look on other nations, behold the lifted hand of the oppressor, and the pains of the oppressed, and contemplate the heathen ready to perish for lack of vision: then turn to your own country, and learn to prize your liberty.

Our country has produced her learned and great men, and enrolled their names on the fair page of fame. In this respect, her annals stand high among all nations.

In the same portion of time, where have the arts and sciences, agriculture and commerce flourished more, or been carried to higher perfection, than on this continent? Or what nation has risen higher in dignity on the face of the whole earth?

Had the settlement, growth and prosperity of our nation been predicted two hundred years ago, who would have credited the prediction? But however then improbable to man, the event has taken place, and is the pleasing theme of this day.

But is there no ground to fear, that, at some future period, our prospects will be veiled in darkness? Ought we not to fear, that the clouds of public calamity will collect and thicken to a tem-

pest, and pour forth upon us their magazines of destruction? In that case, our history would resemble the history of all nations. Changes are quite common, in this world. Divine Providence is complex, containing a mixture of adversity and prosperity, for nations, as well as individuals. One generation passes away and another succeeds. Like the mighty billows of the ocean, nations rise and fall. When they have risen high in magnitude and glory, they frequently sink as low in wretchedness. But what is reserved for America is hidden, within the divine purpose.

Righteousness exalteth a nation, and wisdom is ever profitable to direct. If we retain and carry into operation the spirit of our Forefathers, and faithfully pursue that system of government, under which, we have so happily prospered, we shall, in all probability, still enjoy peace in all our borders, and plenty in all our habitations.

But if we act in opposition to the will of that God who rules all nations; if we break into parties, prefer the vain philosophy of the wicked to the wisdom of the just, set at nought those just and equal laws, by which our civil and religious liberties have been protected and secured, and will not entrust our national concerns with the wise and good: if we thus depart from the spirit of our predecessors: we have great reason to fear, that the judgments of Heaven will convince us of our folly, when it is too late for repentance. But we wish not to indulge these gloomy apprehensions, and would fondly hope for better things:—That our people will be righteous, that we shall imitate the steady habits and noble virtues of our venera-

ble Forefathers, pleasingly progress in our wise system of government, preserve our happy Union, Independence and Freedom, and excel every other nation, in prosperity, dignity and honor.

A foundation is here laid for great and glorious things, and the superstructure vastly exceeds in magnitude and glory.

While we fondly hope, that all possible blessings, resulting from civil and religious liberty, will here descend to our posterity, even to the latest generations : we would look forward to that blessed era, when wars shall be no longer known, when arbitrary oppressive power shall be no longer felt, when just and equal Liberty shall carry its inestimable blessings to every portion of mankind, and when party distinctions and differences shall no longer require mutual forbearance and condescension. Then that Jesus, now despised by many, shall be universally honored as king of the nations ; and men shall be as ready to commemorate his death, as they now are to celebrate their liberty and independence. And then shall a pure offering of praise be directed to God, from the rising to the setting sun, and from the river to the ends of the earth.