

**AN ORATION.**

No. 10. *Dr. Oliver Mills*

AN

**ORATION,**

**DELIVERED AT BARKHAMSTED.**

AT THE

*ANNIVERSARY*

OF

**AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,**

JULY 4, 1815.

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**BY DR. OLIVER MILLS.**  
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## AN ORATION.

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**O**N this occasion, my friends, I shall deviate a little from the beaten track. The exploits of the heroes of our Revolution have been the subject of our greatest statesmen and most accomplished orators. The ground is preoccupied. All that is true, all that is elegant, all that is sublime, has been said ; the subject is rendered sacred : let none presume to intermeddle therewith, but those who excel in wisdom, and have deserved the name of sages. I shall not, therefore, servilely imitate those whom my feeble powers will not permit me to equal ; but pursue that course which I hope may be useful, and within the limits of my capacity.

This is the anniversary of the day that gave birth to our Independence as a nation ; one of the most important events recorded in the annals of history ; in a variety of circumstances important in the highest degree. Happily situated as it respects the continent of Europe, that we have

no cause to fear the subversion of our liberties from that quarter ; but in another point of view we may felicitate ourselves in a still higher degree ; that circumstance is, the diffusion of knowledge, which existed at the time of our Revolution. Perhaps in no country of equal extent, was there to be found as many inhabitants, so well informed on the subjects of Divinity and Jurisprudence ; subjects indispensably necessary to qualify men for legislators. Our forefathers did not fail to avail themselves of the benefit of experience ; the only sure guide in affairs of government. They had a knowledge of that kind of government which has its origin in usurpation, and is supported by force. They had witnessed the awful effects of superstition and bigotry ;— they had seen the whole European continent often in convulsion, through their agency ; but, amidst this mental darkness which threatened the utter extinction of civil liberty, and all true religion, a gleam of light sprung up, which, under the direction of Divine Providence, served to guide our ancestors through the moral wilderness, to the land of liberty and peace.

But the progress of our ancestors in the acquirement of political science, was slow. Many centuries passed away before the inhabitants of any of the European countries had made much proficiency in the science of government ; or had formed any correct idea of civil liberty.

Many of you, my friends, are acquainted with the progress of government in Great Britain; the country from whence our ancestors migrated, and to that country we are still indebted for our most valuable ideas upon almost every scientific subject. In that country the efforts of the human mind have been as great, perhaps, as in any other; yet there, the progress of rational government has been gradual. While the people could endure the existing government, they made no advancement, but remained stationary and tranquil; but when the burden became intolerable, they sought redress, and if milder means failed, had recourse to arms; and thus, endeavoured to obtain a removal of their grievances, and security against similar evils.

It was a considerable lapse of time, after the Norman conquest, before the Kings of England would admit a national council, or parliament. Money was raised in the most unjust and oppressive manner to support government, and to carry on war whenever it existed. But in the reign of king John, A. D. 1199, they obtained the great Charter, which obliged him to summon a parliament, and secured certain privileges, highly valued by the English nation; but in some succeeding reigns, the kings endeavoured to become absolute, and levy money without the consent of Parliament; and such was the superstition and ignorance in those days, that non-resistance and

passive obedience were thought due to the royal authority. It was believed that kings were the vicegerents of the Almighty, and therefore their wills ought never to be resisted. But oppression finally opened their eyes, and the unlimited power of those supposed vicegerents of the Almighty was doubted, and the king's authority retrenched, and his prerogative limited. What was gained in one reign, constituted a law or precedent for all succeeding reigns ; and in this way the boasted Constitution of Great Britain was formed. But many centuries were spent, by the people of Great Britain, in acquiring the liberty which they now enjoy ; and while their Parliament remains uncorrupt, the affairs of the nation cannot long be mal-administered : but through the influence of bribery and corruption, the kings of England have had at all times their Parliaments entirely at their devotion ; and the king's minister could carry any measure, which favoured his design of encroaching on the liberties of the people. So late as the reign of George the Second, a British minister had the audacity to say of the Parliament, that he had a golden key with which he could unlock their hearts. Notwithstanding its imperfections, the British government is esteemed one of the best in Europe. To a perfect knowledge of all those circumstances which relate to the British government, the framers of our Constitution added a knowledge of all former governments, with their attendant circumstan-

ces ; and with those advantages, they framed the best plan of government, perhaps, that can be devised by human wisdom. Its excellencies should be duly appreciated by every American. Its superiority over the monarchical form of government is too obvious to require a particular comparison ; and those governments which are of a mixed kind, and partake of the monarchical, aristocratical, and republican forms, are attended with inconveniences, which do not occur in our own. For instance, the expense in a kingly government must be great ; the dignity of the crown must be supported ; for all the branches of the royal family, annuities must be provided. On the score of economy we have an immense advantage ; but this is not the only advantage over a kingly government which we claim in favour of our own. In such a government there must be an order of peerage, to preserve a balance between the king and his Parliament, or the representatives of the people ; and, according to the common law of England, no one can be tried for a crime, only by equals ; and consequently a nobleman must be tried by the nobility ; and if a nobleman should be guilty of a felonious act which should not concern a nobleman, the public could not receive satisfaction at the hands of the injured party's equals ; and if honour and virtue should not prevail, the whole weight of the nobility might be thrown into the scale against justice ; and such a case may occur. Happily for us no

of his reasoning was clearly shown by Mr. Jefferson, then Secretary of State. "Another doctrine advanced by Mr. Genet," says Mr. Jefferson in his letter to Mr. Morris, our minister in France, "is, that our courts can take no cognizance of questions, whether vessels held by them are lawful prize or not ; that this belongs exclusively to their consulates here, which have been lately erected into complete courts of admiralty by the national assembly." This was a violation of our national sovereignty. But Mr. Genet still persisted in his construction of the treaty, although without a shadow of reason ; and made use of language highly indecorous in his official communications—even the President did not escape his reproaches. He endeavoured to excite the people against the officers of our own government ; but, strange as it may now appear, he was supported by a powerful party ; although Mr. Jefferson had proved that he was in the wrong, by the most celebrated writers upon the law of nations. In the mean time, the British began to arm in our ports, to defend themselves against the French ; but as soon as the circumstance was made known to the President, he directed them to put their vessels into the same condition that they were in on their arrival in port, which was complied with. Nothing could exceed the absurdity of the French minister's pretensions : he contended, that our government had not a right to prevent its own subjects from



entering into the service of France, to fight against Great Britain, with whom we were at peace. (See Mr. Jefferson's letter to Mr. Morris, our minister in France, dated at Philadelphia, 16th August, 1793,) in order to prevent our people from falling into the error, the President published a declaration of neutrality. This filled the French minister with rage ; and after his insolence had passed all endurance, the President desired his recal, which was done accordingly. Notwithstanding the clamour that was raised against him, President Washington inflexibly adhered to his principles of neutrality.

During those transactions our affairs were in an unsettled state with Great Britain. The terms of the treaty of 1783 had not all been carried into effect ; the western posts had not been given up ; and the Indians continued hostile to the United States, through the influence of British agents, as was supposed. The British, on the other hand, complained of the non-fulfilment of several articles of the treaty ; and there remained due to the British subjects, debts to a large amount, particularly in the southern states. In the mean time party spirit greatly prevailed ; but the President remained firm as a rock, on which the collision of parties could make no impression. He was no partisan of France, or of England ; but the guardian of the rights and honour of America ; and by his firmness and integ-

city, he saved his country from the calamities of war; and during the whole of his administration managed our national concerns with so much prudence and political sagacity, that he kept clear of the great vortex of European politics, and maintained the honour and preserved the interest of the nation, under circumstances the most critical.

The attempts of the French and English, to draw us into their snares, did not cease with the close of Washington's administration,—it has continued till the present time; and had the policy of Washington been invariably adhered to, perhaps we should have escaped the late war, and its calamities. Whether that would have been the case or not, there can be no doubt but a strict neutrality with regard to foreign powers engaged in war, is the true line of conduct to be observed by this country. Partiality to any belligerent power, is as impolitic as it is unjust. Our real interest, and our duty, are in this united.

I shall purposely pass over the late war with Great Britain; the principal circumstances which led to it are fresh in our memories, and if any benefit is derived to this country, let us rejoice; but on the contrary, if more evil has accrued to us, let us profit by experience. Let us withdraw our partialities from all nations, and be

united at home : this is necessary to our national existence. Let us realize that we are indeed all Republicans, that we are all Federalists. Let us cultivate unanimity at home, and it will make us respectable abroad. Happy indeed, as a nation, should we be, if all party distinction and local jealousies were buried in oblivion :—that we should hear no more of a Southern or Eastern influence. Unfortunately for us, different interests do and will exist, in the different sections of the union ; we must therefore exercise the greater forbearance ; mutual concessions must be made. Instead of party rancor, let us cultivate harmony. Let us acquire a thorough knowledge of our national interest ; let us coolly investigate all our national concerns, and form our judgment by the influence of measures, and not by party attachment. This is believed to be sound policy. But no people can live in quietness and peace, without the observance of morality ; nor can society well exist ; it is however to be feared, that in this respect, we are on the decline. It is not an invariable rule, that knowledge and science are the attendants of virtue.

No man of information will assert that there is less general knowledge among us now than there was thirty years ago ; and if we have acquired more exterior polish, have we not lost on the score of moral sentiment ? I verily believe that we have. If speculative reasoning fails to con-

vince, we must appeal to facts. Witness the murder of Miss Hamilton, (lately discovered,) with circumstances more alarming than any thing of the kind that ever happened in this country. Is the perpetration of crimes, at which the feelings of savage cannibals would revolt, left for this age of light and moral refinement? Those whose consciences will not restrain from deeds so horrid, have no sense of virtue, no regard for justice, and no fear of punishment. That twelve such horrid monsters were associated into a gang, in a town within the United States,—can it be told without astonishment!!! Of what degree of depravity are such men capable! Let us draw a veil over this gloomy picture of human depravity, and hope for the triumph of Religion and Virtue.—But to insure prosperity and happiness, let us not fail to cultivate our hearts; without it our understandings would be improved in vain. Let true benevolence animate every heart;—then shall harmony take place of discord, and this country become, under the benign influence of Divine Providence, a place of terrestrial happiness.

*Fredrick Boers*