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AN ORATION

DELIVERED AT

RAHWAY, NEW-JERSEY,

JULY 4th, 1839.

BY

JOHN BENTLEY SCOLES ✓

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FELLOW CITIZENS,

To us is granted, the inestimable privilege of beholding the commencement of another, and the sixty-third anniversary of our National Independence. And now—throughout a Republic of unparalleled extent—from its fruitful hills and vallies smiling with the green promise of an abundant harvest ;—from the crowded city, from the thriving village, and from the little hamlet reared by the hardy and adventurous pioneer, on the chosen spot, rescued by him from the wilderness to become the abode of civilized life—may the voice of gratitude and praise rise to the Giver of all good—for having crowned the efforts of our patriot fathers with such glorious success ; and enabled a great and growing population to preserve thus long, from open foes without, and secret foes within—that precious inheritance of liberty, which those fathers periled life and fortune to bestow !

On this festal day, it is customary—and it is salutary and right!—to pause a while in our onward career, and look back upon the past. We are so much involved in the immediate interests, the bustle and excitement of the present moment—so eagerly engaged in the perpetual struggle for wealth, power or fame—so occupied and engrossed—so fretted and harrassed with the cares and perplexities of our ordinary business—impelled forward by that active enterprize, spirit and desire of sudden acquisition and a speedy return of pecuniary profits, which have become almost characteristic of us as a community—we are too apt scarcely to bestow a thought upon the past, in our restless anxiety about the future. We do not think enough of days gone by—we do not think enough of the struggles and sufferings of the “times that tried men’s souls”—we do not think enough of the virtues and the sacrifices of our revolutionary fathers. Would we kindle the generous emotions and expand the noblest sentiments of the soul—would we lose all narrow, selfish, sectoral feeling, in one warm glow of genuine patriotism—embracing in the wide circuit of its benevolence, our whole country, and all who bear her name and love her institutions. We will study the lives, and emulate the conduct of the founders of our Republic !

We have heard and read much of the heroes and sages of Grecian and Roman story. They are familiar to us as the school boy's theme. They are presented to us as models of all that is devoted in patriotism, sublime in wisdom, and ennobling in virtue. They are indeed worthy of our admiration—worthy of the Historian's praise—worthy to be held in everlasting remembrance. But when, in any country, was there to be found in council, an abler and purer association of men than the Continental Congress? Where can we look for a brighter constellation of nobler spirits, than the Signers of the Declaration of Independence? Where is there a character in the whole range of history, upon which we so much delight to dwell—where is there a name which ought to strike such a chord in the American bosom, as that of Washington? Yes, it is indeed salutary and beneficial to meditate upon the history of the revolution. It is full of interest and full of instruction. We may there learn what energy, integrity, and perseverance can do against fearful odds, in the struggle for human rights. We will there discover, that "thrice is he armed, who has his quarrel just." When we behold thirteen young and apparently feeble colonics, rising in the dignity and spirit of conscious manhood; and with generous indignation and unflinching courage—spurning from the shackles of oppression—though the arm outstretched to force them on, was that of one of the mightiest empires of the earth!

From the history of the revolution, we may learn another important lesson—the necessity and advantage of harmonious union. Suppose the leaders of our revolution had not possessed a firm unanimity of purpose? Suppose they had had distracted councils and a mutinous army? Think you that they could have succeeded? No, it was the existence of perfect faith, and the absence of all treachery—it was the unwavering confidence which one could repose in another—it was the one great cause, linking and binding them together—brothers in heart, and mind, and strength. It was this perfect union that gave them the victory, and enabled them to stand freemen on the soil, which they had redeemed with their valor and their blood!

And if we would preserve our liberty, we must be united. We may, and we must differ on many political questions. Men are not alike in mental constitutions, mental habits, or mental cultivation. It is altogether impossible that there should be any thing like unanimity upon the manifold questions of policy that must continually arise. Nor is it necessary—nor would it be beneficial that it should be. Mind sharpens mind. In the collision of intellect truth is elicited. The ener-

gies of man would stagnate if the minds of his fellow men were in all respects like his own. If he met with no opposition—nothing to stimulate his energies and nerve his determination—nothing to rouse curiosity, arrest attention, or provoke inquiry. Wearisome indeed would it be to look abroad upon such a dead level of human intelligence as this would present to us. No, it is as much better as it is. But while we agree to differ upon points of policy—let us be united in our republicanism—united in our devotion to our country, her institutions, and her interests.

We must have party divisions. Party divisions will as a necessary consequence produce some degree of party spirit. But I have yet to learn that some degree of party spirit is not serviceable to a republic. Parties keep a sharp eye upon each other. The selfish spirit of opposition combines with the better impulse of patriotism, to induce each to watch and protect the citadel of liberty from the invasions of the other. Parties cause power to change hands more frequently than it otherwise would, and presents an opportunity of any successful attempt at consolidating and perpetuating it to the destruction of popular rights. But whatever may be our individual views of the tendency of parties in a community like ours, they ever will exist, so long as men desire political power, or differ in political opinion.

But while a certain degree of party spirit may be beneficial, its excess cannot but be injurious, and ought by all means to be avoided. Let us not fall into that extreme of party intolerance—which condemns as a species of moral turpitude, a mere difference in judgment upon men or measures—Which induces us to brand a man as an enemy to his country, because he cannot consent to join with us in doing what we happen to think most for that country's good. We remember what is related of the Emperor Charles V. after a reign which had been disgraced by religious persecution. The monarch who had wielded the sceptre of so immense an empire, exchanged the schemes of politics and the excitements of conquest, for the more harmless, though less royal amusement, of inspecting the machinery of clocks and watches, in which it would seem he became somewhat proficient. It taught him a moral lesson, "with all my observation and skill," said he, "I never could get two watches to go exactly alike, why then should I have foolishly supposed, that I could compel all my subjects to think alike!" Well would it have been for him—well would it have been for the thousands who suffered for conscience sake during his eventful reign, if he had discovered this truth a little sooner! His reign pre-

sented an example of religious intolerance ; and his son and successor improved upon its cruelties. No voice of warning---no gentle persuasion to humanity issued from the the monastic retreat of the imperial solitary, to touch the sympathies, enlighten the mind, or amend the heart of Philip the Second !

Let us be ever ready to condemn impropriety of conduct wherever we find it---in the ranks of our own party, or among our opponents. Let us earnestly contend for that political faith which we believe to be true ; let us enforce and sustain it to the utmost of our ability---but let us concede to others, the right to do the same.

Let us, as much as lies in our power, prevent our party contentions from degenerating into personal bickerings and personal enmities. Why should this be the case ? Men have a right to differ on political subjects, and to proclaim and circulate their own peculiar views. They have a right to maintain their own opinions---to assail with decorum the opinions of others---and to make proselytes, whenever they have the opportunity and the ability. This is the undoubted right of every man---and we should never be so unreasonable as to murmur or complain when it is properly exercised. Why cannot we admit the equal sincerity of one who differs materially from ourselves in political opinion ? Why should that difference of opinion sever our friendship, or lessen our respect for each other ? Let us endeavour to do justice to the motives of men, even when we believe them most egregiously to err. Let us employ the weapons of argument, rather than invective. Let us aim at truth---To the utmost of our capacity, sent to prevent and correct his judgment in ourselves and others---and be prompt and ready to condemn nothing but palpable misconduct.

And, my Fellow Citizens, let us take care that our zeal for our party, does not lead us to justify, or sanction, a disregard of moral obligation, or a resort to the arts of corruption, with a view to obtain or secure its ascendancy. Though we may honestly suppose that the success of our particular party is essentially connected with the prosperity of our country---let us remember, that by extenuating or excusing, for any purpose whatever, a lax morality---we are undermining the very foundations of our institutions---we are spreading a deleterious influence that will pervade all classes of our community---we are feeding and stimulating those evil propensities and passions, that will soon begin to develope themselves in the ordinary dealings between man and man. A community cannot be politically depraved, without being really depraved. When men begin to excuse to themselves corruption, fraud, and treachery in poli-

tics, they will soon begin to do so in the other transactions of life. The moral sense is blunted, they have become familiar with vice—the evil habit is already formed. No, my fellow citizens—let us be wary and circumspect, and never do what we believe to be decidedly wrong, with a view either to defeat opposition, or to obtain success.

The history of the revolution will also instruct us in the true principles of rational liberty ; that liberty for which our fathers fought, and bled, and conquered.

It is always profitable, and sometimes absolutely necessary, to go back to first principles. To understand a subject fully, we must trace it to its origin, and know its history. This is peculiarly the case with the important subject of government and of laws. To understand them fully, we must study their history. No man can understand the character and operation of this Republic, without being familiar with the lives and writings of those who prepared the way for the Revolution, and framed the Constitution. Can there be a more interesting and delightful study? When we gaze upon a noble river, pursuing its ceaseless course in the depth and grandeur of its mighty waters; we feel an insatiable inclination to explore its sources, and to behold its fountain head. It is so with a great and rising nation—as we trace its onward march to increasing intelligence, respectability, and strength. How much more intense should that feeling be—when that nation is our own? Shall we penetrate the dark recesses of ancient history? Shall we make ourselves profound in its fabulous details, and be exceedingly curious in its legendary lore? Shall we investigate the changes and revolutions of every European government, and reason learnedly and logically upon them? And yet exhibit an utter ignorance of the history of that government in which we have the deepest interest? The only government by which our destinies in life are to be directly affected—the most rational—I had almost said, the only rational government in the world? Unworthy indeed, would we be of our privileges as American freemen, if this could with truth be said of any of us!

Frequent meditation upon the writings of the men of the Revolution will establish us in the important and disputed doctrines of State rights and Constitutional powers—as they understood those doctrines. It is peculiarly necessary when we have wandered far away from them, and lost ourselves in the mazes of sophistical refinement and ingenious perversion, in the deceptive guise of explanations, and constructions either too rigid or too relaxed. Whenever we find ourselves in this situation, we cannot do better than to turn at once to the expositions and precepts of the

heroes and sages of the Revolution. It will so extricate us from our entanglements, it will save us from any further wanderings from the straight and narrow path. In their immortal records, we have an unfailing mirror, reflecting the image of unquestionable truth—let us look to it in every case of difficulty or doubt. They are the Fathers of our political Church—and although I do not pronounce them to be infallible. Yet I certainly do consider them the very highest authority to which an appeal can be made. Let us frequently refer to them, and study them with diligence and care. It will kindle and keep alive the fire of patriotism upon the altar of the heart. It will cause us to admire, to love and imitate their excellencies—which are of imperishable renown. It will impart and strengthen within us, the primitive spirit of the Whigs of '76.

It was not a chimera for which they now contended. They pursued no *ignus fatuus* of a vain and speculative philosophy. Their object was substantially before them, and continually in view. They were determined that the American people should make the great experiment of self government. If it proved successful, they knew that it would be the first of earthly blessings—and that at all events, the opportunity of seeking that experiment, was worthy of their utmost zeal, and their most untiring efforts. They understood well their position. They knew the consequences of their conduct, and the extent of their responsibility. They did not go upon a warfare without counting the cost. Bigotted to no political system, embracing no wild theories, impelled by no blind enthusiasm; they were sound thinkers; practical statesmen; men who in all their doings, never lost sight of common sense. Then every movement was marked by the highest wisdom and the most consummate prudence; and we regret to say, has been admired, rather than imitated, by those who have professed to be guided by their example.

Fellow Citizens, we are the inheritors of this inestimable right of self-government. The experiment was made. Thus, far it has proved successful.

But Fellow Citizens---we must not expect too much from government. No government is, or can be perfect. Its superiority can only be known by comparing its principles and operations with those of other governments. It must be framed and administered by fallible men---for the benefit of fallible men. It must sometimes encroach too far, and sometimes be deficient. Government cannot reach the heart. It can only control, and imperfectly control, the outward conduct. When it has done its utmost; much yet remains to be done. Other influences moral and religious must come to its aid. They must operate with it; and reach,

when it stops short—inert and powerless. But while they supply its deficiencies, and are the right arm of its strength—they ask not the support of its physical force. While they operate with government—they must still be kept distinct from it. Government may play the tyrant, and make men hypocrites. It may enforce an external conformity, and restrain licentiousness. But the *will* of man is beyond its control. It cannot make him religious—it cannot make him moral. We rear no splendid temples to our Creator with wealth wrested from reluctant hands. We would have no compulsory worship at those modest shrines, which increasing with the increase of population—bear witness of pious enterprise, public spirit, and Christian faith...and proclaim to wondering Europe...that the land which they adorn, improve, and elevate, has no need of a *church establishment!*

How shall we preserve our liberty? This is indeed a momentous and important question—when we consider what that liberty cost, and all that this question involves. The answer to it might be simply given—by saying that our liberty can only be preserved by diffusing and maintaining among our people a portion of the same spirit by which it was achieved. Permit me to suggest some considerations—by way of elucidating the mode in which this may be accomplished.

First—Let the great body of the people and particularly those who are yet in the ingenuousness of youth—be thoroughly instructed in the distinctive principles of our government. Let the school, the pulpit, and the press, until in urging and enforcing upon the public mind...the essential difference between rational liberty, and that licentious anarchy which spurns all legal restraint--and which is triumphant--whenever a lawless mob, under any pretext, and for any purpose whatever, ventures to assume the power of government, and exercise the functions of the magistracy...and can do so...with the consciousness that numbers give impunity, and that Justice dare not use that sword she wields in solemn mockery of protection. When mobs are suffered to control a community...it is in vain to talk of rights. If the mob spirit gain the ascendancy...liberty must soon be at an end. Let our people be taught to venerate the constitution and the laws, as the security of their political and personal rights...the great foundation of union, government, and good order. Let us guard them from invasion from any quarter, and in any shape. Let us be continually on the watch...never relaxing our vigilance when the enemy is abroad. This is the price of liberty. We know its worth. We cannot hesitate. We must be faithful to our trust.

Secondly...Let the precepts of a strict public and private morality be

sidulously inculcated—and let the practice be enforced by example in high places.

Thirdly—Let us imitate as far as we can, the primitive simplicity of our forefathers—in opposition to the luxurious habits and frivolous manners of European life.

Fourthly—Let us be Americans in something more than name! Let us have a just idea of our dignity as American freemen. Let us foster the intellect of our own country, scorn a servile imitation, and aim at a vigorous appropriate originality. We have suffered much from foreign influence. The effect has been to make the wealthier classes of our community less republican and less American, and to diffuse among the working classes a spirit of *radicalism* or *Jacobinism*, of which we should know nothing in this land of equal rights. It was the uttered wish of one of the founders of our republic that an insurmountable barrier could be raised between us, and the people on the other side of the Atlantic. This wish was probably but half sincere—yet it serves to show what forebodings of evil influence were uppermost in his mind. And the Father of his country—in that memorable message which he left us as the legacy of his love, and which will endure through all time as an evidence of his wisdom—expresses a similar apprehension, and couples it with a solemn warning that should sink deep, and make an indelible impression on every true American heart.

Let me not be misunderstood, however, as encouraging national prejudices, or as recommending any display of inhospitality towards those who may leave the land of their birth, to seek among us a refuge from oppression, or the means of subsistence. No, to all who are honest, and willing to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow—to all who have suffered for conscience sake—to all who have endured persecution, and made sacrifices in the sacred cause of liberty—our republic stretches out the hand of invitation, and will rejoice to throw around them the shield of her protection! She wishes them to become her adopted children—not in semblance, but in reality. She would have them vie with her native sons, in attachment to her institutions, and activity in her cause. Long may she hold her proud pre-eminence—as the asylum of the oppressed of every clime—the “home of the brave”—the favored land, to which the unsuccessful patriot can turn in the dark day of his calamity, and find a ray of consolation in the thought—that here his troubled soul and wearied feet may obtain a solace and a resting place at last! What I desire—what I would impress with the utmost earnestness upon the minds of my countrymen, is—that they may strive

He who in the same space of time may be thrown upon the shore by the to make our emigrant population *Americans*, and not permit them to make us aliens in our own land—that we may not adopt their errors, vices, or follies—their views of government or notions of civil liberty—the product of a different political system, and a different state of society. Let us remember that we are *American republicans*—and that the manners, habits, and feelings, which would be proper enough in a monarchy or an aristocracy, are very improper here. Let those who would arrogate and domineer over their fellow men, because the accident of fortune has made them rich, or because they vainly suppose that the accident of birth has given them some claim to rank, remember that our Declaration of Independence proclaims as a fundamental truth, that “all men are created equal.” And let the working classes of the community bear in mind that with us to labour is not to be degraded, and that many of those who have filled with credit some of the most important stations in their country’s gift, began life with as few resources, and have worked as hard with their own hands, as the poorest among themselves.

In other countries where power is hereditary, and where the aim and operation of the system of government is to concentrate and perpetrate property in the hands of the few, combinations of laborians many may be necessary to protect them from grasping monopolies, and the encroachments of individual or associated wealth. But in this country such combinations are unnecessary and dangerous. It is the *majority* that govern here, not a privileged and aristocratic *few*. The spirit of our institutions and laws—the legal restraints upon perpetuities—the fluctuations of trade, making a man rich to-day and poor to-morrow; all conspire to prevent any reasonable apprehension of injury to the mass of the people, from the land holders and capitalists among them. The numerical strength is the other way, and with us, numerical strength is every thing. Combinations formed for the protection of rights that are not assailed, must be very careful, or they will become oppressors themselves, and invade the rights of others. In a land of equal laws, where the rights of the poor man are the same, and as securely protected as those of the rich man, where the “little all” of the one is as precious in the sight of the law, as the large estate of the other; where the only recognized difference is that between right and wrong, guilt and innocence, what need is there of combinations for the protection of individual rights? But it is idle in this country to talk of *poor men* and *rich men*. Who is our *poor man*? The one who may be the most extensive farmer—the most thriving merchant—the largest landholder—the most substantial capitalist after a few years of prosperous industry. Who is our *rich man*?

stormy waves of that uncertain stream of fortune on which he now rides so proudly—a broken, wrecked, and bankrupt man! How vain—how worse than vain then is it to talk of “*a monied aristocracy*” in such a country as ours, when the very essence of aristocracy is power, substantial, permanent power! How criminal must be the conduct of any man, who would attempt for any selfish purpose, to array different portions of the same community against each other, portions mutually dependant, neither of which can prosper without the good feeling and cordial co-operation of the other!

Lastly, Let us cling to the federal union! However we may be divided upon other matters, let there be no division here. Let us never forget that, although *many*, we are yet *one*, though separated by state lines, we are one people. In interest, in feeling, in attachment to our country and her institutions, *ONE*!—Presenting against our enemies, an undivided strength—to our friends, an inviolable faith! We cannot be held together by that brute force to which the despot is ever ready to appeal, and which is his only, and too frequently, his all sufficient argument. But feeble as foreigners may deem the bonds of our union, let us demonstrate by their continuance unbroken in the midst of every agitation and against every assault, that the good sense and generous feeling of a free people can impart to those bonds an adamant strength!

Actuated by these just principles—pursuing this upright and honorable course, our republic shall stand secure. It will be like that house which was built upon a rock—and which fell not when the rains descended and the floods came. The rude breath of party contention may indeed agitate the surface of the waters—but deep and clear will run the current below. The tempest may indeed sometimes sweep across our sky—but it will only be to clear the atmosphere of impurity and disease—and the blue heavens will shine out again in still serenest majesty. There may be an occasional outbreak of temporary excitement—but the mighty heart of our millions will continue sound and true at the core! O, let us be mindful of our exalted and responsible position—mindful that the eyes of an inquisitive and doubting world are upon us—mindful of the great duty that we owe to posterity and to ourselves! and when we have “run our course and sleep in blessings” —may a distant and grateful posterity—as they proudly gaze upon the honored flag of the republic, spreading its starry folds in triumph on the land or on the sea—exclaim with the same heart-felt enthusiasm, that we now exclaim—

Forever float that standard sheet!
 Where breathes the foe that falls before us,
 With freedom's soil beneath our feet,
 And freedom's banner streaming o'er us.