

**AN ORATION PRONOUNCED
BEFORE THE CITIZENS OF BOSTON
ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE
DECLARATION OF AMERICAN
INDEPENDENCE, JULY 4TH, 1831**

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An Oration Pronounced Before the Citizens of Boston on the Anniversary of the Declaration of American Independence, July 4th, 1831 by John G. Palfrey

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JOHN G. PALFREY

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PRONOUNCED

BEFORE THE CITIZENS OF BOSTON,

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4TH, 1831.

BY JOHN G. PALFREY.

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1831.

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TO THE REV. MR. PALFREY.

Dear Sir; I have the honor to communicate the within copied vote, and to add my personal assurances of the great pleasure received from your Oration.

With great esteem, and respectfully,

Your Ob't Serv't,

H. G. OTIS.

City Hall, July 5, 1831.

CITY OF BOSTON.

In Common Council, July 4, 1831.

Ordered, That the Mayor and Aldermen be a Committee to present the thanks of the City Council to the REVEREND PROFESSOR PALFREY, for the eloquent, patriotic, and very appropriate Oration, this day delivered by him, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

Sent up for Concurrence,

H. T. PICKMAN, *President.*

In the Board of Aldermen, July 4, 1831.

Read and Concurred, and that the Mayor be requested to communicate the same.

H. G. OTIS, *Mayor.*

A TRUE COPY—ATTEST,

S. F. McCLEARY, *City Clerk.*

TO THE MAYOR.

Dear Sir; I have the honour to send you a copy of the Oration pronounced yesterday by the appointment of the Board of Aldermen.

I receive with great sensibility the approbation of the government of my native city. And I am happy in another opportunity to repeat the assurance of the distinguished respect, with which

I am, dear Sir,

Your affectionate humble Servant,

JOHN G. PALFREY.

Court Street, July 5, 1831.



*William Lewis Tracts
Library of
Mrs. F. L. Cary*

ORATION.

I AM all unused, fellow citizens, to situations like that, in which, by your favour, I now find myself. I have no hope of duly meeting its demands. I should unhesitatingly have declined to yield myself to your call, had I not remembered that it ill becomes a dutiful son of Boston, to constitute himself the judge of the forms of service which it may require from him; and, if not with more diffidence, I should have met it with more reluctance, but that I felt too that for a son about to be dismissed from beneath the beloved family roof, there are ties which may well strengthen the obligations of duty, even when these are strongest.

Being here, I hope I shall not seem to misunderstand the tastes of my audience, or to go aside from the purposes of the occasion, if I take for the subject of some such superficial reflections, as I may make, the means to preserve the liberty which we are celebrating. We have often, fellow citizens, been addressed here with eloquent praises of that liberty; and this to good purpose, for so we have been led to a just and useful estimation of its worth. We have often listened to the eulogy of the wise and good men who made it ours; and reasonable and

profitable was it, that that topick should interest us as it has done ; for it is greatly for a people's security as well as honour, and for encouragement to future services which it may demand, that it should be, and appear, alive to the claims of its benefactors. But, if our liberty has a right to be praised, it has a right to be watched over. If to have given it, merits our gratitude, to secure it merits our concern ; and the very testimony, which, on the yearly returns of this day, we are accustomed to bear to its value, and to their good deserts who in the time of its peril were its steadfast and successful champions, requires of us to know and to be doing our own part in the same work, according to the different exigencies of the different time in which we live. Liberty once won, is not acquired once for all. Every page of that most melancholy book, the history of social man, would set us right if we should think so. It is too precious a thing either to be won at small cost, or to be kept with small pains. With us it may seem to be in little danger ; and undoubtedly there are good reasons, —I should rejoice to enlarge on them, but that I must be hastening to my subject,—for being gratified with its condition and prospects. But at no time is it any where in such great danger, as when it is supposed to be in none. The most threatening omen for it, is an impression of its complete security. The only way to keep it out of danger, is to allow that it may always be in danger, and be always observing whether and how it is so. He who would plot against it has no better thing to do, than to establish the persuasion of its being proof against all plots. It is the *very trick* of that portion of demagogues who would

make themselves tyrants,—if indeed this be a portion, and not the whole,—to persuade the people, while they attempt an invasion of their liberty, that, instead of being in danger, their liberty is but in the way to be extended. . When Cæsar set his foot upon the neck of the Roman people, it was because, so far from being exposed, they then imagined themselves all powerful. While they were giving up their freedom, they pleased themselves with the thought of running riot in it. In elevating their favourite, they saw nothing but that they were having their own way. The time of the downfall of republics,—that is, when their death has been a suicide, and not taken at a foreign hand,—has commonly been the time when their confidence of safety was the most proud and rash; and that republic, fellow-citizens, bids the fairest for permanency, whose people, with the most cautious vigilance, are looking at threatening tendencies, to obstruct them before they shall have acquired an unmanageable growth, and, with solicitous prospective wisdom, are providing those further securities for liberty, for which uses may arise in the progress of time, in probable or possible crises of a peculiar nature, or, in general, in that matured condition to which the state seems proceeding.

Among means, which will perpetuate our liberty, if it be destined to live, do I not name a prominent one, fellow citizens, when I speak of a *hearty attachment in the people to the Union of these States*? I say nothing in disparagement of that admirable heroism of our fathers, which brought them so triumphantly out of the revolutionary struggle, when I remind you that it had provided but a very imperfect

and unstable foundation for our liberties, in all that it extorted from England in the treaty of 1783. I am by no means sure, that the most anxious time for patriotism did not then begin; for, as long as Americans were in arms against a common enemy, at least they were disarmed from mutual hostility. I am not sure, that the anticipation of the state, in which these provinces would be, at the end of a successful contest for independence, was not the chief discouragement to some, who, while they took a leading part in the earlier measures of resistance to the mother country, opposed or looked coldly on the declaration of the 4th of July, 1776. In our day, an Italian or South American state does, now and then, what it calls, recover its liberty; but what becomes of the recovered prize the next week, or year? or, at all events, seems likely to become of it the next generation? Look at the North American Confederation, as the war of independence left it, and see how much better were then the prospects of freedom in that quarter. Here were thirteen independent sovereignties, each with a population essentially enterprising and warlike, and now, from recent circumstances, all but universally furnished with arms, and trained to their use;—with separate interests, the mutually ruinous tendency of which, severally pursued, was clear even from the experience of the war itself, when, under an extraordinary excitement of patriotism, and under all pledges of mutual support, Congress had not been able to prevail on the states to lay a uniform duty, so as to avoid exasperating interference with each other's commerce, and supply the common purse to *meet the common danger*;—protected, for the most

part, against each other, by no natural boundaries ;— in their contiguity, their ancient relations and habits of intercourse, their full acquaintance with each other's weak points, their use of the same language, and the easy circulation through them, from one to the other, of whatever heated minds might throw out, offering every facility for mutual provocation ;— their own citizens themselves somewhat impatient of any government, from the irritating recollection of their late sacrifices to put down a bad one, and from the license of their seven years' exemption from any thing which could properly be called by the name ; so that, when even the state was disposed to be peaceable, it was far from certain that the citizen would be of the same mind. In such a condition of things, if something were not done to establish a common authority, and create common interests, what prudent man could imagine that amicable relations could long subsist between these states, or that republican institutions could long subsist within them ?

In the discussions, which ended in the adoption of the Federal Constitution, it is true that we may find fewer traces, than at first thought we might look for, of the kind of anxiety, to which I have referred. We may read more of such things,—important, no doubt, but of a different importance,—as the prospect of ship-builders' wages being raised,—a great consideration here,—by the exclusion of foreign tonnage under a federal government ;—of the need of a responsible treaty-making power to open advantageous markets for the products of the south ;—and of the benefits to the publick finances, and to all private industry, of a uniform rate of imposts.