

Sam. Howe
from the

MR. METCALF'S ORATION.

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT DEDHAM.

JULY 4th 1810,

THE THIRTY FOURTH ANNIVERSARY.

OF

American Independence.

=====
BY THERON METCALF.
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“Te miror, Antoni, quorum facta imitere, eorum exitus nos:
perhorrescere.” CIC.



BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOSHUA BELCHER.

1810.

Dedham, July 5, 1810

SIR,

THE Committee appointed for that purpose, by those at whose request you yesterday delivered an Oration in commemoration of AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE, beg leave to express the high gratification with which your Oration was received, to tender you thanks, and request a copy for the press.

SAMUEL HAVEN, Chairman.

THERON METCALF, Esq.

THE Oration pronounced at your request, is submitted to your disposal

With sentiments of the highest respect,

I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

THERON METCALF.

*Gentlemen of
the Committee. }*

July 6th, 1810.

ORATION.

VENERATION for ancestors and love for posterity are among the most generous sentiments of the human heart, and the most operative principles of human action. Their influence is felt in every relation of life, and in every state of society. They inspire the gentle virtues that adorn the man, and the christian, and the noble virtues that exalt the patriot and the soldier. They conduce not only to the honour of individuals, but to the glory of communities—they give ardour to national feeling, and energy to national character.

The parent leads his children to the family-altar, or the family tomb, and while in the susceptible hour, he tells their forefathers' deeds, they receive the intended impression, and resolve to remember and not disgrace their descent. The lover of his country kindles into enthusiasm at the history of her former glory. In her ancient sages he recognizes the kindred spirit of patriotism, and in his offspring around him he finds the most sacred motives for its exercise. As he contemplates the past, and looks forward to the future, the sphere of his influence and the circle of his duties are enlarged, his soul is

expanded, and he becomes a being of another order. No longer confined to the narrow limits and the stunted pursuits of the present scene, he claims alliance and holds converse with the illustrious spirits of his fathers, and exerts his efforts for the welfare of his children of many generations. The soldier glows with fervour while he surveys the monuments of victory or the *warrior's green-tomb*—and in the dreadful hour of battle, the highest attempt of martial eloquence is to adjure by the glory of ancestors and regard for descendants.

In obedience to the impulse of sentiments like these, you, my countrymen, have now convened to celebrate the birth day of our national independence—to impress a remembrance of the principles of the revolution—of the sovereignty which it produced—and of the government which succeeded it. And for what more laudable purpose could we now assemble? At this alarming period, when the civil establishments of Europe are daily assuming new forms, and revolution after revolution is sweeping away the empires of the earth—when foreign enemies with unexampled perfidy infringe our rights—when even our own citizens deny the first maxims that support our own institutions, it is of the highest importance that we should recur to those principles and to that spirit which actuated our fathers, which led them to fame and to glory, and which alone can secure to us, the liberties which they achieved. It is a sacred duty which in these times we owe not only to the memory of our ancestors, but to ourselves and to posterity. We shall thus obey the dictates of nature, of interest, and of religion. We shall pay a deserved tribute to departed worth, and offer, we humbly trust, an acceptable offering on these sacred altars. It is only by thus honouring our

political fathers that we can hope to preserve our political rights.

No nation can examine its early history with so little abatement of satisfaction and pride as our own. We are not obliged to resort to fable for our origin, nor to conjecture for our progress. The whole is spread before us in unfaded colours. Nor are we disgusted with a picture of our former barbarism and cruelty. Our ancestors were not outcasts from civilized society—they sought these shores, not as a refuge from punishment, but as an asylum for liberty: Not that fantastick liberty which modern philosophy represents as the perfect state of man; but that sober, rational freedom which consists with the restraints of known and pre-established law. They dreaded not the hand of justice, but provided for its prompt and equal distribution, as one of the first objects of all their civil compacts. Although their primary aim was the free enjoyment of their religion, for which they had suffered persecution in their native country, yet, in their political systems, they did not madly proscribe all legal regulation of religious subjects. They believed that law and order were essential to liberty, and that religion was the best preservative of law. They believed not that ignorance was the only legitimate mother of devotion, and that in order to preserve virtue and regularity, they must wage war with science and all its institutions. On this subject they displayed the most liberal sentiments, and to their eternal honour founded those literary and scientific establishments, to which the present generation are principally indebted for advancement in knowledge and refinement.

Under the governments which our ancestors formed, and which were confirmed by charter, they lived peaceable subjects, and exemplary men. During the convulsion and alarm which were excited by the incursion of the French and the Savages, they endured every hardship and privation with distinguished fortitude; they cooperated with the parent country in all the wars of their time, and received from their sovereign the most honourary testimony to their loyalty and zeal. And when the reduction of Canada had put a period to the calamities of war, and the peace of Paris brought its attendant blessings—when a new people, rising in this western world, by their rapid population and superiour enterprize, had attracted the admiration of the east, and excited the jealousy of Britain—even then our fathers retained their love for ancient institutions, and scrupulously maintained their allegiance. It is their peculiar praise that they were neither turbulent in prosperity, nor spiritless and dastardly in adversity. They never boasted of their prowess when danger was at a distance, nor abandoned their rights because it was near. Theirs was a spirit which raises a nation to glory, and makes that glory its own preserver. The history of the revolution is a comment on that spirit.

The American war has too often been defended on wrong principles, and represented as the offspring of a spirit which our forefathers never possessed. It was not a wild desire of change, an impatience of restraint, which called forth their opposition. The conductors of the revolution adopted no new principles, but contended for their rights—rights founded on law and guaranteed by charter. The violation of these rights roused the in-

dignation of a people who had derived from their ancestors an unconquerable spirit of freedom. It was the same spirit which at a former period had opposed the encroachments of the crown, and, by a bill of rights, vindicated the British constitution. It was an opposition of principle, guided by intelligence, and pursued with firmness. No constitutional arbiter could be found to decide the contest. The judiciary had become the mere tool of the crown. This was one of the most prominent causes of complaint; one of the most insufferable evils of the times. This was alledged as one powerful reason for calling a Congress—for taking up arms, and even for declaring the United States free and independent. This complaint was made to the king, and to the people; it was the burden of every remonstrance, a clause in every petition. But the government of Britain dared not trust any independent judiciary with the decision of our rights, and the solemn appeal was made to the sword. Resistance, however, was not rashly made. It was not till after ten successive years of fruitless entreaties, that our fathers took up arms. And even after this long time, the unnatural treatment which they received had not alienated their early affections. They still loved the land of their fathers, they *admired the constitution of their native country, the principles of her common law, and the fundamental maxims of her liberties.* They designed not to effect their independence: They solemnly disclaimed the intention of dissolving the union of the two countries—they fought not for glory, nor for conquest, but for their rights. They fondly hoped to enjoy again the privileges of British subjects. But they

preferred their liberties to their friendships, and resolved to encounter the hazards of war.

The history of the revolution, of its various successes and disasters, the valour of our soldiery and the talents of our commanders are familiarly known to every citizen. The temperance and principle with which the contest was conducted, have done the highest honour to our country, and the martyrs who fell in our defence are enrolled among the sons of glory. The mind reflects with satisfaction on the progress, and exults at the issue of the conflict. The separation of the two countries had become inevitably necessary, and all that the strictest politician can regret, is, that our Fathers did not declare themselves independent before they resorted to arms. And since no good purpose can be effected by repeating the bloody story of revolution, since the transports of victory have been calmed, and the sorrows of death assuaged by time, let the tumult of anger subside, and the acrimony of hatred abate. That cause must be bad, which requires the continual operation of the worst and most malevolent passions of the heart. *In noble natures success inspires generosity*, and to reproach the vanquished is pusillanimous. Let us rather adopt the exalted sentiment of our first Congress and hold the people of England, like the rest of the world, enemies in war, in peace, friends.

At the close of the revolution, the United States were in a most miserable and prostrate condition. The high stimulants that supported them through the conflict had produced their effect, and a consequent debility succeeded. An oppressive debt weighed down the

spirits of the people ; a depreciated currency destroyed mutual confidence, and infused apprehension and distrust into all the intercourse of life. The springs of industry were relaxed, the rights of property invaded ; treaties were infracted ; and publick faith violated. The confederation, formed in an hour of enthusiam, and founded on visionary ideas of patriotism, proved to be utterly inefficient. It had a fatal defect. Like the Amphyctionick league, and the confederate government of Holland, it exercised its powers over individuals only in their political capacity. Its requisitions were of course disregarded, for they could be enforced only at the expense of a civil war.

At this momentous period, when internal dissention and foreign danger threatened the existence of the nation, a new system of government was deliberately formed, which might *establish justice, provide for the common defence, and secure the blessings of liberty* ; a mixed and balanced government, of which the three great departments of power were designed to be essentially distinct and independent. On the adoption of this system, a new political creation rose from darkness and chaos ; justice resumed its ancient course, industry plied its labours, and universal prosperity gladdened our country. Under the administration of that man who led our armies to victory, we were raised to civick renown. He called around him the first talents and the noblest spirits of the nation, and adopted an exalted and prospective policy. He had no little objects, and used no little means. He never mistook the cunning of a demagogue for the talents of a statesman. He never flattered the vanity, nor consulted the prejudices of the people. He regarded their permanent welfare, and not their tempo-

rary and fluctuating passions. If he wished for popularity, it was *the popularity which follows, and not that which is run after*. It was *the popularity which, sooner or later, never fails to do justice to the pursuit of noble ends by noble means*. His policy towards foreign nations was that of perfect justice, impartiality and firmness. He was neither swerved by prepossession, nor intimidated by threats. He never mistook submission for forbearance, nor precipitancy for promptitude. He could distinguish the caution of prudence from the irresolution of timidity, and the energy of national sentiment from the distempered vigour of factious insanity. In his negotiations, he never resorted to artifice and duplicity, and never found himself embarrassed in the confusion of his own crooked and sinister management. Through the most tempestuous season the world has ever seen, he preserved our neutral rights, by showing a spirit to defend them. He withstood those innovations which *hurried* half the nations of Europe *out of the high way of Heaven*; and rescued from destruction that independence which we this day commemorate. The history of his administration displays all the virtues which dignify the statesman, and the consequent glory of his country is his highest eulogy. But his policy was most inveterately opposed, and has since been abandoned. Our reverse of condition shows with what wisdom.

It is not in the nature of popular governments to be free from the agitations of party. The spirit of faction is bitter and remorseless in proportion to the freedom of the state where it rages. This spirit has destroyed all the republicks of the world but ours, and we, amidst the mighty ruins, are left exposed to the same danger, pursuing the same course, and fast tend-

ing to the same fate. Our country is, at the present period, an object of awful interest and solicitude. We are the last hope of republicanism, and unless we learn wisdom from our own and others' sufferings, popular liberty must soon fall, never to rise again.

The salvation of our country depends upon the principles and the spirit of our ancestors, the maxims of Washington, and the influence of our old institutions. These will produce discernment, virtue and valour, the three great preservatives of freedom.

The chief spring of a government like ours is popular sentiment. In order therefore, to conduct and preserve such a government, it is of the first necessity that this sentiment be enlightened. The passions of the ignorant are always the most excitable, and it is to these passions that demagogues make their first addresses. Men ever listen with eagerness to those who promise them a better condition: And when their jealousy is inflamed, and their vanity flattered, they become restless under the most salutary restraints, and necessary burdens of government.

The two most effective passions, which artful leaders never fail to enlist on their side, are avarice, and the dread of domination. It is the delirious impulse of these passions that drives a free people to perdition. Popular deceivers ever effect great concern for liberty and economy. They gratify the avaricious, by promising to lessen the burdens of government; and the licentious, by promising to weaken its restraints. They complain of the prodigality, and the arbitrary principles of those in power, and strive to devote them to obloquy

under some abhorred appellation. It is one of the first maxims in the school of disorganizers, that *words are things*. That part of the community which they can neither flatter, nor alarm, nor purchase, they call monarchists—tories and traitors.—This is one of the most successful artifices by which they circumvent and inflame the ignorant. Political, like all other jugglers, raise their goblins and devils by the magick of names, and in every factious state, the people have led up the *death dance of revolution* to the sweet sounds of reformation and liberty.

It is the peculiar characteristick of faction to make warm professions of regard for the people's rights. For their duties it has no concern. It blazons the evils of an existing system, but never, on obtaining power, corrects them. On the contrary, its leaders often applaud that very administration which they have supplanted, and with shameless effrontery, claim the honour, and boast of the success of a policy which they always opposed—of measures, which they had neither the wisdom to contrive, nor the spirit to adopt.

The spirit of faction is distinguished from the spirit of liberty by its exclusive regard to particular interests. That party, in a state, whose sole object is their own aggrandizement,—who have little or no concern for their country,—who, with an exterminating temper, banish their opponents from every office in their power, merely for opinions,—who employ the whole patronage of the government, the purse, and even the sword of the nation, to maintain themselves in authority, and who would sooner sell the republick to foreign despotism, than resign it to the administration of their adversaries—that

party is a faction. It may be a majority, and a great one; but numbers do not change its nature, and ought not to alter its name.

As the influence of names is in exact proportion to the ignorance of things, it is of the highest concern that the people be enlightened in the doctrines of rational liberty, and enabled to judge of the designs of a political party, before its measures have effected their ruin. It is a proof of the immense importance of the diffusion of information, that faction always makes its first proselytes among the least informed, and during its ascendancy, always has in its train a majority of the ignorant.

These truths our ancestors understood: And it is with peculiar pride and satisfaction that we recognize, in the fathers of this Commonwealth, that generous spirit which has introduced into our constitution an encomium upon the influence of letters on the community, and enjoined on the civil authority a fostering care of our literary establishments. Science and the arts are favourable to the best interests of every society. Literature is the day-spring from on high in the political hemisphere. It sheds a light to cheer, as well as to guide. Knowledge not only enlightens but civilizes and refines: It prepares for national happiness, and raises to national glory. As long, therefore, as sound sense and legitimate argument can find admirers, as long as *the life springs of taste and good conduct* are thought to be worth preserving, so long will our institutions of learning be patronized, and the interests of literature cherished. There may the young acquire the proper knowledge of their rights and their duties, and there prepare and cultivate those talents, which are designed for their coun-

try's service. And if we find a party virulently attacking these institutions, calumniating their discipline, and striving to bring them into contempt, we may safely pronounce that party to be the enemies of the state. The same blind rage that assails our universities, and reproaches their government and pursuits, would overturn the settled order of society, and, like the barbarians that overran the Roman empire, riot over the spoils of learning and taste, and involve our country in all the darkness of Gothick night.

Knowledge, however, uncontrouled by principle, only renders its possessor the more dangerous. It requires the constant guidance of virtue, in order to secure the interests of the community. The press, that mighty engine of power, when under the direction of unprincipled falsehood, shakes even the foundations of empire. By cheating an intelligent people with false premises, it obtains the powerful influence of popular opinion in favour of the most oppressive measures, and adds to the weight of arbitrary authority, the vigour of a free and enlightened sentiment. In such a state, *the publick becomes a centaur, in which brutal force is monstrously associated with the powers of a rational agent.*

The wisest statesmen, in every age and country, have felt and declared the necessity of religion to the permanent support of government. Individuals often prosper in iniquity through the whole course of a long life. But there is no future retribution reserved for communities. They exist only in this world, and here are their rewards and punishments allotted. The immediate welfare of every society depends upon the conduct of its members: and no government ever long survived the

loss of religious influence upon its citizens. It is impossible effectually to restrain men, except by the power of conscience. Those religious institutions, therefore, which our fathers founded, deserve the most decided support. What must be those politicians' designs, which christianity tends to obstruct? Yet its doctrines are openly derided, and its ministers vilified, by many of the loudest pretenders to patriotism, and most noisy declaimers about the rights of the people. They have discovered that our fathers were all under a cloud, which the refulgent sun of the new philosophy has dispelled. Let us not be deceived: Virtue is the true wisdom; and it is only under the combined influence of wisdom and knowledge, that we can hope for stability of times. They who would subvert these great pillars of our happiness are the enemies of God and of man. Their triumph would be that of barbarism and desolation—the triumph of the spirits of darkness over Michael and his angels.

The blessings, which wisdom and virtue produce, must be defended by valour. National valour results from the energy of a common sentiment, and a lofty spirit of national honour. Whatever tends to distract the affections of a people, and destroy their uniformity of principles and habits, is sure to weaken their defensive power. Still more is national strength diminished by the dispiriting influence of a puling and timid national policy. A nation's honour, like an individual's, is tarnished by the least breath of reproach. It is a spirit which exerts itself with a vigour proportionate to its purity.

By an indiscriminate admission of aliens to the honours and privileges of citizens, the licentious and tur-

bulent spirits of the old world are lured to our shores, the tastes and habitudes of the community are rendered discordant, and foreign attachments and prejudices are cherished in the bosom of our own country. By this means the government is unavoidably enfeebled. A liberal regard to the misfortunes of foreigners is doubtless the dictate of interest, as well as humanity: But that fellow-feeling, which requires us sympathetically to cringe at the smart of their stripes, is a most pitiful abasement of our spirit.

The nation, that from fear, or any baser motive, abandons her plainest rights can not long retain her independence. The people soon find *the insidious stratagems and manoeuvres of peace more terrible than the sanguinary operations of war*. A nerveless policy invites aggression, and the spirit that is smothered by the government, will at length be extinguished. Contempt is always won as soon as it is wooed, and retrograde ambition can always be gratified.

What are the little fractional circumstances of danger and expense, in the great calculations of national honour and right? It is the surest mark of a pigmy intellect, and a truckling spirit, to be principally affected by secondary considerations. This was not the character of our ancestors. They never watched the trembling of the beam, to see which way the scale would fall. They resolved to live in the enjoyment of their rights, or die in defence of them. This too was the resolution of Washington; and a retrospect of its success gives pungency to every reflection upon our present condition.

The darkness in which our relations with France have of late been enveloped, has given to our patriotick citi-

zens the most apprehensive alarm, and their worst fears have been confirmed by those few rays of light, which have casually broken in through the gaping chasms of our danger. But a great proportion of the people are more asleep to the encroachments of Bonaparte, than were the Athenians to those of Philip. Not even Demosthenes could wake his countrymen, but ours are sleeping where Athenians never slept. A more ferocious and perfidious than Philip is here. No pleasures seduce him from his great designs. He will not die like Alexander. He indulges his troops in no effeminating habits. He will not meet the fate of Hannibal. His legion of honour are vigilant as the Hesperian dragon. He will not fall like Caesar. The lustre of his character is gloomy and dismal; a glare of Avernus; the blackness of tempest, on which the eye gazes only with horror. The fiery furnace of his wrath is blazing for our reception, and if our government fall down and worship his image, the people will wake to more than Macedonian bondage.

But should our government evince the spirit, which thirty-five years ago resisted the tyranny of Britain, and twelve years ago, nerved our arm against the rapacity of France, we may yet rescue our liberty from every foreign danger. It is in the power of the present administration, at the present period, to unite the discordant parties of the nation and concentrate the energies of the whole American people. The state of our foreign relations demands it at their hands, and the salvation of the country would be their reward.

But whatever may be the policy of our government, as individuals, we have sacred duties. We must remem-

ber and emulate the spirit of our fathers, inculcate their principles, and defend the institutions which they established: And if called to resign our lives in the cause of truth and justice, let us be impressed with this magnanimous sentiment: that *the last end, which can happen to any man, never comes too soon, if he falls in defence of the laws and liberties of his country.*