

AN  
ORATION,  
IN  
COMMEMORATION

OF THE

American Independence ;

DELIVERED

*In CORINTH, on the 4th of JULY, 1808.*

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BY JOSEPH ORMSBEE.  
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# AN ORATION.

FATHERS, FRIENDS, AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE Nineteenth Century, now rapidly opening upon us, exhibits the Nations of this Globe in a light calculated to excite, in every American breast, sensations of fear and astonishment. The eastern continent appears overwhelmed in one vast deluge of tyranny, and the groans of its suffering inhabitants reach our ears, wafted on the waves of the Atlantic. But these happy United States, favoured of Heaven, have, hitherto, rode out the storms of European influence, and at present rest anchored in the heaven of Independence. Impressed with these ideas, permit me to join with you in the celebration of this auspicious day, the natal day of our Nation; in recounting the achievements of the revolution; paying the tribute of respect to the memories of its departed worthies; and in reflecting on our present dangers, and prospects of happiness.

Thirty-two annual revolutions of the bright luminary of day have witnessed our inflexible attachment to liberty. We have bowed at her altars, and sacrificed at her shrine, from an unclouded belief of her worthiness of our homage, attended with the solemn idea of her being consecrated to us by the blood of our fathers. While we contemplate the various causes, which have contributed to put us in possession of this invaluable inheritance, let us take a retrospective view of those worthy ancestors, who fled from the sword of tyranny, which drenched the old world with the blood of religious and political martyrs, and for the sake of liberty, encountered the perils of the ocean, and the dangers of a settlement in this, then, wilderness of savages. What must have been the feelings of that heroic band of adventurers, when, after surmounting all the difficulties of a long and dangerous voyage, they were

hovering on the wild, unfrequented shores of the new world. On the one hand the wide rolling Atlantic, on the other a gloomy wilderness presented to their view ; over whose wide extent, the sounds of civilization had never been heard ; and from which nothing could be expected to sooth the dismal forebodings of their minds, but the howlings of wild beasts, and the savage yells of the natives. Yet, under the smiles of a protecting Providence, they overcame every obstacle. They traded, treated, and fought with their savage neighbours, until their growing population enabled them to bid defiance to the natives, and establish the power of Great Britain on the shores of America. European emigrants flocked into the Colonies. Churches, schools, and seminaries of learning were established, and knowledge, opulence, and population rapidly increased among them. But their growing prosperity was not long undisturbed. The rapacious Parliament of Great Britain soon marked them out as the proper objects of their avarice, cruelty, and oppression. They haughtily assumed the right of making laws to bind the Colonies in all cases whatever, and a system of taxation was invented, which, in its consequences, led to the ever memorable 5th of March, 1770 ; when the barbarous troops of that tyrannical power, drenched the streets of Boston with the blood of its innocent citizens. May that gloomy day, whose morning sun rose to exhibit scenes of blood and carnage in one of our fairest towns, and may those illfated citizens, who felt the first sacrifices at the shrine of Liberty, be never forgotten while an impulse of patriotism swells the bosoms of Americans.—Ye Sons and Daughters of Columbia, now basking in the sunshine of prosperity, enjoying all the blessings of liberty, ask you what were the spirit and conduct of the Colonists at that important juncture ? Go, ask the war-worn veterans of the revolution ; many of whom are yet on this side the grave, some halting on the remains of their mutilated limbs, and living on the pensions of their grateful country. While the spirit of '75 rekindles in their furrowed

cheeks, they will answer, by taking you to Lexington, and Breed's hill, and there pointing you out the commencing achievements of the votaries of freedom. It was there, on the 19th of April, 1775, the Temple of Janus was opened, and the floodgates of civil war lifted up. It was there the clarion of war was sounded, which reached the ear, and arrested the attention of every American. It was there the first scene of that great political Drama was acted, which, in its progress, exhibited, to an astonished world, the patriotism and firmness of an illustrious band of statesmen and heroes. "Those were days, which tried men's souls;" but the invincible spirit of liberty bore down every obstacle, and supported her sons in the hour of danger.

Let us take a cursory view of the critical situation of the patriotic Congress of 1776. A gloomy cloud hung over the tree of liberty. Newyork was in possession of the British, who were also successful in the Jerseys; our little army was expelled from Canada; Montgomery and Warren were already fallen asleep on the death-bed of honour; and what remained of our armies in the field were naked, and without ammunition. Yet, under all these discouraging prospects, that illustrious, undaunted band of heroes and statesmen, fired by the unquenchable spirit of liberty, on the 4th of July, 1776, thundered in the ears of their enemies, and a listening world, that Declaration of Independence, which I shall here beg leave to repeat.

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World, for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish, and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States: That they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all connection between them and Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved. For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Provi-

dence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honours."

Thus, Fellow Citizens, that deed was done, which dissolved all former compacts, and declared our country free. Let us hail the auspicious day. Let us hail the illustrious statesmen and heroes, who, in the face of the world, and as it were, under the thunder of the British cannon, dared to affix to that mighty deed their country's seal.

Annually has this grand event been celebrated in ten thousand forms by a grateful, and happy people. Fathers have related it to their listening children. Divines have descanted upon it in the public assembly. Orators, and Poets have delineated it in their polished periods; and Historians have recorded it in their instructive pages. Let us, this day, with joyful felicitations, unite to congratulate each other on the happy event; and while our bosoms swell with gratitude, and the crimson current of our hearts flows joyfully through the channels of life, let us arise on the wings of fancy, and visit those ensanguined fields, where the heroes of the revolution, mounted on "war's gore besprinkled car," maintained, through scenes of carnage and death, their declared independence. Let us hover over Tyconderoga, view the place where once lay the army of Burgoyne, whose progress spread terror through the northern States, and rallied the inhabitants from every quarter. Let us visit the place, where Starks won the battle of Bennington; view the achievements ~~of Smith~~; and at Saratoga, reflect on the glorious capitulation of Burgoyne, which laid the foundation of a treaty of alliance with France. Let us wing our way to the shores of the Atlantic, visit Long Island, and there reflect on the horrors of War, on the ground, which once was strewed with the mangled corpses of many hundreds of our countrymen. Let us there visit the grave of Hale, whose memory will exist while virtue is respected, who exposed and lost his life purely in obedience to the inspirations of patriotism. Let us there reflect on the circumstances of bar-

at Stillwell's

barity, with which, the British sacrificed that brave young officer, while the last words, he breathed from his patriotic lips were these, "I lament only, that I have but one life to loose for my country." Thence let our fancy lead us to West Point, where a scene of black treachery was performed, which consigned to everlasting infamy and contempt, the name of B. Arnold. Thence, in solemn procession, while our hearts beat time to some funeral dirge, let us move to Fort Griswold, and while the tear of sensibility stands trembling in our eyes, let us there reflect on the affecting history of that illfated place. It was at this Fort, nearly all the citizens of the little town of Groton were suddenly collected, called by the voice of their country quitting the half finished labours of the day, leaving their families and their homes, they grasped their arms, and flushed with health and glowing with patriotism, repaired to the Fort, hoping soon to return, and renewing their labours, again to participate in the joys of domestic life.

Unhappy citizens of Groton! How often did the faithful partners of your cares and joys, the friends of your bosoms, with tears of tenderest concern, offer up their intreaties to heaven for your safety! How often did your little prattling infants, in unsuspecting innocence, enquire when their fathers would return! Alas, little did they think that the cold hand of death would so soon close your eyes forever on all earthly enjoyments; and less did they think that the savage cruelty of the British officer, ~~after~~ storming the fort, and disarming the garrison, would induce him to order his defenceless prisoners all butchered in cold blood, and thus, in one hour, fill a town with widows and orphans! There let us drop a tear on the grave of the brave Col. Ledyard, who commanded the fort, and who, after surrendering and delivering up his sword, had the fatal weapon dyed in the crimson current of his own heart. But let us fly thence to Newyork, there view the place, where once lay the black hulks of the prison ships of England, in whose pestiferous

holds, more than eleven thousand of our fellow citizens found a miserable death, attended with all the horrid circumstances of studied torture, pestilence, hunger and poison ; whose bones long lay bleaching on our shores, the monuments of British cruelty, indiscriminately mingled with seaweeds and shells. Let us proceed farther to the south, view Monmouth, Trenton, and Princeton, and there behold the hero, the father of his country, decked in the laurels of victory. At Carolina let us view the place where was fought the celebrated battle of Guilford, which immortalized the name of Greene ; at Richmond and Williamsburg let us contemplate the achievements of the Marquis de la Fayette, whose generous services in the cause of freedom deserve our warmest gratitude ; and at Yorktown, let us rest, and reflect on the closing scene of the revolutionary conflict, which terminated in the capitulation of Cornwallis, “ laid the foundation of a general peace, and diffused universal joy throughout America.”

These, fellow citizens, are a few of the scenes which fancy must paint, while she portrays the sufferings, bravery, perseverance and fortitude of the colonists, while contending for that independence, which, we have now convened to celebrate. Let us not lightly esteem an inheritance purchased at the expense of so much treasure and blood ; nor let us think our independence secure at this important and eventful crisis of the world ; but let us expect all the arts of foreign influence and intrigue to meet us daily in our way, and, like the serpent in Eden, use the language of guile.—

Whoever reflects on our foreign relations must acknowledge, that our liberties hang suspended by a thread, that we stand on a precipice, and that nothing short of the spirit of '76 can save us from plunging into that gulph of slavery, which appears expanding to receive us. If we turn our eyes to France, we there see an iron Dynasty towering on the ruins of the mild monarchy of the house of Bourbon, which lashes the nations of Europe with a scourge of scorpions, and

threatens destruction to every government on earth. Where now are the Italian States? Where is Switzerland? Where are Spain and Portugal? Where are Austria, Germany, Holland, Prussia, Denmark, and even Sweden? Alas, "they are but the bloody hides of immolated victims," whose carcasses have been dragged away to gorge the armies of a tyrant. The French revolution, after driving the infatuated people through rivers of blood to the altar of liberty, and there giving them their vows of allegiance, has terminated by placing an imperial crown on the head of Napoleon; who, on the ruins of the Bastille, demolished in the cause of freedom, has erected a temple, whose tenfold horrors will silence forever the pretensions of the sons of liberty. Exasperated by a rancorous hereditary enmity to Great Britain, the corsican usurper has exterminated from Europe every coalition in her favour; and now boldly purposing to carry war into the very heart of England, (like Trojan Eneas in single combat with Turnes,) he threatens destruction to every nation that dares interfere.

On the other hand, Great Britain, surrounded by the waves, rides mistress of the ocean, and cut short of her commerce, she proudly lays restrictions on that of the rest of the world. Under these circumstances, what must be the best policy of our infant government? Shall we, by any tangling alliance, throw ourselves into the lap of England, where we must inevitably, sooner or later, awake, shorn of our strength by the Delilah of the ocean? Or shall we seek a more speedy fate, by throwing ourselves into the arms of the corsican, whose fraternizing hug, like that of the deceitful machinery of the tyrant of old, is certain death. Fellow citizens, I anticipate your reply. You will consent to neither. What then? Shall we undertake the protection of our commerce, by building a navy, that shall bid defiance to the powers of Europe? Of such a visionary project, let the fate of Denmark,



bid America beware, and convince her of the soundness of that policy, which withdraws us for a time from the dangers of the ocean, and endeavours to supply the want of those articles, for which we are dependant on Europe, by exciting into action our own native industry and ingenuity, in the employments of manufactories. Why, then, this sullen murmur, that rises on the ear from every part of the Union? Has the scrutinizing eye of public sentiment found our official servants unfaithful to their trust? If so, where is the spirit of '76? Does it sleep in the tombs of the heroes of the revolution? Can we not change our public officers by our suffrages? Or do we not possess enough of the spirit of our ancestors to hold up our hands in defence of that, which they purchased with their lives? Or does this sullen murmur arise from the malignant winds of foreign influence, sent to blight the fair fruit of the tree of liberty, while yet in its bloom? If so, let us not inhale the pestilential vapour, more fatal to our liberties, than the azotic gas is to life. Or does it rather arise from the effects of the precautionary measures of our government on the interests of individuals? If so, let those individuals visit the graves of the martyrs of freedom, there reflect on the losses, sufferings, and privations attending the acquisition of our independence, and blush at their murmurs. What? Shall we tax our ancestors with folly, by refusing to support that with our treasure, which, they thought worthy of being purchased at the expense of both treasure and blood? Or say you that those reports of foreign danger, the avowed causes of the precautionary measures of our government were fictitious? As well might we doubt the existence of the two great belligerent powers of Europe, who, in their contention for commerce, have swept away the laws of nations with the besom of mars, and established the laws of retaliation in their stead. The existence of those powers in Europe, is no more certain, than it is, that, we have nothing to

expect from the friendship, or generosity of either, and every thing to fear from their enmity, avarice, ambition, and power.

We learn from undoubted authority, that those orders and decrees of Great Britain and France, which have so nearly annihilated the commerce of neutrals, were first put in practice in the year 1793; when Great Britain, from commercial or political views, declared certain rivers, cities, and places to be in a state of blockade, before which she did not keep any adequate blockading force. On the 21st of November, 1806, the Emperour of France issued a decree, in which, he charges Great Britain with violating the laws of nations, and the rights of neutrality, and retaliates by declaring the isles of Great Britain to be in a state of blockade. Since this time, retaliating orders and decrees have been reciprocally multiplied on both sides, each party charging the other with violating the laws of nations and the rights of neutrality; until the Commerce of the United States, in its principal objects, has been overthrown, (as it is represented) in every part of the globe, except Canton, in China, some part of the shores of the Mediterranean, Asia, and Africa. And even these chances for enterprise are liable to be done away by captures, on certain pretexts by the one party, and confiscations by the other, for submitting to searches which could not be resisted. Such is the substance of the reports of foreign danger, which gave rise to the Embargo laws. Whether future events will prove those measures to have originated in wisdom or folly, it is impossible to foresee: But we may safely conclude, that, in a government like ours, the best measures are liable to be defeated in their objects by opposition. And the disgraceful inroads, which foreign influence is making among us, the daring outrages which are committed on our sovereignty, and the machinations of internal conspirators, promise nothing very favourable to our country.

Fellow Citizens, I beg leave to repeat to you, we stand on a precipice, and nothing short of the spirit of '76 can save us from ruin !

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*But let Columbia's Genius rise,  
Unfurl her Standard to the skies ;  
And let her Sons united be,  
Their motto—" DEATH or LIBERTY."*

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