

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED IN

HANCOCK,

JULY 4th, 1803,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

Declaration of the Independence

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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BY REED PAIGE.
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AMHERST,

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1804.



ORATION.

ANNUALLY to commemorate, and gratefully to notice the hand of God, in those great events, which have been highly beneficial to mankind, in rescuing them from bondage, and in restoring them to those natural rights, with which the God of nature indued them, is justifiable in the eye of reason, meets the approbating feelings of the human heart, and is warranted by the holy scriptures. The children of Israel, by the direction of the Most High God, annually commemorated their wonderful deliverance from that cruel bondage, in which they had been made to serve in the land of Ham. And those remarkable days, in which the Jews were so providentially delivered from the awful effects of that wicked and tyrannic decree, which Haman, the son of Hammedatha, had obtained against them, and in which the Jews became victorious over their enemies, were ordered to be yearly observed, throughout every generation, as days of feasting and gladness, and sending portions to the poor, that the memorial of this great deliverance might not perish from their seed.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

WE are this day assembled to commemorate a most joyous and eventful dispensation of divine providence—a dispensation, which rescued the people of these States from the shackles of premeditated bondage, and exalted them to the dignified station of a free and independent nation. This day completes twenty-seven years, since we became separated from, and independent of that domineering power, which had prepared for us, and was endeavoring to fasten on us, and on our future posterity, the galling chains of vile dependence and base servitude. As we observe this day as a memorial of our deliverance from the evils, which an imperious power had prepared for us, it may be well to bring into view some of the operative causes, which led to this great event.

The first settlers of these States emigrated chiefly from Great-Britain, and brought with them ideas favorable to true liberty. The New-Englanders, especially, sought these shores, then an inhospitable wilderness, that here they might enjoy an asylum from that civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, which, in their native country, ruled them with despotic sway. The evils, which they had endured, induced them to look with abhorrence on that despotism which, to them, had been a fruitful source of unhappiness. Hence, the nature and extent of civil and ecclesiastical authority were subjects, in which they felt deeply interested; and which, for that reason, early occupied their thoughts. And the more they reasoned and reflected, the more were they confirmed in the belief, that tyranny is contrary to nature, reason and revelation. Hence, they were prepared to guard, with a watchful eye, the rights which the God of nature had granted them, and which they fondly hoped to possess, undisturbedly, in this new world.

But, as they were British subjects, and might be claimed as such, by that country, from which they were about to depart, they felt it needful to obtain the consent of the crown, and some assurances, that here they should be unmolested in the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty. Accordingly Charters were finally obtained, and Government established, favorable to perpetuate these great blessings both to themselves, and to their posterity.

After having endured much hardship and many disasters, in repelling a savage foe and cultivating a stubborn soil, they began to increase rapidly in numbers and wealth. But, on their increasing wealth and growing numbers, Britain cast a jealous eye; and adopted measures, to which if the Colonists had submitted, they would have been brought into a humiliating state of vassalage, and their civil rights would have been buried in the dust.

They were, by their charters, obtained from the British government, entitled to all the civil rights which those subjects were entitled to, who resided in Britain. The people in Britain could not, constitutionally, be taxed without the voice of their representatives in parliament. The several colonies had their representative Assemblies, and they believed, that these Assemblies stood in the same relation to them, as did the British parliament to those who resided in Britain; and therefore believed, that they could not, in right, be called upon for any monies, unless voted by their own representatives. They were confirmed in this belief, not only from the Charters which they had received from the British government; but because they had defrayed, and continued to defray, the expenses of their own government; and because, neither the crown nor parliament had expended any money on them. But the then mother country, in order to aggrandize herself, and to hold the Colonists in a state of abject dependence, claimed the authority of taxing them without their consent.

To carry this into effect, the Stamp-Act, so called, was adopted, by which it was designed to raise a revenue from the Colonists. But they, ever watchful over their liberties, manifested, in a most pointed manner, a full determination never to submit to it. Their opposition arose, not so much from the amount of what might, probably, be raised in this way, nor from the necessary inequality of such a tax, nor from the difficulties which many might be under to obtain that paper, on which notes and other instruments might be legally written; as from this great principle, fixed deep in the American mind, that no power on earth, in which they were not represented, had a right to call on them, for the least sum in any compulsory way. They felt, if they submitted to such a power, their freedom was forever gone; but if they could repel every such claim, they would hold the dignified station of freemen. In consequence of opposition manifested by the Colonists, the measures which they adopted, and the effect, which those measures had upon the mercantile and manufactural interests in England, parliament saw fit to repeal the act.

But, in repealing this act, parliament were careful to use such language, as plainly implied, not only that they still claimed the right of taxing the colonies without their consent, but enacted, "That parliament had, and of right ought to have, power to bind the Colonists, in all cases whatsoever;" thus usurping authority to deprive the Colonists of liberty and property, and to hold them in a state of abject slavery. By their claiming this authority, the Colonists were irritated—they were provoked even to resentment, and therefore kept a jealous and steady eye on the British parliament; and their minds were fired, with a full determination, to repel, with firmness, every invasion of their natural rights.

Not many years elapsed, before parliament made another attempt to carry into effect their determina-

tion, to tax the Americans without their consent. Accordingly a duty was laid on tea, glass, paper and painter's colours. Though the duties were small, yet it being a tax without their consent, and a branch of that usurped power, which parliament claimed, the Americans were determined never to submit to it. They petitioned, but a deaf ear was turned to their petitions. Britain was determined, at all hazards, to execute the law she had enacted; and the Colonists were equally determined to repel its execution. This became the grand point of contest. This called up all the powers of the human mind, in both countries, and on both sides.

Britain was too haughty to give up her claim to uncontrolled authority; and the Colonists viewed their freedom too dear, to yield it up without a manly contest. Britain was brought to that period, in which she must have forever given up her claim, or she must have, by force of arms, compelled her Colonists to submit to her imperious domination. Intoxicated with a belief that her power was invincible, and ignorant of the valour and perseverance of those, who contend for that freedom, which they have once enjoyed, she determined to humble the Colonists at her feet, and compel them to submit to her own terms.

Accordingly, the instruments of death were prepared, an armed force sent, and orders given, to carry into execution her tyrannic determination. A thick cloud of darkness overspread our land. The solemn, the affecting time had arrived, when we must have given up our dearest rights, submitted to the will of an arbitrary and enraged government, which had already declared her determination "to bind us in all cases whatsoever," or the people, but half armed, undisciplined and unaccustomed to the soldier's life, must have met highly disciplined and well armed veterans. The ardent love of freedom, which glowed in the breasts of the Colonists, the fear of giving up those

rights, with which their Creator had indued them, and the painful thought that their posterity should wear the chains of slavery, made them, in some measure, overlook the embarrassments which lay in their way. But, believing that their cause was just, and trusting in the God of armies, they ventured on the unequal contest.

LEXINGTON and its vicinity were the painful witnesses of the commencement of the bloody scene. The distressing tidings rapidly spread through our land, and excited the bitterest resentment. The country was all in motion, thousands seized their arms, and hastened to repel the invading foe. On BUNKER'S HILL, Britain fatally learnt with what a manly courage and firm resolution, those will defend themselves, who contend for their native rights.

As Britain had declared the Colonies in a state of rebellion, made war with them, and soon after hired foreign troops and savage tribes to compel them to submit, they felt they were no longer under any obligations to the mother country, and felt that duty called them to separate from her forever. Accordingly, on the Fourth of July, 1776, when a thick cloud of darkness hung over our land, when we had not a single ally to take our part, the representatives of the people, in Congress assembled, made the public and solemn declaration, "That these *United Colonies* are, and of right ought to be, *free and independent States.*" The British empire then split in twain; and the contest, on our part, took a totally different turn. We had petitioned, we had remonstrated, and we had taken up arms, not to be dismembered from the British empire; but to have our well-founded grievances redressed, and our natural rights confirmed to us. It was by Britain's refusing to redress our grievances, by insisting upon a right "to bind us in all cases whatsoever," and by her sending fleets and armies to execute this usurped and unnatural right, which drove us to dismember

ourselves from her. Our independence was forced upon us, being the result of the unjustifiable measures which Britain adopted.

Having declared ourselves *independent and free States*, there remained a great task to be performed. The British forces were to be repelled, or our having declared ourselves independent and free States, instead of being a blessing, would have proved a curse, by making our then future condition intolerable. Many a hard battle was fought, many a hero fell, many a field was stained with human gore; and the "battle of the warrior was with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood." But He, who as easily can give the battle to the weak as to the strong, interposed in our behalf, was present in our councils, raised up for us a powerful ally, prospered our arms, and led us on to victory; and that power, which had long been devising plans, used great means, spent vast sums, and sent numerous fleets and powerful armies, to compel our compliance with her lawless demands, was herself finally compelled to acknowledge our independence, withdraw her fleets and armies, cede to us a large extent of territory, and leave us in the full possession of independence and freedom.

Thus, freed from an invading foe, and from the confused noise of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood, plans were to be devised, measures adopted, and means used, to secure to us and to future generations the great blessings of independence and freedom, which had been obtained by great sacrifices of property and blood. The powers of the old confederation, formed in time of war, were found to be totally inadequate to effect this great good. The great body of the people felt that something must be done, or they would soon lose all the great blessings which were expected from national independence. Representatives from the several States were elected, by whom our present happy Constitution was framed, and which, soon after, was adopt-

ed by the several States in the Union. The federal government became organized, and the happy consequences equalled, if they did not surpass, the most raised expectations of its warmest friends.

We now find ourselves possessed of all the great blessings, for which we fought, and for which we bled. And, while we sincerely lament the untimely death of so many of our valuable citizens, who fell in battle, while jeopardizing their lives for their country's good, we cannot but rejoice in that revolution which separated us from Britain, delivered us from her tyrannic power, and made us a free and independent nation.

Under the blessing of Almighty God, we now enjoy the greatest sum of civil and religious freedom, and have the most pleasing prospects before us, of any nation on earth. We have no despot, surrounded with armed veterans, to sway the sceptre over our backs, and govern us at his will—no hereditary offices, nor pompous vain titles descending from father to son—no aristocratical body claiming the right to legislate for us without our consent. But our rulers are our brethren, frequently elected from among ourselves, by the great body of the people, and as frequently returning back to the great mass of citizens to give place to others, unless re-elected by that people, who called them forward. The chief Magistrate, in the short space of four years, must lay aside his dignified office, nor dare to claim it as his, by right, nor venture to exercise the presidency a single day longer, unless the will of the people, renewedly, tender him the same. Great barriers fill up the way, which leads to uncontrolled authority. Our frequent elections, not only declare us independent of all other nations; but are the pleasing and heart-gratifying memorials, that we are in the enjoyment of the full tide of domestic freedom, guarded against hereditary rulers and arbitrary government.

We are also in the full possession of all those great and invaluable rights, which relate to the worship of

the great God, the common parent of all. While almost all the national governments on earth compel their subjects, under pains and penalties, to be of a particular denomination, and to worship in a particular mode ; in our land, every individual may choose his religion and worship his God in what mode he pleases, having none to molest or make him afraid. He has nothing to fear from the government under which he lives, while he demeans himself a good citizen, by not disturbing the peace nor encroaching on the rights of others. Whatever his religious tenets may be, he has nothing to disturb him in his belief, profession and practice, but arguments addressed to the rational powers of his mind, taken from the great book of nature, and the more instructive book, the Word of God.

Why then the outcry by any, that religion is endangered by the present administration? Has the present government been enacting laws, or is there any evidence, that they are devising means to deprive their constituents of the rights of conscience, or to awe them against openly professing and advocating their religious sentiments, or to deter them from worshipping God in what mode they please ?

Among the great multiplicity of religious denominations, jarring sentiments, varying modes of worship, and numberless written, as well as oral disputes, do we find that government interposes or concerns itself in the least, about them? Civil officers are not clothed with their offices to regulate religion, or enact laws respecting the Redeemer's kingdom, which is not of this world, any further than to secure to all the rights of conscience ; but they are called to their offices for purposes of a worldly nature, to devise means and pursue measures, that the great rights, civil and religious, may be perpetuated to the present and future generations. Highly desirable is it, that the civil rulers of any people be men, who fear the Lord, walk humbly with God, and practise the great duties of christian meekness, forbearance and

love ; for their pious examples might have a most extensive and happy influence upon the people.

It may also be observed, that we have the most pleasing and flattering prospects before us, respecting our future greatness as a nation. The extensiveness of our territory gives room for us to become extremely numerous as a people. The mildness of our government, and the well known opposition of the people to arbitrary measures, and those extensive territories, yet uncultivated, while they invite emigrants from old countries and from under arbitrary governments, fill our native sons with aversion from seeking other habitations. The prospect therefore is, that as we have done, so we shall continue, for a long time yet to come, rapidly to increase in numbers and wealth. Our remote situation from the warlike nations of Europe, and the continual diminution of the savage tribes, make it highly probable that we shall not, for many years, be engaged in a war with a foreign nation. And from a civil contest nothing can be gained ; and the great motives leading to it, do not exist here. A government more favorable to the freedom of its citizens can hardly be expected. And whatever a few aspiring minds, who may thirst for arbitrary and hereditary power, may wish ; yet it cannot be expected that the great body of the people will soon be willing to exchange their dignified station of freemen to be the degraded subjects of a tyrant.

As we are greatly distinguished in civil and religious privileges, and have agreeable prospects before us, it highly becomes us, that we do not, by rashness or negligence, deprive ourselves of them ; but that we pursue such measures as will continue them to our enjoyment, and hand them down unimpaired to the rising generation. And that such a great blessing may be their rich and lasting inheritance, several things are needful.

The diffusion of knowledge through all ranks, and particular attention to the education of the rising gen-

eration, may be considered as means of prime importance to perpetuate these great blessings. The enlightened mind will be quick to espy at a distance the plans, which may be maturing, and the causes, which may be gathering strength, to rob a people of their dearest rights; but the ignorant untutored mind beholds them not, till they are matured and bursting upon him with irresistible force. The enlightened man knows much better what natural rights it is needful for him to surrender, to retain, in undisturbed enjoyment, the greatest portion of civil and religious freedom; but the ignorant may not know it is needful for him to surrender any, and esteem every restraint a mark of tyranny; or he may be flattered to surrender so much, as will fasten on him the galling chains of slavery. The diffusion of knowledge seems far more necessary for public peace and safety, in a republican government, than in a monarchical. In a monarchical government, the duty of the people is, not to choose their rulers, but to submit to those, who they find are in authority over them. But in a representative republic, every man has a higher and more flattering part to act, than merely to obey. He has directly, or indirectly a voice in every branch of government.

A well armed and well disciplined militia may be considered as another necessary mean, to retain our independence as a nation, and our rights as citizens. A standing army, or a well disciplined militia, is absolutely necessary for a nation to maintain its independence among the nations of the earth. Without the one, or the other of these, we are liable to be brought into a state of servitude to any warlike nation.

But, in a republic, a large standing army, in time of peace, is imminently dangerous to its liberty, and very existence. The support of a standing army is, in a certain sense, independent of the people; and its interest is different from that of the citizens. They receive their support directly from the government, and are

wholly at its disposal: and they will naturally be heartily attached to that government, from which they receive their wages, though that government may change its form. Tyrannical governments have almost invariably been supported by standing armies. Citizens, who have been the subjects of arbitrary power, have known they were unjustly deprived of their rights, have thirsted to regain them; but durst not assert them, nor make a single attempt to regain them, through the dread of an armed force. Should the time come, when, in time of peace, a large standing army shall exist in these States, when no attention shall be paid to keep the militia armed and disciplined, it will then be easy for a government, thirsting for independent, absolute power, to call the army around them, declare themselves independent of the people, and bid defiance to the citizens. Then will our freedom be at an end—then shall we no longer assemble to elect our rulers; but we shall find men, who will rule us without our consent, and control us at their pleasure; and every returning *Fourth of July*, instead of being a day of joy and gladness, will bring to our painful remembrance the rich blessing we have lost; and we shall be compelled to part with our property to support an armed band, who will be instruments, in the hand of government, to beat us back from our native rights, and hold us in lasting bondage. Let the militia be well disciplined and well armed, that, from among them men may be called forth to meet and repel every invading foe, and the natural instruments of arbitrary government be found useless in your land.

In this connexion, the militia present, who appear under arms, in honor of the day, will, perhaps, expect an address.

Fellow Citizens, We lament that human depravity, which is the cause of oppression and war, which influences man to disturb the peace and encroach on the rights of his fellow man, and which parades men in

military array, and arms them with the weapons of death. But as this depravity exists, wherever man exists in our world, so the instruments of self-defence and the weapons of death have become needful. Nations encroach on the rights of nations; and hence it has become absolutely necessary, that nations should possess the means, and stand prepared to repel foreign aggression. But who can be more suitable, or feel greater motives to repel aggressions, than the armed citizens? They have their wives, their children, their parents, their territorial possessions, their great civil rights as freemen, and the honor, dignity, and independence of their dear country, as all-weighty motives to inspire them with manly courage and intrepid resolution.

You, officers and soldiers, are not an armed band, whose interest is, in any sense, opposite to, or inconsistent with, that of the great mass of the people; but you are fellow citizens with your brethren; and your *country's* cause is *your* cause, your *country's* glory is *your* glory, and your *country's* freedom and independence are *your* freedom and independence. To a well disciplined militia throughout these States, of which you are a part, we look as the needful instruments in the hand of God, for the continued support and manly protection of those great and invaluable rights which we now enjoy, and which have been obtained by great sacrifices of property and blood.

And, as you are not mere soldiers, but citizens, and your interest one with your country's, we cannot believe those instruments of death, which now hang by your sides, or those arms, which you now hold in your hands, will ever be employed by you, for the vile purpose of introducing arbitrary power, or subverting that freedom, which you and your fellow citizens now enjoy; but, in the defence of a representative republic, and in the support of the freedom, independence, and rising glory of your country, we trust you will, if call-

ed thereto, manfully employ them. Fixing in your minds that you are citizens, under a government the most favorable to freedom on earth, feeling that you are now in the possession of the most invaluable rights and privileges, that your country's interest and yours are one, and feeling that a well disciplined militia is our best and safest defence, you will naturally aspire to be expert in the military art. Impressed with the importance of your station, officers will instruct, soldiers will obey, and you will be an honor to your country.

· Casting my eye around upon this numerous audience, I necessarily behold many, who were active in the great scenes, which prepared the way for our present independence as a nation, and for the enjoyment of the great rights, civil and religious, which we now possess. Your thoughts naturally glide back to those trying times, when the cause of America hung in painful suspense. You well recollect those many clouds, which, with dark and threatening aspect, spread over our land. You can better tell, than I relate, what sacrifices of property, you voluntarily made, what wearisome days and nights, and months and years, you endured—how often called to seize your arms, leave your homes, and hasten to meet an invading foe—what troubled thoughts possessed your minds,—what your feelings when engaged in battle, when hearing the confused noise of the warrior, and seeing garments rolled in blood. These were painful times; and like these the price of our present independence and glory. But these scenes are past; and you now enjoy the pleasing fruits of your labors and toils and sufferings. Your country now possesses that independence, and those rights, civil and religious, for which you fought and bled. To you, therefore, this day must be a day of joy and gladness; and your joy may properly be the joy of those who have obtained the prize. Your heart's desire is, that these great blessings

may descend to generations yet unborn. And you now have the pleasing prospect, that when you shall be laid in the dust, you will leave your posterity, not the oppressed subjects of a tyrant, but citizens of a representative republic, and in the enjoyment of a greater sum of civil and religious liberty, than is enjoyed in any other nation.

Would we perpetuate the great blessings which we now enjoy, it is needful that a watchful eye should be fixed on our rulers. By this I do not mean, that any one ought to have a determination, or a single wish, to find blame where blame does not exist; and far less do I mean that spirit of misrepresentation, calumny, and base detraction, which, under the present and former administrations, spread through our land, and which cannot be too severely condemned. But I mean a disposition narrowly to inspect the conduct of our rulers, to discover whether they go beyond the constitutional boundaries, with which the people have limited their authority. Our rulers are not brought forward for the sake of filling offices of honor and emolument, and to grasp that power by which the liberties of the people may be endangered; but to devise those means, adopt those plans, and pursue those measures which shall be strictly constitutional, and by which the great blessings of national independence and civil rights may be perpetuated. They may not, in any instance, because they may think the good of the country requires it, leap the boundaries of the constitution. To take this liberty, in a single instance, is the direct road to arbitrary power, and prepares the way for the throne to be erected, and a tyrant placed thereon. Government is absolutely necessary for the well being of society. Without it, we have no safeguard, besides our own feeble, individual strength, to protect those rights, with which our Creator has indued us. But necessary as government is, it naturally tends

to increase in power, till it arrives to absolute despotism : and arrive there it will, unless counteracted. Whatever power it grasps, it holds firm, and reaches forward for more. Those, therefore, who wish to perpetuate their freedom, will keep a watchful, but, at the same time, a candid eye, upon their government.

Let us also guard against a spirit of division and angry contention. We are assured, from the highest authority, that "the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water," and "a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand." That a spirit of division and angry dispute has existed, and does now exist, respecting the measures which our government has pursued, and does now pursue, is but too well known ; and that many irritating observations, having no foundation in truth, have been made, calculated to embitter the minds of parties ; that the former administration, and men then in office had things laid to their charge, which they did by no means deserve ; and that the present administration is treated with equal asperity and groundless censure, perhaps no calm, reflecting mind will deny. In a free, representative government, it is to be expected, that the people will be more or less divided in the choice of their rulers, and respecting the measures which government may adopt. And it is matter of great importance, that opposing sentiments, which relate to our dearest rights, should be discussed with dispassionate minds, and calm debate. Angry passions, reproachful words, and base suggestions give no light, carry no conviction, but provoke a retaliation, and scatter thick around the seeds of anarchy and war. It is a great unhappiness, and a mark of deep depravity, that the human mind is so abundantly prone to magnify the real, or supposed errors, blacken the characters, calumniate the measures, and rejoice at the mistakes of an opposite party. While we would encourage an open, decent, calm, and manly discussion of public men and measures, as necessary to enlighten

our minds, and make us watchful and guardful of our dearest rights, let us avoid, and look with abhorrence on angry dispute and vile calumny, as pregnant with destruction to our freedom and independence.

You will permit me to add ; If we would transmit the great blessings of freedom and independence to the rising generation, or continue to enjoy them ourselves, it is absolutely necessary, that we have the Lord of hosts on our side. In times of national distress, when heavy judgments are pressing us down, we feel our weakness, and the need of his supporting, and all-protecting hand ; but, in times of prosperity, we are apt to be unmindful of our dependence on the God of mercies. In vain, however, are present prospects, and in vain are human wisdom, human measures, and human forces, without the protection of Israel's God. He lifteth up and casteth down, as well nations as individuals, at his pleasure ; and none can deliver out of his hand, or resist his power. His hand is to be acknowledged in all the blessings we enjoy, and in all the agreeable and flattering prospects before us. "For every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights." His holy protection is promised to those, who maintain his fear upon their minds, and live in obedience to his holy word. Should we, therefore, as a people, acknowledge Him in all our ways, lead those peaceable lives, by practising righteousness and truth, which he enjoins upon us, we may fondly hope that he will continue to us our invaluable rights, and do us good for a long time to come. But if we renounce him, he will renounce us ; and the instruments of his vengeance and messengers of his wrath stand thick on every side, and lie near every hand. With the utmost ease, to punish us for our wickedness, he can raise up and send an armed force from the ends of the earth, and cause us to fall an easy prey ; or he can use the savages of the wilderness or any of the neighboring

provinces as a scourge, and cause us to fall by thousands ; or he can send a spirit of infatuation upon rulers and people, and all the horrors of civil war shall be the immediate and awful consequence. Numerous are the means which he can make effectual to the degradation and ruin of a corrupt people. Let us not, therefore, glory in ourselves, nor trust in our own hearts, nor lean to our own understandings ; but acknowledge our dependence on the supreme Ruler of nations and God of armies, before whom all nations of the earth are as a drop of the bucket and dust of the balance ; for, “ blessed is that people, whose God is the Lord.”

FINIS.