

AN

Oration,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE

Associated Disciples of Washington,

MEMBERS

OF THE

HOPKINTON, CONCORD, AND DUNBARTON
SOCIETIES,

AT HOPKINTON, NEW-HAMPSHIRE,

JULY 5, 1813,

BEING

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF.

American Independence.

BY BROTHER JOHN H. SLACK.

CONCORD:

PRINTED BY GEORGE HOUGH.

1813.

HOPKINTON, JULY 5, 1813.

SIR,

THE undersigned, appointed a committee to wait on JOHN H. SLACK, Esq. in behalf of the Washington Benevolent Society of Hopkinton, tender him their thanks for his elegant, scientific, and patriotic Oration, pronounced this day before them and their Brothers of the Societies of Concord and Dunbarton; and request a copy for the press.

EPHRAIM BARKER, }
JOSEPH B. TOWNE, } Committee.
MOODY SMITH, . }

John H. Slack, Esq.

GENTLEMEN,

IN consequence of your renewed request, leave for you to publish my Oration, with a copy of it, is granted; not, however, from my belief that it will interest the Washington Benevolent Society, or the public; but from a consciousness that it *can do them no harm*; and that, if it have merits, it will be censured only by *fools*.

Accept, Gentlemen, for yourselves and the Society, my grateful acknowledgements, for your politeness and attention.

I have the honor to be,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN H. SLACK.

Messrs. Ephraim Barker, }
Joseph B. Towne, } Committee.
Moody Smith, . }

Oration.

CVILIZED nations, while free from corruption or tyranny, have always perpetuated the remembrance of their peculiar blessings.

The practice is founded in wisdom, as a proof both of their gratitude and national virtue ; it has been sanctioned, even by a *special command* from Heaven. When the children of Abraham, the father of the faithful, were, by the interpositions of Divine Wisdom, emancipated from slavery, and had organized a government independent of that from which they had alienated, by the mandate of Jehovah, that glorious day was annually celebrated.

To commemorate, therefore, the anniversary of *our* Independence; to reiterate the sorrows and the joys experienced to establish it; to re-impress the mind with a sense of its excellency; and to re-awaken those useful inquiries, how we may secure to ourselves its invaluable privileges, and transmit them unimpaired to our children, speaks the *grateful feelings* and *duty* of the *American* people,

The acquirement of our country's freedom seems, on reflection, almost a miracle : an infant people of colonies resisting an imperious nation—a nation, whose power and resources, and whose victories, were then almost co-extensive with the habitable globe !

This is an event, in history, without a parallel; an achievement no less extraordinary than the redemption of this powerful and *once flourishing* Republic; its redemption by blood, from degradation and servitude.

The revolution, which established our Independence, unlike all others, endangered not the liberties, or, in the least degree, infringed the rights of foreign powers; but highly conduced to their best interest; it opened, to mankind *universally*, a new region of science, of commerce, and of enterprize.

Those emotions for liberty, which, in times of their prosperity, other nations had experienced, were, by our example, partially revived and enjoyed; they were now re-inkindled, in every soul, in the liberal governments of Europe; their subjects were roused from political lethargy, and told, "it was *base* to suffer when they ought to act."

By our mild laws of naturalization and citizenship, the poor and the persecuted, the rich and the enterprising, of all nations, here found an asylum.

Under such advantages, well might our country have been called the second Eden; well might have hardy agriculture turned its extensive wildernesses into luxuriant fields; well might have architecture adorned it with splendid domes and cities; well might have manufactory erected her habitations on its thousand streams; and active commerce have transported its products to the four quarters of the world, and returning laid their treasures at our feet.

Fuimus Americani! fuit America!
Et ingens gloria Americanorum!!

Such were the first fruits of our Independence; such were our prospects, in the stern—pure age of the Republic.

The glorious success of our revolution even induced many foreign nations to attempt a reform of their governments; but such had been their corruption, they soon relapsed into their former reveries—a state of insensibility to their dangerous situation: Europe's bloodiest usurper then arose; and, with painful reluctance, we must leave them at his mercy, commingling their cries with the clanking of their slavery-chains.

But, thanks be to Heaven! our nation lay not within his grasp—we have been twice preserved! Shall we not, then, with gratitude and joy, notice such a Jubilee as this!

Impressed with this duty, we, my brethren and fellow citizens, now enter the sanctuary to offer a tribute of gratitude to the God of our fathers; who, in mercy, has yet continued to us MANY of the blessings of freedom; while the blood-stained chariot of Mars has crushed, in his furious career, every Republic on the continent of Europe.

Though, *as yet*, we writhe not under the scourge of despotism; though we shout not, *this day*, at a coronation, with a deceived and infatuated rabble, "*Vive l'Empereur!*" though we *now* have a constitution, imparting equal rights to our countrymen—one of our own adoption; yet no anniversary was ever celebrated, by any people, with gloomier prospects, and with more fearful apprehensions of future dreadful consequences, than *this*, by the friends of America.

I must here omit the enumeration of those interesting causes, which opened and closed the sublime scenes of the revolution—which opened and led the way to our national prosperity and glory.

I must omit, too, the mention of those great and good men, who, for our freedom, “faced the cannon’s mouth, and heard its thunder;” who knocked the vile manacles of vassalage from our then loyal but disheartened colonists, and “told them they were free.”

But, our PATRIOT-FATHERS of the revolution *can never be forgotten*; already are their names recorded in history, and in *our own memories*; ‘they LIVE in our song:’ and these sentiments of gratitude which we now religiously cherish, instilled into the minds of our posterity, shall continue living and everlasting monuments of their high worth and valor.

Some few observations, however, on the origin and nature of government; the principles which support, and those which destroy it; such as feel the pure flame of liberty; and such as *will blow* it to a destructive conflagration; *will*, it is hoped, for a few moments, engage the attention, and, *in future*, the reflections, of this enlightened and respected assembly.

A love of freedom is deeply implanted in the human mind. Instinctive at first, it soon grows to a principle; it calls into exercise all the generous feelings, all the social affections of man; and, for his guardianship and protection, impels him to society and government.—Hence, that degree of purity upon which governments are originally established; hence, the simplicity of its forms, and that sacrifice of some individual rights for the

security of those of the general compact; and hence, the origin of a *Republican* government.

But sad experience has demonstrated, that *no species* of government can long exist, without the aid of other principles than a *mere love* of liberty. The seeds of corruption, also, are sown in the composition of man: These germinate and flourish, in different degrees, according to the nutrition they draw from vice; and like the wild plants of nature, **THEY** require *no cultivation*, **THEY** are the spontaneous productions of his passions.

That *liberty may flourish*, **MAN** must be *cultivated*.—*This is a plant of celestial origin*. It can be *naturalized* in a government, *only* by the *united culture* of the *virtues*. But among imperfect beings, every system of *practical* government must necessarily be defective, or at most can possess only a *relative perfection*, consisting in its *suitableness* to the *particular* circumstances of the body politic.

Were the **OMNISCIENT BEING** to devise a system of government for *any* nation, **the result** would be a system of civil polity, which, being adapted to their genius and particular situation, would consequently exhibit, in glowing colors, the features of their imperfections.

This is not a mere assertion founded on *hypothesis*, but on *fact*: **OMNISCIENCE HIMSELF** did direct the business of legislation for the ancient Hebrews; yet *they* enjoyed no liberty. *Why?* Because the government, perfect and holy as its laws were, *restrained not their passions*; but left **them** to be regulated by *each individual*.

A government, therefore, in itself considered, may be *perfect*; and yet, for its *permanency*, it must require a correspondent *perfection* in its *subjects*—and this must be

general, or a *virtuous minority* would derive *no benefit* from the confederacy.

Hence, the question concerning the best form of government, depends for solution on a correct knowledge of the moral habits and condition of that people for whom it is intended.

Different nations, from *climate* or other *local* circumstances, have seldom been associated by *similar* constitutions and forms of government.

The Republican, which alone is founded on equal rights, is infinitely the *best* form of government for a generally enlightened and virtuous people; but when such a people have become ignorant, corrupt, and licentious, they may be deceived and flattered: Despotism succeeds.

The wisdom of a Republican constitution consists in so nicely balancing the *passions*, *fears*, and *interests* of men, that *even its defects* shall contribute to their strength; so *individual* ambition and thirst for power may become *general restraint*, conducive to the good of the whole.

As in the human body, a perfect balance of its several members and their functions, the solids and fluids, constitutes health: so in the political body, when a balance of the passions is preserved, when each individual does his duty, there is political health; and in the public prosperity every citizen has his reward.

Behold, the good man! submitting to innumerable evils, patiently sustaining every privation, stemming the torrent of popular clamor—yet steady, and *steadily* pursuing his duty, with one arm raised in defence of his injured rights, the other, in act of conjuring eloquence, to

unite his jarring countrymen—on him, on *such a man*, the eyes of his guardian Angel are fixed with complacency, and the benevolent Seraph is ready to exclaim, “ Well done! well done! thou good and faithful servant !”

But, not so with the *Democratic* demagogue, who holds association with the vulgar and the vicious to promote his *little self*; who, with systematic meanness, couches low to deceive, as the fawning serpent licked the dust, in flattery, to deceive the mother of man. From such a creature, the eyes of all *good* men are averted with disgust and horror; and his evil genius alone, applauds and cheers him, along the way to infamy and disgrace.

But speculations on civil government often prove fallacious, from the circumstance of their being founded on too flattering an opinion of human nature.-----Man is frequently regarded as a creature who loves the light of Truth, and obeys the dictates of Reason; every movement of whose soul joins in symphony with the social and general interest, and every fibre vibrates in unison with the public good. The *people* labor under no contamination but such as had been engendered by a bad form of government, or from an administration by corrupt and intriguing rulers. Unshackle them, (say such theorists) from systems of monarchy and hierarchy---free them from the absurd notions they have imbibed from villainous politicians and priests, and they would never fail to judge and act correctly. Give them only freedom, and means of political knowledge; and, with undeviating steps, they would tread the paths of virtue, of wisdom, and of liberty.

On such principles, the closet *visionary* builds his political speculations. However corrupt are individua

he regards the *people*, as an aggregate body, in the light of beings uncontaminated and pure.

The writings of many French philosophers are fraught with such visionary ideas: they have been extensively circulated; they have been read with avidity; and *millions* have drunken the intoxicating poison. Even in *this country*, these theories, by a great portion of our citizens, were received with raptures of applause: they were read as perfect *models* of republican liberty: a political *millennium*, they fondly believed, had commenced; and that regenerated France would regenerate the world.

Flattery is delicious to corrupted man. With raptures of joy do a people hear that they are “wise as serpents and harmless as doves”—that their judgment is unerring, and their natures mild—that, in their *collective* capacity, they can do no wrong—that *their* voice is the voice of **GOD**. Such *may* be the inhabitants of Jupiter, or Herschel; or of some other of the superior planets: but this flattering description comports not with the character of **MAN**.

Were human nature free from *weakness* and *imperfection*, and possessed of *Angelic* purity, government might easily be secured against an infringement on the rights of man; or rather, no usurpation of these rights would ever be attempted: but, as in all preceding ages, so in the present, the general predominance of selfishness, the flattery, the intrigues and passions it creates, lead from the extreme of liberty to the gloomy abyss of despotism.—Craft enlists ignorance and penury in its service; hypocrisy leads simplicity in its train; and knavery outwits honesty.

Daring ambition, in the fair guise of patriotism, concealing its poniard, with servile adulation wins the multitude; then strikes the death-blow to their liberties.— When ambition *to possess power* becomes the ruling passion, men, according to a diversity of circumstances, act sometimes a *comical*, sometimes a *tragical* part.

In an absolute *monarchy*, where the prince is the sole fountain of honor and power, aspiring men, while they observe a haughty demeanor towards the *people*, devoutly offer their daily incense of adulation at the foot of the throne. The *monarch* is approached with bended knee, and is addressed with all the arts of cringing sycophancy. But in a pure republic, where all offices and power emanates from the people, the same *intrigue* and *flattery* are used to gain the attention and win the affections of the *sovereign* multitude.

A crafty, ambitious man, determined to rise “per fas aut nefas,” by just or unjust measures, easily bends to particular circumstances and situations. At Rome, under the hierarchal sway, he pressed among the foremost of the crowd to kiss the feet of the chief Pontiff: At Venice, to shew his obsequiousness and veneration to the Council and Doge: But no where has he such a boundless range for practising the cunning arts of deception and intrigue, as in a *free elective Republic*; here, he “stoops to conquer;” here, he lays “couching head on ground, with cat-like watch;” and though in reality his heart be cold as snow on Heckla, he affects to yearn in commiseration for the people; for them he pours forth professions of unbounded attachment to their rights; he changes, with the changing times—and *always* to the wishes of the *rabble*.

Such a man must be watched with an eagle eye ; his flatteries are offered to willing ears; his seductive arts prevail; and he rides triumphant on the full tide of popularity—while able and learned patriots, too honest and independent, too noble and virtuous, to rise to power by such dissimulation, are uniformly neglected; and loaded—Oh! Ingratitude, where is thy blush!—loaded with abuse and execration:-----A dangerous ambition more frequently lurks behind the specious mask of *affection* for the people, than for the purity and efficiency of government.—History teaches, that the former has been found a much more certain avenue to the introduction of despotism, than the latter; and that those men who have overturned the liberties of Republics, commenced their helish career by paying *exclusive* respect to the people, while they were secretly endeavoring to destroy those principles and virtues which secure to them their civil liberties, and stability to their government. Witness, the Republics of Greece, of Rome, of England, and of France. These were self-destroyed—these were corrupted by the syren song of flattery. That virtue, which so long characterized the States of Greece, for ages supported the respectability and power of the Amphyctionic Council: but the event demonstrated that the virtue of the Council alone supported its government. When Philip of Macedon, by his artifices, gained a seat among its members, he corrupted them, and perverted its object: their collected virtue soon became insufficient to preserve their union or constitutional powers. Their sun of liberty soon went down! An eternal night of ignorance, barbarism, and slavery, succeeded!

The popular arts of a Cæsar paved his way to the subversion of the Roman Republic. In the factions at Rome,

he was the prime demagogue; he zealously espoused the people's cause, against the oppression and abuses of the patrician aristocracy. With his flattering words and patriotic harangues, he seduced them; with solemn and frequent professions of his high regard for their rights, he insinuated himself into their affections, and became their darling, their idol: and were the people so ungrateful as to refuse, in return for such civilities, the total surrender of their liberties? They were not. When that aspiring general, (for he instigated the people to delight in war) on the altar of whose ambition a million of lives, in foreign countries, had been sacrificed; when Cæsar marched his legions against the Republic to Rome; yet, humiliating as the thought is, the *people* were his partizans, his friends; rending the air with shouts of applause, they proclaimed him perpetual dictator—and, with frantic willingness, submitted their necks to his iron yoke. Yet the Romans were brave and haughty; they loved liberty even more than life: but their *national* virtue had departed!

A Cromwell subverted the Republic of England. Possessed of a strong mind and deep subtilty; with an extensive knowledge of human nature, he united the jarring factions, fomented by the execution of the unfortunate Charles, and gained the unshaken confidence of the people. "Carried by his natural temper to an imperious and domineering policy," he yet knew when to employ the most profound dissimulation, the most oblique and refined artifice, the semblance of the greatest moderation and humility: his speeches were full of protestations of attachment to the rights and prerogatives of the citizens; and were not unfrequently enforced with sighings and with tears.

The duplicity and intrigues of Bonaparte, by which he enslaved so many nations, and, infuriate with power, mounted an imperial throne, are too familiar to be noticed.

The same principles, with their concomitant practices, which led to the usurpation and subversion of these Republics, are by thousands of our countrymen cherished with the most endearing affection. The political dissensions which for years have disturbed the tranquility of our country, are felt, and deeply regretted, by every virtuous and well informed citizen. The origin of these dissensions is so well known, that to mention it at this time is unnecessary. Suffice it to say, that they have produced a combination which threatens to subvert the pillars of our Republic!

From the first adoption of the Federal Constitution, our form of government has been substantially the same: the basis on which it rests, is civil and religious liberty: these must be supported, in a great measure, by a mild, yet steady direction of the people, in the establishment and support of institutions calculated to diffuse and cherish knowledge and virtue. But, alas! such institutions are now almost uniformly neglected; the nation has become corrupt and licentious!

The general neglect of religion, and of religious institutions, in this country, is, by wise politicians, a subject of deep regret. So far from being considered a *qualification* for high posts of honor and trust, it is, by thousands, and of our most influential men, considered rather a *disqualification*. How frequently are men insulted for professing a veneration for its institutions, and the pious examples of our fathers, *even on the floor of Congress!*

If religious establishments have a tendency to promote morality and virtue, they ought most surely to receive the liberal patronage of an enlightened Republic. To be free, a people must be enlightened: the establishment, therefore, of literary institutions, when founded on liberal principles, is a main pillar in Liberty's temple. But, alas !---but, *on these*, I make no comments.

As *political* information tends to soften the asperity of party, and expose factions; and as it can in no way be disseminated with so great facility as by periodical publications; this privilege, if not abused, is a national blessing. But the *liberty* of the PRESS has now become *licentiousness*—no longer is it a vehicle of correct information. Upstart editors, both ignorant and factious, are now suffered to direct it: they poison the public mind, by diffusing among the people their budgets of lumber and falsehood: when party purposes are to be effected, they level, indiscriminately, their shafts of calumny and invective, at the low and contemptible, the virtuous and patriotic.

An enlargement of the territory of a Republic, by dispersing and thinning the population, and by multiplying places of defence, tends to diminish, rather than increase, its political strength. It creates a diversity of habits and pursuits too heterogeneous to be combined for the general good. Hence, in a country like ours, the State sovereignties may be rent with factions; and, from difference of interest, arising from their local situation, be induced to acts of legislation inconsistent with the interest of the General Government. The United States exhibit a spectacle, no where else to be found on the globe; nor indeed in the annals of history, either ancient or modern. ~~It~~

this country, which professes the purest Republicanism, and a most sacred regard for the rights of man, vast numbers of our fellow creatures are held in bondage—and our laws entail slavery on their posterity. Do these practices strengthen the principles of a *free* government? Are they not calculated to make tyrants? Judge with candor—will they not establish *habits* in those sections of our country, which must destroy *all* government but aristocracy or despotism?

These are evils in our beloved country, greatly to be feared. Let us, then, on this day consecrated to Freedom, interchange our disapprobation of such licentious and ruinous practices----Let us, of *all* parties, raise our united voice, and swear we can no longer patronize or allow them. For, my fellow citizens, should these be continued, all the horrors of a French revolution will soon be acted here—scenes of bloodshed and slaughter, which tongue cannot utter, or language depict!

Should our government build a navy, whose sails may overspread the whole ocean; should it fortify *every inch* of land on our sea-board and the frontiers, impregnable as Gibraltar; and every measure of defence be adopted; these would not secure us against licentiousness, factions, and despotism. No—there must be—and immediately—a reformation in our countrymen; or, “short as the holds on life are,” *we ourselves* may live to read “*hic jacet libertas*,” on the tomb-stone of our Republic!

The members of the Washington Benevolent Society claim, on this occasion, a few observations, aside from the audience.

BRETHREN,

The present is the most alarming and eventful period in the annals of time. Not *two nations* merely, but the *whole civilized world* is in arms! This is a period "big with the fate" of States and Empires; the events of which will probably "develope the destinies of America."

This crisis, then, demands the vigilance of every friend to this country—demands the most vigorous exertions for the preservation of its liberties.

If we believe that virtue is the only basis on which our Republic can with safety rest; if we believe *our* citizens are imbibing those principles of corruption, which, more than arms, destroyed the nations of Europe; if we do really believe there live men in *this country*, who, by plausible theories and "eloquence of words," are laboring to "bind this people with invisible chains;" with what pleasure do we anticipate the usefulness of our rising Institution—and how much in unison with our feelings is this maxim of wisdom, "when *bad men combine, good men should unite!*"

You know too well, my brethren, the tenets of your profession, to require arguments to prove their utility, if practised: you are too well acquainted with the design of your Institution to be told, that a correct understanding of the ~~constitutions~~ and administrations of the State and General Governments, together with pure morals, and an exercise of the benevolent and humane affections, is in the citizens indispensably necessary to perpetuate the blessings of a *free, liberal, and happy* Republican government.

Your Institution, notwithstanding the virulence and opposition of its enemies, is in this country unrivalled for abilities and patriotism; it has already become popular, extensive, and powerful. In New-York and Connecticut, in Massachusetts and New-Hampshire, the principles of your Order, and of WASHINGTON, are triumphantly increasing. Let the Star you have seen rising in the East encourage your hearts, animate your hopes, and quicken your exertions; it is the *sure* harbinger of greater good.

It is not for *men* that you contend; but for the *administration* of our Government, on the *free, Republican,* and *NEUTRAL* principles of the Federal Constitution, as administered by WASHINGTON. You have taken this Constitution for your guide: admit then no person into your Society, who will not revere and defend it as the Palladium of his rights, the *Ægis* of his Independence.

Let me exhort you, (says Junius) never to suffer an invasion of your political Constitution: be assured, that the laws which protect us in our civil rights, grow out of this; and that they must fall or flourish with it.

It is greatly to be feared, that there is establishing in this country a powerful opposition to the genuine spirit of our Federal Compact, under the specious and imposing garb of *patriotism*. To check the growth of this, and to bring back the Government to its former purity, is the summit of our wishes, and the grand aim we have in view. Under these impressions, and with these motives, have we associated: and we are in duty bound to invite the honest and the good, *who are not our brothers*, to unite *their* exertions with *ours*, for the accomplishment of an object so desirable, so necessary.

And permit me to remind you of the duties which you, as members of this Fraternity, are bound to perform—duties to yourselves and fellow men. You are to acquire *correct* political information, and “communicate”—you are to practise *benevolence*, and encourage it in others. Will you see your fellow men traduced and injured?—Will you see them pining under misfortunes and distress? And will you refuse to defend and relieve them? Will you refuse to pour the balm of consolation into their afflicted bosoms? ~~These~~, if you would promote virtue, are indispensable—their duties, as members of this Society, you are solemnly bound, “upon your honor,” to discharge.

Finally, my brethren, let us live and act agreeably to our solemn professions and obligations; let us NOT wear the badges of *our* Order undeservedly; let us prove ourselves worthy the proud appellation we take; and *worthy disciples of WASHINGTON*.