

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS,

JULY 4, 1814.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY EDWIN A. WHITE, ESQ.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

WORCESTER :

PRINTED BY HENRY ROGERS.

1814.

ORATION.

IF there be any striking and obvious peculiarity, my countrymen, which more than any other distinguishes a free state from a tyranny, it is that universal intelligence and sympathy, with which, in such states, national blessings and national calamities are perceived and felt throughout a whole community. There are no people indeed, however slavish or debased, who have not their festivals, their rejoicings, their anniversaries ; but what do *they* commemorate, that should be matter of pride, or even of interest ? The death of a martyr, perhaps, who fell by those very weapons he was zealously employing against others, bigotry and persecution ; the nativity of a saint, of whom nothing is known but his name, and that he worked a miracle ; or the birthday of a sovereign, whose character disgraces them and degrades human nature ; perhaps a tyrant, perhaps a fool ! Whatever he be is no concern of theirs ; so long as their senses are gratified, their eyes dazzled, their ears delighted, and their heads intoxicated, they can be happy ; and when this is over, return again to stupidity !

With what different sensations you greet the return of this anniversary, I need not enquire. This tumult, these happy countenances, and this glowing and expansive animation are not the indications of any lukewarm or grovelling feelings; they announce the generous gratitude, the honest, heartfelt pride of a people who know what they enjoy, and why they rejoice.

It is not wonderful that you, Fellow-Citizens, should contemplate with pride that event which we this day commemorate; not merely because it made us independent; this only placed us where others were, and where we of right ought to be; but rather because of the singular and illustrious manner, in which it was atchieved. This will make it forever looked upon with admiration, by all who know how to appreciate exalted virtue, however unbenefitted by its results or uninterested in its consequences.

Other revolutions of this kind have generally arisen either from the pre-eminent virtue of a few, or from the interested or exasperated passions of the many. Cedrus, by voluntarily sacrificing his life, gave a popular government to Athens; and Lycurgus by a patriotic sacrifice of his interests, gave liberty to Sparta; the Roman people, from the impulse of immediate indignation and revenge expelled the Tarquins; but never has a revolution before ours, originated in the virtue of a whole people. It was not for any exorbitant oppression, or any glaring iniquity, that the American people, with one mind, took up arms against the nation of their ancestors, the nation whom nature had taught them to love, and weakness and policy had induced them to obey; but to resist the first exercise of an unjust claim, which any other people would neither have resented, nor perceived. They would not be taxed, without being represented. It was not surely the narrow suggestion of present interest, which induced this people, young, feeble, without resources, without an army, without a gov-

ernment, to enter into a bold and hazardous contest with a nation, the most wealthy, warlike and powerful of any nation in Europe, to get rid of a paltry duty on tea ! Neither could it have been the consequence of any hatred or disloyalty to that nation ; for though they owed to her no obligations, though they had fled from her tyranny to the inhospitable sanctuary of a wilderness, where exposed to the ferocity of the savage and the deprivation of every comfort and convenience of civilized life, they had never from her received aught of protection or support ; yet had they nobly exposed their lives and spilt their blood in her service without request or remuneration. No, Fellow-Citizens, we perceive not here either selfishness, hatred or ambition ; but we perceive the genuine enthusiasm of virtue ; the jealous spirit of enlightened freedom, which, though it would make any sacrifice to affection, would encounter every hazard rather than relinquish a right.

But it is not in the light of admiration alone, Fellow-Citizens, that we contemplate the American revolution. It is impossible to look upon the virtue which in those days ennobled the American character, without indignantly contrasting with it the vices, which marked and rendered forever infamous the character of the enemy. That this haughty and brutal nation should see, in a rational and sufficiently obvious distinction humbly and decorously urged, nought but a mere cavil of impertinence and disobedience, rebellion and defiance, because forsooth, she saw only the weakness of those who made it ! But more especially, that neither the remonstrances ; nor the supplications and entreaties of the colonies, nor even the eloquence of her own best and brightest statesmen, her Pitt, her Barre, her Burke, could turn her from the mad project of reducing a free people to unconditional submission ! That not regarding what these colonies had done for her, the alacrity with which

they had ever come forward to fight her battles, and the good will with which they had ever supplied her necessities to the extent of their resources, she should send over her ruffian armies "to dragoon them to obedience!" But it has never been the characteristic of this nation, whoever her king or whoever her ministers, to be convinced, when not obliged to concede, or to show mercy, when she is able to employ force. Ah, how do your bosoms alternately throb with pride, with pity and indignation as the eventful series of battles which now followed, throng upon your imaginations! To see these veteran bloodhounds, yet reeking with victory and slaughter from the battles of France and Spain, intrepidly met and taught to tremble in their turn, by an undisciplined and half armed peasantry! But Alas! Every field was not a Lexington, nor every hill a Bunker; and you have soon to see these brave but untaught armies, defeated, driven, slaughtered, in spite of their valour and their cause; you have soon to behold the only remaining portion of this little band, reduced to every distress which want and nakedness could produce, with this merciless army hanging on their rear, and in their front, nought but visions of ruin and of death, flying they knew not whither, and cared not, so they escaped the unrelenting cruelty of an enemy who had a double motive to vengeance, that of being the mother country, and the injurer! Gloomy was the prospect to America; and our newborn independence had like to have perished in the cradle. Then were seen the perpetration of every crime, brutality or baseness, that British insolence, that cruelty flushed with triumph, that rapacity uncurbed by religion or power could commit, or that defenceless humanity could suffer. Then were heard the shrieks of the unprotected virgin, the wailings of the unhoused cottager, the imprecations of insulted age, and the cries of helpless infancy. Yes, let it be for-

ever remembered, that this nation, who is not the last to boast of her high rank in the scale of refinement, with a people descended from her own stock and professing her own religion, observed not the ordinary rules of civilized warfare! Conflagration, rapine, wanton and unprovoked devastation every where indicated the vicinity of her troops; and the innocent blood of women and children smoking on the frontiers, testified that there had been the tomahawk of her skulking allies! But better was the fate of those who found death by her sword and tomahawk however merciless, than those who had to encounter its slow approach amidst the cold blooded horrors of her prisons and her prison ships. What! were there no rights of war? no rights of mercy, or misfortune? Should neither the calls of craving hunger, of parching thirst, of shivering nakedness, receive a glance of pity, or meet a ray of hope! Can it be believed that eleven thousand freemen were starved and suffocated in the reeking bowels of one prison ship? The horrid tale would never have been credited, did not their bleaching bones now lie upon the shore to declare to us and to posterity of what vile crimes men may be capable!

Such, Fellow-Citizens, was the melancholy triumph of guilt over innocence; of a nation fighting for every iniquitous object, and stimulated by every unworthy motive, over a people contending for their rights and excited by the holy love of liberty. But it was temporary. A nation engaged in a just cause may have to pass the fiery ordeal of adversity, but if it forgets not itself will always come out triumphant. We had a Washington. Ah, how resplendent did the character of that unrivalled and godlike hero shine forth in this hour of darkness and calamity? How illustrious does he appear in that desperate juncture of affairs, coolly and firmly watching the crisis; trusting to Heaven for his country and her cause;

putting despair against confidence, and turning defeat to victory ? Soon did the avenging sword of justice directed by his hand, give us ample retribution on our bloody enemy for all the cruelties inflicted by her ferocity ; for though to return them in kind was not in the vengeance of Americans, yet was this war, commenced for our rights as subjects, finished in our sovereignty and triumph as an independent nation.

And now perhaps, Fellow-Citizens, you are ready to ask why I dwell so long on the story of our revolution, in which many here were actors and with which few of you have not been familiarly versed from your earliest years ? I might tell you that it will bear much repeating ; it excites a proper pride ; it was the triumph of your injured country over her brutal enemy ! It gave to the American name a resplendent reputation, and to the American people, liberty, peace, safety, security and happiness. It is full of the noblest instruction. It furnishes a text which may be infinitely elucidated and never exhausted, on which the philosopher and the philanthropist may dwell with delight forever, for it displays the contrast of those passions which dignify and ennoble, with those which blacken and disgrace the human character, and its moral is the triumph of virtue over vice. But I have other reasons. At this time, Fellow-Citizens, it is not fit that we contemplate this illustrious series of events with stupid and unprofitable admiration, or that the passions they excite should die and fall away with the effort of recollection that gives them birth. We have now an occasion which calls for the practice of all the lessons they inculcate. Believe me, my countrymen, there is not that difference between the contest in which we are now engaged with Britain and that of our revolution, that accounts for the different spirit with which it is supported. What ! Shall we admire the unanimity with which these colonies, without regard to interest or safety, at every

risk, at every hazard disputed a hairs breadth overstepping of right, and are we now, when principles the most sacred to our sovereignty, the best defined in the laws of nations, are boldly trodden under foot, to our infinite injury as well as insult, and when our government after years forbearance, have at length been driven to resist, are we now a distracted and divided people? Has Britain lost nothing of her injustice, her haughtiness, her brutality; and have the American people lost so much of their virtue? Alas! unless we learn wisdom, we shall forfeit in this war whatever glory we acquired in that, and the very infancy of our republic may yet be the only part of its history worth remembering!

What is national sovereignty, I ask, but the perfect equality of one nation with another? If a third nation, if Britain tells us you shall not trade to France but in this way or that, she arrogates to herself a prerogative, an authority, entirely inconsistent with the equality we boast, and which if submitted to, at once takes away our independence. To say otherwise is absurd; to argue upon this point is putting reason itself in jeopardy. The point of sovereignty should be the point of honor. It would be useless, Fellow-Citizens, to give you a history of the Orders in Council. It would be useless to tell you how the vessels of this nation were ordered to pass to France through no other channel than a British port; and how each one presuming to disobey these *Orders* was confiscated by British courts to the sole use and benefit of Great-Britain. It would be useless to tell you how long our government reasoned and remonstrated; and how Britain, consistent with her character, rose in her pretensions, the longer we reasoned and the longer we remonstrated; how, at first, they were the only means of preserving her existence, reluctantly adopted at the call of the most imperious necessity, purely in self defence against the enormous maritime power of

France ; how, in the next place, they were a just mode of retaliation upon us for what we had suffered by the Decrees of Napoleon ; how, at length, they became a permanent system founded on clearly established precedent, and indisputably belonging to her right divine as mistress of the seas ; how this atrocious aggressor at length puts herself into the attitude of condescension, and tells us, that though the *right* is never to be relinquished, yet she will not enforce it against us if we prevail on Napoleon to repeal his Decrees, and when we have done this ; then, forsooth, he had only repealed them with respect to *us*, and we must oblige him to repeal them with respect to all other nations ! All this, Fellow-Citizens, appears to be very well understood in this country, by men too who talk in raptures of our glorious revolution, and who if you ask them what in it is most to be admired, will tell you the spirit with which the colonies resisted so small a thing as a duty on tea, in the circumstances they then were ; and yet, after all this injustice, after this audacious and violent infringement of a sacred attribute of our independence, after this confiscation of many hundreds of our vessels, putting our rightful commerce in danger in every part of the world, when Britain at length tells us, who had poorly enough defended our own rights against her, to obtain justice for every nation in Europe from the Emperor Napoleon, before she would do it to us ; these same men say she had given us no cause of war ! At least the matter appears very doubtful ; but if she had, we ought not to have resisted ! We should have waited a little longer, for though her minister told us, that the Orders would not be taken off but upon this contingency, yet it soon appeared that this was far from truth. Thus, Fellow-Citizens, the only mode which an American can find to accuse his own government for being driven at last to declare war, after having had such ample cause for

years, is to accuse a British minister of falsehood, and blame his government for believing him! Rather let any one, who has the least sensibility to national honor, blame his country that she so long submitted. Let him blush, when he beholds this government, strong, flourishing, powerful, full of resources, wealth, arms, but more especially with a people, free, hardy, intelligent and high spirited, who had beaten her in the very worst of circumstances; so long making use of the weapons of reason merely, with a nation, who, if the history of our revolution did not sufficiently evince her disposition, has shown in her dealings with every nation under heaven, that she regards nothing as right, but power. That she repealed those Orders from no wish to do us justice, but from a more imperious cause, the necessity of our supplies, is sufficiently obvious from the care taken in the very repeal itself, to declare her right to do the same thing again whenever she may find it convenient; thus most anxiously preserving all the cause of contention, after having gnawed the bone till her own tooth suffered from its resistance.

But let us not pass over another atrocity not less affecting our liberties; not less displaying the brutality of our enemy; which ought not less than the other, to harrow up every dormant sensation of indignation. What is this practice of Impressment? If the citizen supports the government, shall not the government protect the citizen? And what class of citizens contribute more to the welfare and glory of the country than that despised set of beings called sailors? Do they not encounter every hazard, dare every peril, meet every vicissitude of climate; traverse every region of the globe, to furnish to us the luxuries and conveniences of life? When life is to be exposed, who stands foremost? The sailor. When our rights are to be defended, who first meets the enemy? The sailor. Why then is this man thought to have no

rights ; no home ; no country ? We should not suffer a hair of their heads to be insulted with impunity. They are the brightest ornaments of our country. And shall they be at the mercy of every officer in the British navy ? Shall every American seaman be exposed to be overhauled, like a bale of contraband goods, by any interested captain, midshipman, boatswain, who as he may chance to like or dislike, shall claim him as British or turn him off as American ? Is this a mode of trial which we, an independent nation, ought to submit to ? Gratitude, honor, justice forbid it ! I speak not from passion. I am supported by the greatest names and highest characters in the country. I am supported by every administration. Jefferson, Marshall, Pickering, Madison, and Munroe, when secretaries under their respective Presidents, have successively reprobated the iniquitous practice in the severest terms that indignation could supply ; and demonstrated its injustice by every argument that a conviction of its atrocity could produce on the strongest and most vigorous intellects. Twenty years has it been the continual theme of ineffectual remonstrance—and but for the friendly aid of these Orders in Council, might have been a mere punctilio of negotiation as much longer. We had talked about it indeed till we could have no face to fight about it ; and it is not hard to conceive from what inducement the Prince Regent looks upon our tardy resistance as in the highest degree extraordinary and unexpected ! But, Fellow-Citizens, if a gross invasion of the personal liberty of an American seaman ; if the loss of some thousands of our bravest and most useful brethren are not to be resented, let us no longer boast of our independence, but at once subscribe to whatever conditions of servitude Great-Britain in right of her superiority over us may dictate.

If there be any thing in what I have said ; and I think I have not entirely failed in justifying the present war

with Great-Britain, how are we to account for that inveterate, violent, and I might almost say rebellious spirit of opposition, which ever since its commencement has been manifested towards those, who, in right of the powers vested in them by the constitution, declared it? Britain, says one, was always ready to negotiate. This, so far from being disposed to deny, I readily admit and go farther: I say it was always what she wanted. While she could have negotiation she was quite sure of having no war. But does this prove that we ought forever to negotiate? Directly the contrary. We had spent so many words with her, that we had almost argued away our rights, and the spirit of the nation.

But we were too hasty; we were not prepared! It must be acknowledged that our Administration appear always to have calculated more upon the justice of England than the well known disposition and the uniform history of that nation would warrant, and not to have anticipated the present state of things early enough to have made all the preparations that they might have done. This can surely be no objection to the justice of the war; and after it is declared, becomes entirely impertinent. It is indeed a censure upon those who make it, for instead of justifying opposition, it calls for exertion.

But our troops have been guilty of entering Canada! And must I again have recourse to the story of our revolution to justify a measure so plain, so obvious, so perfectly politic, so necessary? Montgomery entered Canada, "made war upon the unoffending inhabitants," and died before the walls of Quebec; but we have never yet heard that that war was waged "for the purposes of conquest and ambition."

These objections have hitherto been nearly merged in the overwhelming cry of *French Influence!*

This monster, ushered into existence from the prolific brain of Fisher Ames, has long been a singular

source of terror to the good people of these United States ; and like the frightful deities of Hindostan appears to have been the more devoutly worshipped the more abhorrent its deformity. Shaped out in suspicion, and compounded of all the dissocial and misanthropic affections, it has haunted the imaginations of these good people with a delusion which neither reason nor philosophy could drive away. Unfortunate indeed is it for this country, that a Constitution so admirably formed as ours, should be, even in its greatest perfections, a source of evil to a people who so fully realize its beauty, and so effectually demonstrate its excellence in their universal appearance, as do the American people. But that activity of mind, which results from the uncontrolled liberty of thinking and communicating which it guarantees, will not be always employed in contemplating its benefits. Satiated with real good, they must ponder on imaginary evils. Therefore let no one who would figure with this people as a politician, who would rise to high honors, and gain an imperishable reputation, when speculating on the state of the nation, consult *reason* ; no, he would there find nothing but a dull round of cultivated fields, peaceful dwellings, proud cities, extensive manufactories, well appointed schools and well attended churches, confidence, security, freedom, happiness ; or if he extended his reflections to our foreign relations, would only observe a plain, dull, consistent, system of conduct, such as fostering a peaceful commerce, doing justice to every one, and hurting no one, when smote on one cheek, turning the other, and reasoning instead of fighting ! But let him have immediate recourse to *imagination*, and after invoking all the evil spirits of spleen, malevolence and suspicion to assist him, if he is at length, able to conjure up some hideous bugbear, frightful enough to attract attention, let him protrude it in all its deformity upon his country. He may be assured

that the head which conceived will be regarded as the oracle of wisdom and the heart that dictated as the temple of patriotism. If it be only moderately disproportioned, he may see its image immediately reflected from newspapers, senates, pulpits ; if infinitely ugly, he may see it in time the watch word of a party, which must not be relinquished but at the hazard of infamy ! Such was this bugbear of *French Influence*, which has now, to the infinite joy of every friend to union, received its deathwound in the downfall of Napoleon.

How has this man, Fellow-Citizens, appeared on the theatre of human affairs ? How has he dazzled, astonished, terrified ? Rising from obscurity by the influence of a most powerful genius, he became, successively, a hero, a revolutionist, a tyrant, a conqueror. Victory never left his standard ; terror went before his name ; till growing giddy with an elevation and a fame higher than any mortal had before attained, and imagining himself beyond the reach of fortune, he would make his nod the law of sovereigns, and his ambition the rule of right. He has met that punishment which ambition ever brings upon itself ; he has shown another illustrious instance of that fate which ever hangs over the head of boundless love of power ; for though human ability could not withstand his matchless skill, yet the very elements themselves combined to turn the tide of victory ; and all Europe following up the success, hurl'd him from his throne. We acknowledge the justice of his fate ; and rejoice that France, after having alternately experienced the extremes of anarchy and tyranny, has at length been able to attain that golden mean, which if she knows how to prize (and her constitutional fickleness makes it extremely doubtful) may make her happy. Nor have we any reason to despond, though our enemy has become by this means so powerful, since we may confidently anticipate that the delusion of *French Influ-*

ence and *British magnanimity* will be succeeded by the clear perception of an honest government fighting for every thing sacred on one side, and an old and overgrown oppressor fighting for all that is iniquitous on the other. Real magnanimity I take it, Fellow-Citizens, consists in open, generous warfare; in attacking the strong, but sparing the defenceless; in being neither depressed by adversity, nor elated by prosperity. British magnanimity, has ever been the reverse of all this. It shone pre-eminently conspicuous in Ireland, in India, at Copenhagen, in the war of our revolution; it has also in the course of this war displayed itself in its true colours, in setting on the insidious savage, in attacking our defenceless villages and *sparing* our strong seaports; and it now comes forth in all its lustre. What! Our government had not sought peace in the spirit of peace! Had we in season restrained British subjects from entering our merchant vessels, Britain would readily have renounced the practice of impressment; and late as it is, we have every thing to hope from her *magnanimity*! Such was not long since the language of opposition, and, in prospective, was seen this poor, frenchified, government, who had so wantonly challenged this magnanimous nation to a wicked war, trembling, suppliant and receiving from her gracious forbearance that pardon which it had no reason to expect from her justice. But now it seems, when Britain has triumphed over France, this practice of impressment has become a mere cypher! In the pride of this success she seems to be more mad than ever. We hear of retrenching our boundaries, relinquishing Louisiana, giving up our fisheries, our East and West India trade, as indispensable preliminaries; and we may think ourselves fortunate, if we have not his majesty the Prince Regent to govern us! If we are to expect all or any of these claims, (and what may we not expect from Britain intoxicated with victory?)

Is it not time, my Countrymen, that we seriously look to the safety and honor of the nation? Is it not time that bugbears and chimeras existing in the fancy should give way to real danger? Is it not time that New-England resume the high attitude which she is entitled to hold in the republic, and which she had so foolishly relinquished? When we consider what this state now is, and what it ought to be, we must be struck at the infatuation with which men may pursue a course directly the reverse of their interest, or glory, and yet imagine they are pursuing both.

We boast of our hardy yeomanry; our military strength; we boast that in the *north* lie the sinews of the nation. What then is our obvious duty? Are our magistrates to clog, retard and discourage the constituted authorities, because they cannot govern them? Rather is this the hour that should see us the protectors and defenders of the national honor. Whatever may be the disputes of the day, whatever the bickerings of party, national disgrace will be our disgrace and national glory our security. Behold the Navy of our country! They consult not private opinion—their rule is obedience. Yet how are they honored! How does every mean, base, party passion bow down abashed before the enthusiasm of patriotism! How is every rankling jealousy lost and overwhelmed in the strong sense of public glory excited by their victories! The reason is obvious; the reputation they have gained will be a talisman of terror to our enemy and safety to ourselves, forever. These considerations, abstracted from the justice of our cause, might surely have induced to a different course from that pursued by our Legislature. And what additional excitements have we now to unanimity?

If neither to protect the freedom of our trade, nor the rights of our sailors; if neither the thousand wanton insults, nor the thousand unprovoked injuries

we have suffered, if no considerations of national honor have as yet been sufficient to call up a proper patriotism ; let at least the safety of our homes and our firesides, the preservation of our territory and our constitution awaken the sensibilities of this people. Let reason resume its sway ; let it inculcate throughout the republic a hearty and effectual co-operation in all its branches ; a spirit of obedience and emulation. Then will adversity only serve to show more completely the strength of our compact ; we shall come out tried and proved from the furnace ; soon will the distinctions of party be forgotten, and England be compelled to learn *once more* from us, single handed, the lesson which she and all Europe have but just taught Napoleon.

To you, Republicans, it cannot be necessary to point out that obvious course which reason, honor, consistency dictate. You have hitherto, through the influence of the contagious torpidity around you, remained inactive. But every consideration, the cause you support, the professions you have made, now call upon you to put yourselves in the front rank of patriotism and danger. Let not this day, devoted to the contemplation of the heroism of our fathers, pass unimproved. May their spirit fall upon us, their mantle come over us ! May we, as we admire, be prepared to imitate. And may posterity look back to the conflict now approaching, as we look back to our glorious revolution !