

John Phillips' Oration.

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AN
ORATION;

PRONOUNCED

JULY 4th, 1794.

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

TOWN OF BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY JOHN PHILLIPS.

*Ad illa, pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quæ vita, quæ mores fuerint
per quos terræ, quibusque artibus, domi militiaque, et partum et ancium im-
perium sit.*

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BOSTON:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY BENJAMIN EDES, Kilby-
Street.-- 1794.

At a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of
the Town of BOSTON, duly qualified and legally warned,
in public Town-Meeting, assembled at Faneuil-Hall, on
Friday the 4th of JULY, A. D. 1794.

VOTED,

THAT the SELECTMEN be and hereby are
appointed a Committee to wait on JOHN PHILLIPS, Esq,
and in the Name of the Town to thank him for the spirited
and elegant ORATION this Day delivered by him, at the
Request of the Town, upon the ANNIVERSARY OF THE
INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMER-
ICA—in which, according to the Institution of the Town,
he considered the Feelings, Manners, and Principles which
led to that great National Event—and to request of him a
Copy thereof for the Press.

Attest.

WILLIAM COOPER, Town-Clerk.

GENTLEMEN,

THE Request of my Fellow-Citizens, induces me to
submit the ORATION Yesterday delivered, to their perusal.

I am,

Gentlemen,

With the greatest Respect,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN PHILLIPS.

BOSTON, JULY 5th, 1794.

AN
O R A T I O N.

THE assemblage of free and enlightened minds is ever interesting and august. Usefulness marks ~~even~~ their recreations; and the object of their festivals is the perpetuity of their country's honor.

THE anniversary of that great day when our nation was born, when our independence of all earthly foreign power was proclaimed, is the most exalted occasion for serious, deep reflection, for cordial, grateful acknowledgment.

THIS day we consecrate to the fame of our fathers' virtues, the principles of our revolution, and the rising glory of our country.

WHATEVER circumstances more immediately favoured the revolution, its distant causes we recognize in the conduct, and trace its remote source
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from the character of our ancestors. Their settlement in America is a phenomenon in history. If we revert to ancient nations we find their origin disguised by fiction, or enveloped in obscurity. . . If we descend to more modern times and contemplate the birth of European empires, we behold fierce and unlettered barbarians pouring forth in successive swarms from the unexplored regions of the North, spreading havoc and desolation in their progress, shrouding the light of science in thick clouds of superstition, and entailing those fetters of slavery, which the convulsive efforts of their posterity to unrivet, now crimson their soil with blood. Similar horrors marked the entrance of the Spaniards on the southern continent. To satiate the demands of unbounded avarice, two opulent and peaceful empires, consisting of millions of polished and intelligent people, abounding with monuments of art and industry, with luxuriant fields and magnificent cities, the chosen seats of cultivation and plenty, were ravaged, depopulated, and destroyed. The laws of hospitality, liberally observed by a beneficent people, were basely violated, and the cross uplifted to sanction the most atrocious crimes.

CONTRASTED with the conduct of such adventurers.

turers, what examples of moderation, justice and magnanimity did our ancestors exhibit. Among them are seen no vagrant miscreants roaming in foreign climes in pursuit of that wealth which ignorance or vice prevented them from acquiring in their own; but illumined and discerning minds, prompted by the noblest of motives, the attainment of civil and religious liberty, relinquishing estates, kindred and country, traversing a widely extended ocean, encountering unaccustomed inclemencies of season, inhospitable wilds, and all the uncertainties of an infant settlement. Regardless of royal grants or nugatory charters, the sport of philosophy, and the ridicule of reason, they occupied no portion of the soil until they had exchanged with its possessors an ample equivalent. Instead of spreading misery and desolation in the abodes of happiness and peace, they instructed the savage natives in the arts, and supplied their wants with the conveniences of civilized life. They tempered their ferocious manners by disseminating among them the truths of that religion, whose precepts are peace, and whose foundation is humanity.

SENSIBLE of the value of that liberty which they had made so many sacrifices to attain, their first attention was pointed to the means of securing it for
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their children. Hence originated those literary institutions, which have diffused a degree of information unknown in those enslaved countries where learning, like other natural rights, has been monopolized by the few, only to multiply, to subtilize, and refine the miseries of the many. Hence also those distributive laws, which render the possession of property comparatively equal. With us no elder born exclusively riots on the spoils of patrimonial industry, no nerveless arm or vacant head burlesques a title conferred by public admiration on a wise or valiant ancestor. Intelligence, industrious habits and social equality were the legacies which our fathers transmitted to their posterity, and experience has proved them more powerful preservatives from oppression and tyranny than unbounded opulence or veteran armies.

ALTHOUGH persecution caused the migration to this country, its inhabitants still cherished the warmth of filial affection to the parent state. This was evinced by a patient acquiescence in a monopoly of trade, and many arbitrary restrictions on manufactures. Even when the despotic edict was issued, which declared her right to bind her colonies in all cases whatsoever, their first recourse was to supplication and entreaty. In vain, however, did they address the justice and magnanimity of
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Britain, and conjure her by the ties of kindred only to lighten the accumulated load of oppression. In vain did they approach her with humble petition and respectful remonstrance : to petition, she replied by injury ; to remonstrance, she answered by arms. That flame, which affection and prudence had so long repressed, now burst forth with irresistible fury. Reiterated injuries and multiplied oppression, had enkindled an enthusiasm uncontrolled by the idea of impracticability or danger, and at a moment when veteran armies were ravaging our coasts, and triumphant fleets menacing our shores, the birth of our nation was announced. America sent up an approving, exulting shout, her morning stars sang for joy, while the responsive earth echoed their melodious notes with glowing emulation.

THE illustrious patriot, whose name first sanctioned the august decree, which gave existence to an empire, cannot be recollected without mingled emotions of grief and admiration. That voice now sleeps in eternal silence, whose animated strains, in yonder hall of liberty, once roused your tardy resentments, and impelled your souls to heroic resolution. That heart, whose expanded affections embraced all your concerns with the ardor of patriot-

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ism, now lies compressed by the clod of the valley. His illustrious deeds are engraven on the hearts of his countrymen, and shall be called to grateful recollection, oft as the annual acclamations of emancipated myriads shall hail the return of this auspicious day, which consecrated a new era in the annals of freedom.

THAT reliance on the Supreme Ruler of the universe expressed in the first national act, and which marked the conduct of our rulers during the whole struggle for freedom, will account for their consistent steady attention to the public welfare, at the expense of all party views, or private considerations. Enthusiasm, excited by the fervid heat of transient patriotism, may serve as a temporary substitute for religion, but can never permanently supply its place. Men of superior talents, uncontrolled by any principle stronger than the impulse of passion, rush with equal ardor into opposite extremes, exhibit the most sublime and most atrocious actions, and inspire alternate love and detestation. But the uniform inflexible patriot, equally qualified to display the magnanimous energies requisite in the tempestuous season of public calamity, or the milder virtues which secure happiness in the calm of peace, regardless of airy fame, or the gratification
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of momentary popular humours, still makes the unerring rule of rectitude his guide, and appeals for approbation to his God. Characters like this adorned the American revolution, and preserved unanimity, unparalleled in the history of any other country. Among the first of these we rank the venerable sage, who, after a long unfulfilled life of patriotic labours, now dignifies the first office in this State, by the unabated exertion of extraordinary talents and virtues.

A CONTEST, originating in the purest motives, was crowned with the most distinguished success, and the ninth revolving season beheld our country in the complete possession of peace, liberty, and independence.

It could not be expected of men that in the tumultuous years of resistance, they should have been able to ordain and erect those perfect modes of government, that should remain the permanent pillars of civil liberty. Nor can it surprise us, that the first moments of quiet after recent convulsion, should not suddenly furnish the means of ample reward to the meritorious. But relaxation, debility, and disunion too strongly marked the succeeding period. Our country beheld with too great indifference men who, to secure the freedom and peace
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of its citizens, had encountered the hardships of the field, the perils and vicissitudes of war, sinking unrewarded into indigence and wretchedness. This neglect compelled them to sacrifice the evidence of their demands against the public, and to this source may be traced that injustice, the odium of which discontented minds have, with sedulous assiduity, attempted to throw on the present government. A government which, like most human blessings, is undervalued only by those who enjoy its benignant influence. Its basis, a constitution fabricated by the collected wisdom of the continent, by those sages and heroes, whose united prudence and valour had emancipated their country from the yoke of foreign oppression. A constitution not suddenly resorted to, as a refuge from internal convulsion, or a safeguard from foreign violence, but calmly discussed and deliberately adopted by an illumined people, when the voice of faction had long been hushed, and the mild whispers of peace were heard throughout the land.

THE united voice of the people has repeatedly summoned to preside in the national government, that illustrious patriot, whose successful efforts in the field had so often conducted their armies to victory. The exalted head, which had been encircled by a more verdant laurel than that which
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adorned the brow of Fabius, now wears a wreath more glorious than that which dignified the temples of Solon. The unequalled General stands the unrivalled statesman. To draw a just portrait of a character so exalted is equally beyond the limits of the occasion and the abilities of the speaker. Before an assembly of Americans the attempt is unnecessary. To them the name of WASHINGTON; the splendor of his actions, and the glory of his virtue, are inscribed on every public scene which is interesting either in recollection or in prospect. And the eulogium, which their mingled gratitude, esteem and admiration demand, is as much above the power of language to express, as the rewards due to his piety, magnanimity and patriotism exceed the recompense of all terrestrial crowns and honors.

THE effects of the event we this day commemorate were not confined to our own country, but soon extended across the atlantic. The prospect of humbling a powerful rival induced an arbitrary prince to aid the American cause with numerous armies and powerful fleets, exhibiting the paradoxical appearance of slavery fighting the battles of freedom. The subjects of despotism soon imbibed the principles they were employed to defend, and caught the ardor which flamed in the American bosom.

bosom. Surrounding circumstances led to reflections highly unfavorable to their own situation. They perceived the tree of liberty profusely watered with their blood, its foliage spreading, yet yielding them no shelter, its fruit blooming and mellowing in luxuriance, yet denied the delicious taste, it excited no passion but despair. When the mandate of their sovereign summoned them to their native shores a deeper horror seemed to shade the darkness of despotism. They beheld with mingled grief and indignation a people in the most fertile country of Europe, amid the profusion of the bounties of nature, obliged to live on the gleanings of their own industry. The scanty pittance, saved from the exactions of arbitrary power, yielded by ignorance and superstition, to satisfy the boundless demands of a rapacious clergy. A kingdom converted to a bastille, in which the mind was imprisoned by a triple impenetrable wall of ignorance, superstition and despotism. The fervid spirit which glowed within them, soon pervaded their country, and threatened destruction to their government. On the first favorable contingency, the enthusiastic energies of reviving freedom burst the cearments which had confined it for two thousand years, and the gothic fabric of feudal absurdity, with all its pompous pageants, colossal pillars and proscriptive

proscriptive bulwarks, the wonder and veneration of ages, was instantly levelled with the dust.

AN astonished world viewed with awful admiration the stupendous wreck. They beheld with pleasing exultation the fair fabric of freedom rising in simple proportion and majestic grace upon the mighty ruin. The gloomy horrors of despotism fled before the splendid effulgence of the sun of liberty. The potent rays of science pierced the mist of ignorance and error, "republican visions were realized, and the reign of reason appeared to commence its splendid progress." But the whirlwind of discord threatened to raze the fabric from its foundation. The lowering clouds of contention hung around and darkened the horizon. Fayette, the apostle of liberty, was abandoned by the people whom he saved, and became a victim to despotic cruelty and cowardice. The damp poisonous exhalations of a gloomy dungeon now encircle and chill that bosom, whose philanthropy was coextensive with the universe, whose patriotism no power could extinguish, no dangers appal. But illuminated by the rectitude of thy heart and the magnanimity of thy virtue, the trickling dews of thy prison walls, shall sparkle with more enviable lustre than the most luminous diadem that glitters on the brow of the haughtiest emperor. CANDOR

CANON will make every allowance for the irregularities of an immense people who were precipitated into insurrection by the extreme of national calamity. Who had not been previously prepared for a revolution by the slow progressive improvements of education. They possessed no happy constitution, including within itself the safe and regular means of redressing such abuses as experience must discover, or such inconveniences as an alteration of circumstances must produce in the best system of government. Their political institutions, the accumulated abuses of ages were so entirely corrupt, that they would admit of no reform, nor could any remedy be applied less powerful than regeneration. In attempting this work they were opposed by those numerous orders of clergy and nobility, who had so long monopolized the wealth and power of the nation, and by the selfish designs of those artful, factious men, who are continually raising popular commotions, that they may by them accomplish their detestable purposes. While perplexed with these internal difficulties, they were attacked from without by numerous armies of combined kings, whose avowed object was the restoration of that tyranny so recently banished. Will the history of past ages produce an example of so great convulsion unattended by

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by the commission of crimes? Great as these have been, are not the annals of successful despotism blackened with still deeper horror? Remotely situated as we are from the scene of action, our sources of information few, and those discoloured by party and corrupted by faction, we cannot determine where to censure or how far to applaud. This uncertainty must remain until the tumult of passion has subsided and facts shall be fairly ascertained from the pen of an impartial historian.

A QUESTION of the highest magnitude remains to be determined by the event of the present European contest. A question, which affects not France, not the present age only, but which embraces the interest of the whole European world and its remotest posterity. Should that nation be subdued by external force or internal treachery, the tyrants who now totter on their thrones, will exult in perfect security, and the shackles of slavery be more firmly rivetted on the subjects of their arbitrary governments. But should success crown their efforts, and republicanism, unsullied by anarchy, be established among them, despotism will be destroyed, and the principles of enlightened liberty pervade the universe.

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SEPARATED by an immense ocean we fondly hoped to remain unshaken by the convulsions of Europe. But the depredations made on our late flourishing commerce, has defeated the illusory expectation. Piratical spoliations have been committed under colour of a British edict unfounded in the laws of nature or nations. The savages of the ocean have crept from their lurking place and seized with relentless hands our unwary mariners. With fearful apprehension we beheld a dark cloud spread itself over our hemisphere and threaten to pour forth a deluge of misery on our devoted shores. But the cloud is broken and scattering. The Mediterranean again imprisons the barbarians of Afric, and we trust that pacific negotiation will procure retributive justice from Britain, and prevent the necessity of a resort to arms. The sources of wealth will again open and the prolific streams pour from both Indias in plentiful abundance. The busy hum of men already pervades our cheerful streets, our crowded ports echo the shouts of hurried seamen, commerce whitens our seas, and rejoicing Ceres spreads the gifts of harvest waving luxuriant o'er our fertile plains.

AMERICANS! you have a country vast in extent and embracing all the varieties of the most salubrious

ous climes. Held not by charters wrested from unwilling kings, but the bountiful gift of the Author of Nature. The exuberance of your population is daily divesting the dreary desert of its rude attire, and splendid cities rise to cheer the gloomy wilderness. You have a government deservedly celebrated as "giving the sanctions of law to the precepts of reason," presenting, instead of the rank luxuriance of natural licentiousness, the corrected sweets of civil liberty. You have fought the battles of freedom and enkindled that sacred flame which now glows with vivid fervor through the greatest empire in Europe. We indulge the sanguine hope that her equal laws and virtuous conduct will hereafter afford examples of imitation to all surrounding nations. That the blissful period will soon arrive when man shall be elevated to his primitive character, when illuminated reason and regulated liberty shall once more exhibit him in the image of his Maker. When all the inhabitants of the globe shall be freemen and fellow citizens, and patriotism itself be lost in universal philanthropy. Then shall volumes of incense incessantly roll from altars inscribed to liberty. "Then shall the innumerable varieties of the human race unitedly "worship in her sacred temple, whose pillars shall rest on the remotest corners of the earth, whose arch will be the vault of heaven."