

AN

# ORATION,

DELIVERED ON THE FIFTH OF JULY, 1813,

IN THE NORTH CHURCH

IN

SALEM,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

—  
BY BENJAMIN R. NICHOLS.  
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SALEM:

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1813.

*THE Committee of Arrangements present to BENJAMIN R. NICHOLS, Esq. the cordial thanks of the Federal Republicans of Salem, for the very patriotic and appropriate Oration, delivered by him in commemoration of American Independence ; and respectfully request a Copy for the press.*

*Per Order of the Committee of Arrangements,*

**JOHN PRINCE, JUN. Chairman.**

*Salem, July 5, 1813.*

*MR. NICHOLS would express to the Committee of Arrangements his deep sense of the honour conferred upon him by their polite note ; and, in compliance with their request, submits his performance to publication.*

**TO JOHN PRINCE, JUN. Esq.**

**Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements.**

*Salem, July 7, 1813.*

AN  
ORATION.

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RESPECTED FELLOW CITIZENS :

WE are assembled to celebrate the birth day of our nation ; the day we dissolved the bond of connexion with our parent country, and declared ourselves free, soveraign and independent. Ever sacred be that period to ourselves and our posterity ! Ever memorable be the events of our revolutionary struggle ! Ever grateful may we be to Heaven, for the glorious result of our efforts ! May the privileges thus purchased by our fathers be faithfully preserved by their children. May the object of the national compact never be frustrated, nor the cause of independence betrayed, by the licentiousness of the people, or the corruption of our rulers. May we never have cause to say, It would have been good for this nation, had it never been born.

Being involved in a war with the same power, with which we were before engaged, it will be perhaps neither a useless undertaking, nor inapplicable to the present occasion, to compare the two contests, and to see if there exist between them any lines of resemblance.

Is the present war as just or as necessary, as the war of our revolution? Is the object we are contending for as important, or our chance of success as great? In the prosecution of this war, have we as powerful a stimulus for exertion, or are we under the like obligations to give it our support and encouragement?

The cause of our former struggle was a claim of the British ministry to tax us when they pleased, without allowing us the privilege of being represented in their Government. This claim, we were satisfied, was unjust. The *amount* of the tax demanded was trifling; but we considered the *principle* it involved to be equally dangerous, as if it had been a demand of our all; and we determined to resist it, at the hazard of every thing dear to us.

The cause *now* alleged by our Government for the *present* war, is, that the British claim the right of impressing their seamen from our merchant vessels. Does this claim render a war as just and necessary, as that of unlimited taxation? Has Great-Britain no more right to take *her* seamen from our vessels, than *our* money from our pockets? Since the able discussion of this subject in different parts of the country, particularly that which has taken place in Congress, and the minute investigation of a Committee of the House of Representatives of this Commonwealth, we must be satisfied, that the question of impressments has been grossly misrepresented. We do not deny, that there are cases of impressments, which excite our commiseration. But the sad tale of the *six thousand two hundred and fifty-seven* American seamen groaning in bondage, “on board the floating pandemoniums of the ocean,” is as much an outrage upon truth, as Falstaff’s multiplying into an host the two rogues in buckram. Admitting however that British officers have in some cases wantonly impressed our seamen, without regard to their protections; yet such conduct has never been justified by the British Government. On the con-

trary, whenever application has been made to them for our impressed seamen, attended with evidence of their citizenship, they have been discharged. Farther, Great-Britain has been always ready to negotiate upon this subject ; and is doubtless still ready to renew the arrangement she formerly made with our ministers, and which they considered both “ honourable and advantageous” to the United States.\* The British never pretended to a right of impressing *American* seamen. But they claim a right to their own ; and this in the view of our rulers is a just cause of war. Our Government would make our merchant vessels, like our soil, “ an asylum for oppressed humanity,” and insist upon our flag’s protecting every thing under it. Thus, literally building castles in the air, they would convert into a fortress a piece of bunting at the mast-head. Fellow citizens, is there any justice in a war waged on our part, to protect British renegades from the authority of their sovereign ? The same British sailors, who have deserted their coun-

\* It ought not to be forgotten, that those ministers (Messrs. Monroe and Pinkney) were appointed by President Jefferson, and that they now hold two of the highest offices in the general government.

try, when their assistance was most required, have still all the privileges of British subjects, and may claim the protection of British laws. In return for these advantages, they owe their Government the benefit of their services. And any attempt of a neutral power to *shield* them from their Government, except while they remain upon the soil of the neutral, or on board its public vessels, is as much a departure from neutrality, as an invasion of the British territory.

In our former war, the *professed* object for which we contended was the *real* one. All we then asked, and all we desired, was, to be acknowledged as an independent nation. As soon as we obtained this object, we were satisfied. But the professed object of the present war, we have reason to believe, is *not* the real one. If the British should yield us all we demand with regard to impressments, our Government would probably introduce some new claim. At the commencement of hostilities, every one supposed, that the grand point in controversy was the British Orders in Council, and that as soon as they were revoked, we should have peace. But the revocation of the

orders in council produced no abatement of the animosity of our rulers, and the war has been continued with the same bitterness as before. The President even intimates, in his last message, that the British must not only abandon the right of impressment, but also of searching neutral vessels for property. Our rulers thus appear to have adopted, in their full extent, the principles of the French Continental System, and the American cabinet seems converted into another Court of St. Cloud. How different the councils which now prevail, from those which conducted us through the war of the revolution! Instead of following those maxims of Washington, "that inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded, and that just and honourable feelings towards all should be cultivated;" our rulers appear intoxicated with admiration at every thing French, and inflamed with hostility at every thing English. They seem to burn with the same lust of power and the same thirst for conquest as actuate the tyrant of Europe. Instead of striving for peace by a conciliatory conduct, they seem constantly devising new plans for exciting the resentment of the people, and for

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keeping alive a perpetual irritation. But they are not more distinguished by their animosity than their imbecility. They have plunged us into a war with Great-Britain, without either the means of annoyance or of defence. Having exhausted their *restrictive* energies, which they displayed so fully in their embargoes and non-intercourse acts, they are *now* exerting their *suffering* energies, in bearing the buffetings of fortune and the stripes of the enemy.

In the revolutionary war, we had reason to believe, at the commencement of the contest, that we should succeed in our object. The people were convinced of the justice of their cause, and were of course united. All hearts beat in unison. An universal sentiment existed that the claims of the British ministry must be repelled at every hazard. The flame of opposition to the parent nation ran through the country, and burnt with a steady and uniform ardour, till the object we contended for was secured to us. How different the feelings of the people with respect to the present war ! A large majority of the commercial States, for whose benefit it is *pretended* the war is carried on, have condemned it from its commencement.

The most strenuous advocates of the war are among the planters of the South ; men, who, like their spaniels, are tied to their homes by their slaves, and are as impotent as they are clamorous. It is the slave driver of Virginia, whose heart is most rent with pity at the sufferings of our seamen. It is the people of those States which are hundreds of miles from our seaboard, the men who have no interest in commerce, and who would probably rejoice if we had not a ship upon the ocean—these are the men the most zealous for war on account of the violation of our maritime rights.

Let it not be said, that because the people of New-England oppose the present war, they are destitute of patriotism, or influenced by British partiality. In a war of necessity, we should rush forward to meet the enemy, with as much ardour, at least, as the nabobs of Virginia or the backwoodsmen of Kentucky. Did the people of New-England discover any want of patriotism in the *revolutionary* war? Did they not bear their *proportion* of its burdens and expenses, and give as strong evidence of bravery as the people of the Southern States? Look at

the battle of Bunker Hill, the capture of Ticonderoga and Crown Point, the battle of Bennington, the capture of Burgoyne, in short, the whole course of the war from its commencement to its termination; and say if any part of the country performed its duty more faithfully, or is entitled to more credit for the success of our cause, than New-England. Even in the present war, should the enemy invade our territory, he would encounter an opposition not less determined, than he met with in the revolution. Look at Connecticut, the State, which next to Massachusetts has been most stigmatized by our national rulers, for attachment to the enemy. With what alertness have the people of that State taken up arms to protect the public ships within their jurisdiction! Massachusetts has discovered a like spirit, by the appropriations made by our Legislature for arming our militia and defending our sea coast. Massachusetts will *always* perform her duty, while she has a **STRONG** for her commander in chief; a man who knows no fear but that of his Maker; who will be always as vigilant in the defence of our soil, as he is resolute in maintaining our rights; who feels as much for his constituents,

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as a father for his children ; who is as pure, as firm, as patriotic, as Washington.

We display our opposition to the present war, not from any want of patriotism, but because we believe it to be unnecessary and unjustifiable ; because it is exhausting the resources of the nation, and filling it with misery, to no purpose ; because in consequence of the poverty and idleness and profligacy it occasions, our independence is endangered, and we are fast hastening to destruction.

Such being the state of the public sentiment, and such the circumstances under which the war was declared, what chance of success have we in its farther prosecution ? We had never a chance of reaping *profit* by it, even if we were justified in fighting for that alone. Nor have we any longer a prospect of acquiring honour. The few ships of war we possessed, except the small squadron under Commodore Rodgers, are either captured, blockaded, or out of repair. But should those which remain appear again at sea, and even succeed in capturing an equal number of the enemy, what benefit would re-

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sult from it to the country at large? Our naval character would not stand higher than it has been already placed by the heroic achievements of Hull, of Decatur, of Jones, of Bainbridge, and of Lawrence. Notwithstanding these successes, the British would still have a force sufficient to blockade our ports and to destroy our commerce. The right claimed by the British of impressing their seamen from neutral merchant vessels is in their opinion too important for them to yield, except from necessity; and if we expect to force them to submission, we must continue the war till their last ship is destroyed.

We have still less reason for calculating upon honour or profit from our operations by land. Every day brings us accounts of fresh disasters, and the present campaign will probably terminate like the last, with the loss of thousands of men and millions of treasure to no purpose.

But let us suppose, we should succeed in conquering Canada. Would the acquisition be worth the cost, or should we be any nearer a settlement of our difficulties, than we are at present? We should be in possession of a territory

which we do not want, and which it would require a constant standing army to preserve. The dispute about impressments would be still unsettled. The British would still have a decided ascendancy upon the ocean, nor would they suffer us to appear upon it, till we had restored their possessions, and abandoned every claim we have in controversy. Indeed, so *absurd* does the project appear of conquering Canada, that we cannot suppose it is the sole object of our Government, in embodying our troops. So *useless*, nay, so *mischievous to us* does it appear, that we will neither support nor encourage it by our language or our actions. We are not disposed to triumph in the disgrace of our Country, or to wish our soldiers any personal injury. But if the conquest of Canada is contemplated with a view to oppress New-England, may our armies never enter Quebec, except under the standard of the enemy.

The distresses of the people in the revolutionary war were not greater than they are at present. If the present war is continued much longer, our seaports must be abandoned. Poverty is coming upon us like an armed man. The rich are daily becoming poor, and the poor

miserable. Our streets are thronged with beggars, and many who were once able and willing to administer relief, have become objects of charity. When we reflect upon our degraded situation, and compare it with what it would have been under a wise administration, the contrast is almost insupportable. What a flourishing commerce we should now enjoy, were we permitted to be at peace! The whole north of Europe, Great Britain and Ireland, Spain and Portugal, a considerable part of the Mediterranean, the coast of Africa, the East Indies, the West Indies, and South America, would be open to our trade. But by means of our present rulers, our ships are driven from the ocean, or thrown into the hands of the enemy. We are deprived of the *fisheries*, which are as necessary to a large portion of our citizens, as the corn-field to the farmer. Our coasting trade is interrupted, our harbours are blockaded, and our seaports lie at the mercy of the enemy. A deathlike silence reigns in places, which lately exhibited the continued hurry of business. In every direction we see people anxious for employment, but compelled to be idle.

But the losses and privations we have already suffered are still to be increased. A load of internal taxes are coming upon us. The five or six millions reported to Congress this session are but the beginning of a long and increasing series. The system of taxation being once commenced, it is impossible to determine to what extent it will be carried. The expenses of this war for every month are rated at six millions of dollars. The prospect of better times is at least as remote, as at the commencement of hostilities. As long as the Government can find the means of carrying on the war, so long it will be continued, with all its burdens and distresses.

It would probably, in the view of our rulers, be a compensation for all *our* sufferings, was the war equally injurious in its effects upon the enemy. But it has proved to the enemy rather a benefit, than an injury. Great Britain was perhaps never in so flourishing a condition, as at the present moment. The loss of her trade with this Country is more than balanced, by the advantage she possesses of excluding us from the ocean, and of thus enjoying, as it



were, a monopoly of commerce. Her power is still more increased by the late brilliant successes of the Russians; successes which, though attended with such advantages to our enemy, must afford the highest satisfaction to every friend of liberty. Alexander has stayed the hand of the tyrant, who was threatening the conquest of the world. Never was there embodied an army more numerous, and at the same time more powerful, than the French army, which entered Russia the last year. And never was there witnessed a more complete overthrow. By these successes of the Russians the arm of Napoleon has become weakened, and Great Britain is left at liberty to direct her forces against the United States.

How little does the real situation of this Country and Great Britain accord with the representations of our rulers! The President in his last message would have the people believe, that the British Lion was in the act of crouching to the American Eagle; that the navies of Great Britain were almost swept from the ocean, her armies almost annihilated, and we "in the full tide of successful experiment."

Our rulers seem to be labouring under a political infatuation, and, like the hero of La Mancha, to mistake the mischiefs they are scattering among their friends, for victories won from the enemy.

Our Government doubtless think, that we have so far subdued *one* enemy, we may now safely enter the lists against others. We are at open war with Algiers, and upon the eve of a war with the king of Spain. Calculating, probably, upon the attention of the people being principally engrossed by the war with Great Britain, and therefore that the seizure of the Floridas would excite but little observation at the present moment, the Government have taken possession by force of the port of Mobile, and have thus given to Spain just cause of war. How different our conduct to Spain in *her* struggle for independence, from that of Spain to us under the like circumstances! In our revolutionary war, she was the first to acknowledge us as an independent nation. But we have declined acknowledging *her* as such, to this day; and have thus tacitly justified Bonaparte in his attempts to overpower her. Fortunately, we trust, she will obtain the object

she contends for, without our assistance. But we are adding baseness to ingratitude, by seizing upon this moment to dispossess her of her territory. *What* can be the object of our Government in seeking a quarrel with Spain, at the present crisis, unless to put a stop to the supplies, which we have heretofore furnished her, and which has given umbrage to the Emperor Napoleon?

Our Government appear determined to drive the people of New-England, and particularly of Massachusetts, to a state of desperation. Not satisfied with involving us in a war with a power the most able to injure us, without necessity, and when we were entirely unprepared, and continuing the war against our wishes, after the chief pretence for it has been removed, they now withhold from us the arms to which we are by law entitled; and thus deny us the means of protecting ourselves from the enemy. They have also, in their answer to the application of our venerable chief magistrate, added insult to injury; by insinuating, that we are destitute of courage and of patriotism, and therefore not *deserving* of protection.

There are many circumstances which indicate, that the real object of our rulers is to destroy the prosperity and annihilate the influence of the Commercial States. One would naturally think, that the *slave holding* states would be satisfied with their advantages over us, conceded to them by the constitution. But so far from this, they have in *violation* of the constitution, through their representatives in Congress, admitted new States into the Union, of their own political interests, formed from territories out of the original limits of the United States, and have thus set up a principle, which, if submitted to, will make us more dependent, than we were as colonies of Great Britain. If a majority of Congress have a right of making new states where they please, we shall probably soon hear of States formed for us in East and West Florida, and should it come *within the scope of the policy* of our rulers, of others on the Pacific Ocean. If all this be right, the consequence is, that the people of New-England, in case of any disturbances in these newly erected States, may under pretence of suppressing insurrections be forced to march, in obedience to the constitution, to the remot-

est regions of the globe. The absurdity of such a pretension is too striking to need argument. By the admission of new States into the Union out of our original territorial limits, the Constitution has been palpably violated, and, to use the language of our Representatives, "it may hereafter be questioned, whether the adherence to the Union, of those States which dissented from the measure, is the result of obligation or expediency."

Notwithstanding all the injuries inflicted upon us by our national rulers, we will still yield them the deference to which they are entitled by the Constitution. We will yet labour to preserve the Union, and endeavour to believe, that we are still to be protected as members of the confederacy. But if the period should ever arrive, when the conclusion is *forced* upon us, that it is the settled purpose of our rulers to distress and impoverish us, to trample upon our rights, and to be our tyrants instead of our protectors, we shall not only be at liberty, but it will be our duty to *protect* ourselves, and to withdraw all connexion from men, who, while they are pretending to be legislating for

our good, are rivetting upon us the chains of slavery. Let us preserve over our rulers a constant and watchful jealousy ; for this is our birthright, and our only security against oppression. Our fathers fought for independence, and obtained it. Let it never be said, that they fought only for themselves ; that they reared up sons unworthy of their sires, and transmitted their privileges to men who were willing to be slaves.