

N. H. Historical Society

A N

O R A T I O N,

PRONOUNCED AT EXETER

ON THE FOURTH DAY OF JULY 1800,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

By GEORGE SULLIVAN, Esquire.



FROM THE PRESS OF H. RANLET, EXETER, NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

1800.



SIR,

Exeter, 5th July, 1800.

I am authorized and desired by the Selectmen of the town to present you their cordial thanks for your elegant and patriotic Oration delivered yesterday, and to request a copy for publication. At the same time I cannot forbear expressing to you, from my own knowledge, the entire approbation and high pleasure with which it was heard, by the company at whose particular desire it was composed.

I am, Sir, with no less personal than official respect,

Your very humble servant,

SAMUEL TENNEY, one of the Board.

GEORGE SULLIVAN, Esq.



SIR,

I have to return you my sincere thanks for the very obliging manner in which you have been pleased to communicate to me the favorable, but perhaps too partial, opinion entertained by the Selectmen and Gentlemen of the town, of the Oration delivered by me; and also of their request of a copy for publication. Agreeably to their desire I deliver the requested copy.

I am, Sir, with sentiments of the highest respect,

Your obedient servant,

GEO. SULLIVAN.

HON. JUDGE TENNEY.

ORATION.

TO celebrate the annual return of those days, which have been distinguished by events important to the happiness of the people, is a custom which has prevailed among all civilized nations. In conformity to this long-established, this salutary institution, it becomes Americans to commemorate the auspicious day on which the political ties, that had connected their country with Great-Britain, were dissolved ; and on which America “ assumed her separate and equal station among the powers of the earth.” Amid the vast variety of events recorded in the history of nations, none can be found more deserving of celebration, none that can more justly challenge the gratitude of a people, than the establishment of our country’s independence. The day, on which the States of United America rose from the humble condition of British colonies to the rank of an independent nation, will be as memorable, as it was extraordinary in the annals of the world. Its memorial will be cherished while freedom shall have votaries—It is stamped in characters never to be obliterated from the records of fame.

Americans, the celebration of the birth-day of your empire is dictated no less by wisdom than by gratitude. By its observance you make an annual sacrifice at the shrine of freedom ; you make a solemn declaration that you venerate and sacredly adhere to those glorious principles, which conducted your country to independence ; and you pledge yourselves never to surrender *that* independence, but with your lives.

Those noble, those sublime principles, which led to the establishment of our national independence, swayed in the bosoms of our famed forefathers. An ardent, an invincible attachment to liberty formed a distinguishing trait in their character. Deprived by the lawless hand of power of those rights, which they claimed from the Sovereign of the universe, they fled from the sword of persecution in their native land to the then uncultivated and inhospitable shores of America. Animated by the noblest motives, which can impel man to action, they encountered with cheerfulness the perils of the ocean; they set at defiance the pains of hunger, nakedness, and disease; they regarded death itself with every species of torture, which the ingenuity of savages could invent, as far less terrible than slavery. After suffering innumerable toils and incredible hardships, those illustrious emigrants converted the wilds and mountains of America into the favorite residence of freedom.

For a long series of years from the time in which our country had arrived at such a degree of importance, as to attract the attention of the British government, she was regarded in no other light than as an instrument of commerce. The laws which were made, and the restrictions which were imposed upon her, were all of a commercial nature; the inconveniences, which resulted from them, were small and were felt without a murmur. Americans bowed to them with the same submissive reverence, as children to the commands of a parent. While Great-Britain exercised her supremacy in regulating the commerce of our country; while she contented herself with a monopoly of our trade, and made no attempt to draw from us a revenue, our situation was prosperous and flourishing; and the commerce, power, and grandeur of Britain rapidly increased. Had this enlightened commercial policy been pursued, America might long have continued an appendage of the British empire.

Immediately after the conclusion of a war, the most glorious to the arms of England of any to be found in her his-

tory; a war, in which the formidable powers of France and Spain were humbled and compelled to form an inglorious peace, the scene was changed—a new system was prepared for the government of our country. At this period of prosperity, when Britain had subdued the natural rivals of her grandeur and had reached the highest point of greatness, a deliberate plan was concerted to reduce the inhabitants of America to a state of slavery. As Americans had shared in the toils and dangers of the war against France and Spain; as they had shed their blood for the aggrandisement of England, and had contributed to the success of her arms; they expected to enjoy, in common with the rest of the empire, the blessings of peace and the advantages of victory. But they were not long permitted to indulge this pleasing expectation. The folly and barbarity of Britain soon presented to them the melancholy alternative of slavery or death. From this unfortunate æra the affairs of England became distracted; the spirit of wisdom, offended at her conduct, abandoned her councils; and the sun of her glory, declining from its meridian, appeared to hasten to its setting.

In an hour of infatuation, a corrupt ministry, in order to relieve Great-Britain from the oppressive weight of an immense national debt—to support her towering greatness, which excited the envy and alarmed the fears of Europe—and to supply her future extravagance and profusion—conceived the unjust, impolitic, and ruinous scheme of raising a revenue from America. The British parliament asserted the unreasonable, the unfounded claim of imposing taxes on Americans without their consent. The first exercise of this pretended right appeared in the memorable stamp act. This tax was imposed on our countrymen by an assembly of men, in which they were not, and from their local situation could not be represented. The people of America knew it to be a principle of the English constitution, the privileges and advantages of which they claimed as their birth-right, that the property of no man should be taken from him without his consent, or that of his representatives. Nay more, they knew

it to be a principle founded on the eternal, the immutable laws of nature and of justice. They foresaw that if this claim of taxation, unlimited in its extent and endless in its duration, were acquiesced in, they would be slaves; they would become pensioners on the bounty of the British parliament for all that they possessed. Not content with imposing on Americans this unwarrantable tax, the parliament asserted their supremacy in the most unqualified terms, and declared that they had a right to bind them in all cases whatsoever. These claims at once so unjust, so unconstitutional, and so utterly subversive of liberty, were indignantly rejected by three millions of freemen, who were determined to sacrifice their lives, rather than to exhibit a tame, servile submission.

The people of Great-Britain, listening to the persuasive voice of interest, and impressed with a belief, that in proportion as their brethren on this side the Atlantic should be loaded with taxes, they should be eased of their burden, were pleased with the iniquitous scheme of the ministry; and warmly advocated the doctrine of parliamentary omnipotence. Americans stated their rights and the violations of them, and remonstrated in the moderate, but dignified and determined language of freemen. Britons regarded the remonstrances of oppressed freedom, as the dictates of a daring spirit of rebellion. They did not reflect that the principles, which actuated our countrymen, had always been considered as sacred by their ancestors—They did not reflect that they were the same principles, which once inspired the illustrious HAMBDEN and those glorious patrons of freedom, who dared to oppose the arbitrary impositions of the house of Stuart.

The King, misguided by men, who did not merit his confidence, and indulging a wish, so congenial to the nature of royalty, for arbitrary power, approved the ministerial expedient and the proceedings of parliament. He, who should have protected the violated rights of his people, gave his sanction to their subversion. He was deaf to the united voices of reason, justice,

and humanity, pleading in behalf of his much injured subjects in America.

When the inhabitants of our country perceived, that the King had united with an unprincipled ministry to reduce them to slavery, they no longer viewed him as their rightful sovereign; they justly considered themselves as released from their allegiance to the crown. Allegiance was the price of protection; when the King, far from protecting, attempted to degrade them to a state of vassalage, their allegiance was at an end.

Appealing to heaven for the rectitude of their intentions and the justice of their cause, the representatives of the people of America, agreeably to the wishes of their constituents, on the *FOURTH DAY OF JULY* 1776, declared the United colonies to be free, sovereign, and independent states.

Americans, let us contemplate the noble, the glorious spectacle, which our country presented to the world, on the day which we are now assembled to commemorate. Such an ardent love of liberty, such a degree of patriotism and determined bravery no nation ever exhibited.

At the time when our national existence commenced, the military prowess of Great-Britain was the subject of praise and admiration in every quarter of the globe; she was by far the most formidable power in the world. Queen of the sea, her mighty fleets were triumphantly wafted over every part of the widely expanded ocean; she possessed troops well disciplined, and second to none on earth in bravery; she threatened to destroy the balance of power, which European sovereigns had long endeavored to maintain, and on the preservation of which their possessions depended. The most powerful Kings felt their thrones insecure and dreaded the exertion of her arms; the nations of Europe trembled at the mention of her name.

Great-Britain thus formidable was obstinately determined to subdue our country. Already had her hostile fleets filled our ports & her hostile armies had spread desolation on our shores. At this moment a people, almost unknown to civilized nations, was seen to dispute the arbitrary claims, and to bid defiance to the mighty strength of Britain. That an infant nation "with scarcely a weapon to attack," unsupported by any alliance, without government, without funds, who beheld in her troops valor without discipline, should dare to contend with that gigantic power, the thunder of whose arms shook the remotest corners of the earth, could not fail to excite the greatest astonishment. The fortitude and determined spirit of our countrymen were admired, but their cause was regarded as desperate. Buoyed above the terror of death, the attention of Americans was directed solely to the freedom of their country. All the jarring, unsocial, selfish passions of the heart gave place to the purest patriotism. They resigned their property with cheerfulness, and determined to sacrifice their lives for the liberty of their native land. They declared that if their houses should be consumed, and their property wrested from them by the hand of tyranny, they could retire to the wilderness and enjoy the luxury of being free; if death should be their fate, in death they should obtain that liberty, which in life they were forbidden to possess. The diversified history of the world will be in vain consulted, to find a nation exhibiting such a degree of patriotism and possessing such high-toned heroism. Three millions of men, high-minded men, swearing on the altar of freedom to preserve inviolate those rights and privileges, which they inherited from their fathers, and to transmit them unimpaired to their posterity, or perish in the glorious attempt, is the most august, the most sublime scene, that human imagination can suggest. Thousands, whose bosoms on the birth-day of our empire glowed with the purest flame of patriotism, have fallen martyrs in the cause of liberty and their country—they have sealed their principles with their blood—and have been translated to their native skies.

Americans, it is our pride, our boast to say, these were our fathers. Let us imitate their illustrious example, for by it they have taught us the important lesson of republican virtue. They have taught us that property, nay life itself, should be cheerfully resigned, when the welfare of our country demands it.

Humanity forbids a recital of the various acts of cruelty practised by Great-Britain during our revolutionary war. It will be sufficient to observe, that with the aid of her mercenary troops and the savages of the wilderness, she was unable to overcome our countrymen, whose fortitude and bravery erected eternal monuments to their fame. The laurels, which Britain had acquired in former wars, and which promised to flourish in perpetual verdure, now withered on her temples. After an ineffectual struggle of seven years, after wasting the treasures and profusely lavishing the blood of the people, she was compelled to acknowledge the States of America to be free, sovereign, and independent.

Our glorious revolutionary war was succeeded by an advantageous peace. At this time we had but the shadow of a national government. Our confederation was merely a system of recommendation. It was formed at a period of distress and danger, when our enemies were in the bosom of our country and our houses were in flames. Its framers built a visionary fabric on the fallacious idea of public virtue. Accustomed in the dark and gloomy moments of the war, to see the people obeying the recommendations of Congress, as if they had been laws, they were led to believe, that Americans had only to be informed of their duty, to do it. But experience has taught us that recommendation is a miserable substitute for law. The States had been united during the war by a sense of common danger; fear had supplied the place of a coercive power in the confederation. But when peace returned and danger disappeared, a consciousness of security loosened the bands of union, and the advice of Congress lost its wonted influence.

For a season the friends of our liberty and independence imagined, that they had fondly anticipated halcyon days, scenes of happiness which were never to be realised in our country; much did they fear that we never should enjoy those blessings, which our revolution seemed to promise. The war had corrupted the morals of our citizens. Love of country was no longer the ruling passion; the desire of private gain had supplanted the spirit of public good; and a disposition every where appeared to sacrifice the interest of the community at the shrine of avarice. Our commerce was at its lowest ebb, our money had vanished, lands had depreciated, private confidence, the friend of industry, had ceased to exist, and industry itself had almost disappeared, because it had little hope of reward for its toils. Our credit and respectability as a nation were lost. Debts, which were the price of our independence, and for the payment of which the faith of our country had been repeatedly pledged, remained undischarged, and without any suitable provision for their payment. There is no symptom of national disorder and insignificance, no indication of impending ruin, which did not form a part of our public calamities. The confederation had in vain attempted to raise us from our distressed and prostrate situation; it was too feeble to afford relief.

In the midst of the deepest gloom, when our political horizon was darkened by the thickest clouds of public misfortune, the day-star of our happy constitution arose to illuminate and conduct our country to respectability and happiness. To form a perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, and to secure the blessings of liberty were the grand objects, for the attainment of which the people of America ordained their national Government. A government worthy of our illustrious revolution; worthy of that enlightened, that august assembly of patriots who formed; and of the people who adopted it. Its framers derived wisdom from the experience of other ages and of other countries. In theory it is unvalued, in practice its theory is completely justified.

No sooner did this government commence its operations, than the clouds of adversity were dissipated, like mist, before the glorious luminary of Heaven. Under its auspicious influence America has progressed more in happiness in the course of a few years, than other nations have in centuries. To a person, who contemplates the flourishing state of our country, she will appear like an ancient nation advanced to perfection by prosperous enterprise, successful industry, and a long course of fortunate events. To our unequalled constitution she is indebted for her safety, her prosperity, and her fame. It is equally the interest and duty of Americans to preserve and perpetuate this pledge of the future happiness and grandeur of their empire.

It is no less the fate of nations, than of individuals, to have a portion of alloy mingled with their purest happiness—Their brightest sunshine of prosperity will always be attended by its cloud. While on this auspicious anniversary we congratulate each other on the flourishing situation of our country, we experience a degree of regret arising from the reflection, that the pleasing prospect may soon be darkened, and our fondest expectations blasted. That our glorious constitution is assailed by very formidable enemies, both foreign and domestic, is a truth of a serious and an alarming nature. Can it be doubted whether any foreign power wishes to see our government destroyed, and us a divided, debased, and degraded nation? Let the history of our country for a few years past be consulted, and it will furnish the most irrefragable evidence of the fact. The rising greatness of America is viewed with jealousy and fear by other nations. France, wishing to sit as empress of the world, has been particularly jealous, and particularly hostile to our country. She has in various instances attacked our sovereignty, insulted the people in the person of our President, plundered our commerce, imprisoned and murdered our citizens, rejected our ministers of peace, and attempted to degrade us from the rank of freemen to the wretched condition of tributary vassals.

America has nothing to fear from the arms, but every thing from the arts and influence of foreign nations. Foreign influence is "the destroying angel of republics;" those of ancient and of modern times have fallen before it. France has boasted much of her diplomatic skill, and her influence has always preceded her arms in those countries, which she has conquered. In order to establish it, she has overleaped the barriers of creation; barriers, which nature seems to have formed for the security and repose of nations. In vain did the towering Alps oppose to her their frowning precipices, their stupendous rocks, and eternal wilds. Italy felt her influence, and mourned the loss of its liberty and independence. In vain does the vast Atlantic roll its mighty waters between our country and France. We feel the effects of her baneful influence, and unless we are inspired with a spirit of wisdom and of vigilance, America will fall a victim to her system of delusion.

Our country nourishes in her bosom a faction, coextensive with our empire, protected by and devoted to the interest of France, which plots the destruction of our national government, and would rejoice to see it prostrate. It is unquestionably true, that factions ever have and ever will exist under free governments. There is no danger of their destroying liberty, unless they are aided by a foreign power. But when they are taken under the protection of a foreign nation, become obedient to its will, and are wielded as an instrument, by which to destroy the government of a people, they are truly formidable. If we turn our eyes to those countries of Europe, which have been conquered by France, we shall find that she had in all of them factions, by which her principles were disseminated, her destructive influence was extended, and with whose cooperation their deluded inhabitants were deprived of their constitutions, their liberties, and independence.

The faction in our country wears a most threatening aspect; it is the more dangerous, because it veils its hostile de-

signs beneath the garb of patriotism. It is composed in part of those persons who were the early enemies of our national government, and warmly opposed its adoption. They are embittered in their hatred in proportion as it has been fortunate in its operations. Such is their vanity, that they would see their country in chains at the feet of a foreign power, rather than their inauspicious predictions respecting it should be disappointed. But men under the influence of a wicked ambition form the largest part of this faction. They hate the wisest and most salutary measures merely because they have no hand in framing them. Destitute of those talents, by which alone ambition can be gratified; or destitute of that integrity, which is essential to the character of a good ruler, they seek for employments in vain. Sighing for offices, which they are destined never to enjoy, they wander among the people, uttering the most malicious slanders respecting the constituted authorities of their country. The profligate are the natural enemies of good government, and of course join the standard of the faction. This party is the organ by which France expresses her sentiments and her wishes, it is the instrument, with which she expects to destroy our government.

In order to excite the sympathy and to interest the feelings of Americans in behalf of France, the Gallic faction declares, that liberty has always been the object of that nation, since the commencement of her revolution. But her conduct for years has proved the falsity of their assertion. When she had repelled her enemies, established her independence on the firmest basis, and had adopted such a form of government as she thought proper, she proudly rejected terms of peace, which were highly advantageous. She disclaimed every idea of conquest, yet for a long time conquest has been her object. She denied the right of one nation to interfere in the affairs of another; yet there is scarcely a nation, whose affairs she has not attempted to govern, and in whose councils she has not endeavored to gain an ascendancy. That neither good faith, nor justice, nor moderation can secure a people against her hostile attempts is proved by her

treatment of our country. Every person of reflection, who has attended to the conduct of France for a few years past, will perceive, that the ambitious projects of Lewis XIVth. have been revived in that country ; or rather, he will perceive the gigantic schemes of that aspiring monarch dwindle to insignificance, when compared with those of his republican successors.

The French party in our country, as in every other which France has subdued, has endeavored to render our rulers objects of jealousy, and to withdraw from them the confidence of the nation.

All governments must be maintained by force or by the confidence of the people. Public confidence is the main pillar, which supports the glorious fabric of our American government ; destroy this, and the tottering edifice must fall to the ground, and our liberties must perish beneath its ruins. Sensible of this, France and her partisans in our country, have with unceasing efforts struggled to infuse into the people a spirit of illiberal distrust, and to withdraw entirely their confidence from their rulers. They hope in this way to destroy a government, which they cannot subvert by force. It will be remembered, that the silent, unsuspected stream in secret undermines and prostrates on the ground the mighty oak, which the tempest, that shakes the earth and the heavens, would have assailed in vain. They do not make use of force to overthrow our government ; but they employ the more dangerous, because the more deceptive, instrument of jealousy. This spirit must not be indulged, for it destroys the basis on which elective governments are founded. The slightest degree of reflection will convince us, that the principles, which taught our countrymen to be jealous of an hereditary monarch, an hereditary body of nobles, and a house of commons not appointed, nor controlable by them, ought not to be extended to rulers of their own choice. There is no government, whose very structure affords such liberal grounds of confidence as our

own. In the first magistrate of our union we do not behold a sceptered tyrant with the imperial diadem glittering on his brow, adorned with all the splendid attributes of royalty, taking the government of our country, as his inheritance. He is not protected from disgrace and punishment by the ridiculous supposition that he can do no wrong, and by considering his person as sacred and inviolable. The people are not liable to be oppressed by the knavery or folly of an hereditary body of opulent nobles, constituting a branch of their legislature ; nor by representatives, chosen for such a length of time, as to forget their duty to their constituents. Our rulers are all chosen by ourselves as often as is consistent with the welfare of the nation. It will be our own fault, if we do not have men, to fill our public offices, distinguished for their wisdom, integrity, and patriotism. Our chief magistrate, and all our rulers, are liable to impeachment, removal from office, and punishment for any crimes of which they may be guilty. Their interest is so blended with that of the people, that they can make no laws to oppress them, which will not equally injure themselves—They are in fact part of the people, and must participate, in common with the rest of the community, in all the advantages and disadvantages resulting from the laws they make. A government, thus constructed, is entitled to all the confidence, which any human government can merit.

The conduct of our administration has been dictated by the profoundest wisdom and the most penetrating foresight. While almost every other nation has been involved in the present destructive European war, ours has been preserved from it by an enlightened policy, and has flourished beyond all former example. The partisans of France conspired to slander our administration, and talked much of the folly and ruin of its measures. But the voice of experience, the oracle of truth, has answered and refuted them.

Americans, in the fates of those unhappy nations, which France has subdued, we read an awful but instructive lesson. Wisdom and duty alike require that we should profit by their misfortunes. Their melancholy history informs us, that their calamities were owing to French influence; whose approach to a country, like the portentous approach of a comet, foretells war, pestilence, and death. If by means of this destructive influence, we are induced to withdraw our confidence from those faithful rulers, whose eulogy is written in the happiness of their country, we shall experience its malignant effects in the destruction of our constitution, our morals, our religion, our liberty & independence.

This glorious anniversary forcibly recalls to our minds the virtues and achievements of our fathers; we feel a patriotic pride in their contemplation. Animated by their illustrious example, let us, in our turn, swear on the altar of freedom, that we will never behold our native country, degraded to a state of slavery by the arms or the influence of any foreign power; let us prove to the world that the same spirit, which inspired our fathers and impelled them to assert our independence, survives in the bosoms of their sons to defend it. Relying on the assistance of that Almighty Being, who holds the fates of empires in his hands, let us nobly resolve to use every exertion, and to make every sacrifice in favor of our country—let it be the first wish of our hearts, that the liberty, independence, and happiness of America may be perpetual.

FINIS.