

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED IN THE MEETING-HOUSE,

AT

RUTLAND,

JULY 5th, 1802.

By WILLIAM CHARLES WHITE, Esquire.

*Hail ! Independence ! hail ! Heav'n's next best gift,
To that of life and an immortal soul !
The life of life ! that to the banquet high,
And sober meal, gives taste ; to the bow'd roof,
Fair dream'd repose, and to the cottage, charms !*

THOMSON.

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A N

O R A T I O N.

I AM, almost, overpowered with embarrassment, Never, before, had I such feelings as, at this moment, oppress me ! Already do I begin to wish that I had declined a task, far, far above my abilities to execute ! Yes, such is the partiality of my Fellow-Citizens, that I am called upon to deliver my sentiments on a subject, which might employ the copious genius of a CICERO, or exercise the rapid and impetuous eloquence of a DEMOSTHENES !

THOUGH these considerations give me an almost unbounded title to your candor, yet many acknowledgements, and much gratitude, are due to the subject, on which I have the honor to address you. Such a subject, as LIBERTY, cannot fail of animating even the dullest mind ! It possesses a generosity and a nobleness, which steal secretly upon the heart, and govern all its affections. LIBERTY, my Fellow-Citizens, is a theme the most engaging and sublime ! It has wrapt up philosophy in the noblest contemplations, it has invigorated the eloquence of the orator, it has animated the song of the poet. At the holy name

of Liberty ! the depressed and abject slave rises up in awful rebellion against his oppressor. His soul acquires an elevation, from which it looks down with abhorrence on a tame and submissive servitude. He is determined to be free ! LIBERTY, the daughter of Heaven, and the benefactress of mankind, is the deity, to which we, this day, offer up our devotion. Most emphatically is she entitled to the worship of Americans ! With a pride, grateful as it is becoming, they recognize in her, the friend of virtue, and the friend of their country. There is a charm in her smile as bewitching as the inspiration of beauty ; there is a sublimity in her rage as terrible as the wrath of Heaven ! Unprovoked by the assaults of despotism, she has the meekness of a lamb ; but when roused by oppression, her fury rests not till it has hurled a bastille into ruins, or torn a tyrant from his throne ! LIBERTY, like the saviour of men, has, too frequently, been spurned by the rich, and despised by the proud ! She has been denied by more than one PETER ; she has been betrayed by more than one JUDAS. Like the blessed MESSIAH of the christians, she has been crucified, buried, and exalted into Heaven !

FROM her celestial residence, she beheld a great and magnanimous people struggling against a foreign despot, who called himself their King. Her eye glistened with indignation ; she instantly flew to their relief ; and Americans were rescued from a bondage, which would have been both cruel and disgraceful !

THAT we may the better appreciate the blessings of our emancipation, let us, for a moment,

contemplate the character of him, who was our foe ; let us look into the heart of him, who meditated our slavery ; let us analyze that pageant of a Kingdom,
GEORGE THE THIRD.

DID he not call himself by every fair name, which hypocrisy could invent, at a time too, when his military butchers were violating the most sacred obligations of humanity ? At a time when those more than barbarians were murdering our citizens, and defiling our virgins ? Did he not call himself our *father*, at a time when he was instigating the sanguinary genius of the savages to new experiments of torture and devastation ? Did he not keep up the impious title of *defender of the faith*, when our plains were reeking with the blood of our heroes, and our villages were made a burnt offering to tyranny ? Was not the art which made him a hypocrite, suggested by that pusillanimity which constitutes a coward ? Was he not a villian through fear ; and did he not shrink from honesty, as a thing fatal to his nature ?

IF such be the character of **GEORGE THE THIRD**, in what illustrious knave shall we look for his parallell ? Shall we find it in **CALIGULA** ? He, alas, was an idiot ! The ridiculous attachment, which he bore his horse, is a sufficient proof of the imbecility of his mind ; and his famous wish that *the Roman people had but one neck*, is rather an evidence of his aversion from torture ! Shall we find it in **NERO** ? He, indeed, was a monster ! But his mother was his greatest foe ; and the parricide which he committed was in defence of his crown.

If, then, the dignified page of history does not furnish a parallel to **GEORGE THE THIRD**, we ought to disdain to gratify a, perhaps, fruitless curiosity, since we must thereby ransack the dark volumes of Newgate cell-ders, and bloody registers! It would be an unenviable task, indeed, to recount a long and a black catalogue of cold murders and midnight assassinations!

IN refusing to dwell, thus publicly, on the particular vices of **GEORGE THE THIRD**, let us beware how we bury in forgetfulness the instructive story of our wrongs. Let us beware of any injustice to the memory of those intrepid warriors, who made a willing sacrifice of their lives in defence of their country! Let us cherish, in eternal remembrance, the virtues of **WARREN**, **MERCER**, and **MONTGOMERY**! Let the annual return of this day be dedicated to a kind of political sacrament, in commemoration of their martyrdom! Let us bear in mind, that to forgive national injuries is beyond the authority of individuals; and that that man is, at best, but a cold patriot, who can tamely and patiently look back to those dreadful days of adversity, when the rights of his country were insulted by a malicious and deadly tyrant!

It is time that we turned our eyes from this hideous picture of our old adversary; it is time that we fixed them upon a character, bright in every virtue, and illustrious in every great qualification. The character of **WASHINGTON** is a subject rather of sublime speculation than exact analysis. It is easier contemplated than described. There is a stillness and

a tranquility in reflection, finely adapted to the survey of his character. At every examination of it, new beauties rise to delight us, and new virtues rise to inspire us. We look upon WASHINGTON as having been one of those extraordinary men, whose great and good qualities were examples of the highest perfection of human nature. He seems to have united in himself the most distinguished excellencies of the most distinguished of heroes, without any of their vices, or even weaknesses. Like POMPEY he was valiant, yet like ALFRED he was wise. Like HANNIBAL he was enterprising, yet, like FABIUS, he was prudent. With resources less than those of BELISARIUS, he accomplished a greater sum of victory, than was achieved by ALEXANDER ; and with a foe more dreadful than CAESAR to contend with, he outstript a CATO in firmness and magnanimity ! Such was the man, who shone the hero of our revolution !

BUT it is not in our own country, merely, that we are to look for those who were its champions ! The justice of our cause, not only gave determination to our own councils, and courage to our own armies, but inspired even distant nations with sympathy. In *France*, a FAYETTE generously extended the hand of relief in a moment of distress. It was then that our hearts beat high with gratitude at the name of *Frenchmen*. The Gallic flag waved proudly on the ocean, and her thunder bade defiance to the naval pirates of the world !

EVEN in *England*, the very dwelling place of our foe, a CHATHAM exerted the whole energies of

a mighty genius in vindication of our rights. In the midst of a parliament notorious for its venality, he delivered the sentiments of a just and independent man. He disdained to flatter the wickedness of an execrable monarch. There was a happy coincidence between his virtues as a man, and his wisdom as a politician. The greatness of his mind and the excellence of his heart were, always, displayed together. He was a patriot, but he was, also, a philanthropist. He loved his own country, but he likewise liberally extended his regard through the whole circle of humanity. He beheld with almost "streaming eyes and a bleeding heart," the dreadful accumulation of wrongs that were heaped, by his king, upon a young, and almost defenceless people. He saw their miseries and he complained! He saw their victories and he triumphed! An unprincipled and oppressive House of Lords sunk with shame beneath the majesty of his eloquence, and a vicious and abandoned aristocracy blushed at the sublimity of that virtue, which they had neither the greatness nor the fortitude to imitate. O, my countrymen! this venerable man remitted not his solicitude for your welfare even amidst the distractions of disease. He exposed his life in discharging his duty as a legislator, and "*America*," was the last word that trembled from his lips! Would it not, then, be an eternal reproach to your gratitude, to pass by this day, without offering up your praises to the memory of this distinguished benefactor! Let us, then, consecrate his virtues by inscribing them on our hearts; let us deify his name, by associating it with that of LIBERTY!

HAVING thus bestowed a momentary thought on the tumultuous time of our revolution, it may not be improper to take a glance at those peaceful and happy scenes which now gladden our country. The dreadful conflict between a dastardly king and an insulted nation is, now, at an end. The great charter of our independence has been solemnly and officially executed. The minions of St JAMES'S no longer upbraid our distress with reproach, or our prayers with butchery. They no longer din our ears with a hue and cry about *royal mercy*, or crimes against *majesty*! No, my fellow citizens, we, now, acknowledge no royalty, but the royalty of our nation, no majesty, but the majesty of independence!

ONCE in four years we exercise the highest prerogative of our liberty. It is then that we reveal to the world our dearest sentiment in the policy of our nation. It is then that we place at the head of our general government, the man, whose virtues have enthroned him in the hearts of his countrymen.

It is not the least of the many pleasing considerations, afforded by this anniversary, that the present first magistrate of our nation possesses, in an eminent degree, those great and useful talents, which so happily qualify him for his arduous situation. To do justice to the character of JEFFERSON would demand a genius of no ordinary skill. There are in it, some fine lineaments, which would require many exquisite touches of the pencil. He is remarkably distinguished for a liberality of mind, which alone elevates him above all competition.

children are not driven from the inheritance of their fathers, to make way for *one* older child, whom fortune had brought *before* them into the world. Such a selfish and monopolizing system may suit the unfeeling pride of unblushing aristocracy, but it can never be endured in a nation of generous and enlightened freemen! No distinctions are made between the two sexes, dishonorable to that, which we emphatically term fair. Our law shews not a blind and stupid preference to the male heir in its dispensation of family estates. No, my fellow citizens, we have not yet to learn, that the daughter is as precious to the parent as the son; that the relation, in which she stands to him is as dear; and that the weakness and delicacy of her sex, so far from invalidating, rather confirms her title to justice.

In our criminal code we see not the exercise of a wicked and cruel invention! The wheel and the hurdle are instruments unknown to our mild and humane system. In all cases, there is a due proportion between the crime and its punishment. The agonies of a dying malefactor are never aggravated by a dreadful succession of still different tortures! "The sins of fathers are *not* visited upon their children!" Such savage inflictions are opposed to the beneficent genius of our government. They partake of the nature of revenge more than that of punishment.

With such constitutions, with such laws, is it possible that we can be politically unhappy? Would it not be ingratitude to complain? Would it not be an atrocious insult to the memory of our forefathers?

tion. The human mind is every where fast approaching the majesty of intelligence. In this universal progress of the intellect, the rights of man become more sensibly felt and better understood. That monster, which we call a KING, has already begun to be odious. Such a fantastic and glittering nuisance must, therefore, soon be extirpated from the face of the earth. The world will not much longer be deluded by the glare of its diadem, or insulted by the mockery of its purple! No, my fellow citizens: The crown and the sceptre will, ere long, be numbered among the relicks of antiquity. They will soon add themselves to the riches of the virtuoso; and be valued only as the most wonderful curiosities of barbarism!!

He venerates the public sentiment as a thing awfully sacred ; as a thing, which ought never to be profaned by government, under the artful pretext of punishing sedition.

In religion, as in politics, we behold, in this great man, the same benignant, the same charitable spirit of toleration. And where is the man audacious enough to accuse this spirit ? Can we call ourselves freemen, while our consciences are in slavery ? Shall we not, rather, deprecate that persecuting zeal which forbids the mind the privilege of thinking ; which, in the violence of its fury, passes sentence of condemnation on the noblest faculty of man ; and would fain excommunicate his reason ? O, my countrymen ! what term of infamy would you apply to the sacrilegious plunderer, who should rob you of the comforts of your religion ! What sighs of anguish would escape you, at sight of your holy temples prostrated, by the profane hands of the Deist and the Jew ! How amiable would be your distress ! How magnanimous would be your indignation ! Look, then, into the secret of yourselves ! Consult the pride of your understandings ! Count over the riches of your hope ! You will, thereby, learn what are the sufferings of the Deist and the Jew, when the pride of *their* understandings is insulted ; when the riches of *their* hope are destroyed !

It is necessary, for the happiness of society, that religionists of every persuasion should renounce those rude incivilities so disgraceful in any character, but more particularly so, in that of the christian. For him there is no apology. The holy being, whose

example he professes to adore, was a perfect model of meekness and generosity. To him the passion of hatred was unknown. His pure and upright soul was never shaded by a single cloud of malignity ! Why, then, should any of the disciples of this being indulge themselves in those ungracious dispositions so abhorrent to benevolence and their master ! Shall we not charge bigotry with the cause ? O, my friends, when once the mad and merciless temper of bigotry is let loose upon the world, there is no crime too high for its commission, there is no enormity too extravagant for its practice. For the truth of this assertion I appeal to the authentic records of history. I appeal to the absurd persecution of GALILEO who was censured, as a heretic, by a barbarous inquisition, for advancing an astronomical truth. I appeal to the reign of the second THEODOSIUS, when a young and amiable woman was inhumanly murdered by a set of pious ruffians, because she was attached to the religion of her fathers. I appeal to the celebrated massacre of St. BARTHOLOMEW, when an ocean of blood, an ocean of human blood, was shed to appease the malice of the catholicks !

SINCE, then, we have these dreadful examples before us, with what vigilance ought we to guard against those prejudices which mislead, and those passions which destroy. With what jealousy ought we to view that gloomy and misanthropic spirit, which too often imposes itself upon the credulous for the true religion !

WERE I capable of drawing a picture of religion, I would form in my mind an image of perfect puri-

ty. Her eye should be serene. Her attitude should express the backwardness and reserve of modesty. Her right hand should be eagerly extended in love towards her friends ; her left hand should be generously inclined in charity towards her enemies. How different this from that dark and comfortless superstition, which broods, with fullen malignity, over the miseries of life ! The character of the one is full of simplicity and benevolence ; the character of the other is full of affectation and hatred. From religion we have every thing to hope ; from superstition we have every thing to fear ! The one will teach us to overlook those little differences of opinion, the existence of which must be expected among a great people ; the other will embroil us in perpetual warfare. The one will conduct us with a steady hand, through the undeviating paths of truth ; the other will seduce us, with a giddy and intoxicated step, through the trackless wilderness of falsehood !

BUT it is not the terrible fury of fanaticism, alone, which we have to dread. We have another fiend to encounter, at whose frantick rage, humanity shrinks with consternation ! Let us collect, then, the united forces of our wisdom, and our virtue, to quell this monstrous, this audacious spirit of party ! This spirit leads, in the melancholy train of her ruin, those estimable virtues which give a charm to Society. She brandishes a scourge of living serpents, whose very hisses deafen our reason, but whose sting is more agonizing than death ! In her rage for devastation, she assails whatever is wonderful in genius, or digni-

sed in virtue. It is this restless and pernicious harpy, who poisoned the felicity of the ancient republics, and, finally, triumphed in their destruction! Greece felt the plague of her factions, and Rome felt the mischiefs of her fury! In the one, ARISTIDES, the just, the patriotic, the amiable ARISTIDES was marked out, a guiltless victim of her abomination! In the other, her pestiferous rage glutted itself upon the brave and memorable CAMILLUS. In our own country, she is, we hope, but a stranger. We have seen many marks of her spleen, but no monuments of her desolation. Let us, then, discourage the first efforts of her confidence, lest she, hereafter, acquire a boldness which may be fatal to our LIBERTY!

THERE is no antidote, perhaps, so effectual against this insolent spirit of party as REASON! It is those thousand prejudices which we imbibe from education or accident that obstruct our passage to truth, and which, by perpetuating our ignorance, perpetuate our folly! While therefore, our prejudices remain, this spirit of party will never forsake us. Let us then, act in a manner, becoming the nobleness of our nature. Let us act worthy of freemen, and take reason for our guide. It will conduct us to wisdom and to happiness. It will bind us together by a tie more dear, more honorable, and more lasting, than can be effected by the most ingenious and solemn contract upon parchment. It will relieve our minds from those busy and vexatious prejudices, which are not only troublesome to ourselves, but highly offensive to society.

Was it not prejudice, which sharpened the rage of the two factions of *York* and *Lancaster*? Reason disdains to decide the claim of two kings, when *both* are usurpers! Was it not prejudice, which impelled the crusaders to the holy land? Reason would have told them, that conscience is not to be converted by the sword; and that an all-merciful being can never smile on a murderer! Was it not prejudice, which, in the days of ecclesiastical insolence, made the anathema of a *POPE* more terrible than the edict of an emperor? Reason blushes at such monstrous absurdity! Is it not prejudice, which, even in this day, sanctifies the presumption of kings, and almost consecrates the palaces and thrones of tyrants? Reason disclaims such idolatry!

PREJUDICE, my friends, is both blind and obstinate. It is incapable of discerning truth, and, therefore rejects it. It worships ancient follies, because they *are* ancient. It proscribes modern improvements, because they *are* modern. But reason, ever temperate and ever free, examines for itself. It searches, after truth with never-ceasing solicitude. It explores with a bold and discriminating eye, the arduous works of philosophy, and the exquisite productions of genius. It approves whatever is just, it admires whatever is beautiful, it reveres whatever is sacred, it condemns whatever is absurd! Its judgment is originally and eternally its own, and is never biased by the wavering temper of party. Where is there a guardian, then, so vigilant, where a guide so faithful, where an instructress so intelligent

as reason? It was this highly illumined faculty, which, once, lighted us through the dark winding paths of a dreary revolution. It directed us safely to this paradise of freedom, which we now enjoy, and which it may still enable us to preserve.

WHILE we, thus, indulge ourselves in a strain of anxious and solemn admonition, on a subject so important as that of reason, let it be remembered that it is our privilege to boast of the highest monuments of its perfection! Our federal and state constitutions furnish its amplest and brightest commentary! It is in these, that we trace the vestiges of an uncorrupted wisdom! It is in these, that we peruse those sublime lessons upon government, which might make the proudest monarch blush! It is in these, that we see the rights of man definitively asserted! To our rulers, discretionary power is cautiously and sparingly delegated, while the people are left free to elect them into office.

No feudal oppressions incumber these mighty charters of our LIBERTY! We are not here childishly amused with a vain and nonsensical prattle about privileged orders! Such empty and unmeaning words as DUKE and CARDINAL find no place in our political vocabulary.

OUR laws, the legitimate offspring of these constitutions, speak a language pure and plain as that of their parents. They disdain to adopt those follies and vices of ancient jurisprudence, which originated in barbarism. The vile doctrine of primogeniture is here exploded as a cruel abomination. Younger

Would it not be an unexampled impiety against heaven? But these questions are surely impertinent! I am too well acquainted with the generosity of my Countrymen to suppose them necessary! Consider them, if you please, then, as the interrogatories of an ardent and hasty imagination.

WERE it possible for us to be so far forgetful of our national and individual prosperity as to indulge ourselves in disgraceful murmurs, it might be useful to review not only the ancient, but also the recent history of Europe. A melancholy and repining spirit may there find an abundant subject of gratification. Its indignation and its pity may there be eternally excited! It may there behold the bloody conflicts of ambition; the artful, the cowardly, the infamous impositions, which are practised upon the weak and the ignorant classes of mankind.

SUCH a review, however, might be unworthy this joyful, this glorious occasion! We ought not, if possible, to indulge, on this day, a single gloomy reflection. Every heart should beat with a high and noble exultation! Let us, then, instead of bewailing the distresses of our fellow beings, look forward, with an eye of prophecy into futurity. Let us anticipate, in benevolent imagination, those times of general felicity, when human nature shall assume its just dignity throughout the world. Americans claim the honor of setting an example which challenges universal admiration! This memorable example has not been without its influence; nor will it cease to do good, while a single nation on the globe remains in oppres-

T O T H E

HON. LEVI LINCOLN, ESQUIRE,

ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,

AS A TESTIMONY OF THE HIGH VENERATION,

IN WHICH

HIS VIRTUES AND HIS TALENTS

ARE HELD,

THE PRECEDING PAGES

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS FELLOW-CITIZEN,

THE AUTHOR.

Rutland, July 5th, 1802.