

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED

AT TOPSHAM.....DISTRICT OF MAINE,

ON THE

fourth of July, 1805,

THE ANNIVERSARY OF

American Independence.

AT THE REQUEST OF

THE FEDERAL REPUBLICANS

OF

BRUNSWICK AND TOPSHAM.

By SAMUEL WILLARD.

Portland :

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MR. SAMUEL WILLARD,

SIR,

THE Committee of Arrangements for the celebration of the birthday of our national Independence, in the name, and at the unanimous request, of their fellow citizens assembled on this occasion, express to you the high satisfaction they have received from the excellent oration delivered by you this day, and solicit the favor of a copy for publication.

**JOHN ABBOT,
CHARLES COFFIN,
BENJAMIN HASEY. } COMMITTEE**

Brunswick, 4th July, 1805.



Brunswick, July 6, 1805.

GENTLEMEN,

THE approbation of the wise and good is an object of laudable ambition. If this attempt has been in any degree successful, I am richly rewarded. A copy of the address accompanies this note.

With high respect, I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient and humble servant,

SAMUEL WILLARD.

*JOHN ABBOT, Ling. Prof.
CHARLES COFFIN,
BENJAMIN HASEY, ESQ'S.*

Oration, &c.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAPPY were our fathers and elder brethren, who on the morning of our political day first entered the smiling field. All was then beauty, novelty, and splendor. On every side flowers and early fruits were so richly diffused, that selection was the only labor required in preparing the most sumptuous entertainment. Far different is the task of him, you have appointed to provide on this occasion. Studious to please, he has wandered thro garden, field, and forest, in search of something new and entertaining. But all to no effect. The flowers have already been plucked, or they have fallen to the earth; and the fruits, that appeared so fair in the bud, are now withered!

The memory of past joys affords at best a melancholy pleasure, and departing glory casts a shade behind. How then shall we review those scenes, that once shed lustre and happiness on this our natal day? How shall we look backward without blushing, or forward without trembling? The virtues of our political fathers were once our boast; but they are now become our reproach. What then is to be done? Shall we consign them to oblivion? Gratitude forbids. No; oft, as the sun performs his annual circuit, let us assemble, and pay our tribute to the memory of those patriots, whom we have not virtue to imitate. Let us unfold their characters. Let us follow them thro every trying scene, and observe their manly spirit, their patience, their courage, and their ardent love of country; and if possible, let us kindle in our own bosoms the flame of emulation.

Here might I pause, and for a few moments give free

scope to your winged thoughts. Words would impede your recollection. All the circumstances of the revolutionary war are familiar to you. You know the beginning, the progress, and the event; the labors and sufferings, the discouragements and the hopes, the defeats and the triumphs. These things you have often traced in history, and you have seen them dressed in all the charms of poetry. To celebrate the praises of your heroes has been a favorite task of the bard, who has exerted all the powers of art in adorning his theme.

But what are the powers of art, compared with those of nature? On this subject the war-worn soldier is the most impressive orator. Every wound, received in defence of his country, adds to his eloquence. How often has his simple narrative beguiled you of a long winter evening, while in a fixed posture you have caught every word, as it fell from his lips! Meanwhile your hearts continually vibrated between hope and fear, joy and grief. At his fears you were alarmed; at his dangers you trembled; for his sufferings you wept; in his triumphs you exulted. While in his artless manner he described battles and sieges, you heard the groans of the dying, and saw rivers of blood flow before you. After all this, what can you expect or desire from me? My warmest eloquence would not do justice to your feelings.

We have seen the conduct of our fathers in the field of battle. Let us now follow them to a calmer scene.

The object of our contest was to obtain an equal and just government, not to gain savage liberty. Accordingly the attention of the American citizens was early directed to the formation of such constitutions, as would be most likely to secure the rights, they had so nobly defended. This was no easy task. Almost every person had some peculiar prejudice; and political prejudice, especially when built on self-interest is not easily removed. Most were in favor of a democratic form of government with a mixture of aristocracy. You have seen the result.

Tho we must admire the form and substance of our federal constitution, we can not think, that every article was founded on the immutable ground of justice. Much was the effect of concession. Hence we may look for continual change. Those, who, to save their country from anarchy and civil war, have sacrificed some of their own most valuable rights, may now appeal to the modesty, as well as justice of their opponents, for an amendment of those articles, that were built on such unreasonable concessions, as none but extortioners would have had a face to require, and none but patriots would have consented to grant. On the other hand, it may be expected, that person void of the sentiments of justice and patriotism, who have already enriched themselves by arrogance and assumption, will attempt change after change, till every vestige of equity be erased.

The government of this State and that of the United States, are similar in their general construction.— Were I permitted to give an opinion, I would say, they are both too aristocratical. If they had been more republican, they might have been more stable and more productive of happiness. The voice of the people should be distinctly heard, and their power should be easily felt. A little aristocracy may be admitted, but it should be used, as alloy. Democracy is the pure gold.

Let us for a few moments contemplate the most aristocratical feature in our constitutions, and we shall be struck with its ugliness. I refer to the mode of electing the high officers: viz. the federal representatives, the governor, lieutenant governor, and senators of the Commonwealth. When the people are required to vote immediately for these, a fatal blow is given to republicanism; and tho the form remains, it is a dead carcass, worse than nothing.

The great body of the people, consists of farmers and mechanics, who, if industrious, are fixed to one spot, and whose acquaintance is generally confined

to their own town. Within these narrow limits their acquaintance may be intimate. They have many opportunities for knowing the characters of their fellow townsmen. Beside their private connexions as neighbors, they all meet several times a year, to transact their public business ; and in all well regulated towns they every week assemble in the relation of brethren, to pay their acknowledgments to the common Father of mankind. In some of these various scenes, a man's true character is generally unfolded to the observing eye.

Here then is the field, where the people might display their invincible power. Here they might act with courage and independence. If they would be content within their fortress, their persons, and their rights, would be secure from all invasion ; from open violence and secret fraud. But the moment, you send the people into the unknown world, to vote for a civil ruler ; when you send them to enquire of any body and every body, "Who is the suitable candidate ?" that moment you subject them to the vilest imposition ; you make them slaves of invincible despots ; you turn them out blindfold to fight with tygers and scorpions. How much better it would be for the people in these instances to vote by proxy ! How much would it contribute to their safety, and how little would it derogate from their majesty ! In the concerns of private life, from the most trivial to the most important, we use the services of others without diminishing their dignity, or loosing the reputation of prudence. A person unacquainted with merchandise, employs a judicious agent. In sickness we do not rashly prescribe our own medicine, nor in the intricacies of law do we disdain, or fear to entrust an able advocate.

In almost every village are two or three persons of integrity and extensive acquaintance. From these the people might choose electors, who should meet, and give their vote for the officer to be chosen. Then all would be safe. Then the people would be the origin of power. Then they would be the main wheel in the the great political machine, giving direction, as well as motion, to all the rest. Their voice would be an

infallible decree. If they wished for able and virtuous rulers, they might easily have them by appointing electors of the same character.

The present mode of electing most of our civil officers, is, as observed before, the very essence of aristocracy. The people are the nominal voters, but they are mere tools. Their hands, their feet, and perhaps their hearts, are called into exercise, while their heads are neglected and despised. Like puppets, they move and speak, as directed by a few managers behind the curtain.* As they cannot act independently in the choice of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, senators, and federal representatives, they form such a habit of blind submission, that they will not use their own reason and judgment, where they might, in the choice of their town representatives.

But this high seasoned aristocracy, is sweet to the taste of the people. It is the last thing, they would relinquish. The power of giving their immediate vote for all their civil officers they consider the ensign of their sovereignty. On the day of election equality takes place thro' all orders. Then you may see those

* Whence arise these expressions? Not from contempt of the people, but from indignation against the aristocrats, who thus abuse and insult them. The farmers and mechanics of New-England are respectable, very respectable, in general well educated, and very capable of governing themselves, if they were not required to vote for men, with whom they have no acquaintance. A person may have talents and learning enough to make him a legislator, and at the same time he may not be qualified to vote for Governor. To proceed understandingly in this election, he must be acquainted with characters; and, to obtain a general acquaintance with men, the farmer and the mechanic must leave their farms and their shops, and spend their time in rambling over the state: they must cease to be farmer and mechanic and instead of being, what they now are, the support and ornament of society, they must become idle vagabonds. It is an honor to the great body of the people to say, that they are not generally acquainted with men. It is the same, as to say, they are industrious, they keep at home, and mind their own business. The conclusion is, that with our present mode of election the people do not and cannot act independently. They must vote, as an unknown Somebody directs. Experience agrees with this theory. The people have become mere instruments of election. This is truth; it is a solemn truth, and, if any deny it, let him lay his hand on his heart, and answer these questions:—
 "How is it, in our elections there is no division, except what arises from general politics? Is it because all the people are acquainted with every candidate? or, because general orders are given from head quarters, and the people are so well disciplined, as to yield cheerful obedience? How happened it, that in 1804, all these, who for three years had thought Mr. Gerry the best man for Governor, deserted him, and with the unanimity of bees, swarmed around Mr. Sullivan?" If these things can be reconciled with the independence of the people, I will retract every thing I have said.

who can neither write nor read, strutting off to meeting with all the pride of self-importance, while each has a soliquy, like this : “ I am a great man, I vote for governor. My vote may turn the mighty balance of the state.”

Here is a fine tune to be re-echoed by the insidious demagogue. Vanity is the weak side of the people. Let the ambitious flatter them, and they will love him. Let him pay them “the homage of his high respects,” and he will be esteemed a patriot and a christian, while he tramples on the laws of God and the rights of man.

We have seen one grand defect in our constitutions ; but still they are better, than could be expected amid the violent collisions of interest and predjudice. One man of wisdom may form a beautiful theory of government, but the great difficulty is to make others concur in the adoption and support of his plan. An instrument of ten thousand strings, cannot be tuned by man. If it could it would require an angel to play upon it. Beneath a mortal hand the most jarring discords would soon arise.

Division has long been our unhappiness and reproach. It first appeared in relation to foreign countries. Injuries create aversion ; favors attachment. We were no sooner weaned from our mother England, than we ran to the arms of France. She received us with apparent affection, and beguiled us into the most extravagant fondness. It was long esteemed a mark of Patriotism to hate England and love France. The wise and discerning early saw, which was the more worthy of hatred. They saw thro the policy of France, and were effectually cured of their fondness. Tho this alienation was the temporary salvation of our country, it made such a schism, as may never be closed. After France had opposed all favorable terms of peace between us and Great-Britain ; after she had sent her ministers hither to spit in the face of ~~of~~ our government ; after she had laid her rapacious hand on millions of our property ; the attach-

meat of many remained the same, and they were ready to curse every one, who discovered the least emotion of resentment. Happily for us the majority of the nation were not then blind to the danger, nor submissive to insult. Happily for us we at length escaped the embraces of her, who, to show the ardour of her affection, has sucked the heart's blood of all her lovers.

As every warm climate is fruitful in venomous reptiles ; so ever-free government nourishes a faction, to bite and sting her own sons. We have always had a faction in our country. At first it was a worm in the dust, but it is now a flying serpent. It was some time, before it rose so high, as to aim its impoisoned sting at the heart of our political savior. At the heart of Washington ! Every drop of patriotic blood, every drop of human blood, curdles at the thought ! And yet to the astonishment of earth and heaven, this serpent has completely charmed the people, and seems ready to devour them.

Variety of opinion is an unavoidable consequence of human imperfection. Different men have different degrees of light from the brightness of the meridian sun to the feeble rays of a star beneath a veil of clouds. Some are in total darkness where the purest white appears black.

Erroneous opinions, that have no effect on practice, should be viewed with indulgence. If your neighbor assert, that the earth is a large plain, and that the sun actually rises and sets, you may smile at his weakness, but you ought not to quarrel with him. The error is very harmless. But some opinions are so evidently false and wicked, as to have no claim to charity. For instance, should a person maintain, that it is no crime to invade your property, your life, your bed, or your reputation, charity toward him would be inexcusable. There is no such thing, as neutrality, in the case. You must either embrace, or reject with abhorrence.

Some erroneous political opinions now prevalent in

this country are entitled to candor. For example, it is possible, that an honest man may believe the present administration more just, economical, magnanimous, or even more republican, than the former. Some very honest men have denied their own existence.

A few centuries ago the Pope, who pretended to be the humble follower of Him, that said, "My kingdom is not of this world," assumed universal authority and absolute power over the empires of men. Whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down. He brought the greatest sovereigns of Europe, to hold his stirrup, and made them literally kiss his feet. Yet many honest christians believed him meek and humble. While he carried on the most bloody persecution against all, who dared to *wink* differently from himself, they fancied, they saw tears of compassion roll from his fatherly eyes. Tho' he boldly transgressed every article of the sacred constitution, these honest men still believed him a good christian. Human nature is the same in every age. Can we then wonder at any thing, that has lately happened in our own country? Is it strange, that good honest republicans should be earnestly engaged in support of the greatest despots? It may be strange, but it is not impossible.

Candor however does not forbid us to lament this delusion. An honest man is the most powerful agent in a bad cause. His sincerity renders him active and zealous, and his reputation for integrity gives him influence.

The most upright are frequently most liable to imposition. Conscious of no wish to deceive, they fear no deception. Hence they too often judge men by their professions without paying any attention to their conduct. If a man tell them, he is their friend, they require no proof but his word.

This want of just suspicion gives the artful, the designing, and the false, great advantage. A person of real merit, who is every day proving his uprightness

and benevolence by valuable services stands no chance against the boasting villain. These honest people want some stronger proof of friendship, than mute actions can afford.

The man, whose head has been turned grey by anxiety for his country; whose body is covered with wounds received in defending her rights, is neglected, because he has not brass enough to trumpet his own praises; while the new born patriot arises, lets fly the arrows of calumny, and proclaims his own "love for the people," his "republicanism," his "economy," "magnanimity," and "virtue," and is immediately embraced.

Hitherto we have observed nothing in the people but honest credulity, and for this we ought to make the most candid allowance. But—when we are told, that civil rulers have no concern with the duties of the Christian or the man; and that the public teachers of religion have no right to preach against the vices that are encouraged by the favorites of the people; nor even to warn their hearers against the pernicious effects of bad example; our blood runs cold. Never was so much poison collected within so small a compass. Already we see its malignant effects. Already has it swept away its thousands and tens of thousands, and the contagion is rapidly spreading. When will the plague be stayed!

That the minister of religion ought both by example and precept to recommend good order, obedience to magistrates, and respect for the constituted authorities, will be denied by none; it is an injunction of the gospel. Perhaps he ought never in the desk to speak of the characters or measures of administration, except when they evidently affect religion. So the child is commanded to honor his parents; and tho by their vices they may forfeit their title, still he is obliged to treat them with all the tenderness, respect, and submission, consistent with fidelity to others. But, when he sees his dearest friends, his brothers and sisters imitating the bad example of his parents, blindly follow-

ing the road to destruction, must he still be silent? must he still palliate? Humanity forbids. The laws of heaven forbid. These cases are similar, but differ in extent. The vices of a parent may ruin a family; those of a ruler corrupt a nation. The wicked parent is like a lonely cottage on fire. The vicious ruler is an inflamed tower in a city.

The relation of politics and religion is like that of the body and soul. When the animal body is destroyed by violence or disease, the soul arises to superior worlds. So when the body politic is corrupted, religion flies from the abodes of men. To say then, that the clergyman has nothing to do with the religious character of civil rulers, is just as reasonable, as to say, that he has no concern with the bodies of men, that he has no right to relieve corporal distress, not even to rescue a victim from the robber's knife. Who laid these restrictions on the gospel minister? Certainly not He, who so often commissioned his prophets to reprove the unprincipled kings of Israel and Judah.

In the choice of rulers it is equally wicked and imprudent to disregard religious qualifications. Where the eye of common sense is not blinded by the impenetrable veil of prejudice, the imprudence of such conduct will immediately be seen. It is an eternal truth, that

"A foe to God was ne'er true friend to Man.

We have indeed been told, that "the worst men make the best husbands;" and we have lately heard, that "bad men make good rulers." But the ruin of many individuals and communities proves both these maxims to be detestable falsehoods. They are twin monsters, the offspring of villany and credulity. Is a man dishonest in private life, what security can you have of his integrity in public? Will he be restrained by fear? or by the principle of honor? Certainly not by fear. Knavery in private dealings is more liable to detection, than in public matters. Every man's eyes are fixed on his own interest. Here he is watchful, and can hardly be deceived. But it is not so in the affairs of state. The people, who are

most concerned in the integrity of administration and who must be the guardians of their own rights, are liable to the grossest imposition. Many state matters are so intricate, that the people cannot understand them. Here the villain may satiate his desires without apprehension of danger.

But it may be said, that every public officer is called to an account for all his conduct, especially when public property is concerned. This was formerly the case in our country, but it is not so now. Was Mr. Jefferson called to an account for the fine he remitted? Was he called to an account for the nolle prosequi in the case of Duane? Was he called to answer for the thirty-two thousand dollars expended on the Berceau? Did not the friends of Mr. Jefferson rebuke the curiosity of the faithful representatives of the people, and restrain them from asking any questions with regard to the expenditure of so large a sum of their constituents' money? Now, supposing it had been possible for Mr. Jefferson to cherish any unworthy desires, say, whether he might not safely gratify them, when he saw, that his friends were so firmly attached to him, and had such unwavering confidence in him, that they would never suffer him to be questioned with regard to his most important transactions? In order to derive security from the mutual checks of the different branches of government, you must be sure to have the majority inflexibly upright; and to obtain this majority, you must make it your fixed principle never to elect to a public office a man, who is not honest, upright, and faithful, in his private dealings.

That a sense of honor will be a safeguard of the public interest, is too weak to need refutation. The honor, that is not built on the immoveable foundation of morality and religion, is the very worst principle of action. It permits, yea it prompts the political knave to sacrifice the good of the whole to the interest of his party. So the high-wayman is obliged by the most refined sense of honor to be faithful to his clan, while he is at war with all the rest of the world.

Enough has been said of the imprudence of overlooking the moral character of a candidate for office. Less would have been sufficient, but unhappily a large proportion of our fellow-citizens can be met on no other ground. Policy and self-interest are the only arguments to be used with persons, who have no religion. But for men of enlarged views, refined sentiments, and noble desires; for those, who believe in the existence of a Superior Being, to whom man is accountable; we have another argument, infinitely more weighty, than any derived from policy. As surely, as God delights in virtue, for every mark of approbation, we bestow on the enemies of virtue and religion, we must give an account on the day of judgment. He that in political election prefers the bad to the good stabs at the heart of his country, and in the eye of the great Guardian of nations will be considered a traitor and parricide. But this is not all. He takes the most direct step to subvert, if it were possible, the empire of Christ. Let him then blot from his prayers these two petitions; "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Does he shudder at this impiety? How much more should he tremble at the thought of insulting heaven with such hypocritical petitions!

Is vice a plant so rare and valuable, that it must be cultivated? Is it not a useless and pernicious weed, that has already overrun the face of the earth, and converted the garden of God into a wilderness? And will you still spare it? Will you nourish it with riches and honors? No; pluck it up, and tread it under feet, as equally vile and detestable. If we have any sincere love for our country, let us be virtuous; let us be religious; and let us do every thing in the power of love and hatred, to reform the morals of our people. If we succeed, all our exertions will be richly compensated; & should we fail; should our political building that is now reeling over our heads, fall, and bury us in its ruins; still we shall not be forgotten; every drop of our blood will be numbered, and recorded in heaven.

Finis.