

Timothy Bigelow Esq

with the respectful regards of

The Author.

AN

ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

TOWN OF BOSTON,

ON THE

THIRTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

INDEPENDENCE

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

By PETER THACHER.

BOSTON:

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1807.

SECOND EDITION.

VOTE OF THE TOWN.

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AT a meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of the Town of Boston, duly qualified and legally warned, in publick Town-Meeting, assembled at Faneul-Hall, the 4th day of July, 1807 :

On motion, **VOTED**, That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a committee to wait on **PETER THACHER, Esq.** in the name of the Town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited **ORATION**, this day delivered by him, at the request of the Town, upon the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America ; and to request of him a copy for the press.

Attest,

WILLIAM COOPER, Town-Clerk.

ORATION.

IT was a custom among the Romans, at the feast of Saturn, to suspend all business, and to devote the season to festive sports. The children were released from the exercises and discipline of the school. The slave eat at the same table, and was clad in similar attire with his master. He was indulged in an unrestrained liberty of speech, and for the time lost the memory of his servitude. All orders, as though conscious only of their common origin and common destiny, willingly forgot the political and accidental distinctions of society, and joined in the festival of nature. It was a spectacle, on which mortals might look with envy, and which would be regarded with complacence by the common Father of gods and men.

Though we discover great difference in the modes of social intercourse, between ancient and modern times, we yet find but little novelty in the maxims of

government, or in the conduct of life. In all ages, and in all nations, we hear men chanting the praises of liberty. Indeed, it is the voice of nature, which is heard through her vast extent. Her notes may sometimes be silenced for a time, but they only then acquire new strength, and become more melodious. Why, my countrymen, have you ceased from your usual labours, and convened with solemn pomp in this place? Why was this morning ushered in by the roar of cannon, the peal of bells, and other expressions of joy? And why do we hear the voice of musick and festivity throughout the land? It is the Saturnalia of Americans. It is because you are men, you have the feelings of men, and you love freedom.

If this were not your character, you could not claim kindred to a long line of illustrious ancestry, who first planted the tree of liberty in this soil, and who continued to nourish it, through a succession of ages. They were educated in a country, where freedom was better known, than in any other nation on earth. For whatever have been the offences of Great-Britain against civil liberty, it must be allowed, that none have ever struggled in its cause with more glory or more success than Englishmen. But the union of this extensive empire with what, on comparison, appears on the map of the earth but a point rising amidst the ocean, was contrary to the order of nature. It required no inspiration to see, that this country would, in the course of

events, rival the greatest nations of the earth. Its destinies were not to be checked by ordinary impediments. All the restrictions imposed on its commerce, and all the efforts to check its growth, were like the bands of Samson, 'which he brake from off his arms like a thread.' The chain, which reached across the Atlantic, and which tied us to that little, but renowned island of the sea, must, in process of time, have been dissolved by its own weakness, if it had not been broken by the valour of our countrymen. So that the declaration 'that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states; and that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown';* was only a publication of the decree of nature. The series of events, which led to the American revolution, has become a portion of our history. The principles, feelings, and manners of the actors, which have not failed to employ the poets and orators of our country, whose strains still float in the air, and vibrate on our hearts, we refer to the diligence and accuracy of the future Belknaps and Minots of our country. We are now more interested in the salvation of our political rights, than in the history of their origin; and therefore the present moment shall be devoted to some considerations on the means of preserving our independence.

If for a nation to be free and happy, it were only necessary, that it should be able to boast of a republican form of government, we should be the only free and happy

* The Declaration of Independence.

nation on the face of the earth. Look around you, and seek after the republics of former ages. Inquire for those, on which that sun has shone, within the present age, as well as on our own. Where are the renowned states of Greece, so celebrated for their wars, their triumphs, and their dissensions? In vain do we seek for the living glory of Athens. Her train of orators, poets, and philosophers; her muses, her arts, and her graces have long since deserted the ruins of that celebrated city. The grandeur of Rome, which once carried in its train the spoils of a conquered world, has vanished like a spectre of the night. The constitutions of Switzerland, those variegated forms of republican liberty, which we once contemplated with delight, have melted like the snows, which descend from her Alps. They have all been destroyed by party spirit, or else they have been swallowed up by the jaws of a monstrous despotism.

We are a free people. There never was a period, when we were slaves. Our independence was founded, not on the ruins of tyranny, but on resistance to pretensions, which would have ended in tyranny. The actors in the revolution knew how much easier it was to resist the beginnings of usurpation, than to demolish it after its establishment. But let me ask, wherein does our freedom consist? In the form of our government? If that is not written on our hearts, as well as on parchment, believe me, it will be but a frail tenement for the abode of liberty. Does it consist in your power to destroy tyranny? But if, when you have de-

posed one tyrant, you have a heart to create another, think you, that the fickle goddess, whose romantick spirit delights in the woods as well as in the full city, will be proud of her votaries? Perhaps, however, it consists in our right to elect our own rulers. But if, in the wanton exercise of this right, we capriciously reject the old and faithful servant, whose services have an equal claim on our admiration and gratitude, then we are tyrants, and consequently we cannot be free. We are to treat with reverence the principles of our constitution. It is the government of our choice, and therefore we are not to murmur, that in a republick every thing is subject to change. As wave succeeds wave, the rival factions fast press on each other, and each gradually sinks to the common level. And the day, which invests a citizen with power, reminds him, by the fate of his predecessor, that he likewise is mortal.*

We need not search the records of history to discover, that freedom is not essentially dependent on the form of a government. Civil liberty consists in your being governed by laws, and not by men. The political liberty of a citizen consists in the tranquillity of mind, which proceeds from the idea, that he has no reason to fear any one, provided he keeps a clear con-

* Quanti tandem est ista hominum gloria, quæ pertinere ad unius anni partem exiguam potest? Igitur alte spectare si voles, atque hanc sedem, et æternam domum contueri: neque te sermonibus vulgi dederis, nec in præmiis humanis spem posueris rerum tuarum: suis te oportet illecebris ipsa virtus trahat ad verum decus. Quid de te alii loquantur, ipsi videant: sed loquentur tamen. *Cic. Som. Scip*

science. The first duty then, which, as good citizens, we must practise, to perpetuate our happy constitutions, is obedience to the laws of our country. For in proportion as these approach to perfection, and they are administered with purity, we may estimate the degree and worth of our freedom. Subordinate to this, but essentially connected with it, is the obligation to venerate the Lawgiver, and to protect the Judge. If there is then, in this community, any one, who is constantly insulting your civil institutions; if there is any one, who is engaged in the nefarious attempt to control, or to intimidate your courts of justice; if there is any one, who is not willing that the law should be supreme; he is a dangerous citizen; he is either a tyrant or a slave, equally ready to wield the sceptre of death, or to cringe at the feet of a despot.

To perpetuate our independence, it is necessary, that the union should be conducted on the principles of equality. So long as the maxims of a liberal and equal policy, which guided the original friends and framers of the federal compact, those great and good men, who were inspired with a true sense of national glory; who are now, however, successively descending to solitary stations, but whose setting rays will not fail to shed a benign influence on our publick affairs; so long as the principles, so eloquently recommended by the immortal Washington, in his political testament, are observed by the common government of these states, their union and independence will remain. But should any one of the Seventeen Pillars be unjustly depressed below its proper level; or

should any one tower above its just altitude ; the proportion of the goodly edifice will be destroyed ; an event, which will be alike fatal to its beauty and its strength. Among a society of independent states, it requires no small magnanimity in the powerful, to respect the equal claims of the weak. Magnanimity is not the peculiar prerogative of the great. Like the other virtues, it sometimes adorns the humblest walks of life. The virtues indeed are confined to no climate, to no age, to no complexion ; they will inhabit every heart, which is open to receive them ; and they will never quit you, till you have first deserted them. But if any one of our sister republicks, presuming on her numbers, her weight, or her antiquity, should begin to exercise dominion over the other members of the family ; it will become us all, at once, to recollect the achievements of our common ancestors.

When we contemplate the present state of the world, we must be sensible that the independence of our country, which is at all times difficult to be maintained, is now exposed to great hazard. All those nations, with whom we have connexion, are involved in a war, which is not a contest for victory merely, but for existence. We have no reason to expect favour, we ought to be in a situation not to want it, from either of the contending parties. It is dangerous for us to indulge the unreasonable expectation, that we can long remain peaceful spectators of the tumult, augmenting our wealth with the spoils of a neutral position.*

* Lorsqu'on voit deux grands Peuples se faire une guerre longue & opiniâtre, c'est souvent une mauvaise politique de penser qu'on peut

Can we, at this moment, view the condition of France, can we reflect on the history of her revolution, without devoutly wishing, that there were between the two countries an impassable gulph. There is no sympathy between us. The genius of the citizens, the principles of the government, and the interest of each, are totally dissimilar. The example of that country has proved, that the excesses of liberty are as terrible as the excesses of despotism. In the destruction of the ancient system, and in pursuit of a flaming meteor, which they called liberty, Frenchmen became so voracious for blood, that from want of other victims, they were devouring one another. In truth, they stood in need of an Iron Sceptre, to which they might look and be healed, just as the Israelites did in the wilderness to the Serpent of Brass. But what was the salvation of France has been fatal to the independence of the surrounding nations. The Pillars of Hercules do not limit her power. ‘She is mistress of the coasts of continental Europe from the bottom of the Adriatick gulph to the straits of Gibraltar, and from cape Finisterre to the Baltic.’* By her enormous strength, she has destroyed the balance of power, which existed among the states of Europe. ‘It is certainly a remarkable occurrence, that in the course of three most eventful centuries, amid so many bloody wars, so various and deci-

demeurer spectateur tranquille ; car celui des deux Peuples qui est le vainqueur, entreprend d’abord de nouvelles guerres, & une Nation de Soldats va combattre contre des Peuples qui ne sont que Citoyens.

Grandeur des Romains, et leur Decadence, Chap. 17

* “The Dangers of the Country.” 5.

sive negociations, so frequent changes of power, so great and extended revolutions, and a general anarchy of all social, civil, religious, and political relations, not one independent state was annihilated by violent means. Neither Switzerland, nor Holland, nor any spiritual or temporal German power, nor the most insignificant imperial city, nor Venice, nor Genoa, nor the small Italian republicks, though surrounded on all sides by states of gigantick greatness, nor Malta left to itself, nor the weak though flourishing Geneva, pressed by France on one side, and Savoy on the other ; nor even the power of Savoy, at one time threatened by Austria, at another by France, nor Portugal, inclosed on all sides by the Spanish territory, nor Sweden, nor Denmark, both endangered by the prodigious extension and aggrandizement of the Russian and Prussian powers : not one of all these states disappeared. But the greater part of them, if not all, would, to the vast prejudice of the whole, have gone to ruin, had they not been supported and protected by the general interest of Europe, and those great, enlightened principles, by which that interest was conducted. The whole of this excellent system has now at length, like all the works of man, seen the hour of its fall.*

The ruins of Europe will not satiate the ambition of France. We may say of it, as the Athenian orator

* Fragments upon the Balance of Power in Europe, by the Chevalier Frederick Gentz.

said of Philip of Macedon, ‘that the property and liberty of mankind will never be secure, until it meets with some effectual opposition.’† In a long course of war, the citizens of France have become accustomed to martial sounds. We have heard their chief, hardened as he is to scenes of human destruction, exclaim over a field of carnage, while walking ‘along the waste dominions of the dead,’ *Such a spectacle must inspire princes with a love of peace and a horror of war!*‡ But the return of peace will not restore to Frenchmen the love of industry, the fondness for domestick scenes, and the other peaceful virtues. Accustomed to exact tribute from all, shall we be the only nation from which tribute shall not be demanded? **REMEMBER THE FATE OF PRUSSIA!**

At this period, it is an interesting question, whether we are ready for the changes and disasters, to which nations are liable? Our extensive country, which has fully realized all the advantages for commercial enterprise, which arise from its natural situation, abounding with every thing rich in nature, and valuable in art, is without fortifications, and presents an easy prey to every invader. Has not our Sparta already witnessed from its walls the smoke of an enemy’s camp?

It was not my intention, on this occasion, to stimulate an implacable resentment against Great Britain, by recalling the memory of griefs and resentments,

† Philippic the fourth.

‡ After the battle of Eylau, sixty-fourth bulletin of the grand army

which are past. I considered her as engaged in a just and necessary struggle against the insatiable ambition of France. I wished to speak of her only with veneration, and to utter my hearty prayer, that the land, which contains our fathers' sepulchres might never be polluted by the rude feet of barbarians. But no ties of affection, of interest, or of blood, can silence the indignation, which Americans ought to feel for the recent wound, which has been given to their national honour. The serious aspect, which this event has cast on our relations with Great Britain, and the hostile attitude assumed by the forces of that power within our harbours and on our coasts, bid us to prepare for the last resort of nations. While we wait to be guided on this momentous subject, by the constituted authorities of our country, we trust, that it is no invasion of their prerogative, and no violation of the duty of a citizen, to declare, that this outrage calls for such a return, as is worthy of a brave and just people. Your laurels have not yet withered, which you gained in an arduous and successful struggle with these Lords of the Ocean. The spirit of the country is not yet wholly depressed. Its blood has not yet ceased to beat at the fountain. Recollect that period, when we could boast of a naval character. The waves of the Atlantic, and the shores of the Mediterranean, have been tinged with the blood of Americans, shed in the cause of honour and of victory. Peace to those spirits of our countrymen, whose only grave was the bed of hon-

our ! ‘ The everlasting oaks of your forests,’ wave in their native seats, impatient to descend for the defence of your cities and your rights. They see with indignation, that the trade of your country, floating on every sea, has, through the deficiency of a naval force, no other protection, *but the justice of nations*.* The valour of our countrymen, which has recently imitated the Roman spirit on the theatre of Roman triumphs, beholds with just alarm the institutions of the old world falling in rapid succession, and in their fall hears the knell of American independence. When our country needs defence, let us not hear of cool calculations of economy. When honour is the prize, let not money alone be the instrument of defence ; as though all the treasures of the country were too great a sacrifice in defence of national security ; as though the richest blood in the country would not be voluntarily shed in defence of national honour ; which, when once gone, neither blood nor treasure can redeem.

A nation, which is doomed to fall, is first deprived of counsel. It is not strength, which sustains a community ; it is not numbers, nor wealth, nor situation, but wisdom : those are all of the earth, this is divine.

* Les Puissances établies par le commerce, peuvent subsister longtemps dans leur médiocrité ; mais leur grandeur est de peu de durée : elles s’élèvent peu à peu, & sans que personne s’en apperçoive ; car elles ne font aucun acte particulier qui fasse du bruit, & signale leur puissance ; mais lorsque la chose est venue au point qu’on ne peut plus s’empêcher de la voir, chacun cherche à priver cette Nation d’un avantage qu’elle n’a pris, pour ainsi dire, que par surprise.

Grandeur des Romains et leur Decadence, Chap. IV.

Timid councils will soon debilitate the spirit of any people. They open the door for faction, and invite the ambitious to seek for their own aggrandizement on the ruins of the general liberty. It is better that a state be surrounded by enemies, watching for its destruction, provided its citizens are united. Nothing in nature is so powerful as union. The universe might be poised on a drop of water, kept in a compact state. Nothing is so sublime, nothing so powerful as the combined energies of great minds, intent on the preservation of their country. They cannot be friends to their country, who wish, at this eventful crisis of our affairs, to perpetuate the bitterness of party spirit. United, our country would have nothing to fear from a combined world. The storm might gather. The thunder might roll. It might beat on the edifice of our independence; but it would not fall, because it was founded on a rock.

On these solemnities, it becomes us to recollect with gratitude the heroes of our revolution. I see in this assembly some, who were actors in that splendid drama. I see some, who, when the independence of our country was rising, like Venus from the froth of the sea, were present at her nativity. The stream of oblivion has not yet effaced the image of your illustrious compatriots, whose earthly existence is now only in the remembrance and gratitude of their countrymen. How often do our thoughts visit the tomb of the sleeping Warriour on the banks of the Patowmack! The solemn silence of the scene is disturbed only by the

heaving sigh and the falling tear. While, distant from the sacred spot, the voice of praise swells into loud and majestick strains, inspired by the glory of the Father of his Country.

But the lapse of time admonishes me, not to intrude on the pleasures of this day. Though to dwell on the praises of one's own country is indulging a species of refined selfishness ; yet it is authorised by the custom of nations, and would, I doubt not, find an apology in your hearts. The subject has ceased to interest us by its novelty. An orator on these occasions may not, at this period, indulge the ambitious expectation of literary fame. These annual tributes are born but to die. Like the fruits of the season, they perish with the day, which witnessed their vernal bloom and ripening strength. Their authour must derive consolation from the respect, which he pays to the custom of the times in which he lives. He must be content to cast his pebble on the heap, which has been raised to the independence of his country. He must learn the little worth of human estimation, which often descends with the sun which saw it rise, never to rise again.

ODE,

SUNG AT THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES.

(Written for the occasion, by a Citizen of Boston.)

1

STRIKE, strike the notes of loftiest joy,
And roll them to the distant sky ;
Freedom herself began the song,
Let Freedom's sons the strains prolong.
This is the day by heroes lov'd,
When ling'ring Freedom reach'd our shore ;
This is the day by heaven approv'd,
That paid the toils our fathers bore.

CHORUS.

*Then let us raise the lofty strain,
From age to age while years remain ;
Let busy toil and sorrow flee,
For this is Freedom's Jubilee.*

2

Sheath'd be the sword your fathers drew,
'Gainst foul oppression's gorgon crew ;
While from afar no foes invade
The soil, for which those heroes bled.
But should old Jove's tempestuous son,
Again disturb your peaceful shore,
Look on the fields your fathers won,
And draw the swords they drew before.

CHORUS.

Then let us raise, &c.

5

Though the loud-sounding trump, from far,
 Shall call one half the world to war ;
 Ne'er shall this joyous day be lost,
 But ever live Columbia's boast.
 Raise the loud notes beyond the skies,
 Where, crown'd with wreaths, her heroes dwell ;
 Long to their names shall praises rise,
 And days unborn their deeds shall tell.

CHORUS.

*Then let us raise the lofty strain,
 From age to age while years remain ;
 Let busy toil and sorrow flee,
 For this is Freedom's Jubilee.*