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COLUMBIA UNITED, THE LAND OF FREEDOM, THE CLIME OF PEACE AND THE GRAVE OF TYRANTS.

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ORATION,

PRONOUNCED BY

JOHN HOLMES, Esq.

on the 4th of last July, at Alfred, (Massachusetts.)

Fellow Citizens!—Man reflects with pleasure on the day of his birth. To contemplate our progress from infancy to manhood, our weakness, wants, and escapes from danger; the solicitude of friends, and the affection of parents.—excite our tenderest passions.

The effect is not different, when we reflect on the birth of a country. Governments, like individuals are born, progress, become stationary, decay & die. They have their infancy and manhood, strength and debility, innocence and depravity, health and sickness; & they have their old age. They have friends to instruct, and parents to protect them; traitors to deceive, and assassins to destroy them.—Their infancy & inexperience expose them to infinite hazards, from weak supporters, ignorant advisers, treacherous friends and open enemies. The difficulties, therefore with which a country has, in its infancy, been obliged to contend, the dangers it has escaped, the progress it has made, and the glory it has acquired, are subjects, upon which its friends will dwell with peculiar interest and delight.

Other countries, with little reason, celebrate their origin. A conquest, a change of masters, the substitution of one prince for another, are hailed as auspicious events. The birth of a prince to rule and oppress a people, to rise on their shoulders, or tread on their necks, is a source of extreme delight. And shall we, who boast of our title to freedom, be silent on that day when the PEOPLE of America decreed that they would govern themselves? A day which made tyrants tremble and humanity rejoice! A day when the sun of liberty rose in his strength, dispelled the clouds of prejudice and superstition which enveloped him, and cheered and reanimated oppressed and desponding man.

On the 4th of July, 1776, the united colonies abjured all allegiance to Great Britain, and declared themselves "free and independent states." On the 3d of Sept. 1793, Great Britain acknowledged their independence; and in 1788, the States ratified the federal constitution, which, without impairing their rights, united their strength, increased their power, and confirmed their liberties.

By this last event the right for which we had contended seemed permanently secured. A constitution, whose object was "to provide for the common defence & promote the general welfare of the United States," to be administered by an executive, deriving his election from the people, with a legislature, most wisely constituted as well the guardians of the states as the people, promised a triumph over the enemies of popular governments. Those, who imagined that they saw the American states progressing to a state of anarchy, which would end in despotism, were confounded. The alarms and jealousies of the public subsided, errors were corrected, weak and vicious men were removed by the process of popular election, and under those illustrious characters, who, in succession, have administered the government, we enjoyed an unexampled portion of prosperity and peace. During this period, we were surrounded with revolutions and conquests.—The enemies of republics had witnessed dangers in all governments but ours. Combinations of "Legitimate sovereigns" to depose "usurpers;" these "usurpers" actually dethroning those combined "legitimate sovereigns;" and the subversion of kingdoms and empires, following in quick succession, were a pretty good

comment upon the "stability of monarchy," and "the fluctuating state of all republics."

But it was said that the experiment had not been fairly tried, that it was in war the strength of a government must be tested, and its defects exposed.—The advocates of "ancient and venerable institutions," abroad, and many at home, were solicitous to provoke hostilities, upon which they predicted a destruction of our government. The opinion and belief that our rulers dare not hazard the experiment, that they "could not be kicked into war," bro't upon the nation fresh and aggravated insults and aggressions. What was to be done? To submit to the seizure of our property, the impressment of our citizens, upon the most frivolous pretexts; or venture upon the hazardous and untried experiment of war was the alternative.—We had with little exception, been 30 years at peace. Our feelings and habits were pacific. We trembled at the thought of shedding human blood. The heroes of the revolution were gone; the art of war was forgotten; officers and soldiers were to be created, and we had none who knew how to create them. Britain, the greatest aggressor, was powerful; she was mistress of the ocean, inured to war and plunder; and her friends among us, were numerous, faithful and active. In this crisis, this conflict between duty and inclination, government decided as they ought. Regardless of their popularity, they determined to resort to arms.

There is a national pride, which is allied to virtue. It is the guardian of the national honor. So powerful is this sentiment, that even barbarians have suspended their inveterate party feuds, and united against a common enemy. And, surely, it would have been uncharitable to have suspected that free, civilized Americans, were so destitute of national feeling, as to sow dissension in time of war, seek safety from the partiality of an enemy, or press to power at the expense of their country's honor & rights. It was less to be apprehended, from the example of the enemy, which, in other respects, the opposers of the government had felt proud to observe.

But no sooner was war declared, than the administration was assailed, with the most outrageous abuse. The war was denounced as wanton, unjust and murderous; and numbers who voted for it, were personally insulted and subjected to violence. The opposition assumed a brazen front; the enemies of the revolution were unmasked, and the strength and designs of the British faction exposed.

In this state of agitation the government were met with new embarrassments. A principal object of the federal constitution was the control of the national strength, for national purposes. To meet an enemy in the field and perform the duties of active and offensive warfare, it was proper that congress should have power "to raise and support armies." But as large standing armies were deemed dangerous in a republic, this power was a subject of much debate, and excited considerable jealousy, at the time the constitution was adopted.—To confine its exercise within reasonable limits, it was deemed safest to provide a national militia for national defence. It was important, as well to the defence as the liberties of the union. From these men, being citizens, no danger could be apprehended to the republic; and their being officered by the authority of the state in which they are raised, seemed a sufficient pledge that they would not be disposed to invade that authority. They were to be detached by congress, who represented, as well the states as the people, and to be commanded by the President, the executive representative of both. The constitution was explicit. It gave expressly to congress the power to call forth, organize, arm and discipline the militia, and to employ them in the service of the United States; "to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions." "To provide for the common defence," and to have no discretion in the application of that defence, nor of the extent of the danger, was an absurdity from which the framers and supporters of the constitution concluded they had nothing to apprehend. The unequivocal tenor of the instrument itself, the doctrines advanced in its support, and the practice, after the organization of the government, seemed a sufficient guard against such an outrageous construction.—But to the utter astonishment of every friend of the union, it was decided in Massachusetts that the United States had no control over the militia, but at the pleasure of the states; and that these were exclusively the judges of the danger, and when and to what extent the militia should be employed.

Had this construction prevailed we should have been reduced to the singular and mortifying crisis of eighteen states in time of war, each deciding for itself when the United States were in danger, and what was necessary for their defence or safety. Happily for our country, it was too monstrous to prevail. One or two of the small states followed the example or dictation of Massachusetts; but the doctrine was generally rejected as a most dangerous perversion of the constitution. Instead of compelling Massachusetts to obey their requisition, the United States permitted her to practice upon her own extraordinary principle; to incur the responsibility of judging of the danger, and of course the expense of providing against it. The result was what was expected, and what it probably always will be when men assume a power and discretion to which they are not entitled. The state was invaded, and we found no protection from our friendship for the enemy. A feeble, ineffectual and disgraceful resistance was made and the enemy were permitted quietly to occupy a large portion of the territory of the state until the close of the war. And Massachusetts remains a standing proof of the wisdom of the provisions of the constitution, the folly of opposing them, or of requiring the general government to provide for the common defence, and of denying the means essential to accomplish the end.

Another embarrassment was experienced from the mercantile class of our citizens in the eastern states. Of the most respectable of these are many distinguished and patriotic supporters of the government; and though most of the rest were hostile to the administration, it was hoped and expected that they would have lent their aid in support of those rights which at different times they had been so loud to defend. But it was found that "orders" and "impressment" were not otherwise offensive to them, than as they affected their speculations or diminished their profit. These gentlemen had assumed to be the exclusive merchants of the United States, and had imagined that New-England was the only part which was interested in commerce, and that could the eastern states be permitted to manage their own concerns, they might be prosperous and happy. This brought up a most delicate and unpleasant discussion. "The father of his country" had predicted that factious men would in troublesome times, find a pretext to excite local jealousies which might endanger the union of the states, and had warned his countrymen to be upon their guard. The people of New-England are exceedingly jealous of their rights. To make them believe that their government intended to oppress them, is sufficient to rouse them to resistance. In case the leaders of faction, who were pressing for power, even at the expense of their country's honor and safety, took advantage of the credulity of this description of merchants, excited their alarms and jealousies, and addressed their interest and their cupidity. A merchant of limited information is but an indifferent politician. His attachments are often strongest where his speculations are most profitable. Where his treasure is, there we shall most generally find his heart. We have, therefore, less to expect from his patriotism than from those whose attachments are at home. These men, therefore, were the first and most easy dupes. They were induced to believe that their rights were attacked, and that resistance was essential to the interests of commerce. But upon investigation it was found that the commerce of New-England was entirely dependant upon the other states. Upon the score of interest, therefore, these merchants doubted, suspected they had been deceived, made their calculations, found that resistance was unprofitable, compromised with their consciences, and engaged in the practice of privateering, which they had before denounced, as inconsistent with honor, morality and religion.

Opposition rose from another quarter.—In other countries a priesthood have had a powerful, and often a pernicious effect in the civil administration of the state. Having in some measure the superintendance of education, the control of consciences, and the custody of the divine oracles, they had become dangerous to the civil power.—It had been found by experience that they had seldom used it in favor of the liberties of the people. The truth is, the clergy are like other men, and "subject to like passions." Possessing the means of gratifying their ambition, they do not fail to improve them.—Hence the most cruel and vindictive wars have been waged, and the most barbarous tortures and murders inflicted, in the name of that religion whose

"glad tidings" were "peace on earth and good will to all men."

In this country the clergy had been entrusted with no temporal power, and they had felt, or affected to feel, that humiliation which well became the disciples of "the meek and lowly Jesus." Whether from fear of becoming subject to an episcopal hierarchy, or of losing their livings by opposing or restraining the indignation of the people, or from honest and patriotic motives, certain it is that after the battle of Lexington most of them became zealous advocates of the American cause, and contributed essentially to its support. From their conduct in the revolution their patriotism was not suspected.—Possessing the avenues to the hearts of their hearers, their popularity was extensive, their power and influence increased; many of them grew wanton, and aspired to the control of the civil power. Foiled in their attempts, and despairing of governing a nation so extensive, intelligent and free, as the U. States, the most distinguished of the order, projected the establishment of a hierarchy over a section, to be severed by foreign and domestic exertions. The moment, therefore, that war was declared, they took a stand in favor of the enemy, magnified his power, complimented his magnanimity & forbearance, eulogised his justice, and pronounced him "the bulwark of our holy religion." The leaders of the order were most inveterate, wanton and abusive. Their coarse vulgarity, their insolent denunciation of the government, their gross calumnies against the legitimate rulers of the American people, & their undistinguished recommendations of open resistance, polluted the sanctuary, offended the Christian, disgraced religion, and insulted the Deity. They had made peace with the pope, their former Anti-Christ, and all the pious curses which they used to invoke upon this "man of sin," were now transferred, with ten-fold vengeance and malignity to the President of the United States! Say not that we attack religion, when we denounce those who pervert it. Say not that we are hostile to the clergy when we discriminate against those who disgrace the profession. Our remarks are intended to apply to those, and those only, who have prostituted their sacred duties to purposes of opposition to the government.

We venerate the man whose heart is warm, whose hands are pure, whose doctrines and whose life, coincident, exhibit lucid proof, that he is honest in the sacred cause, that he is honest in the sacred cause, that he is honest in the sacred cause, whose actions say that they respect themselves.

But when they use their offices to cover the vilest and blackest designs, when they wound and insult the feelings of one part of their flock to gratify the spleen and rancor of the other, when they attempt to scandalize the only government on earth which would tolerate their scandal, we must and will doubt whether they can be disciples of HIM, whose "kingdom was not of this world." Point me to a word in all he said, which recommended or licensed opposition to the government, where he was, and I consent you take it for your text, to justify all the virulence and abuse, which have been disembogued from the polluted lips of the vilest incendiary that ever disgraced the pulpit. No, your divine master did not "stir up the people." "He went about doing good." His doctrines and his life were respect and submission to "the powers that be."—And by his precepts and example, he proved that "tribute" even to a most odious government was "lawful," when he himself was so poor and penniless that he was obliged to work a miracle to pay his tax. Ye hypocrites! who neither say as he said, nor do as he did, who neglect your duty to abuse your rulers, "ye cannot be his disciples."—Ye neither render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," nor "to God the things that are God's." For your own sakes, desist. Think not to feed your flocks with political feuds, when they are starving for the "bread of life," lest pious christians shall be offended and turn their backs on those sanctuaries which you shall have defiled with your horrid-blasphemies.

But the opposition to the war did not stop here. A most bold and daring measure was devised and adopted by Massachusetts. At a special session of the legislature, summoned upon the pretext of defence, but at which no defensive measures whatever were matured, delegates were appointed to meet in convention with others from the rest of the New-England states, for the purpose of taking the resources of the government out of their hands, preventing the exercise of the federal authority within these states and preparing the way of a final separation. The project was resisted, and its effects and

tendency exposed. The people became alarmed, the enemy encouraged, and strong apprehensions were entertained that Massachusetts, at least, would throw her whole weight into the scale of the enemy. But that Being who has so often interposed in behalf of our country, did not forsake us in this extremity. The session which authorized the convention, was summoned after the capture of Washington, and while the public mind was depressed, and in some measure desponding. Had nothing favorable intervened, it is impossible to say to what length the madness of party would have driven this deluded state. But the loss of the capital was succeeded by the most brilliant triumphs. This depressed the enemy and discouraged the opposition. The convention met; resistance was postponed; and several alterations to the constitution were proposed, tending to impair its energy and abridge the power of the people and their rights, having no bearing on the then state of affairs, and the fate of which is now viewed with profound indifference. Upon the acceptance of the report of her delegates, Massachusetts appointed three commissioners to act as a committee of grievance to the seat of government, to ask, what the United States had no right to give.—These disconsolate gentlemen, after meeting with much tribulation, ridicule, contempt and pity, and hearing the mortifying and unwelcome intelligence of victory and peace, arrived at Washington; were afraid or ashamed to make known their errand, returned as secretly as possible, and here the farce ended!

Thus have I enumerated some of the engines, by which the constitution was attacked, while she was buffeting the storm of war. But he, who watches over the destinies of America, shielded her from the storm, protected her from the tempest, and brought her to her haven in peace, and triumph. In spite of these and other embarrassments, you see this infant republic rise from the cradle and lumbe the mistress of the ocean. You see in the lakes two British fleets of superior force, strike to the matchless skill and unconquerable bravery of Americans. You see our young and experienced officers and soldiers at Chippewa and Bridgewater, in field fight, meet and repel a superior force of the veterans of the Peninsula, the conquerors of the conquerors of Europe." You see at N. Orleans the most powerful British army that ever stepped on American ground, vanquished, with vast destruction of their officers and men, by "the backwoods farmers." Who can doubt but the God of battles espoused our cause, and not only "covered our heads" in the day of danger "but covered our enemies with "shame as a mantle" and "confusion as a garment?"

And you, fellow-citizens, are partakers of these exploits. If the rulers of your state have endeavored to stifle the flame of your patriotism and to prevent your sharing in your country's glory, the brave volunteers from Massachusetts and Maine have gloriously fought and bled for their country. Many officers and soldiers from this state can boast of honorable wounds received at Chippewa, Bridgewater and Erie, Plattsburg and elsewhere, in defence of our country's honor and its rights; and many a gallant tar from your native soil has helped to the dousing of St. George's cross to the stars and stripes of America.

Yet up starts one of your calculating gentry and asks, "Pray what have you gained by the war?" I answer national honor; "without which," as was once observed by a leader of the opposition, "national independence is not worth preserving." Full well I know that this national honor is a commodity which many calculating Yankees cannot comprehend. If it is not an object of speculation, they do not understand it. "What (they will ask) is its value in the market? How can it be exchanged for stock? Will the brokers take it? What quantity of it will purchase a cargo of rum and molasses, or sugar and brandy? Will it pay taxes? If it will answer none of these purposes, it is of no use to us.

Leaving these gentlemen to their speculations, permit me on this day to congratulate you on the high ground your country occupies on the return of peace. In Europe, to be known as an American, is to command respect. We mean an American in the legitimate sense. For we are told that the British themselves treat those with contempt who bear the name of Americans without possessing the spirit.

Notwithstanding the increased power of the enemy, during the war, and a correspondent increase of opposition from our own citizens, the peace is honorable and satisfactory. Those who confide in British honor and magnanimity

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