

ORATION,

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THE THIRTY FOURTH ANNIVERSARY.

OF

American Independence.

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ORATION.

THE festivity of patriotism may, with propriety, be classed among the most elevated joys of the human mind. It is not a light fantastick gaiety playing around the surface of the heart, and snatching the shadows of pleasure as they flit along : It is a magnificent and philosophick recreation of the soul, which, taking her flight above the observation of vulgar objects, smiles and rejoices in the sublime love of liberty.

It is to emotions like these, fellow citizens, that we owe our emancipation from the British tyrant. It is to such emotions that we owe the illustrious blessing of national sovereignty. In the hands of a dull, a tame, and an irresolute people, the whole tremendous machinery of war is little else than mere lumber and rubbish. With such a people, the sword, the bayonet, and the cannon, are almost harmless, or rather ridiculous instruments. It is the spirit which, while it forces, justifies an appeal to arms, that can alone assure them successful execution, and drive them through perils to triumph and to glory. Such

was the spirit of Americans : a spirit sublime and unconquerable ; which bravely faced the thousand formidable terrors which despotism could oppose to it, and which ultimately taught our haughty foe this humble and bitter lesson, that, “for a nation to be free it is sufficient that she wills it.”

The story of the American revolution furnishes a text upon which philosophy might write a thousand volumes of instructive commentaries. In this respect it may justly be considered as far more valuable than every other history, ancient or modern.

Most other histories present us with no very flattering pictures of human nature : On the contrary, human nature is exhibited under the most degrading and mortifying aspects. We see the vilest and the blackest passions start into frightful and ungovernable operation. We see ambition climbing to power through the secret and winding avenues of fraud ; or openly and directly marching to it by violence. We see governments without a compact, authority without right, laws without wisdom, and religion, or rather bigotry without even the forms of morality or virtue to recommend it. On the one hand, we see kings swimming to their thrones through oceans of human blood ; and then making their power subservient to the degradation, the misery, and at last, the destruction of their subjects. On the other hand, we behold these subjects stung by repeated injuries which they can no longer endure, in their turn hurling these usurpers from their thrones, and, in the

tempest of their wrath, tearing up the foundations of society, and scattering, on all sides, desolation and ruin.

Such are the lamentable views displayed by most histories in regard to the political condition of man.

But when we turn our eyes towards the American revolution, and the glorious results it produced, a brighter and happier prospect bursts upon the view, and we yield ourselves to the fascinations of admiration and delight.

When we consider this revolution, man, on this side the Atlantick, appears under a new aspect; he seems to breathe with a new soul, to think with a new intellect, and to be animated by a regenerated spirit. We almost wonder that he has ever been a slave. We can hardly believe that he could ever tamely surrender his neck to the yoke of despotism; and we become almost incredulous to the testimony of those histories, which have recorded the meanness and brutality of his servitude.

When we contemplate this revolution, a new region of political philosophy breaks in upon us. Government appears no longer a consecrated mystery, but a rational and beneficial science, progressive like its sister sciences, in which discoveries may be made to an indefinite extent.

When we reflect upon this wonderful revolution, we regard the political prejudices of ancient times and distant nations as the chimeras of madness or the dreams of idiocy, rather than as the errors of rational

beings. The sounding titles, the empty pageants, and the solemn mummary of monarchical governments appear to us like so many contemptible artifices calculated to defraud ignorance of even the little understanding it may chance to possess, that it may have neither the faculty to perceive nor the spirit to resent those impositions they are intended to conceal. Kings and emperors, and dukes and lords, and cardinals and bishops,—nay, the whole gay delusive puppet-show of political impostures looks like the wicked enchantment of a set of juggling fiends, who flatter the senses that they may seduce the understanding, and who, by this sort of infernal witchcraft, strive to immortalize the empire of folly.

These, fellow citizens, are among some of the most striking and salutary impressions, resulting from a review of our memorable revolution: a revolution which began in a manly resistance of arbitrary power, and which terminated in that happy and splendid event, whose anniversary we, this day, consecrate.

But we ought not here to dismiss this topick. The manner in which our revolution was conducted requires at least some portion of our consideration; for it gives value to our liberties by shewing we deserve them.

No nation is entitled to freedom who knows not how to obtain it, or who knows not how to preserve it after it is obtained. This is one of those obvious and eternal truths, which can never be controverted with the least colour of argument: Hence there are some

people fit only to be slaves like the beast which is harnessed to the plough. Even he may rebel if you treat him too hardly, but he will nevertheless be satisfied with his servitude, and the most he will desire is a change of masters.

So is it with some people. They are not only willing to fall down before the golden calf of monarchy ; they pay a most sincere and hearty elevation to the idol, and even vaunt of their worship. Their minds are incapable of those generous and lofty sentiments, without which, rational liberty can never be properly understood. If they cannot understand it, they have no business with it ; for they would only abuse it. They would turn it to the most unjust, the most cruel and the most destructive purposes.

With such a people, liberty is but another name for the most profligate and abandoned licentiousness. Break but *their* yokes, and tear asunder the salutary cords which bind *them*, and like so many wolves and tigers let loose upon the world, they would instantly begin the horrible work of carnage and desolation. Every thing beautiful in nature and sublime in art would become the objects of their fury : Nor would their wrath be restrained, nor the dreadful progress of devastation be terminated, till the necessity of self preservation should drive them to solicit the interposition of some hardy and determined tyrant, from whose strong hold they might hope never afterwards to escape.

Such is the strangely brutal and ferocious characters of some nations. But not so the characters of Americans. We always knew the value of liberty ; and were determined never to part with it. Let us then, only abide by this determination, and we may place the most unlimited confidence in its security.

Of the strong title which Americans have to freedom, greater evidence cannot be adduced than that which is furnished by the history of our contest with Britain. Even when we were the humble colonists of that haughty nation, we were not willing to hazard the liberties we then enjoyed, though invited by the alluring chance of enlarging them.

With us, allegiance if not a sacred, was at least an honourable principle. We obeyed the king and obeyed him cheerfully, so long as he kept within the pale of his prerogative. And even when this king and his vile servants, and still viler parliament, were forming an unnatural confederacy against us ; when the insolence of power and of office was demanding of us the surrender of that principle which was the bulwark and defence of our freedom ; even then we forebore an immediate appeal to arms ; and our judicious moderation and philosophick temperament are among the most meritorious traits in the characters of the revolution.

We had learned the maxims of prudence in the school of intelligence. We well knew how essential government was to the protection of liberty ; and we were not willing to risque the latter by an inapro-

vident contest with the former. We therefore conducted ourselves according to the suggestions of the most cautious policy.

We were willing, for the sake of the greater good, to elect the least evil. We were willing to prostrate ourselves even at the footstool of a tyrant. We were willing to drain the bitter cup of humiliation, even to its very dregs. We knelt before the throne, and in a supplicating attitude beseeched his majesty to recognize our rights.

But the art of humility and the science of prayer were exhausted in vain. The king frowned contemptuously on our abasement; and, in spite of our philosophy, we were obliged to appeal to the last reason of nations.

We flew to arms—we sought our oppressor—we hurled the thunderbolt of our wrath—we were free!—the enemy acknowledged our independence, and we were classed among the nations.

Such is the character of our revolution—in this manner was it conducted—in this manner was our freedom achieved. Who then will deny our title, our proud, our boasted title to liberty, to glory—I had almost said—to political immortality.

But, fellow citizens, better were it for us that we had never known the divine blessing of liberty, if we must now part with it forever! Part with it forever did I say? It is a thought too painful to endure, though but in fancy.

Let it not be said that Washington fought, or that Warren died in vain. Let it never be declared that we are unworthy the sacred cause for which these heroes so gloriously contended; or that we have wasted, or deserted, or have even been driven from that invaluable and splendid inheritance which they so largely contributed to purchase by their valour and their patriotism.

The disgrace of such an event can be more easily conceived than described. Mountains of infamy would heap themselves on us and on our posterity, which neither time nor labour could take away. Then indeed would our wretched and degraded offspring lament the hour of their nativity, and in the voice of mingled grief, indignation, and horror, pour a thousand curses on the heads of their fathers.

It behoves us, then, fellow citizens, to guard our rights with the most zealous and unremitting vigilance; for the enemy is at hand, who is waiting to destroy them.

I will give you an emblematical description of this enemy.

Over a cassock of black, she wears a flowing robe of purple and gold. On her head is a crown and a mitre, the significant ensigns of church and state. At her breast is a pendant of burnished topaz, with this engraving, "*pious fraud.*"

In her right hand she waves a sceptre, bearing at one end a wreath of cypress, and at the other a garland of poppies. At the cypress end is this inscrip-

tion, "*despotism*;" and at the other is this inscription, "*delusion*."

Her right foot, bare and brawny, treads maliciously in the dust the hated volumes of modern philosophy; and her left foot is bound in a sandal stained with the blood of martyrs.

Such, fellow citizens, is our foe. She stalks abroad in dark and secret places, and celebrates the virtue of tyrants and the piety of monks, in feasts of human victims, and libations from the skulls of infants.

She hypocritically assumes the attitudes and gestures of a saint, and straining her goggle and blood-shot eyes to heaven, with all the holy vehemence of a certain right reverend political election sermonizer, she breathes out her calumnies and her anathemas against the best friends and brightest ornaments of humanity, and lastly, winds off with the zealous praises of religion.

Again I say, fellow citizens, such is our foe. I need not tell you the name of this allegorical personage. You may learn her name from her character. You may learn it in that malevolent and almost frantick hostility, with which our government, our constitution, nay our very independence, has been, alas, but too long assailed.

It may be found in the deadly persecution of republican virtue by those who arrogate to themselves the exclusive possession of the talents, and the morals, and the patriotism, and, lastly, the religion of our country.

But permit one to ask where is the evidence of that vast fund of talents and morals, which are so much boasted of? Let the impotent reproaches the abortive wit, and the wilful and execrable falsehoods which swell the pages of OSGOOD and of PARISH, answer this question.

These are among the men who have received the animated praises of a certain junto, for acuteness and vivacity of mental powers, as well as for strong and undeviating principles of integrity. But the party are welcome to these men. Republicans are too proud to envy any honours which can be derived from the alliance of such characters.

Thus much as to the talents and morals of this arrogant and peevish faction. We will now briefly examine their title to patriotism.

Patriotism, we have been taught to consider as signifying the love of one's country; and it never fails to display itself in generous and disinterested sacrifices of private advantage to the publick good. It is a preternatural, and, I had almost said, a god-like virtue.

But do the most violent of the opposition possess it? Do they love their country? Do they venerate its institutions? Do they obey its laws? Do they respect the constitutions? And do they contemplate the political happiness of their fellow citizens with pleasure and with pride?

Let a long and regretted catalogue of recent and well established facts answer these questions.

We have not yet forgotten the rebellion against the embargo laws, nor the efforts to effect a separation of the States, nor the thousand ingenious labours to embarrass the national executive in his attempted negotiations with the belligerents; nor the wanton and wicked calumnies of Jefferson; nor the indecorous justification of Great Britain, and the criminal reproaches of our own government, in matters which concerned the dearest interest and most sacred honour of our country.

Can this be patriotism? Can so much vice be found in the company of such a dignified and elevated virtue? No, fellow citizens, it would scorn such mean society. It is not patriotism; it has only borrowed its name to give facility to its projects of sedition. It is the mad and malignant spirit of party, whose opposition is founded in no slight or superficial views, but arises in a rancorous and implacable hatred of our republican institutions.

Having thus briefly dispatched this topick, we will now examine the title to religion which our opponents are so forward to claim, and on which they are perpetually dwelling with such complacency and such triumph.

To boast of religion is the reverse of religion: And in those who profess christianity, such conduct is not only immodest, but amounts to something little short of insolence; nay more, it is impious; for it falls within the description of that odious and loathsome offence for which their Lord and Master so severely rebuked the Pharisees. We have, therefore,

the highest possible authority for calling into question the sincerity of these vaunting professions.

Religion, my fellow citizens, is not an idle fancy which dwells on the exterior of the mind, and enjoys the dismal ecstasies of fanatical speculation. It does not consist in sickly dreams or frantick reveries. No, indeed : It is a deep and settled principle of the heart, which sweetly mingles itself with the affections, which incorporates itself with the disposition, and produces a happy and essential result to the entire character of him who possesses it.

It is not full of noisy impertinence. It is not perpetually stunning us with the praises of its own infallibility, and with the reproaches of those, to whom it imputes error. On the contrary, it is full of gentleness, it is full of peace, it is full of love. As it respects professions, it preserves a modest and unobtrusive silence, and it is in actions only, that it is truly and divinely eloquent.

The man of real religion is a man of delicacy ; he is a man of feeling ; he is endowed with all the tender and elegant sympathies. In every bird that sings, in every flower that blossoms, in every spire of grass that grows, he finds a perpetual and inexhaustible theme of gratitude and adoration.

He does not impiously attempt to pry into the awful mysteries of the divine nature, but humbly retires from speculations for which his Maker has not given him a capacity. Instead of insulting you with the brutal and exploded dogmas of ignorant and bigotted commentators, he recommends the cultiva-

tion of the understanding as one of the best means of forming the heart to virtue ; he blesses God for the gift of reason which distinguishes him from the brutes ; and, lastly, he pours out his heart in thanksgiving for the wisdom and the happiness with which the abundance of nature continually supplies him.

He is meek, and charitable, and humble. He seeks out objects of distress. He feeds the hungry and he clothes the naked.

Like the blessed Jesus, weeping at the grave of Lazarus, his soul is divinely touched at the sight of sorrow. He compassionates it—he soothes it. Like a little child who grieves for the afflictions of its beloved mother, he will gently put his hand and steal away the tear that is coursing down the cheek : And, like the good Samaritan, he will pour oil into the wounds of the unfortunate, with no other reward than the delight which attends the consciousness of a benevolent action.

This, fellow citizens, is real religion ; for it bears good fruit. Every one must venerate it ; for it admisters largely to human happiness ; although every one cannot or does not practice it. It is indeed, the religion of Jesus. He recommended it in his precepts,—he practised it in his life.

But, permit me to ask, is this the religion of our opponents? If so, it is time that we heard less, and that we saw more of it. Let them then no longer boast of it. Let them no longer with the odious ostentation of Pharisees, proclaim their piety upon the house-tops ; but let them exhibit some resplendent

examples of virtue that shall awe us into admiration. At any rate, let them furnish one single solitary proof of sincerity, and convince us, if they can, that they are not consummate hypocrites.

I have now completed my examination of the title which our adversaries so modestly claim to all the talents, and all the morals, and all the patriotism, and all the religion of our country. The evidence and the argument are both before you, fellow citizens, and I most cheerfully submit it to the integrity of your understandings to deduce the result.

When I speak of our adversaries, I mean not to comprehend every individual who has enlisted himself in the ranks of the opposition. So far from it we are ever proud to believe that the great mass of the American people are brethren of the same principle. And the splendid triumph which has crowned the republican suffrage the present year justifies the hope that our numbers ere long discourage the voice of opposition.

This, however, like almost every thing else, must be left to the determination of time. Much depends on the wisdom and spirit of the people, and much, very much depends on the judicious and energetick policy of the chief executive. We all know the important powers which are committed to him by the constitution; and these it is his duty to exert in such a manner as will best meet the expression of the publick will.

And now, fellow citizens, permit me again to admonish you of that ceaseless vigilance, so essential

to the preservation of our liberties. These liberties were dearly purchased ; we paid their price in blood ; they are therefore deserving of our warm and constant solicitude.

Let us then watch the foe ! Let us inculcate in our children a veneration of republican institutions. Let us be meek and humble in our religion, and leave to our adversaries the triumphant accusation of infidelity. Let us patronize the arts, foster the sciences, and cherish literature. Let us take genius by the hand, and assist him in the attainment of that fame and that glory which is his natural destination and rightful inheritance. Above all, never let this day, this thrice joyful day, pass unconsecrated by appropriate festivities.

Then, fellow citizens, in spite of tyrants, traitors, and hypocrites, we shall be indeed a great and an illustrious people ; great for our wisdom and illustrious for our felicity.

Then, indeed, peace will take up her abode amongst us, and the voice of faction be heard no more. Then the frenzied reign of fanaticism will fall, and the serene empire of philosophy rise upon its ruins. Innocence will beam on our dwellings, and plenty smile in our vallies.

Then, fellow citizens, you may gather your children around you, and make to them this happy declaration ; *We have fought the battles of our revolution, we have finished its triumphant course, we have kept the republican faith : we have obtained our inde-*

pendence, and have preserved that independence from the violation of the enemy: and now we are able to transmit to you a splendid and tranquil inheritance, which, we pray God may be "incorruptible and undefiled, and may never fade away."

O my countrymen! at the mention of your children, do you not feel a tide of tenderness gushing in upon you? Are not your finest sensibilities awakened, and do not your hearts swell and throb with emotions too delicate for utterance?

Turn your eyes with me, and behold the numerous children who are the spectators of our happiness. Their young eyes gaze with delight upon the scene, and wonder at it. Their young hearts beat with a new, but confused joy; for they know not yet all the pride of this jubilee. But they will one day know it, they will one day feel it, and they will hereafter display all the enthusiasm of their fathers.

O my dear little ones, you know not now the happiness that awaits you. You know not the blood that was shed for you. Yes, your fathers did not fight and bleed for themselves alone: they fought and bled for you also.

Alas, they have not long to abide here. A few more years and their spirits will mingle with those of eternity. And when the ashes of the grave shall cover them, when the earth shall hide them from your sight forever; when you have ran the happy race of boyhood, and are called upon to fill your stations in the world; then, O then, my dear children, forget

not this day ; but imitate the noble example your fathers have set you. On every return of this anniversary, gather round the altars of your country, and celebrate the blessings of heaven, and the virtues of your ancestors. Take *your* children in *your* arms, who are to be the future fathers of a more distant generation ; and in *your* turn teach *them* also the divine lessons of liberty.