

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON SOCIETY,

IN BOSTON,

ON

THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1816.

BY ASHER WARE.

PUBLISHED BY THE REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

**BOSTON ·
PRINTED BY ROWE AND HOOPER.**

1816.

ORATION.

IMPORTANT events occur in the history of every people, which the wisdom and patriotism of statesmen mark out to be commemorated by anniversary celebrations. There is a fitness and propriety in the thing, that at once approves itself to every reflecting mind. Nothing has a stronger tendency to nourish a lofty and generous patriotism. We seem to participate in the glory of those great deeds, which we celebrate, and the sentiment of patriotism becomes identified with that of self-love.

Actions that have in themselves a character of peculiar grandeur, or that have in the current of events led to important results, cannot be left to sleep in obscurity with the common mass of history. They necessarily stand forward in bold relief among the monuments of national glory, and become, as it were, central points, around which the feelings of patriotism are rallied.

What event could more suitably be selected for this purpose by any people, than the act that made them an independent nation. The declaration of Independence by the patriots of '76 was an act of that moral sublimity, that finds few parallels in the history of nations. It was an act by which an infant people set at defiance the vengeance of one of the oldest and most powerful nations in the world! With the

tempered feelings, and moderated enthusiasm of these times of repose and tranquility, we can with difficulty conceive the tone of heroism to which the minds of men of that day must have been raised, before they ventured on such a step. Yet when we were without an ally, without an organized government, without an army or navy, destitute of pecuniary and military resources, with a population small in number and widely dispersed, a dark cloud of savages hovering on our defenceless frontier, and a mighty fleet sweeping our unprotected sea-coast ; under all these disadvantages, Congress did but what the wishes of their constituents had anticipated, when they defied the utmost vengeance of a power that had recently triumphed over the united strength of France and Spain. The act derives additional features of moral grandeur from the motives which led to it. It was not to vindicate the claim of an hereditary despot to a throne, nor of a profligate aristocracy to exclusive privileges, nor to sustain the pernicious authority of a bigotted priesthood over the consciences of men ; it was to defend the equal rights of a whole people. It was the holiest cause for which men deserving to be free ever unsheathed the sword.

The consequences correspond in their importance to the intrinsic dignity of the act itself. These we see and feel in part, in the blessings of political freedom, and national prosperity ; and these we are too much in the habit of considering as the whole. But the full measure of its effects is yet to be unfolded in the records of future ages and other nations. It is the successful issue of our contest that now inspires

with fortitude the patriots of South America. It is our example that led to the planting of the tree of liberty in the fields of Mexico, and the plains of Chili, among the mines of Peru, and on the banks of the La Plate. Amidst the perils and convulsions to which they are exposed, it is the day-star of freedom which first dawned on our shores, that, gleaming through the tempests of war, reanimates them under misfortune and defeat to new exertions, and that will finally render the rights of man triumphant over the pride of kings, in every part of the western world. The friends of despotism justly represent the cause of liberty as contagious, and we have still grounds to hope, that the example of America enjoying the most perfect tranquility amidst the most perfect freedom, will inspire the abused people of Europe with courage and strength to burst the three-fold cord, with which hereditary tyrants, and obsequious priests, and mercenary armies have bound them down to servitude. Yes, the fourth of July is not more the birth-day of a nation, than it is the birth-day of freedom. I do not say that other nations did not before that time boast of their political rights. The orators of England extolled the liberty of Englishmen. But what was that liberty? the original, underived, and inherent rights of men, such as we contended for and established? No; its origin shews its nature: it was traced to the concessions of their kings. It was the miserable dole extorted by sturdy beggars from timid or necessitous masters.

The declaration of Independence was then the first effectual assertion, at least in modern times, of the

natural rights of man. Our fathers did not approach a tyrannical monarch and his profligate ministers with courtly complaisance, with the voice of entreaty and supplication. The only throne to which they acknowledged allegiance was the throne of God, and the only majesty to which their prayers were addressed, was the Majesty of heaven. To human dignities and earthly thrones, they spoke in the language of men conscious of their rights. They did not disgrace these rights, by giving them the name of privileges, and tracing them to the grants and concessions of previous monarchs. They declared themselves free because God had made them so.

The principle, on which we justify the patriots of '76, is the soul of all our political institutions, the natural and inborn right of man to self-government; a right that can neither be strengthened nor impaired by precedent or prescription. On this principle the statesmen of our country have erected a scheme of civil polity, which, while it is the pride and glory of America, has extorted the admiration of the wise and good of other countries. It has been mentioned as a peculiar instance of good fortune, to be praised by one who is deservedly loaded with the praises of others, *laudari a laudato viro*, and while our political institutions have been honored by the panegyrics of such men as Fox and Carnot, we may smile at the harmless scurrilities of the parasites of kings. We covet not the commendations of men whose bodies are bowed down in habitual deference to hereditary rank, and whose souls are cankered with the jail distemper of perpetual servility, though some of these birds of ill omen may have lit on our shores.

Such I believe to be the feeling of the vast majority of the American people. They are attached by habit, sentiment, and principle to a representative democracy, and have no disposition to exchange the unostentatious simplicity of our democratic system of government, for the tawdry and fantastic trappings of royalty. They feel no reverence for titled depravity, or hereditary folly. They find it difficult to imagine why a man destitute of every public and private virtue, should be entitled to rank and authority, merely because his ancestors, with as few claims on the respect of mankind, had enjoyed them before him. They cannot perceive how an individual whose notorious baseness has excluded him from the more respectable class of swindlers, whose low vices render him an unfit companion for professed gamblers, whose word of honor has been so often pledged, and so often forfeited, that it will not pass among the associates of his revelries for a shilling, I say, they cannot easily see how such a man, even though fortune may have placed him on a throne, can be the fountain of honor to a whole nation. If there are men amongst us more highly gifted, who can discern the fitness and propriety of these arrangements, the great mass of the people are incurably blind; nor can they be persuaded that the highest office in their gift, after having for a quarter of a century been filled by genius and virtue, could derive any accession of dignity, by being accepted by a dotard of royal pedigree, though he could number a hundred among his ancestors as foolish as himself.

But though such is the general feeling, it is only in the death-like silence of despotism, that all men think alike, or, to speak more correctly, cease to think at all. Where the mind is left free to follow its natural bias, there will always be a diversity of opinion. It has been said that the distinction of whig and tory has a foundation in the nature of man; certainly his natural temper, as modified by the institutions of civil society, does afford a very broad foundation for this distinction. The timid and corrupt naturally seek shelter behind the ramparts of the throne, and the monarch willingly protects the useful train of his mercenary dependents. Men of a bolder cast of character, of a sanguine temper, and enlarged benevolence, mark out for themselves another line of public duty, in guarding with vigilance the rights of the people. The first class of politicians justify themselves by pleading the danger of popular commotions and irregular tumults, and by insisting much on the want of virtue and stability in the people, to maintain a well-organized and efficient government. The whig denies every proposition of the tory, and pleads the universal tendency of power to concentrate itself, and the manifest danger, when it is confided in considerable portions, to a permanent body of men, or made hereditary in a family, that it will gradually absorb all the authority of the state, till not a vestige of popular freedom is left. The distinction of whig and tory, as it has long been known in England, exists in this country, but with considerable modification, under the names of republican and federalist. It is not only the timid that swell the ranks

of federalism. She ranks among her proselytes the daring and profligate, who seek to erect a throne amidst the confusion and tumult of popular contention, and among the haughty and supercilious, whose pride is wounded on finding themselves lost in the mass of common citizens, with no mark of distinction, and none of the insignia of superiority. It is far from my intention to apply this description to the great body of the federalists. They are doubtless as firm in their republican attachments as we are. But in adverting to the character of a party, the attention is unavoidably drawn to the leaders, who, in all questions of temporary interest at least, give the tone and temper to the whole. And we are fully authorised in saying, that the active and stirring spirits, who hold federalism in leading-strings, have views in many respects not favorable to our democratic freedom. If we go back to the period of the formation of the constitution, we find Hamilton, the great champion of the party, proposing in the convention an elective monarchy. Nor have we cause for believing, that the spirit of the party has undergone a change since that time. Look into the works of Fisher Ames, the political bible of our Junto. A more bitter invective against republics was never penned by the most devoted minion of kings. Every epithet of virulent abuse, and every odious and revolting image, that a ready memory and fertile imagination could suggest, are brought together to express the rancor of his hostility to a republican form of government; and he appears to have summoned all the powers of his acrimony, where he describes democracy as an illu-

minated hell, and the people of America as a band of demons, waging implacable war with every thing that is noble and generous in man, and all that is great and good in the constitution of civil society. The transparent veil thrown over these torrents of obloquy, by substituting the word democracy for republic, takes nothing from the edge of the invective, and conceals nothing of the spirit of the writer. Our own government is a pure democracy. All political power resides in the people, and you may rely upon it, when a man in this country professes his hostility to democracy, if he understands the signification of terms, he means a republic. Yes, there are those among us, few indeed in number, but who, by their activity and resources, have been able to place themselves at the head of a powerful and respectable party, to whose eyes liberty never appears so lovely, as when she is reposing under the shadow of a throne, and to whose fears she never seems so secure, as when protected by the guardian genius of aristocracy. Nor can they feel satisfied till they see the last grace given to polished society, in the sparkle of a coronet, and till the last ornament of political perfection glistens in the lustre of a diadem.

But men are never in want of pretexts to justify their opinions, and to give avowed hostility to an established form of government even the semblance of patriotism. It has been discovered by the wisdom of these times, that a democracy, which a philosophic critic of antiquity, bred in a despotic court, called the nurse of great geniuses, is deficient in energy. So far has their notion been carried, that the prediction has often been

repeated both in this country and Europe, that our constitution would never survive the shock of war; that it had not strength to bring out the resources of the nation, nor even to sustain itself amidst the convulsions incident to such a state. The experiment has been fairly tried and the prediction has failed. The result of the war was as much a triumph of republican principle, as of the republican party. It proved that in many respects, the freeist government is the strongest. Twice has it been our fortune to measure our strength with one of the most powerful nations in Europe, and twice has our enemy by his own confession retired from the contest, baffled and defeated, with stripes bleeding on his back. The trophies of two wars have been won under the freeist government that ever existed, and from the bitterest foe that ever waged a war of massacre and extermination. Other nations have arrayed more numerous armies and covered the waves with mightier fleets. But what fleets or armies ever shewed a more heroic devotion to their country's cause than ours? Was there any want of energy during the summer of 1814, when our whole northern frontier, from the shores of Erie to the waters of Champlain, was lighted up with an uninterrupted succession of the most brilliant triumphs. One dazzling exploit followed another with such rapidity, that an admiring people had scarcely time to celebrate the achievements of one hero before another put in his claim to equal honor. The thunder of victory was borne through the farthest woods of the north, and startled with its echoes the wildest of our savage foes that wander in the arctic regions. Here

indeed seemed the completion of our martial fame, this seemed the fullness of our military renown, when a rival splendor bursting from the other extreme of our empire filled every faculty with admiration and astonishment, lent a new species of glory to our arms, and displayed in a new light the resources of a republic. In the northern war regular troops had been opposed to the hardiest veterans of the old world led by the most experienced officers. But for one of the best appointed armies, that ever sailed from Europe, to be vanquished, and almost annihilated by an equal or inferior number of unpracticed militia, whose hands were yet callous from the labours of husbandry, is a new event in the annals of war: and this glory was reserved for the youngest daughter of the union.

A government, under which such deeds have been performed, must possess strength from some source or other. If it is not found in the extent of its authority, it will be seen in the confidence and affection of the people. A despotism, that rules by the influence of fear, may call forth more effectually the resources of the country for the purposes of foreign conquest; but a free government, that reigns in the love of the people, will be incomparably stronger for the purposes of defence. We have witnessed this in the alacrity with which our citizen soldiers have turned out to defend the rights of the soil. If we meet with a solitary exception in our own doubly dishonoured state, it is to be ascribed to the disposition of the ruling chiefs, and not to the degeneracy of the people. If one third of our territory became a cheap and bloodless conquest, it was not for want of courage or a disposition in the

militia to defend it. If the enemy was allowed quietly to fortify and strengthen his positions, the cause is to be found in the councils of the state.

On the commencement of the war, the government of this commonwealth was placed in the hands of vain glorious and boastful federalism. The leaders of the party, while the thunders of war were heard rolling at a distance, were not sparing of their censures of the general government, for the want of courage and military talent. The close of the war gave them an opportunity of exhibiting their prowess in the field, as well as on paper. It is vain for them, in this case, to plead conscience. Their political Nestor had gravely announced to his admirers, that it was lawful to defend the soil, even against the armies of Britain; and happy would it have been for our honor, if the energies of the "Washington of Massachusetts" had not been exhausted in discovering and giving utterance to this great truth. One good effect, however, resulted from it. It removed from *scrupulous* federalism, the restraint of conscience, and now was the time to shew her gallant bearing. Never were men placed in circumstances where honour called more imperiously for action. But where shall we look for the monuments of federal prowess? Shall we go to Eastport, or shall we stop at Castine? Where was the spirit of federal chivalry when the sacred rights of the soil were violated by hostile feet? Where the might of her chosen hero, who was called from retirement by the exigences of the times, and retired again when the tumults of war had subsided? Did he return to the quiet of domestic life covered

with laurels, and seamed with honourable scars? No—His prudence suggested that the better half of valor is discretion, and he kept at a respectful distance from the hazards of battle. The prowess of our military chief was not displayed in the din of arms and the triumph of victory. He did not thunder in front of the enemies lines at the head of his Northampton cavaliers. He did not array for our defence the far famed terrors of the “silver greys.” He did not meet the advancing foe with hostile banners, and angry cannon, and dangerous steel. More peaceful feats were better suited to his courage and capacity, and he beset Mr. Madison and Congress with a din of syllogisms, he scoured the field of negotiation with a cloud of metaphors; and if he did not gain the reputation of a good captain, he at least came off with the credit of a bad declaimer.

And was this enough to satisfy the pride and lofty spirit of a party that, with such singular modesty, claims all the talents and patriotism of the country. Were the chiefs of that party content with harmless menace, and sounding declamation, and empty gasconade? Not so. The unpublished records of the Hartford Convention, that first-born of the Junto, and the untold tale of the mission to Washington, may fill up the chapter. And here the glories of federalism terminate. How are the mighty fallen!

A most important trust is confided by the wisdom of providence to our hands. It is the cause of civil Liberty. And it is consoling to find, that the trial which it was hoped by some, and feared by others, would prove its grave, has served only to invigorate

and confirm it. There was a time indeed when the most sanguine had cause of alarm. When the minions of royalty, who had heretofore dared little more than to whisper their hopes to the confidence of friendship, gathering courage from public disasters, began to avow them with boldness. When hollow-hearted pretenders to republicanism, and professed advocates of monarchy, were seen celebrating the triumphs of despotism over the last hopes of liberty in Europe; when the madness for legitimacy was at such a height, that our presbyterian clergy, who had for generations wearied Heaven with prayers for the downfall of anti-christ, smit with the love of kings, and suddenly charmed with the splendors of prelatical dignity, sang Halleluiahs on the restoration of that man of sin to the plenitude of his ancient power; the re-establishment of the inquisition with its dungeons and racks, the revival of the Jesuits with the endless train of their intrigues and impostures. We remember the cloud that gloomed over the country at that time, when the events of Europe permitted our ancient and inveterate foe to throw the whole of his immense force on our shores, and the pride of Englishmen talked of nothing but deposing our President, and dictating to us terms of submission in one of our commercial capitals. And what was the conduct of Massachusetts federalism at that time? A thousand lights blazing in our legislative hall, to honor the triumphs of monarchy by divine right in the old world, and welcome its minicas to the new, and a simple vote of thanks sullenly refused to one of our own heroes, are at once a proof and an illustration of the spirit and principles

of the party. Threatened by an overwhelming power from abroad, and jeopardized by the hardihood of domestic treason, it is not to be wondered that the boldest and most sanguine felt alarm. Then it was that the energy of a government, trusting to the affections of the people only for its resources, appeared in all its glory. A youthful republic was seen awing into silence the murmurs of treason, and the clamors of disaffection, and at the same time with a vigorous arm beating down the power of an ancient and warlike monarchy. The storm that threatened to prostrate our liberty in eternal destruction, only shook its branches, and caused its roots to strike deeper and more firmly in the soil. And thus shall terminate every trial, if Americans prove worthy of the trust, which the benignity of Providence has reposed in their hands: and the tree of Liberty, watered by the blood of heroes and martyrs, shall continue to flourish and look green in the chosen land of law and freedom, till the thunders of the last trumpet shall be heard resounding over the fragments of a ruined world.