1823

Oration Delivered at Wiscasset, July Fourth, 1823

Moses Emery
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ORATION

DELIVERED AT WISCASSET,

JULY FOURTH,

1823.

BY MOSES EMERY, ESQ.

WISCASSET:
PRINTED BY JOHN DORR.
1823.
Wiscasset, July 4, 1823.

DEEPLY impressed with the truly patriotic sentiments you have this day expressed, permit us the honor of presenting to you, in behalf of our fellow-citizens, their vote of thanks for your elegant Address, with their request for a copy of the same for publication.

B. Young,  
WM. M. Boyd,  
Darius Wilder,  
Zeb’l’ Thayer,  
Nymphas Stacy,  
Committee of Arrangements.

Moses Emery, Esq.

Gentlemen,

Please to accept, in behalf of our fellow-citizens, the assurance of my liveliest gratitude for the very flattering compliment they have paid me by their vote of thanks and request. If in their opinion, my hasty production will tend, in any measure, to fix the fleeting impressions of passing events, and, what is more, to cherish a love of our happy country, a copy is at their command.

I am, Gentlemen,  
Your most obedient Servant,  
Moses Emery.

To the  
Committee of Arrangements.
ORATION.

MY FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN:

BEFORE the North American Colonies had ceased to rejoice at the successful termination of the French and Indian wars; while the recollections of many a perilous expedition were fresh in their minds, and the wounds of many a bloody day yet unhealed; ere the war-whoop of the savage, or the dread tidings of the messengers of death, had ceased to ring in the affrighted imagination of the suffering inhabitants, or the praises of the gallant Wolf had died away on their lips; the British Government commenced against them a system of oppression, more fatal than the hostility of the French—more to be dreaded than the tomahawk of the savage. It was a period, when a sense of united efforts to repel danger and desolation nourished a lively attachment to the parent country—a time, when the interchange of friendly offices and a community of interests bound Americans to Englishmen by the strongest ties of affinity. To resist aggression was to act the unnatural part of a child rising up in rebellion against its parent;—it was to forego all the pleasures and advantages of social and commercial intercourse with Great Britain;—it was, without the resources of an organized Government, to set at defiance the most powerful nation under Heaven;—it was, in fine, to light up again the slumbering resentment of the savage, that had only been smothered for a time, that it might break out again with more destructive fury. Accordingly, when duties were
first laid on some articles of importation, our countrymen contented themselves with remonstrating only. But that independent spirit of investigation and that pertinacious attachment to their rights and liberties, which brought them from their native country, their relatives and friends, set bounds to their forbearance and submission, which even George the 3d. could not transcend; and it was not all their veneration for the land of their fore-fathers, or the lively recollections of the past, that could deter them, when Great Britain had thrown off every semblance of parent and friend, from coming forward boldly to vindicate their rights.

The attacks upon their dearest privileges were, at length, too direct to admit of any alternative, but to renounce all pretensions to liberty and humbly throw themselves upon the mercy of their persecutors, or to assume a firm posture of defence and trust their all to the courage of their hearts, the might of their arms, and to the decision of the God of Battles. They did thus trust, and were redeemed from the oppressor and his chains.

The battle of Lexington, amounting to a declaration of war on both sides, is perhaps among the most important events of the Revolution. Are there none present who can recollect when the news of the affair of Lexington and Concord first reached their ears?—none that can remember what emotions it excited in their bosoms?—what a fearful forecast they were led to take of the future?—what a scene of troubles, effusion of blood, parting of friends, and direful solicitude, hung over the prospect? Who could then look upon the abyss before him, tossed by so many storms, traversed by so many enemies, and not shudder at the thought of embarking thence to a port unknown?

The battle of Bunker's or Breed's hill followed some one or two months after, and though our troops were compelled to retreat, they did an essential service to the cause of their country, and covered themselves with immortal glory. Who ever heard of this battle and did not, on the impulse of the moment, wish he could have been there? The simultaneous fires of Charleston added new terrors and new energies to the scene,—a scene, perhaps the most truly sublime and awful, that was witnessed during the Revolution.
I need not, surely, describe all the incidents of the American Revolution, previous to the Declaration of Independence, to revive in your minds the interesting feelings of the period;—the taking of Ticonderoga, of which our brave, but afterwards unfortunate Col. Allen demanded the surrender, in the name of the "great Jehovah and of the Continental Congress,"—the ill-fated expedition against Quebec, in our recollections of which, the death of the gallant Montgomery throws a gloomy shade over the scene, and gives our impressions a deeper cast of sadness; the attack upon Sullivan’s Island, where victory "perched upon the blood-stained sword" of Columbia: No, these events are never to be forgotten; to name them, is more than to describe them.

On the 7th of June, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, a member of Congress, then assembled at Philadelphia, made a motion for declaring the Independence of the Colonies of North America, and, on the 4th day of July following, after mature deliberation, the thirteen Colonies, under the name of the United States of America, were declared a free and independent nation. This day it is, my friends and countrymen, that we are here assembled to commemorate. This day it is, that wrested from the grasp of the far-famed “ruler of the waves,” and the self-styled “King of Great Britain, France and Ireland,” the fairest portion of his forfeited inheritance, and gave birth to a nation of freemen. Some of the results of this day’s deliberations, and the influence of the principles which determined them, will form the subject of what I have to offer.

The Declaration of Independence cut asunder all the formal ties, that linked America with Great Britain, and our countrymen no longer used the hypocritical mockery of styling themselves the faithful subjects of a monarch with whom they were at war. All the forms and ceremonies of servile submission crumbled together in the dust, and the spirit of Freedom moved triumphant through the Union. The hopes of a reconciliation no longer palsied the arm of the doubting; the lines of distinction between Tory and Patriot were clearly marked. "He that is not for us is against us," was the language of the times. No alternative was left the secret royalist, but active patriotism or disgrace, and many, who
would not have yielded from choice, were compelled by the love of character to advance the American cause.

The campaign following the Declaration of Independence was prosecuted with great vigor and various success; but ended gloriously for the Americans, in the surrender of Burgoyne and all his army prisoners of war. This was indeed a bloody year, and many a patriot spirit was sent before the throne of the Almighty to plead the cause of freedom and his country.

The three succeeding years were filled up with all the horrors, distresses and vicissitudes of war. Now the American Eagle soared proudly sublime o'er the encrimsoned field,

*With terror on his beak and lightning in his eye;*

then, the British Lion growled, in sullen triumph, on the battle ground. The taking of Stoney Point by General Wayne, the battle of the Cowpens, the treachery of Arnold, and the execution of the amiable, accomplished and gallant Major Andre, will ever be remembered.

The campaign of 1781 terminated in the capture of the whole British army under Lord Cornwallis. We are informed, that at the battle of Marathon, where a numerous army of Persians, who had come to conquer Greece, were routed and cut to pieces by a comparatively small band of Athenians; one of the victors, mortally wounded, ran to carry the joyful news to the city, and arriving at the gates just as the purple stream of life was dropping its last, uttered only, "rejoice, we triumph," and expired on the spot. This last success of the American arms sent a thrill of joy, like an electric shock, through the Union, and Doct. Ramsay tells us, that "one man, at least, expired under the tide of pleasure that flowed in upon him." This was, substantially, the conclusion of the Revolutionary war; for the continuance of hostilities was only indicated by occasional skirmishes of little moment: As when a destroying tempest has past over, the splendor of the sun and the clear blue sky are intercepted only by wandering skirts, that loosely attach themselves to the great body of the cloud: Or as when the main shock of an earthquake has spent its force, the stillness and the quietude of the earth and heavens, are interrupted only
by desultory concussions and the feeble rumbling of subterranean
movements.

In 1783, the British Government followed the other European
Powers in acknowledging the Independence of the United States
of America. Thus ended the war of the Revolution, which con­
secrated the memory of Washington to everlasting veneration,
and ushered in the political Millenium of his country.

I shall not attempt to delineate the origin, or to discuss the
merits of the various parties, that have risen up since the close of
the Revolution. Wherever civil and religious liberty is enjoyed,
there will be and there must be, in this imperfect state of being,
a difference of opinion on political and theological subjects; and
it is the spirit of persecution and despotism only, that condemns
a man for the honest convictions of his soul. Let us then, my
friends and countrymen, expel every lingering shade of party
prejudice, and, as partakers of the same inestimable blessings,
rejoice together, that our God and our warriors have made us
free and independent.

The war of 1812, while it proved the necessity of disciplined
soldiers and entire union, if we would undertake great enterprizes
and cover our enemies with sudden dismay, shewed also, that
Americans were capable of the grandest achievements,—that the
spirit of the Revolution still animated their bosoms,—and that,
whether they fight for liberty, or for fame, "the rolling drum and
thrilling fife," is the music they will march by to victory or
death.

The second, like the first war with England, was wound up
with a most brilliant victory, on the banks of the Mississippi.
The battle of New-Orleans was the grand salute, that hailed the
coming news of peace; it was the thunder and the lightning
and the hail of the storm that shook the foundations of the earth;
and, passing away, rendered milder and deeper the serenity and
stillness of the succeeding calm.

I shall now proceed to consider the influence of the example
and principles of our Government in a more widely extended
sphere.
I have already intimated, that the peculiar cause of the Revolution, in North America, may be traced to a more thorough acquaintance, on the part of the Colonies, with the unalienable rights of man, than belonged to any other people. The doctrine of the "divine right of Kings," and the maxim, that "a King can do no wrong;" were at once exploded and thrown aside, as ridiculous and absurd. The right acquired by conquest and maintained by arbitrary power, was the right of banditti to their plunder—was the right of the corsair to erect a death's head and unfurl the bloody flag on the high seas. It was determined, that the only true foundation of civil government is compact, expressed or implied, and that the terms are obedience on the one hand, and protection on the other. The British Government had torn up their charters, violated the terms of the civil compact, and against their rights and privileges waged a most determined war. On the principles of self-defence, therefore, the Colonies rebelled.

I should not have troubled you with this dry dissertation on the fundamental principles of our Government, did I not wish to direct your attention to the wonderful phenomena, that are resulting from their progressive diffusion through the world. The ball of the American Revolution, to which an Otis or an Henry gave the starting impulse, has not yet ceased moving; it still rolls, and will continue to roll, to the end of time.

The French Revolution was among the more immediate consequences of the American: But the extremes, between absolute monarchy and pure Republicanism, were too wide, and the transition too sudden, for the French nation. Liberty was a draught they had never tasted, and, when indulged, they drank to excess, became delirious, and fell to destroying one another. They were, at length, restored to their senses; but the cup of liberty was dashed from their lips. The reign of Bonaparte was the most brilliant of modern days, and the loss of freedom was compensated to Frenchmen, by the full indulgence of their characteristic love of glory.

On the European continent, the misfortunes of the French threw the principles of Republicanism into temporary disgrace; but in America, the splendor of our example shot up the political
horizon, with the brilliancy of the northern lights, and not only shone over the panting inhabitants on the banks of the Amazon, but illumined the fertile shores of the Rio-de-la-Plata. Colombia is, already, an organized Republic. The other nations of South America have long been engaged in the most arduous struggles for liberty; but have unhappily mistaken their object, or are pursuing it with bewildered minds. When the progress of civilization and farther dissemination of sound principles of government, shall have dispelled the darkness, from which they are emerging, and given them a clear vision of the perfectability of civil government, they will, undoubtedly, follow the examples of the United States and the Republic of Colombia, and the whole American Continent, from where the polar bear prowls for his prey, among the icebergs of the North, to the extreme limits of Patagonia, become one general dominion of liberty.

I would only name the attempt of Naples at independence, to throw it into merited derision. It was not the fire of liberty that animated the Neapolitans; but the soot and smoke of despotism had produced a transient nausca. The attempt was only a squib and a dispersion.

What a striking contrast to this dastardly insult upon the cause of freedom, is exhibited in the glorious struggle of the Greeks! It was in Greece, that the battles of Marathon, Platea and Thermopylae were fought. There flourished Solon, Lycurgus, Epaminondas, and myriads of distinguished heroes and Republicans of ancient days: There Xenophon, Plato and Socrates wrote their immortal works of genius, which we read with interest at this distance of two thousand years: There sat an Athenian Assembly, electrified to the soul by the unrivalled eloquence of Demosthenes, or listening, with transports of delight, to recitations of Homer. The Greeks, then, have not only the living example of American Independence to encourage them; but the recollections and pride of ancestry impel them forward. The prayers of patriots, philosophers, scholars, and Christians, are perpetually ascending to Heaven for their success.

Inhabitants of Spain, what language shall Americans hold with you? Shall we tell you that liberty is an European tale—only
another name for licentiousness and anarchy?—that independence is the phantom of fools and the "wilderling vision" of madmen? Or shall we shew you a country of freemen, that has prospered beyond any other nation that ever existed?—point you to our system of jurisprudence, our institutions, and our national character for hardy industry, strict morality, and enlightened piety, and ask you to contrast this country with regions of despotism, wherever to be found? Shall we advise you tamely to surrender your constitution, your independence and your all to the disposal of an unhallowed conspiracy formed against your rights and liberties? As friends, shall we tell you to bow yourselves down to the earth before a deluded monarch, who was himself placed over a brave people by foreign powers, because too feeble to oppose the designs of their ambition, and suffer him to divide, with you, this stigma cast upon the French nation, by dictating to you your form of government and your prince? Or shall we remind you of your ancient renown as warriors, when you so long resisted the Carthagenean army, commanded by the great Hannibal, and almost the last defender laid down his life on the walls of Saguntum?—Or when you opposed the Roman Legions under Pompey, Caesar and Scipio Africanus, and ate the very bones of one another, rather than give up the city of Numantia to a foreign enemy? Or shall we name to you the more recent action of Pavia, where you overthrew a French army and made their king your captive?—or the still later battles of Badajos, Sarragossa, and Corunna, which redeemed your country from foreign slavery? And, when we have done this, Spaniards, shall we not tell you, that all Christendom agree in calling this a crisis of greater moment than any other in your whole history; and that it will be the lowest depth of degradation, on your part, to call in your Guerillas, or to sheathe the sword of war, till every field in Spain is whitened with the bones of your soldiers, and every stream encrimsoned with their blood; or you have driven back the Duke of Angouleme and his host beyond the Pyrenees, or immolated them upon the altar of freedom?

Such, my friends and countrymen, are some of the consequences of the American Revolution. The principles of government, then developed, and since proved to be sound by actual experi-
ment, acquired a credit and a currency, that will send them thro' all the world, and revolutionize every nation governed by arbitrary power.

In the Grecian and Roman Republics, religious liberty was neither understood nor allowed, and, strange as it may seem, the keenest persecution was not uncommon, where the principles of Republicanism formed the pride and glory of the nation. In our system of government, on the contrary, the rights of conscience are held not less sacred and inviolable, than our political rights. The Christian, the Jew, the Mahometan or Pagan, if he disturb not the public peace, is permitted to worship his God, according to the dictates of his own conscience. No man is bound to the stake, brought to the block, hung up in gibbets, or banished this country on account of his religion.

But there is one particular in which all Republics agree; which is, that civil liberty, and the diffusion of useful knowledge are inseparably connected; and this is a triumphant argument in the mouth of the Republican, that his government, alone, promotes the general improvement of the human mind and exalts his species.

Our soldiers of the Revolution fought not for civil liberty alone, but for the rights of conscience and the dissemination of knowledge. Nor are the benefits of their exertions confined within the limits of this country or their own age. The remotest clime, the latest posterity, and the obscurest individual, are to share the fruits of their sufferings and valor.

Shall we not, then, regard with veneration, the veteran soldier, whose life has had so important a bearing upon the destinies of the world? Would any one treat, with disrespect, a hero of the Revolution? Many were called away into the service, at the tender period of life, when the moral principles and habits were not sufficiently confined to withstand the diversified temptations of a camp, and lost forever their innocence and the happiness of virtuous lives. The loss of character, under such circumstances, was almost a necessary consequence of their condition, and, in the unhappy instances of this nature which occurred, formed an additional sacrifice to the cause of humanity, and calls for our deepest commiseration. Who will tell us, that placed in the
same situation at the same youthful age, he would have come off more immaculate? There are other revolutionary soldiers remaining among us, who, more fortunate perhaps in early life, honor the cause, in which they were engaged, by the purity of their morality and the goodness of their hearts. Shall we grudge any the paltry sum of ninety-six dollars a year to smooth the rugged couch of old age, and to cheer their downward way to the grave? Let us regard the veteran soldier of the Revolution as we regard a parent, and, by every consolation in our power, gladden the fainting spirit of the aged warrior, that must so soon take its flight to the skies.

* Fellow Soldiers,—I need add little to what has already been said, to shew the value of a brave and well disciplined soldiery. Without this, not only would a community be perpetually open to incursions and plunder from abroad; but the execution of their municipal laws would be resisted. It is as well the duty of the military to support the civil authorities as to repel invasions. Our peace and prosperity, at home and abroad, depend for their security on our soldiery. And now, what sort of characters ought we as soldiers to form, in order to fulfil the destinies assigned us? Must we sacrifice ought, in the temper or habits of our minds, that improves or adorns the enjoyments of private life? Shall we endeavor to acquire bravery, by hardening our hearts against the misfortunes of others? Such an attempt would be worse than useless: The wretch who has no sympathies for his fellow-man—who practices unkindness and cruelty towards his neighbour, is most acutely sensible to danger when exposed himself. Even the savage, who considers revenge a virtue, shews, that his nature revolts at the enormities of his creed, and his guilt stings him when his enemy looks him sternly in the face. Unkindness and cruelty, are no traits of bravery. Is it the pugillist, who is always falling into a passion, and bullies and engages every one

* Mr. Emsry was first chosen by the Washington Light Infantry, of which he is a member, to deliver an address on the occasion; but the inhabitants of the town and vicinity, wishing to unite in the celebration, the original object was in part changed, and only this short address delivered to the Company.
who accidentally offends him, that possesses true courage? No, passion is the soul of his daring, and the grim visage of war has little, in its aspect, to excite anger. On the day of battle, all other sentiments should be absorbed in the settled love of country and of glory. The terrors of an approaching enemy, must be met by the coolness of resolute minds. Is it the individual that loves to talk of his exploits and boast of his prowess, who has valor at the core? Too many a boasting Falstaff has had the reputation of courage.

The bravery of the soldier, therefore, is not inconsistent with urbanity of manners, benevolence of heart, or any of the virtues of private life. Let us, then, fellow soldiers, while we endeavor to support the honor of our corps, by a laudable ambition to excel in military tactics; while we prepare "our arms and our hearts," to meet the future enemies of our country, cherish the tender sympathies of the philanthropist, cultivate the lively sentiments of friendship, acquire the fascinating graces of refined intercourse, and rest securely for our courage to meet every danger, upon the strength of our minds, a sacred regard to our characters, and the grandeur of our objects.

My friends and countrymen—a halcyon calm now pervades the political waters of our country. A transient breeze only springs up at times from the North or the South to disturb their general stillness. The election of a President, a Governor, or a Representative, may excite a slight agitation of parties, which, however, subsides with the cause that produced it.

Internal improvements are making rapid progress in every State of the Union. Canals are already formed, that will add immensely to the wealth of the nation. Our manufactures are more attended to than formerly, and great advances have been made in all the arts of husbandry. These are subjects of present gratulation, and, if we compare this nation with British Provinces, the Canadas and Nova Scotia, we shall consider them the legitimate fruits of our independence. The scene around us is truly delightful; the prospect before us, grand beyond description.

But a small portion of our country, compared with the whole, is brought into a state of cultivation. To use the very expressive
language of the late Governeur Morris, "as yet we only crawl on the outer shell of our country. The interior excels the part we inhabit, in soil, in climate, in every thing. The proudest empire in Europe is but a bauble to what America may be—must be."

All the vast extent of territory bounded by the Mississippi river and Pacific Ocean, is, with few inconsiderable exceptions, yet uninhabited. The country between the Mississippi river and the Stony Mountains only, is larger than all inhabited parts of the United States, and is one of the most fertile regions in the world.

Travellers delight to transport us to the summit of some tall mountain, on the banks of the Missouri, and point out the magnificent scenery around,—prairies loaded with all the varieties of grass and plants, and diversified with flowers of the finest tints and sweetest fragrance, moving in gentle undulations hundreds of miles beyond the ken of human vision; countless rivulets and streams winding their serpentine courses along, now lost in a luxuriant growth of shrubbery and willows, then breaking out in radiant brightness and reflecting all the splendors of the noon day sun; innumerable wild beasts, disporting themselves in all directions and animating the solitude of nature. Such is the territory between the Mississippi river and the rocky mountains. Beyond these mountains till you come to the Pacific Ocean, is a still more extensive tract of country, less fertile than the valley of Missouri, but intersected by many large rivers, that take their rise but a few miles distant from the sources of the Missouri and the Arkansas.

Now it is no idle vision of the imagination, to suppose, that the time will come, when the valley of Missouri, which is now emphatically called the paradise of hunters, will become the garden of America—the paradise of civilized man; when fields of cotton, coffee, rice, grain, the clustering grape, elegant dwellings, and beautiful villas, shall cover its whole extent; when the Arkansas and Missouri rivers, which are navigable almost to their very sources, shall be thronged with an innumerable sail of vessels.—It is no idle day-dream to anticipate the period, when the shores of the Pacific Ocean shall be lined with cities carrying on an extensive trade with the East Indies, under the same facilities that
the Atlantic States enjoy in their commerce with Europe, and when canals shall unite the navigable waters of the Bonaventura and Columbia rivers with those of the Arkansas and Missouri, and the whole immense distance between the two oceans be traversed by our inland navigators. Nay, it is no fantasy to predict, that the morning of the fourth of July, some few centuries hence, will be ushered in by a grand salute of Artillery, breaking its thunders along the shores of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, rolling them back, and repeating them, till the whole continent of North America shall resound with the universal burst of joy.

FINIS.
Mr.

Orr and
Nichols

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