

OF THE AN  
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

AT THE

MEETING-HOUSE

IN

BENNINGTON,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1807.

ISRAEL PUTNAM RICHARDSON, F. 2.

BENNINGTON:

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BENNINGTON, JULY 4, 1807.

THE Committee of Arrangement, with the unanimous desire of the large and respectable Audience present, cordially embrace this opportunity of returning you their sincere thanks, for your ingenious, learned and patriotic ORATION, this day delivered; and, in obedience to their wishes, with pleasure request a copy for the press.

With sentiments of esteem, we are,

Sir, yours,

D. FAY,  
E. BAKER,  
E. HAWKS,  
W. HENRY, jun.  
I. WEBSTER,  
M. NORTON,  
J. WADSWORTH,  
I. HENDRYX,  
J. LAWRENCE,

Committee of Arrangement

WILBUR  
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VERMONT  
LIBRARY

To I. P. RICHARDSON, Esq.

THE underwritten is sensible that his Oration merits not the epithet of "ingenious," or "learned;" he is sensible that it will not suit the appetite of many moral, religious, literary and political Critics; he well knows the disadvantage of a young man's appearing in public; he expects the malice of the back-biter, the venom of the slanderer, and the calumny of the puerile babbler who knows not the *abc* of his political alphabet, to be poured on him in copious streams; yet, if this day's performance contains one principle consentaneous with those which induced a part of the Committee to face a *Burgoyne* on the field of battle, if it contains one sentiment in accordance with the feelings of many of the Audience who stand high in the confidence of their fellow-citizens, if one idea contained in it can be of use to any person, the undersigned will be proud in granting their request.

ISRAEL PUTNAM RICHARDSON.

BENNINGTON, JULY 4, 1807.

To the Committee  
of  
Arrangement.

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## AN ORATION.

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**FRIENDS, AND FELLOW CITIZENS,**

IF there is a propriety in other nations' celebrating, with splendor, and magnificence, the birth of princes, kings, and emperors, the era of their degradation, and misery, it is surely not unbecoming the American people, annually, to convene for a more manly and patriotic employment ; to congratulate each other on an event the most auspicious to political liberty recorded in the history of civilized man. This is the birthday of freedom, the natal day of an extensive republic ; it will be held in grateful remembrance by every son of America ; one divine enthusiasm will animate every breast, on this day, from the Superior to the Atlantic, from the St. Croix to the Rio-Bravo. This is the day appropriated to celebrate the emancipation of our common country from the dominion of a foreign tyrant ; on this joyful anniversary the heroes and patriots, who now survive, present themselves to bear testimony of the eternal hatred subsisting between freemen and despots.

Thirty one years have elapsed since the continental Congress declared the United States of America free, sovereign, and independent ; the voice, like the electric shock, pervaded the Universe, and oppressed humanity felt relief. The day, on which, was proclaimed the charter of your independence, presented the most solemn spectacle ever beheld through the long track of antiquity : It was the scene of an extensive nation in the labor of political regeneration, an empire rising in defiance of majesty, and openly assigning the reasons which compelled them to a severance from their parent state ; a separation of infinite consequence to the inalienable rights of man, and in its effects deleterious to the tyrant by whom it was caused. America, at this time, exhibited the singular phenomenon of a nation uniting in defence of those rights which the Creator of man had conferred on him, against the most potent nation in the two hemispheres, to rescue herself from their arbitrary and despotic jurisdiction.

Many of you, fellow citizens, are well acquainted with the long train of abuses and usurpations, practised by the British government on her American colonies ; the burning of cities, the revocation of charters, the suspension of legislatures assembled to deliberate for the interest, the welfare and happiness of their constituents, the plunder of private property, the establishment of armies to overawe the defenceless inhabitants, the destruction of

lives, the wanton and barbarous violation of the fairer part of creation and the profanation of temples dedicated to the worship of Almighty GOD, occupy but a small space in the black catalogue of crimes which that nation had been instrumental in committing. A nation inheriting the principles and sentiments of their Saxon and Gothic ancestors could not endure the wicked and unconstitutional proceedings urged against them ; to have passed, in silence, the continual inroads made on their liberties, would have been, as expressed by an orator of those times, disloyalty. The Goddess of liberty, *per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum*, winging her way from the celestial regions, deigned, once more, to take up her abode among the children of men. Independence erected her standard ; the banners of freedom were unfurled, and myriads of her sons rallying around determined to receive with welcome arms the heavenly stranger. The statesmen and heroes who urged the all-important cause, resolved to shake the colossus of despotism to its centre ; and we have reason, Americans, devoutly, to thank that Being who holds the destinies of universal nature, that the termination of the contest answered their most sanguine expectations ; right and liberty, on the one hand, triumphed over prerogative and slavery on the other.

The tear of affection will glisten in the eye of the war-worn veteran, when he calls to his

mind the man who led the republican armies of America against the vice-gerent of Pandemonium, king George the third; tears of sympathy will roll down the cheek of the aged soldier, who now survives, covered with the wounds and scars inflicted in defence of his, and his country's rights, when he reflects on the situation of his country invaded by the myrmidons of Britain and the mercenary Hessians; here will he see the midnight assassin lurking around the mansion of his neighbor, when the earth is folded in the arms of sleep, watching for an opportunity, with the uplifted hand of violence, to execute his horrid deeds of death; there will he see a wretched, and unfortunate family, deprived of a son blooming in the vigor of youth, a daughter robed in the attire of innocence, a wife endeared to her husband by the affection, which is inseparable from an union of congenial souls; these will he see fall as victims to glut the vengeance of a vindictive Tory, or with their blood to moisten the tomahawk of a savage hell-hound of the wilderness; here will he behold a village, once the abode of gaiety and happiness, now demolished and desolate; the splendid edifices which once adorned it are now consumed by the fire of a barbarous enemy; there he will see an honest and industrious husbandman with his decent competency doomed to poverty and ruin by a merciless banditti from a British army.

These are among the sacrifices made by the revolutionary heroes for that Independence which is left as an inheritance to their posterity. Is there any person amidst this vast concourse of citizens, whose heart is so chilled with apathy, that he undervalues the price of our freedom, let him repair to the banks of the far distant St. Lawrence, where lie bleaching the bones of the immortal Montgomery; let him go to the heights of Charlestown, there, with his hand on his breast, while the tears of sorrow, involuntarily, gush from his streaming eyes, he will read, *hic jacet quem arma et scientia condecoraverunt*, here lies the man whom arts and arms adorned, the ingenuous, the courteous, the valiant Warren, the martyr in the cause of his country; the Leonidas of America; let him, in imagination, revert to the fate of Norfolk, there he will see a city in flames, the inhabitants at the disposal of those whose tenderest mercies are but cruelty, while the thunder of British cannon is scattering death in every direction; let him visit the fields of Monmouth, drenched in the best blood of the illustrious sons of America; let him approach the grand laboratory of misery, the prison-ships at New-York, where a civilized nation could vie with the savages in the improvements and refinements practiced in barbarity. Scenes like these tell us, in language louder than the thunders of Mount Sinai, the value of our liberty. I pass in silence, fellow

citizens, the situation of this town, when it was infested by the armed battalions of an enemy ; I forbear to call to your minds those acts of rapine and ferocity which could have been committed by none but barbarians ; I forbear to call to your minds the horrors of that day on which the LORD GOD of sabaoth was pleased to smile with complacency on your exertions and crown them with a most glorious victory ; I omit to bring to your recollection the shrieks, the agonies, and the groans of the wounded and dying, the tender affection for a brother, a father, or a son, whose blood now fertilizes your plains. These events have long been past, they have given way to the halcyon days of peace and liberty.

When other nations have emerged from servitude, when they have broken the bands of despotism, it was a temporary thing, and generally succeeded by a tyrannical usurper ; that universal diffusion of knowledge and correct principles, which gave rise to the American revolution, has been an utter stranger in the oriental world, where the progress of liberty has been slow, and has advanced by almost imperceptible degrees. That Egyptian darkness and Vandalic midnight, which have ever enveloped the mind of man on the eastern continent, presented an insurmountable barrier to the continuation of the political institutions of Greece and Rome ; it is, therefore, incumbent on every government, whose main spring

is virtue, to encourage literature in all its branches, to promote a laudable desire for mental improvement. Education is the *substratum* of representative government, and ignorance in the citizens would be a morbid disease, continually preying on its vitals; as air is to the animal and vegetable creation, so is information to a republic; it is necessary to the existence of a government which derives all its authority from the will and affections of the people: as vice is of so haggard a form that it needs but be seen to be embraced, so the evils attendant on despotism, thoroughly understood, will raze it in the dust; so the beauties, the harmonious operations of a great and extensive republic, properly portrayed, will establish for it a character more lasting than monuments of brass.

The principles of political morality should be, however, the prime object of study, by all who wish to retain that equal station to which they are, in justice, entitled. It was a knowledge of these principles, emanating from a Hortensius and a Cicero—from a Solon, a Lycurgus, and a Pericles—which could save the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. A dissemination of these principles has enabled modern France, in her late glorious struggle with the enemies of man, to wrest from tyrants some of her natural rights. A knowledge of these principles gave rise to the present form of government in the United States—a government of laws, a

government that operates equally on all professions, trades, and occupations; it protects the weak as well as the powerful, the indigent as well as the opulent. Under a sound administration of such a government, man resumes his native dignity; free and uncontrolled, he knows no Lord but his God; the dependants of despotic pride and courtly favor, in comparison with him, sink into their merited insignificance; no superior controls the exercise of his mind; like the grand luminary of day, he traverses the vast expanse of nature and explores the regions of philosophy; the happiness of his fellow men is his object, and his benevolence is limited only, by the confines of the universe.

Turn for a moment, to the situation of mankind in other governments; in the despotic and monarchical countries of the east, man insulted, abused and degraded by the noxious influence of slavery, falls far below the sphere assigned him by his Creator; and scarcely presumes to call himself a human being. At the rehearsal of the wicked and sanguinary deeds of a Tarquin, a Nero, a Domitian, or a Heliogabulus, the citizen of a free country imagines he hears the groans of millions rise up in judgment against them. What has been the history of the Alexanders, the Ghengis-Khans, the Cæsars and the Tamerlanes, but a narration of human butchery; a scene in which man, designed for more noble purposes, has converted his talents and power against his

fellow man, dealing around him death and destruction to all ages and conditions ; a scene in which the violence of ungovernable passion, inflated by the pampered minions of despotism, has carried the horrors of war into every hamlet, village, town and city in the eastern hemisphere ; a scene in which a cruel and barbarous soldiery are taught to imbrue their hands in the blood of their brothers, their sisters, their parents and their children ? To such a people, where one part of society is the destined prey of another, what are the inexhaustible treasures of Potosi, the unbounded riches of India ; what avails their flowery meads and meandering rivulets ; does the grand and picturesque scenery which surrounds them, their mountains towering amidst the etherial regions, their rivers rolling in majesty through their luxuriant plains, impart one solitary glimpse of happiness ? Far from it ; it is the mild government of liberty and law which raises man to a preeminent station and creates in him a relish for enjoyment ; it is the protection and security conferred by them which implants within his breast the sacred *amor patriæ* without which life is a curse.

From time immemorial, the Oriental world has been the theatre on which things have been conducted in the most preposterous manner : ecclesiastical delusion has, hermetically, sealed the eyes of the populace, aristocratical depravity has corrupted mankind and crowned heads have

conspired to desolate the face of nature : that Independence which is the heritage of freemen is destroyed, is lost amidst the ostentation and gaudy habiliments of those who claim distinction by the dignity of their blood.

By the adoption of the feudal system, the nobility, a junto of robbers, and picaroons, have laid an embargo on the labor, the conscience and the person of their vassals. The industrious mechanic, the enterprising manufacturer and the more humble day-laborer must all bow before the sceptre of power ; in the mean spirit of degradation, man, who is by nature equal with his fellow, who knows no superior, or inferior, approaches his master in a style unbecoming a brute : these are the concomitants of slavery.

But you, Americans, hail this anniversary, with extatic joy, as the day on which commenced a new order in government, as the auspicious morn which brought forth that inimitable instrument which has been read to you ; an instrument unrivalled but by its illustrious author ; you have still greater reason to rejoice that the principles therein contained was the basis of that constitution under which you and your posterity are to continue. While the subjects of the Ottoman Porte adore that vile being who styles himself " the shadow of GOD on earth," the citizens of this country revere that institution which guards, with vigilance, the personal security, the personal lib-

erty and private property of every individual in community ; these can never with impunity, be violated. A tyrannical administration may, for a short time, abuse the power committed to them, may make encroachments on these rights, but whenever the people, the only sovereigns of this country, have a knowledge of the improper conduct of their servants, they will dismiss them with the ignominy and execration which they justly deserve. The suffrages of the people, the just and well proportioned checks and balances of our constitution, are a powerful stimulus to the officers of government ; their duty and their interest combine to make them faithful to their constituents. Power, however it may endeavor to entrench itself in wealth, in profusion of equipage and ornament, in the splendor of attire, or in the sanctity of its situation, may, in a very short time, be hurled from its exalted situation by that efficacious corrective, the public will. Chicanery and cunning may, for a time, conceal the most excessive vices, the most atrocious crimes ; injustice, wickedness and oppression may cover themselves for a while, by plausible pretences, but sooner or later they will receive their merited punishment.

This principle of responsibility is, inseparably, annexed to every office in the government, from the tide-waiter to the Supreme Executive ; every person to whom authority is deputed

must give an account of his stewardship at stated times, which are defined and fixed by either the law or constitution. The doctrine of irresponsibility is the foster child of monarchy and in its texture are plainly to be seen the features of its parent. That the king can do no wrong is one of the fundamental principles of the British constitution, and the other branches of the government are equally exempt from inquiry, except the house of commons, who have indeed but a faint shadow of accountability, not being liable to have their conduct canvassed, at a shorter period than seven years; an ample time for "a junto of public spoilers, a pensioned confederacy of political craftsmen," to ruin any nation!!! This is the situation of the most free nation in the transatlantic world. The despot of Turkey tells you that he has the power of life and death over his subjects; that private property is at his control, that he is responsible to no one for his conduct. How different is this language from that found in your constitution; public agents are, by that instrument, compelled to pass the ordeal of popular investigation; the Supreme executive, once in four years, mingles with the mass of citizens; the Senate are accountable in six years, and the representatives may be ousted by their constituents at the end of two years. Every friend to a republican government considers this trait in the American constitution as of inestimable

value ; but of equal importance is that part provided for religious liberty ; the congress cannot establish any particular sect to the injury of another ; the union of Church and State, so familiar to other nations, is not recognized by our constitution. Religion is, here, placed on its proper foundation ; it is left to stand or fall, by its own intrinsic merit, or demerit. Is a man a candidate for a place of honor, or trust he is not to be questioned concerning his religion ; we have no test acts to bribe the dishonest to become hypocrites, and to disfranchise the upright ; these are left to that " stupendous fabric of human invention," the British constitution ; we have no racks and inquisitions, those pungent weapons of orthodoxy, to torture mankind into religion ; these are at the disposal of his most christian majesty, the king of Spain. Atheists and Theists, Mamometans and Christians, Protestants and Catholics, are equally the objects of public favor. If a man is competent to the discharge of an office, if his principles and actions coincide with the genius of the government, that he should be ineligible is unreasonable, it is pernicious to the public welfare, in most cases, by rendering, useless and inactive, preeminent talents and unshaken integrity. Freedom of religion is unknown to all other countries but France and America. Temporal and spiritual power are united in all despotic governments, religious intolerance is

of the essence of such establishments, persecution and cruelty are the appendages of these institutions; it is necessary to their existence, that there be a national hierarchy to blind mankind and keep them in ignorance that they may be the more completely servile.

Another barrier established by the constitution to counteract all arbitrary power in the unlawfully imprisoning a citizen, is the right to the writ of habeas corpus, a writ of the most extensive remedial nature, a writ demandable by every man, in whatever manner he may be detained, a writ that restores to a man his natural liberty, when confined contrary to the laws of his country. The constitution is so alive to the liberty of the citizens, that it permits not even the legislative authority to suspend this writ, except invasion or rebellion shall threaten the dissolution of government; in such an awful crisis, *Leges silent inter arma*, the civil must be controlled by the military power, has been the maxim among all nations; but such an order of things is much to be deprecated in a free government; inevitable necessity may justify the procedure; treason, clothed with the audacity of a Cataline, may raise its hideous head to such a height, as to require the interposition of power to prevent the bands of civil society being torn asunder.

The next property which distinguishes the American constitution from all modern or ancient institutions of a political nature, is that

its own internal energies afford a remedy for its defects. Imperfection is stamped on every thing of earthly origin. The pyramids of Egypt could not withstand the ravages of time, the grandeur of Balbec and Palmyra, the seats of ancient magnificence, is now in ruins, the arts and sciences have been buried for centuries, the Greek and Roman empires disappeared at the irruption of the northern barbarians. Our predecessors foresaw that the circumstances of this country would alter, that the manners and habits of the people would change, that mankind would be subject to great inconveniences under an unalterable constitution, that the gradual improvements among men would call imperiously, for modifications, that it would be folly to attempt to control the weight of public opinion for any future time, that the people would exercise the irresistible right to innovate on the established system, when they should discover defects; they therefore provided the most easy and expeditious method to the accomplishment of this end; they have left it to the fountain of political power; the people through the medium of their representatives, have the exclusive right to amend and alter the charter of their freedom. In the exercise of this function is manifested that power which every nation ought to reserve to itself. Fortunate usurpers, who have wrested this right from the community at large, have always attached a sacredness to the established

government, which no human workmanship deserves; reformation therefore, in such countries are always effected by means of insurrection, rebellion, revolution and civil wars.— Prudence to be sure, dictates, that institutions venerable for the wisdom contained in them, should not be changed for trivial inconveniences; but by the lapse of time they may become oppressive and require the interposition of the people. Let it not be said, that Democratic licentiousness will, in the exercise of this power, lead to a departure from our republican form of government; that the people, frequently, adopt measures hostile to their own interest; that they will imbibe ideas repugnant to the spirit of our constitution; that laws made by them will not be sufficiently energetic; that anarchy and revolution have been invariably connected with popular power. The good sense of an enlightened people is a sufficient security against these misfortunes. Experience of times past refutes the vile calumny, that the “people are their own worst enemies,” and evinces a disposition in them to preserve their own rights in as much purity as any *one man, or set of men* have been willing to do it for them.

The liberty of speech and the freedom of the press are, by the constitution, secured, and put above the control, or influence of the Congress. Destroy these securities and your other rights are gone forever; take this feature

from your Constitution and you tear from it its fairest leaf ; impair them in the least, and you sap the foundation of the best constitution on earth ; evil will be added to evil ; corruption, unrestrained by the salutary correction of the press, will find its way into the public councils ; power will assume a more overbearing aspect ; the suffrages of the citizens will be, scarcely, competent to check the aspiring ambition of public agents.

Having taken a cursory view of the *political* liberties, or those which are derived from the constitutional code, we ought, in the next place to examine our *civil* liberties, or those which arise from legislation : for what benefit can arise to the people, if laws are enacted subversive of that code, if a marked hostility exists in the law-making power to the principles there explicitly fixed and established ?

Few circumstances are more essential to the duration of civil liberty, than that the government should, at proper times, exercise all the constitutional powers vested in them ; and it is *absolutely* necessary to its existence, that the land-marks of the constitution should be abrogated under no pretence whatever. The history of this country exhibits two conflicting parties ; parties which have ever differed in the measures to be taken to accomplish the same end ; this division existed anterior to the revolution, and has been, with modifications, handed down to the present time. One por-

tion of the American mind has ever been directed towards monarchy, as the best and most energetic, as the most effectual government to secure the general happiness; while another has considered, that a qualified democracy is the best adapted to compass the same object. One party have ever struggled to establish a system of distinction, to introduce a national religion, to blend temporal and spiritual authority, to throw unlimited power into the hands of the government: another have, as indefatigably, persevered in the ancient and constitutional system of equality and religious toleration; they have advocated a total separation of the spurious conjunction of Church and State; they have discarded the principle, that there should be an irresponsible junto created for the sole purpose of domineering over the people.

This freedom of opinion is what is guaranteed to every man, and we have no right to impute improper motives to any person, provided he follows the honest dictates of his own conscience. The first manifestation of these extreme fundamental principles of government was under the name of Whig and Tory, names of celebrity in this country, and whose sentiments are thoroughly understood. However, by the treaty of Paris, the Tories were in a measure frustrated; they were obliged to abandon the idea of establishing a foreign despotism in America. Notwithstanding these impedi-

ments, they determined to destroy the liberties of this country, if possible; they received a considerable accession by emigration from Europe, and occasional apostates from the principles of democracy; the spirit which had actuated them in the revolution had been for a while dormant; but it burst forth with redoubled fury at the adoption of the present constitution; they then exhibited that ardor for their favorite system which has ever characterised the friends of arbitrary power; they openly avowed their hostility to a republican government; they contended that mankind were not capable of governing themselves, that a constitution must be formed partaking strongly of the properties of the British, that the tenure of office should place the president and senate beyond all responsibility. Our friends of energetic government were, however, again defeated; the good sense of the people once more triumphed, and they have no reason to repent their determination.

As a distinguished personage, of whom we read in ancient story, metamorphosed himself, that he might the better circumvent our first parents—so the monarchical and aristocratical confederacy, after the adoption of the constitution, thought it would be for the advancement of their schemes to change their outside appearance; they accordingly assumed the name of “friends of order and good government.” As Satan, by the comeliness of his person, by the urbanity of his manners and his mellifluous

eloquence, deceived the mother of the human race—so the friends of order and good government had the address to ingratiate themselves with the people; they obtained the reins of government. Then commenced that gigantic system of patronage, which, at a future period, was to confer a diadem on some unprincipled and ambitious Cæsar; a system as odious to the American people as it was dangerous to republican institutions.

An host of beardless boys must be collected under pretence of repelling French invasion, but for the real purpose of wearing black cockades and dancing to the tune of "Rule New-England;" an army of *officers* must be created to bask in the rays of presidential favor; a navy must be built as a panacea for French deprivations on commerce; internal taxation and land taxes must be resorted to in order to support the dignity of the nation; by an Alien Law, a power more arbitrary than was ever claimed by a British king in the height of prerogative, must be given to an American president; and to complete the climax of oppression, the mouths of five millions inhabitants must be closed in silence, lest the agonizing groans of an expiring constitution, should resuscitate the latent energies of an exasperated people.

But, fellow citizens, the reign of political delusion is past; the American people have settled upon their own character; the meas-

tures subversive of your liberties have been condemned by the audible voice of the public will ; principle is substituted for terror ; morality and religion are no longer propagated at the point of the bayonet ; standing armies and powerful navies no longer eat out your substance ; the prosperity of peace is no longer to be obtained by war ; the cockade is no longer the *role d'equipage*, the universal passport for admission into fashionable and private circles ; union is no longer taught by discord ; the constitution is administered on its own principles. It is a long time since you have seen the broad shoulders of poverty sink under the weight of oppressive taxation ; it is a long time since you have seen the missionaries of executive vengeance convert the seat of justice into a political inquisition ; it is a long time since you have seen one of your citizens dragged from one end of the state to another and there carried before an American Jeffries ; it is some time since you have heard the groans of such an one echo from the noisome walls of a dungeon ; it is a long time since the barbarity of the dark ages has been enforced against a citizen whose only crime was that of publishing the truth.

These are lasting monuments of the danger of delegating power to the sworn enemies of democracy ; they are solemn mementos to the people, that they ought to confide in the friends of the constitution ; that they ought to invest

tigate the conduct of those who are placed as  
 guardians over the liberties of their country ;  
 they call on the people to be cool, to be delib-  
 erate, to persevere in the support of the rights  
 of man, and the acclamations which rend the  
 air on this national anniversary will be heard  
 till thundering *Catopaxi* shall cease to burn and  
 the cloud-top'd *Chimborazo* is sunk in the ocean.

#### ERROR OF THE PRESS.

In the great haste with which the foregoing work was  
 executed, it is regretted that an accident of magnitude  
 occurred. In the 9th page, between the 11th and 12th  
 lines, the following should have been inserted :

'needs be seen to be abandoned, as virtue'