



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





8177. f 78

4922
AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT WORCESTER,

JULY 4, 1817.

THE FORTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY,

OF THE

INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

BY PLINY MERRICK,
STUDENT AT LAW.

WORCESTER :

PRINTED BY HENRY ROGERS.

1817.

PLINY MERRICK, ESQ.

SIR,

The company assembled this day in commemoration of the Declaration of our National Independence, through their Committee, deputed for this purpose, present you their united and cordial thanks for the *elegant and patriotick* ORATION, eloquently delivered by you on this occasion,—and beg of you the additional gratification, of a copy for the prefs.

OLIVER FISKE, *Chairman of the Committee,*
PER ORDER.

Worcester, July 4, 1817.



HON. OLIVER FISKE,

SIR,

In expressing a reluctance to the publication of my Oration, this day delivered, you will believe me sincere, when you recollect the unusual shortness of the notice, and the peculiar circumstances under which it was prepared. But as it was written with a view to the commemoration of our NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE, where the animosities of party were not to be permitted to mingle, if it conforms in this respect to the wishes of my friends of all political parties, I shall be fully satisfied, though it may be entitled to no further praise. In compliance therefore with the request of the Gentlemen celebrating THE DAY—communicated by you in the most polite and gratifying manner—I submit to them a copy of my Oration for the prefs.

Permit me, Sir, to express to the Committee with whom you act, and to the Gentlemen by whom you were appointed, a sense of my obligations for their polite attention.

I am, Sir,

with the highest respect,
your obedient servant,

PLINY MERRICK.

Worcester, July 4, 1817.

ORATION.

ONCE more, my Fellow-Citizens, are we brought by the revolving year to the anniversary of the Declaration of our nation's Independence; and again we assemble amidst the resounding echoes of triumphant joy to commemorate this birth-day of our country. Grateful is the duty its return enjoins; but more than grateful, when on this auspicious morn, "our feuds forgotten" and our discords dead, one hand is called to strike that trembling string, which wakes exulting harmony in every breast.

Whose bosom does not burn, when the mind reverts to the causes which occasioned, the valour which accomplished, and the blessings which resulted from the event we this day celebrate? When reflection recounts the miseries which our country escaped by dissolving the cement which bound her to the government of England; when it numbers the alternate fortunes of revolutionary heroism—its appalling disasters, and its final triumph—and still more when it unfolds the innumerable benefits she acquired in establishing the principles and attaining the objects for which, through an unequal contest, her blood and treasure were profusely expended? Who does not exult that protecting Providence raised to our fathers a WASHINGTON to lead them through the perils of

inward defection and external war, and to give them at last the securities of Peace with the enjoyments of Liberty ?

To attain however an adequate conception of the importance of our Independence, the miseries which the continued dominion of England would have imposed on our country must be recounted. Separated as we now are by causes as powerful as the element which rolls its waves between our shores, they may be told in language as calm as enquiry can make it, attended with the proud conviction that now they can never be inflicted. Still though the ruin averted by its declaration and achievement cannot be concealed, when a just estimate of its importance is disclosed, the danger of exciting resentment where caution only is intended, will justify but a general allusion, lest minuter rehearsals should waken animosity on the borders of peace, or renovate the expiring flames of discordant passion.

But while regarding the importance of our national Independence, and the value of the blessings its establishment spread through our country, gratitude demands its tribute to the wisdom which planned—the virtue and heroism, which secured it. During the revolutionary contest, few American Patriots were seduced by the alluring blandishments of regal munificence to desert the cause of their country, or were driven by the menaces of approaching destruction from the standard to which they had rallied.... Tranquillity prevailed in the day of disaster ; and though the ardour of patriotick enthusiasm was sometimes clouded by volumes of smoke which rose from our towns and cities given by victorious hostility to the flames, new animation was caught from the illustrious achievements, which constantly distinguished the progress of that eventful period ; and confirmed that belief which rested with confidence on the final triumph of their contending efforts. It

was a magnanimous fortitude, a heroick, gallant daring, such as language cannot adequately tell, which bore the Patriots of the revolution through the accumulated difficulties of publick and private want, while the science of war was almost unknown, and the feeblest system of government was adopted, till they reached the attainment of their Independence, and marked their progress with such victories as rendered your Trenton immortal, and covered the fields of your Yorktown and Saratoga with unfading glory !

The arms of the Patriots were not resigned nor their toils diminished, until peace, crowned with unusual blessings, was restored. But when its attainment was announced, they who from citizens had become familiar with camps and attached to the life of the soldier, threw aside their military habits and feelings together, and cheerfully returned from the field they had honoured, to enjoy the better gratifications, which belong to the domestick circle their patriotism had compelled them awhile to forsake.—The peace, which followed the revolutionary conflict, opened to our country on every side the sources of national wealth and prosperity ; invited its citizens to share in the hazards and promises of commercial and domestick enterprize ; confirmed the character to which their efforts and genius had already entitled them ; but more than all, acknowledged our nation “sovereign and independent” ; and by that acknowledgement brought to the people the means of enjoying a higher degree of civil liberty, than any government ever imparted to its citizens ; and ultimately produced our present political institutions, as the best pledge, that its possession should be permanent.

There is however a charm in Freedom, which has sometimes betrayed the sober zeal of enquiry into the raptures of enthusiasm ; and the imagination and fancy delight to array this fascinating theme in their gayest decorations. Hence civil liberty has

been often mistaken for some magick power, which would transform the face of nature into regions of Paradise, and in the suspension of labour, would gratify all the wishes of man in unlimited and luxuriant indulgence. But the visions of fancy are too dazzling and transient to endure the scrutiny of time and investigation; and they who would enjoy the blessings of liberty without annoyance from the rude hands of reality must abandon the descriptions of poetry and the delineations of enthusiasm, to learn its nature from reason and truth.

Civil liberty can only be known in a state of society. Its very existence presupposes some restraints on natural rights by the artificial establishments of power; *and it is enjoyed most perfectly, where the least diminution to original rights results from the support and maintenance of government, while the privileges of society are equally distributed in return.* If liberty insists on expanding beyond these confining limits, and spurning the restraints of authority aspires to universal prevalence, it may indeed exist, but society and its refinements exist no more. In the progressive advancements of lawless anarchy, the groves and gardens of cultivated life will change to the gloom of untraversed forests, and the hills, which before wore the aspect of culture and care, will echo only with the terrific notes of savage freedom!

Such is not the liberty for which our fathers fought, or to which their sons succeeded. It is that civil liberty which flourishes under the protection of law; it is a tempered freedom; stripped of wild pretensions, and fitted to the scenes of social life; which gives equal rights to every citizen, and distributes its privileges with indiscriminate liberality.—And there is sufficient liberty in that community, whose regulations are founded in justice, clothing none with power to trample with capricious cruelty or deliberate malice on another's right; where the same

standard applies to the ruler and the subject, and gives to the weak the protection afforded to the strong; where every individual, however humble his fortune or his talents, is equally secure—where he meets the same patronage to his valuable labours and sentiments, and finds an equal protection to his person and his property, though it be but the humble reed on which he leans; for wherever he walks in the security of equality and justice he treads on the ark of his own and his country's safety.

When at length the vicissitudes of war were past, and the principles of liberty, which had been proclaimed and defended in the hour of peril and danger and through the storms of a revolutionary conflict, were guaranteed to our country by the security of its Independence, the privileges acquired by its establishment were subsequently explained in a Constitution, which stands the covenant, the seal, and the charter of the people's freedom. This instrument—the source of authority, the foundation of government, and the parent of our political institutions—was created to secure the enjoyment of the rights of civil liberty; and unlike the constitutions of other climes, its recorded articles are the offspring of mutual arrangement and matured reflection. The provisions combined in this national compact form the noblest work of political ingenuity; and though it cannot boast of complete exemption from defect, its faults have crept in through the treachery of the human faculties; and it must be remembered, that change cannot cure, nor revolution eradicate the frailties of humanity. While we behold it with generous admiration, others view with envying applause the happiness it confers, and some have struggled to attain its blessings. One nation indeed—rich in the bounties of Providence, but torn and disgraced by the passions of man—boldly sought, through the dangers of civil commotion, for the comforts of our free constitution; and having swept

away every vestige of former government, challenged the raging vengeance of a tremendous revolution to defeat the accomplishment of its object. But "the bloodiest record in the book of time" was imprinted by the daring efforts in that fatal attempt; and in the cruel sufferings of alternate anarchy and despotism, ill-fated France met with constant resistance in her struggle for freedom; and found that it would not flourish, while resentment still sent abroad its weapons of destruction, even on the graves of the inhabitants of the Tuilleries!!—Too visionary in their opinions of liberty and its excellence; too eager to grasp at any phantom which wore its semblance; and too volatile to pursue it with patient enquiry and prudent industry, her philosophers and statesmen little resembled the characters of those who cautiously planted the foundation and erected the fabrick of our government. It was the effort of these, to give stability to the high tone of sentiment which prevailed; to unite the forms of order with the privileges of freedom; and our political institutions were modelled by wisdom gathered from the experience of all ages, and regulated by the circumstances which influenced or affected the times of their adoption.... They were established alike as memorials of the existence of civil liberty, and as barriers to protect it from the approaching violation of corruption or power; and while they endure, it will be safe from the direct assaults of forcible hostility, or the more dangerous attempts of secret and insinuating machinations.—Adherence to forms may sometimes preserve the substance; and our political institutions, while they are the natural guardians of its rights, may become their more effectual securities, by fixing reflecting attention on points which are certain; and thus saving the observers of liberty from the unqualified disappointment of those, who having been wrapt in the contemplation of ideal perfection, find at last the

beauty they hoped to embrace naught but the evanescent shadow of fancy !

But while our political institutions are cherished as the protectors of civil enjoyment, the mind inquires with irresistible anxiety if these monuments will endure, and it shrinks from the appalling suggestion, that fate has marked them also as the victims of remorseless destruction. If indeed they cannot resist the annoyance of unceasing variation, but must "totter in the breeze and fall before the storm," or must lose their essential peculiarities by new acquisitions from the grosser materials with which they fortuitously mingle, then calmed by the voice of exulting applause—for their imaginary excellence may fade ere our triumphs are past, and their fleeting perfection be no more ere the notes of praise shall have ceased their vibrations !

That states, like the members of which they consist, are subject to natural decay, is an opinion, which has so long continued its dominion, it may now perhaps be presumptuous to doubt the sufficiency of the reasons on which it is founded, fortified as it is by the venerable supports of antiquity. It was speculation however which, pleased with the theory that assimilated the progress of kingdoms to the life of man, has found, or at least has imagined as much, in the history of nations, that the commencement of their existence is marked with an infantile imbecility, while advancing years gives them the vigour of manhood, and finally sees them sinking in the decrepitude of age. But the analogy has been imperfectly drawn ; and it were better to forget the hasty dissolution of physical nature, in comparing the existence of political institutions with powers of the mind—for like that, they are susceptible of indefinite improvement, and like that, they may "flourish in immortal youth," if they are founded on the immutable principles of justice and truth ; and we fondly believe, that

Buts will endure unhurt by the ravages of time; and that future ages will be their witness, that "decay's effacing fingers" are too feeble to crush their massive columns!

The durability of the political institutions in the "goodly heritage" where we dwell will be protracted by the mildness of their provisions, their pacifick temper, and the regularity of their operations. The pestilential vapours of revolution and disorder are odious to the feelings of cultivated men, when they are not roused by some powerful excitement, and if left in the tranquil enjoyment of civil and social liberty, they cherish little disposition to abandon their quiet possessions, for the dazzling meteors which gleam in times of commotion, and they shrink with intuitive dread from the desolating whirlwind of revolutionary passion! There are indeed exceptions in those fierce and restless spirits, who own no joy but in the "pulse's maddening play," who feel no exhilarating rapture but in the raging fury of battle and strife; but these untameable tempers are comparatively few; and to them the jealous prudence of a people living under liberal institutions of government affords but few opportunities to disturb established regularity; and as hereditary honours are discarded, they can never attain by birth to a rank, which would enable them like the "madmen of Sweden and Macedonia" to sacrifice both government and people in pursuits which caprice or imaginary honour may describe. They are therefore in our country chained to a limited sphere; and the mind would fatigue itself in vain in apprehending danger from their restrained and scattered exertions when acting on the stability of those opinions which are the legitimate offspring of equitable moderation. These sentiments, so congenial to the benevolent feelings of men, will never cease to find their way to the hearts of most; and thus the mildness these institutions

promote gives to them health and vigour in return, and almost ensures their perpetual duration.—There is little inducement to hazard the perils of rebellion, where no pressure is felt, and where hope in the wide range of variation can point to no prospect more grateful to the imagination or the wishes of men than the scenes of present enjoyment. Yet it cannot be denied, that in the midst of prosperity, the forms of government have sometimes suddenly changed, and with a rapidity which surpasses belief, “establishments apparently the most solid and thrones the most ancient” have been melted away by the fervour of some sudden and violent revolution. But where these have occurred, the institutions of government had no fixed and certain principles by which they were supported but rested exclusively on the uncollected maxims of general law, joined with the unsatisfactory and perhaps varying authorities of precedent. From such dangers we as a people are exempt—for the forms of our government are accurately described, and all its powers distinctly defined. In other countries, executive authority may safely indulge in the wildest aberrations from duty and justice, and screen the enormity of the wrong by pointing to some similar or perhaps more flagrant deviation of a bold predecessor; but in ours, that guardian of its rights—a written constitution—points to power the path it must pursue, and proclaims in the commanding language of Omnipotence, “hitherto shalt thou go, but no farther.”

From those frequent and usual causes of the prostration of government—the imbecility on the one hand, and the sternness on the other, of its provisions—our political institutions are completely secure.... The streams of justice pass in equable currents by every door in our land, and no subject requires the interference of the spirit of chivalry to save him from the lawless oppressions of gigantick power. Alike

distinguished from the weakness that invites the aggressions of proud ambition, and the despotism, that drives by the cruelty of its inflictions through sufferings at last to rebellion, the establishments of our government have little to fear from the attempts of the one or the exasperations of the other. If, mistaking the mildness they inculcate for the measure of their strength, some aspiring demagogue, in the wildness of his political enthusiasm, should endeavour to destroy the forms of our government, to build his personal greatness on their ruins, he will meet in the career of his folly with an overthrow as signal as attended that lunatic hero of romance, when his madness induced an engagement with the wind-mills in knightly encounter ! A constant vigilance—the consequence of that compact which combines distant territories together—would unceasingly expose his insinuations, and the spirit of enquiry, which results from the local ambition of the north, the west, and the south, would detect every variety of plan and contrivance, and unitedly darken his hopes by involving him in constant defeat.—And still less even than these, are the dangers our institutions must encounter from the extent of the power they impart. They limit while they define, and surround the authority they bestow with restrictions both firm and discreet ; and no powers of importance are left to the indefinite law of discretion. The system, thus founded on the permanent principles of right, secures the affections of the heart, while the understanding pays an “undissembled homage” to its excellence ; and even when it bore the severest pressure of that peril and commotion which have characterized our times, complaint found other objects on which to exhaust its murmurs, and our political institutions could then boast of the avowed affection of every heart, while every eye was still thrown on them as the pride and safety of our country !

To estimate the duration of the forms and substance of our government by the term of existence prescribed to the establishments of other countries, is to indulge in idle and unmeaning speculation.... What is the resemblance between our free constitution and the mighty despotism which has just crumbled on the fields of France? or where is the analogy which holds between our institutions and the tottering fabrics of fanatick Spain? what features do we wear in common with the thrones and dynasties of Europe? or how much nationality have we drawn from the land of our ancestors? Who does not feel the distinction in government to be wide as the waters which divide our climes, and sufficient to engender the causes which render the famishing population there, as wretched as poverty and ignorance can make them, while all our country is vocal with the delights of education and liberty, superadded to the solid comforts of plenteous subsistence?

Republics indeed...the establishments of former days...have long since passed away, unable to bear the conflicts of revolution and time. The noble simplicity of Grecian liberty, and the majestick grandeur of Roman republicanism have alike disappeared, and the record of their former freedom only has survived; while we know that savage hordes of northern invaders have since trampled on the interesting soil of the last, and the ferocious Turk still wanders in the indulgence of malignant passion among the remaining monuments of the first. But to us belongs not the fate which broke upon them; for both the republics of Greece and Rome were destitute of that pacifick temper...that certain and definite character... which are peculiarly connected with the institutions of our government; and each of them, with little discrimination or justice, having disturbed the nations on every side with the continual tumults of war and the clangour of arms, at last lost their pru-

dence in the extravagant joy of success or wildness of victory ; and having yielded to the solicitations of that boundless dissipation, in which their riches... the trophies of uncounted victories...enabled them to indulge, after struggling ineffectually awhile, they surrendered their freedom to the conquering arms of a Philip and a Cæsar ; and alike descended from the proud elevation of liberty to the stern embraces of despotism, in the splendid car of Eastern magnificence and luxury !

And little have these favourite institutions of our government---so secure from the spirit of revolution and the blasts of civil commotion---to dread from the violence or power of foreign hostility. If invasion threatens to land her legions on our shores, one common sensation thrills with corresponding sympathy in every breast ; and like the promiscuous and pervading generosity which united all hearts in defence of Baltimore, when hostile bayonets gleamed round its entrenchments ; if the rights or liberties of our country are in danger, all its valour and force will be found gathering on the same field, and mingling in the same array with kindred devotion, ensuring success by the ardour of confidence and the pride of patriotism ; and prepared, whenever necessity calls for the effort, to imitate the bright example of Russian magnanimity, which preserved its government by the distressing but triumphant sacrifice of its riches and grandeur!—Already the strength of our warriors has been tested on the field of battle and the “mountain wave;” and many a plain from the heights of Bunker to the mounds of New-Orleans is the witness, while the beaten Insurgents of France and the conquered Guerrieres and Javas of England proclaim their irresistible energy. How vain to attempt the destruction of our government by bursting thro’ the phalanx composed of the descendants of WASHINGTON and the brethren of LAWRENCE and PIKE !

The present situation of our country---now, when the cannon's roar has ceased to tell of hostilities with England, and the corsairs of Barbary, who clung with greedy embrace to our government to taste its tributary streams, have been shaken from their hold like "dew drops from the Lion's mane;" now, when the friendliness of our foreign relations finds no rival but in the joyful tranquillity of our domestick intercourse---adds new confirmation to those rational hopes, that anxiously anticipate the perpetual endurance of our political institutions. In the peaceful progress of successful operation, their powers and capacity are still more amply unfolded, as they assume fresh strength for deeper dangers; removing those burdens, which passed trials have induced; and as they draw into action and life the resources and vigour of the nation, and bring on each successive variation with unerring tranquillity and exactness. While a feverish disquietude, which pervades many of the countries of Europe, threatens their respective governments with speedy destruction, and revolution seems almost prepared to struggle with the monarch of Sweden and the tyrant of Spain; while the power of the House of Bourbon is supported by tens of thousands of foreign bayonets, and the unqualified privilege of inquisitorial imprisonment vested in the servants of the Crown protects the endangered throne of Albion; we behold THREE of our fellow citizens, who, having calmly relinquished the highest honours in the nation, now repose in dignified retirement, while a FOURTH, just ushered into the office they have left, is cheered by the loud and universal acclamations of his affectionate countrymen!

No, my Countrymen! our political institutions---those pillars of our Independence---are not destined to fall. "The stern tide of human time" shall pass harmless by the enduring cliffs on which they rest,

and its ceaseless floods shall bleach and beautify, but not destroy these adamantine monuments. Still they shall support our civil liberty through unnumbered ages ; and the hope, that springs from the assurance of their unfading power, points through the grateful vista of advancing years to the perfected pyramid of our country's glory, adorned with the trophies of successful art and triumphant science. Then shall the calm historian tell how his country was born in danger and cradled in honour, and exulting bards enrich their strains with the gallant achievements of its early days ; while virtue and valour and literature and science shall still combine to dignify, adorn and defend it. Then its wide population, which throng the shores of the Atlantic and raise the murmurs of settlement and business on the banks of the Missouri, shall meet round the altar of Liberty, and breathing congenial sentiments, shall exchange their offerings of patriotism there, where "on earth there is peace and good will towards men."—Round that altar should now assemble on this **JUBILEE OF FREEDOM** all the brethren of our national family, to brighten the chain of our **UNION** by mutual and cordial congratulations ; and there should they indulge, in connection with the loud joys of exulting festivity, in the silent but unspeakable ecstasy "of hearts that are mingled in peace."

1868

