

New York Historical Society
from John Purbar.
1797.

AN ORATION.

DELIVERED ON THE FOURTH JULY, 1794

A N
O R A T I O N

DELIVERED ON THE
FOURTH JULY, 1794,
TO A NUMEROUS AUDIENCE, ASSEMBLED IN
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF
NEWARK, TO CELEBRATE THE
EIGHTEENTH ANNIVERSARY
O F
AMERICAN EMANCIPATION.

By ALEXANDER C. MACWHORTER, Esquire,
Counsellor at Law.

*Published at the desire of the Republican Society of
the Town of Newark.*

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At a stated meeting of The Republican Society of the Town of Newark, held in the Society Chamber, on Monday evening, the 14th July, 1794, and in the Year of American Independence the Nineteenth, it was

On Motion,

Unanimously Resolved,

THAT Capt. Thomas Ward and Stephen Wheeler, be a Committee to wait upon Citizen Alexander C. Macwhorter, and present him with the thanks of this Society, for the Oration which he delivered the 4th inst. in the Presbyterian Church of this Town, to his fellow citizens, at their desire, and request the favor of a copy for publication, and if favored with a copy, to cause the same to be published.

Extract from the Minutes.

AARON PENNINGTON, Secretary.



A N
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DELIVERED

ON THE
FOURTH JULY, 1794.

THIS auspicious day, my fellow citizens, is the epoch from which we date our national existence ; it ranks first in our American calander. From one extreme to the other of these extensive states, does this anniversary of freedom and independence call forth the patriotic citizens of America to mirth and festive joy. The birth-day of kings, their accessions to their thrones, and the periods of their victories, when thousands of their fellow men have fallen, constitute, in general, the great festivals of the earth ; but in the view of reason and philosophy these are days of sorrow not of joy. We, on the contrary, assemble to celebrate a day,

the first in the annals of time, which gave to mankind equal rights and equal privileges—How striking the contrast ! the one sinks and degrades, the other exalts and ennobles the human character—How august the contemplation ! that through the various changes and national revolutions which the historic page unfolds, this should be the first period of time, when in truth and reality man became re-invested with that equal liberty, which the God of nature gave him. It is right therefore, that we commemorate this joyous day ; and in the commemoration thereof, what contemplations, my fellow citizens, more useful & instructive, than the causes from whence resulted this our great revolution. The principles on which it was defended and supported—the distinguished rank it takes among the other revolutions of the earth, and the conduct of its brave defenders in the days of danger and distress.

A British political writer observes, that the
 “ American war originated in parliamentary job-
 “ bing, and its great purpose was to transfer
 “ enormous masses of English property into loans,
 “ funds and taxes, to form that corrupt ministe-
 “ rial phalanx called the friends of government :
 “ while this faction, like a malignant disease, was

**“draining the vital substances of Britain, and
 “even armies and navies were merely its ramifi-
 “cations.”**

If this representation of the cause of the American war be true, and such a faction, or such a parliament, could obtain such an ascendancy in Britain as to draw forth the vital substances of that nation to effect such purposes, how awfully wretched must have been our situation and circumstances had they been enabled to rear and establish the standard of corruption on our American shores—instead of rejoicing this day, we should have been mourning—instead of celebrating the triumphs of freedom, we should have been languishing in the shackles of despotism.

The frequent representations which were made in England of the wealth of the Americans by the British officers, who had served here against the French, and who had fared sumptuously at the American tables, roused into action the contemplations which had long been entertained by the government, to raise a revenue in America.

Early in 1764, the question of right to tax was brought forward in the house of commons, and so strong was the impulse of avarice, and such the

influence which a corrupt administration had acquired at this period, that not a person in the House ventured to controvert the right. Afterwards however, many illustrious characters came forward in the opposition; and the names of those whose motives were pure and uncorrupt will ever brighten and adorn the page of American freedom. They improved us in the knowledge of our political rights, and confirmed us in the support of them. The first, the foremost, and I may add, the most sincere, was the celebrated Colonel Barre, for whose noble defence of virtue, and America, in opposition to the whole house; "May recorded honors gather round his monument and thicken over him."

Subsequent to the revolution of 1688, the most prominent features in the British system of politics was "That taxation could only result from representation," or, in other words, that the property of the subject could never be taken without his consent. But the influence of corruption and the anxiety to draw resources from America to support its foetid stream, in all its branches, from the king on the throne down to the lowest ministerial hireling, had operated such an entire dereliction of principles, that when the question of right, as

before observed, first came forward, there was not an advocate in its favor ; and they considered the future opposition as merely the petulance of discontent and not the voice of reason.

From hence, my fellow citizens, we have this instructive lesson, never to permit a departure from a political principle of freedom, known, established and felt to be right—it augurs corruption in the government, and will never be attempted from motives pure and virtuous.

To supply the privileged and pampered orders of state, the heart of poverty in Britain had been probed, from every quarter, for many years, and for new sources they turned their baleful eyes across the atlantic.

America was seen like a fair flower rising in the wilderness, untouched and unblighted by the breath of corruption. The hierarchy of that country ever closely united with the ministry and with hands equally impure, as anxiously desired to grasp and enjoy the flower—it was as strongly inculcated that the establishment and support of a Bishopric in America, with its desirable appendages, was as essential to the support and preservation of the mother church, as the obtaining a

revenue was essential to the support of the state. Thus united with these views and these desires, they commenced the operation from whence resulted the glorious revolution which we this day celebrate.

But let us turn, my countrymen, from that barren waste “ in which no salutary plant takes root, no verdure quickens,” to a soil, as I willingly believe, pure as the limped stream, and fertile in every great and good qualification.

It is the observation of an elegant writer, “ That the Americans, dispersed throughout an immense continent, free as the wilds of nature which surrounded them ; amidst their rocks, their mountains, the vast plains of their deserts, on the confines of those forests, in which all is still in its savage state, and where there are no traces of either the slavery or the tyranny of man ; seemed to receive from every natural object a lesson of liberty and independence—as far removed from riches as from poverty, they were not corrupted either by the excess of luxury or the excess of want. Feed us with food convenient for us, lest we be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord, or lest we be poor and steal and take the name of our God in vain,” was their united prayer.

From this natural equality in which man is more jealous of his rights than perhaps in any other state of society, flowed a greater effusion of knowledge than falls to the lot of mankind in general, as they better understood their rights, so were they more ready to repel every unjust invasion of them.

The principle, that representation and taxation must go together, was well understood in America ; there were comparatively few, so illiterate, but knew it to be a political axiom ; none so insensible but felt it as their only security against the grasp of oppression—this principle individuals in America opposed in their public prints to the repeated attempts making in Britain to bring forward bills to tax them ; and illustrated it with a strength of argument that sunk beneath contempt the vile and slavish yell of the minions of despotism, that all opposition to government was rebellion, and rebellion treason.

The plan however progressed in Britain, and when matured, was brought into action ; it was like putting fire to the train ; the noble sentiment of *Freedom or Death* spread quick as the electric flame from one extreme of our continent to the other, and roused, as it were, instantaneously, three millions of people in support of their right.

The forming a Congress by a representation from the then different Colonies, circumstanced as they were, is a phenomenon in political science, and the strongest evidence of the happy effects resulting from a general diffusion of knowledge among the people ; spread over an immense tract of territory, strangers to each other, with different customs, manners and local prejudices, under strong collisions of interest, flowing from commercial rivalships and disputed boundaries of territory, reason and policy required their union under one head, to render effectual the defence of their freedom. Contrary to the expectation of their enemies they nobly sacrificed every private and party consideration, and immediately complied with the requisition. And here let me ask, in the language of a celebrated orator, “ What memory teems not with the recollection of the wisdom, the eloquence and perseverance of our confederated statesmen,”—called together to vindicate the injured rights of their country, they assembled with hands and hearts pure as the cause in which they were engaged. No faction—no corruption found admission here ; their councils were not warped by intrigue, nor their resolutions confounded by party heat and animosity—the good of their country was their object, and every difference

of opinion, as to the means of obtaining it, was discussed with the calmness of reason, seeking for truth, and not with the keen personal invective only aiming at party superiority. And to the honor of our country would it be, could we in truth pass this eulogium from the Congress of '75 to every subsequent Congress of America. Their compositions united a manliness of sentiment with an elegance of style that seemed inspired by the pure spirit of the cause in which they were engaged, and will go down to posterity as illustrious monuments of American genius.

To show to you, my countrymen, the character of these our youthful politicians in the mind of the unprejudiced in Europe ; permit me to repeat the language of the first statesman and orator of Britain : “ The representatives of America (said he) meet with the sentiments and temper, and speak the sense of the continent. For genuine sagacity, for singular moderation, for solid wisdom, manly spirit, sublime sentiments and simplicity of language, for every thing respectable and honorable, the Congress of Philadelphia shine unrivalled. They are viewed as the northern constellation of glorious worthies illuminating and warming the New World.” These eulogiums resulted from that

policy, spirit and union, which they exercised in the support of their grand principle, that no American could be taxed without his consent, expressed by himself or representative, which right they contended, our ancestors derived both from nature and the British constitution, and transmitted, unmarred, to their posterity ; and to the honor of our country be it remembered, that this principle, as their leading star, was unremittingly pursued from the gloom of unsuccessful supplication to the splendor of victory and acknowledged sovereignty.

But let us pass to a comparative view of this our glorious revolution, with the other revolutions of the earth, having *Liberty* for their object. In one respect, my countrymen, there is a distinguishing difference which gives lustre to the American character. The revolution of this country proceeded from a well digested knowledge of civil rights, the result of philosophical reflection, and speculative enquiry. The other revolutions, which have preceded it, have been caused either by a series of oppressions which could no longer be endured, or have sprung from the impulse of the moment, occasioned by some unexpected and violent act of despotism that tortured human nature into action—the one portrays the reason and reflection of man, the other the limits of his pati-

ence, and the keenness of his sensations. The Romans, so celebrated in history for their patriotic virtues, were roused from slavery to freedom by the sight of the poignard reeking with the blood of the virtuous Lucretia.

The death of the chaste Virginia, by the hand of her father to save her honor from the tyrannic Decimvir, and her body exposed to the public view, impelled that people again to revolt and to annihilate the order of the Decimvirs, which had violated the rights of the Roman citizens.

And to come down to more modern times—the introduction of the inquisition into the Netherlands by the despotic Philip,—The terrible spectacles daily presented by that awful institution of men perishing in the flames on account of their religion ; and the ignominious death of Egmont and Horn, two popular favorites, at length tortured the people into that opposition which, eventually, issued in the emancipation of the seven united provinces. Even the hardy robust inhabitants of the Alps, since so famous for the Helvetic confederacy, for a long time, bore the most degrading oppressions until the manly virtues of a TELL excites them to resistance. Nor is the important revolution in France, so justly celebrat-

ed for the magnitude of its object, and the transcendent brilliancy of execution, an exception; those heroic and unconquerable republicans had borne the hard hand of despotism, till forced by its oppressive weight to avenge their wrongs.

The guardian genius of America, on the contrary, would never permit the fangs of despotism to fasten on our hallowed soil. And may it forever be our great characteristic to foresee danger at a distance, and to repel its approach on principle, and rational enquiry.

Where are the liberties of the republics which have preceded us; except the Swis Cantons, I know of no republican state at this day but has returned to the dark glooms of despotism, and the name of *Republic* and *Liberty* is, with them, meer sounding brags and tinkling cimbals. The cause of this awful relapse from freedom to slavery is well worth the enquiry of every American. And the great source from whence it has proceeded, my countrymen, is the want of general instruction and information among the people. This forms an unsurmountable barrier against their investigating their political rights, renders them inattentive thereto, and obliges them to intrust the sacred deposit in the hands of a few individuals, whose

conduct they are unable to scrutinize, and subjects them to be carried away credulous victims to the artifice of every designing demagogue.

But it is time we turn to a summary consideration of the conduct of the brave defenders of our country in its days of danger and distress. “And what hand withholds the lawrel so justly due to the virtues of our patriotic warriors,” called from the peaceful walks of private life by their country’s danger—from citizens they became soldiers. What hardships, incident to that situation, for seven long years did they not endure? Where is the example in history of equal gallantry and perseverance in every difficulty and danger unsupplied and unpaid, owing to the impoverished state of their country. In the dark seasons of the war when the genius of liberty seemed to languish under the pressure of despotism, and many of her sons, in moments of despondency, sought protection from the relentless foe; who saw the army discover symptoms of despair, or heard from them the language of submission?

Permit me here, my fellow citizens, to pay the tribute of praise to the patriotic soldier who continued on the banks of the Delaware, with their illustrious commander, after the expiration of their

enlistments, and with whom he was enabled to recross that river & turn the tide of the war by his victories at Trenton and at Princeton. But why do I particularize? Scarcely a town in our country but where have been displayed acts which found their panegyric—when the cause of freedom was finally triumphant, and the minions of despotism obliged to withdraw from its shores, which they had so long stained with the blood of its citizens, these patriotic warriors gave to the world an example of the love of country ever to be admired and imitated. Unsatisfied and unrequited for their long laborious toils and services, the moment their country ceased to call, they forsook the insignia of *War* for the mantle of *Peace*, and returned to the bosom of that country whose rights they had so nobly defended.

And here they have pursued the various occupations of civil life with an industry which distinguishes them in society; and at this day are, almost unexceptionably, conspicuous examples of attachment to the *Rights of Man* and the cause of *Liberty* in general, in opposition to all arbitrary power—sentiments that were so strongly impressed in the course of their illustrious service. The praise, the respect and affection due to distinguish-

ed merit, is the only compensation they can now receive. These will never be withheld while gratitude is an American virtue ; and when time shall cease with them and us, let their monumetal inscription be "HE FOUGHT AND CONQUERED IN HIS COUNTRY'S CAUSE." It will serve both for Epitaph and Elegy, and endear their memory with posterity.

The brilliant exploits of the militia of our country ought never, on an occasion like this, to be passed over in silence. They have ever been considered as the grand defence of every land of freedom, and in the course of our struggle for independence, they proved themselves eminently worthy of the sacred charge. The scenes of Bunker's hill, of Bennington and the Saratoga heights, will stand to the latest time, illustrious examples of their prowess and intrepidity. But to enumerate all the glorious deeds of our warring yeomanry would require time far beyond my present limits. Permit me only to add, that the militia of New-Jersey acquired laurels which will ever be conspicuous in the volumes of American history.

I will not lead you on this occasion to the tombs of our illustrious warriors who fell in their coun-

try's cause—it would touch the springs of grief in the heart of sensibility, and draw the sympathetic tear from many an eye. The renumeration of their names without the annexation of their shining virtues, would be too melancholy a detail—and to give to each his characteristic glory is the pleasing task of the historian. The memory of every son and daughter of liberty will embalm them as long as time and recollection shall exist.

And now permit me to close this address, my countrymen, in reminding you that the preservation of that liberty, which you have so gloriously obtained, depends on your own knowledge and the right instruction and education of your children; for you and they can only be thereby enabled to guard the avenues to the temple of freedom, from the first approaches of tyranny, and to detect both oppression and anarchy, which are equal evils in all their variety of shapes—guard with anxious care your present free and glorious Constitution, and afford at all times your ready exertions to support it in its purity against either its destroyer or corrupter; for by either its destruction or corruption you lose your all; *in vain you fought—in vain you conquered.*