

AN
ORATION

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DELIVERED BEFORE
THE WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

AND THE
HAMILTON SOCIETY

IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

ON THE

Fourth of July, 1812.



BY JOHN ANTHON, ESQ.



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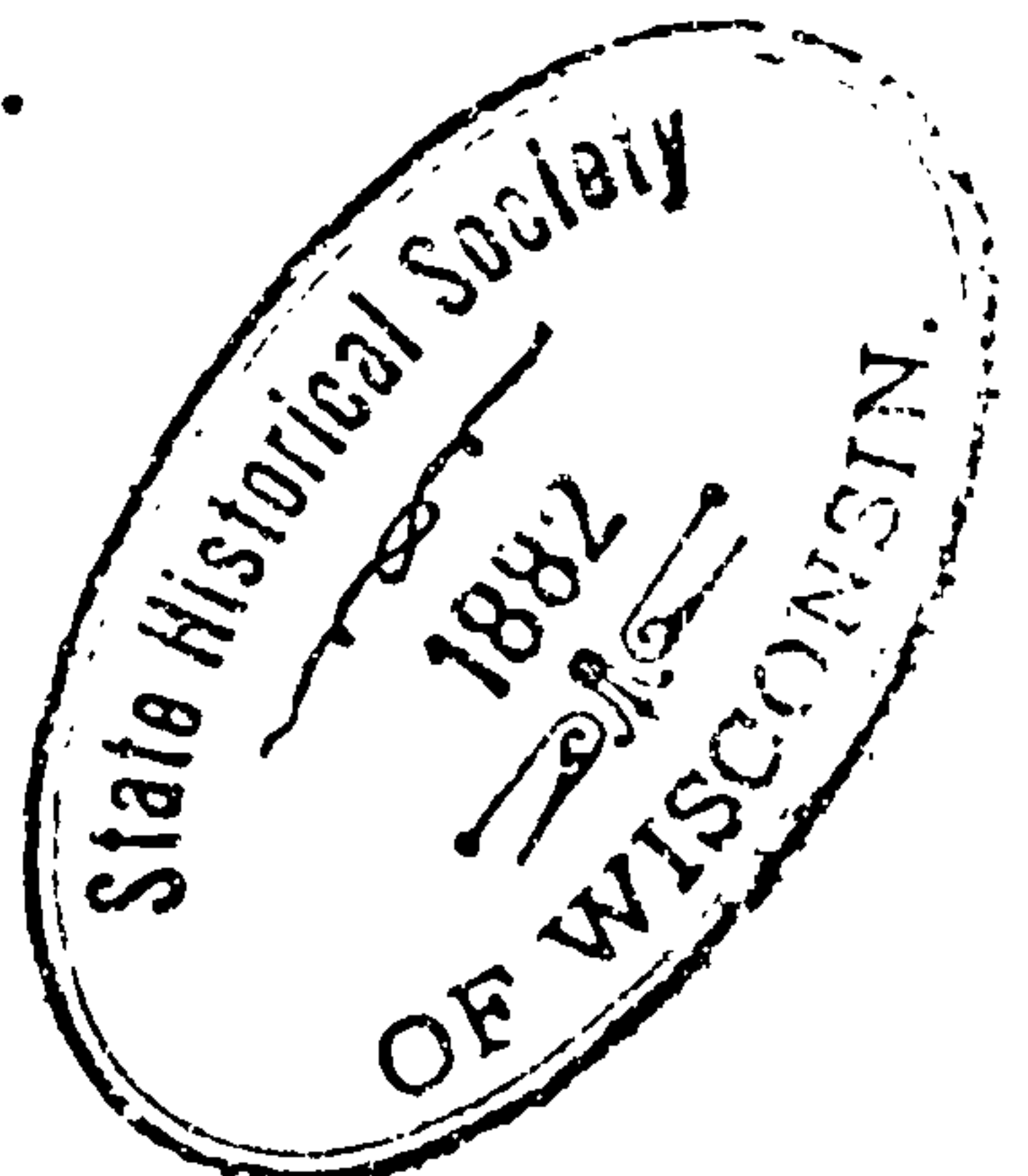


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ORATION.

THE American Revolution forms an extraordinary era in the history of the world. The establishment of a free and independent nation was its immediate result, but in its remote consequences it has caused a radical change in the political condition of continental Europe. The spirit of liberty operating on energy of character, and principles of virtue, in the American colonies, led them to independence. The same spirit encountering vice and corruption on the continent of Europe, has produced anarchy and tyranny. The bold doctrines of manly freedom inculcated on this side of the Atlantic laid the foundations of a glorious republic, while the same doctrines on the other side of the Atlantic roused an angry and destructive tempest which, in its resistless and overwhelming course, has overturned kingdoms and empires, and destroyed rational liberty.

The American Revolution occurred at a period peculiarly adapted to its success. The struggle between Great-Britain and France for the possession of the continent of America, had just drawn to a close. Britain, although successful in the contest, was heavily pressed with an enormous debt, while

the colonies derived from it an increase of strength, and some proficiency in military discipline. It was a school in which the great captains of the revolution were trained; who, from the knowledge acquired in this war, were afterwards enabled to marshal the patriot bands of America, and lead them to victory.

Revolutions either create extraordinary men, or, the deity directing the event, prepares in talent means competent to the important end. The cause of America, in this particular, also stood strong; it was supported both at home and abroad by a constellation of genius. In the British senate, the prophetic wisdom and impressive eloquence of Chatham, the philosophical energy and rhetorical elegance of Burke, and the inflexible severity of Fox and Barre, vindicated the American cause and gave a tone to American resistance. In the national councils of the colonies, the firm and undaunted patriotism of Hancock and Adams, and the cool philosophy of Franklin, roused and directed revolutionary zeal. Washington, Warren, Green, and Montgomery, stood forth their country's bulwark in the field, and the powerful faculties of Hamilton were maturing to uphold a sinking nation when the exhausting conflict should be past. In addition to these, look to your blazoned standards; there are names which will never be erased from the imperishable annals of fame. Time, while he crumbles into dust the monumental columns of royalty, and draws the veil

of oblivion over the history of kings and kingdoms, will add new lustre to their deeds. Their examples, like those of the heroes of Rome and Greece, shall animate the remotest posterity, when the name of America, and her glorious struggle, are evidenced by history alone.

Such was the intellectual force which the colonies possessed. In this, and in the justice of their cause, they were superior to their enemy ; but in physical power they were every way inferior.

The causes of the momentous contest, between the American colonies and the mother country, are to be found in the sound and stubborn principles of the colonists, and in the infatuation and ignorance of the British ministry.

The North American colonies were, in their settlement and growth, essentially different from all other colonial establishments recorded in history. Originally settled by intrepid adventurers, they owed a rapid and unexampled growth to the intolerant spirit of the mother country. This spirit drove from her bosom men of characteristic resolution, who unhesitatingly forsook the ease and luxury of their native country, for the enjoyment of freedom in the wilds of America. Such men would rear their children in their own principles, and they and their posterity would consequently be the last to submit to an invasion of their rights.

In very early periods the kings of England posses-

sed and exercised a despotic prerogative of exacting arbitrary taxes from their subjects under the name of feudal aids. In regulating this contribution, the king was supreme, both as to the extent and time of exaction. After various struggles, however, this despotic prerogative was wrested from the hands of the monarch, long previous to the settlement of America, and a new principle engrafted on the constitution, that taxes were to be the free gift of the people. No provision of the English constitution has been more sacredly guarded, or more tenaciously asserted than this; it is interwoven into the very forms of parliamentary procedure, and inculcated in every page of British history. The colonists in the temper of mind in which they left their native country, would deem this right above all others their birthright.

In 1762 the French war terminated, and left Great-Britain in possession of the continent of America, from Hudson's bay to the southern cape of Florida. In the year following, the Grenville administration commenced its destructive career. An administration which courted the people at the expense of the people's rights, and, like similar administrations, which we have witnessed in more modern times, offered up the constitution itself on the altars of their own popularity. This administration, to conciliate the affections of their countrymen at home, came to the resolution, unconstitutional as they knew it to be, to relieve them from the pressure of the French

war debt by taxing America. Taxes were accordingly by an obsequious time-serving majority in parliament imposed on the American colonies, unrepresented as they were in that national body. By this act of gross and palpable tyranny, the Parliament assumed with respect to America, the very power and prerogative of arbitrary taxation, which had been wrested from the English kings, and obliterated from the English constitution.

This innovating experiment met with a promptitude of resistance in the colonies which disconcerted the ministry, but their popularity was at stake, and to save that, they prepared to risk the welfare of their country. From this period until the commencement of actual hostilities in 1775, the policy of the British cabinet is marked with the strongest infatuation. Grossly ignorant of the American character, every ministerial step, whether conciliatory or coercive, embroiled the strife and added new energy to American resistance. Weak, wavering, rash, and intemperate Britain, *reeled* through the legislative contest which terminated in her disgrace, while the infant colonies, displaying a maturity of wisdom, maintained a steady resistance with firm unbending perseverance. In vain did Burke and Fox and Barrè raise their warning voices to their country. In vain did the aged Chatham, standing on the very verge of dissolution, plead the cause of justice and America. In vain did they point out to the ministry the

awful precipice on which they stood ;—blind and infatuated, they rushed forward on the threatening mischief and plunged their country into ruin and disgrace.

When the colonies discovered that nothing but unconditional submission would satisfy Great-Britain “Then flamed their spirit high.” The sound of arms and busy preparation was heard along the continent. The storm of opposition first burst forth in Massachusetts, and the inhabitants of that state stand gloriously pre-eminent for having enkindled the flame of liberty on the altars of America. The remaining colonies were at first irresolute but the example of Massachusetts fired their flagging zeal and created a uniform spirit of firm resistance. Against Massachusetts, therefore, ministerial indignation was excited, and the vials of ministerial wrath poured forth ; her commerce was destroyed, her chartered privileges revoked, and her civil constitution changed. Massachusetts unappalled prepared to assert her rights. At her call the first American congress of colonial delegates assembled. History does not record an example of a more wise and temperate procedure at the commencement of a revolution than this. Without a congress, the colonies might have been subdued in detail by the arms of Britain, or individually wheedled into submission by adroit negotiation. This patriotic body, forming the basis of union, gave energy and system to resistance. They made

the wrongs of Massachusetts the rallying point; they approved of her bold opposition; and pledged United America for her support in the important contest.

Anxious however to secure their rights by peaceable exertions, petitions, impressive for their eloquence, and irrefutable in their logic, were first sent forth. But Britain treated the petitions of an injured people with rudeness and contempt; they were unanswered, because they were unanswerable, and the door of conciliation was closed for ever. Massachusetts, the foremost in asserting her rights, was destined to be the first to shed her blood. The battle of Lexington opened the important warfare, which terminated in the independence we this day celebrate.

When we reflect upon the political situation of the great conflicting parties at this period, and behold on the one side infant colonies dependent on the mother country for the very implements of warfare, with a population thinly scattered over an extended territory, discordant in feelings, and united only by their wrongs, and by a weak and temporary government, the offspring of those wrongs, without the shadow of an organized military force, and destitute of revenue to support such a force, when created. And on the other side, the gigantic naval and military power of Britain, her energetic government and exhaustless resources, we must be struck with wonder and admiration at the boldness of the leaders of America, in venturing on the unequal contest. But their

cause, the cause of Justice and Freedom, fortified their hearts, and created a spirit, which, setting danger at defiance, led them fearlessly to victory.

Hancock was called to preside in our councils; and to Washington was entrusted the staff of military command. His undaunted bosom, in the most perilous and trying times, never despaired of his country's cause. He disciplined a raw peasantry in the face of a veteran army. And the first glorious achievement of his arms, was the driving of the enemy from Boston, the cradle of American Liberty. The navy and army of Britain were then set in array against us; and the year 1776 presented to America the awful spectacle of a brave and disciplined army, under tried and able generals, taking the field against new levies, half armed, and undisciplined. But the spirit of America increased with increasing danger. Britain having haughtily rejected every overture of rational adjustment, and manifested an inflexible resolution to coerce, the colonies threw off their dependence upon her, and declared themselves a free and independent people. This declaration, while it struck the mother country with astonishment, roused the enthusiasm of America to its highest pitch. From this period all was at stake—The Rubicon was passed.

The British ministry commenced the revolutionary war with a total misapprehension of the American character. They believed the Americans to be cowards; and this character was publicly bestowed

on them in the British Parliament. A Col. Grant, a parasite of the ministry, declared in the House of Commons, “that he knew the Americans well, and from that knowledge, would venture to predict, that they would not dare to face an English army.” Many ludicrous stories of their cowardice, (says the historian) were told by this gentleman, greatly to the entertainment of the ministerial members, who were confident that America would make but a short and feeble resistance.*

The battle of Bunker’s Hill, however, and the surprise and capture of the Hessians, at Trenton, in 1776, at the very inception of the war, soon taught them that the Americans dared to face them in the field. And the surrender of Burgoyne, with his army, at Saratoga, in 1777, to the comparatively undisciplined troops of America, compelled them to respect the character they had traduced.

This change of sentiment, thus forcibly wrought in the British ministry, increased the difficulties of our situation. More powerful armies, with more efficient commanders, were sent to renew the conflict. Having experienced the energy of the north, the next experiment was made upon what was deemed the effeminacy of the south. Various, and occasionally disastrous, were the occurrences of the war in the southern department, from ’78 to ’81. The hopes of Britain were sometimes exalted, but oftener depressed. Cornwallis, with the army of the south,

* 1 Bissett’s, Geo. III. 528.

for a while carried terror and dismay wherever he approached; victory seemed to have taken up her residence in his tents, and to have crowned him with her never-fading laurel. Washington, however, by a masterly movement, and a display of consummate generalship, blasted the hopes of Britain, tore the laurel from the brow of Cornwallis, and terminated victoriously the trying conflict. By skilful operations, he amused Sir Henry Clinton, the commanding officer of the British forces in New-York, with the idea of his intending to attack that post. Letters in furtherance of the plan were framed, and purposely exposed to interception—they were intercepted, and the British general confidently relying on their contents, kept himself entrenched in New-York, and did not dare to weaken his garrison, by sending reinforcements to Cornwallis. When Washington discovered the success of his stratagem, he proceeded by rapid marches to Virginia, and in conjunction with the forces there, surrounded Cornwallis; and on the 19th of October, 1781, compelled this celebrated general to surrender, before Sir Henry Clinton, at New-York, had recovered from his surprise. Thus fell the army of the south, and with it the spirit of Britain. Finding the contest hopeless, she yielded to force, what she had denied to justice, and preliminaries of peace were signed in '82; our independence was acknowledged, and America assumed her station among the nations of the earth.

Thus terminated our contest with our *foreign* foes. But this was not the close of our Herculean labours. A civil government was yet to be formed, to secure the independence we had gained. The colonial confederation, although supported by the zeal of the Revolution, had proved weak and inefficient. The consummate genius, however, which lead us safely through the gloomy periods of the war, guided us in the cabinet.

A portion of the community, either blinded by intemperate passion, or misled by the designing counsels of ambitious men, opposed the establishment of a Federal Constitution. Violent were then the internal commotions of America. For a while her fate was doubtful,

“ And Freedom trembled for her last retreat.”

Then grew up the Federal character, which proved, as I trust in God it ever will prove, the great bulwark of our country. At its creative voice the Constitution sprang into existence, triumphant over the malignant star of anti-federalism. The black surcharged storm which had hung lowering over us, passed away to the continent of Europe—There it has raged with uncontrolled violence, and its distant thunders are yet heard from our shores. Posterity, in the glowing page of history, will grant the well earned meed of praise to those wise and patriotic men, who, sacrificing personal motives, laboured for their country alone in the establishment of our happy constitution.

Had the schemes of anti-federalism prevailed, the dreadful scenes of murder and internal war, which stained and disgraced the annals of revolutionary France, would have been realized on our shores ; and instead of enjoying that free constitution which is now our boast, we should, like France, be galled by the heavy chains of an iron despotism. America, grateful for the momentous deliverance, placed the administration of affairs in the hands of Washington and Hamilton, the great champions of the constitution ; and under their protecting buckler, soon enjoyed profound peace.

For twelve years was the Constitution administered in its purity, with a single eye to the welfare of the people—and the world saw with astonishment the rapid growth of the infant republic. Britain and France assailed her in vain. Impartial towards the nations of the earth, respect was exacted and obtained from all. Britain, alarmed at the nerve and energy of our government, restored her ill-gotten plunder, and pledged her faith no longer to molest us. France shrunk from the thunder of our cannon, and was compelled to do us as much justice as could be expected from an unjust nation. Our national character was then honoured abroad, and the name of an American, like that of a Roman in the best days of Rome, was a shield and a mighty protection to all who wore it. Thus was our revolution perfected. Without this consummation of our labours, we should

have been merely noted in the passing annals of the times as a bright coruscation, illuminating the horizon for a moment, and then sinking in darkness.

These great events which established the foundations of our republic, we this day celebrate, and the extended continent of this western world, rings with the loud note of joy, poured forth by a nation for national deliverance—this day, in every city, town, and village of our country, is heard

“ A nation’s choral hymn for tyranny o’erthrown.”

But while we rejoice, let us duly honour the memory of those by whose integrity, genius, and valour, these deeds were wrought. Warren, the first patriot chief, who, at the very dawn of the bright day of freedom, taught his countrymen how to die in their country’s cause. Montgomery, who fell in the arms of glory on the heights of Abraham. Herkimer, who died amid all the horrors of savage warfare. De Kalb, whose life’s blood streamed from eleven glorious wounds. Pulaski, that brave and noble Pole, who, forsaking the birth place of his forefathers, found in this land of freedom, a country and an honourable grave. All these have received the meed of glory—their loss was mourned in the day of our affliction; and their memory embalmed by a nation’s tears. They, perishing in the doubtful field, died the death of glory—enough for them that they

“ In the battles fiercest fire,

“ In their *country’s* battle fell.”

Among those who survived the conflict, Washington and Hamilton stand pre-eminent. History knows not their parallel. Fancy lags behind reality in depicting their virtues; and enthusiasm in admiration is bare justice to their merit. The military and civil history of these great men, is the history of their country, for to her were their lives devoted.

Washington led our armies to victory, and then secured by his counsels, what he had purchased by his valour. Hamilton, fixing his eagle eye on objects beyond the limited vision of malignant envy, drew forth the infinite resources of his country, fixed her credit on an immoveable basis, and extorted the reluctant admiration of his foes. But both Washington and Hamilton are gathered to their fathers—and who is there left whom America can delight to honour? The weak and timid, the corrupt and interested, occupy those seats which were heretofore filled by bravery, resolution, integrity, and patriotism.

When Washington and Hamilton were taken from us, our political sun was stricken from its sphere, and the nation has since groped in utter darkness. Twelve years of prosperity marked the upright counsels of the early friends of the constitution. Twelve years of adversity have marked the wicked misrule of its early foes.

When Jefferson, in an evil day, was raised by popular infatuation to the presidency, the machine of state was in full and successful motion. Impelled by

federal energy, its course was not speedily stayed. The continuation of this original impulse enabled him for a while to deceive a credulous and willingly deluded people. To hold up our prosperity at home, and national respect abroad, as the effect of his counsels; and to vaunt of our overflowing treasury as the offspring of his economy. But our prosperity and national character were the work of those who framed our constitution, and guided its early operations. Our treasury was the work of Hamilton. From this source, in particular, Jefferson derived his bastard honours; and the only laurel that ever graced his brow, was pilfered from the tomb of Hamilton.

Soon, however, this impulse ceased, and from that moment our national character and prosperity have been retrograde. With the anti-federal administration, popularity has been the ruling object; to this the welfare of the nation has been secondary. The mischief resulting from this source, is incalculable; it is the root of every evil under which our country at present groans. Instead of following the honest example of their predecessors, by sacrificing their own interest to the interest of their country, they have reversed the scene, and have sacrificed their country to their popularity. This is the god of their idolatry—at his shrine, we, the people, are offered up. They have worshipped also at the altars of French abomination—and their prayer there has been for popularity. Practising on the ancient prejudices

of the people, they have dealt unjustly between the great belligerent powers, and their iniquity has recoiled upon their own heads, for even handed justice is now holding the poisoned chalice to their own lips. Economy, one of the handmaids of their popularity, has emptied our treasury, destroyed our commerce, and stained our national honour. Rather than violate their darling economy, by prompt resistance to unjust aggression, they have tamely submitted to insult upon insult; and at length, after years of traitorous supineness, we have seen them seriously endeavouring to discover to which insult they first submitted. Trembling, not for their country, but for their official stations, they have plunged us into a war, partial and unjust, under the expectation of exciting a feverish heat, to reanimate their gasping popularity. This war, we, as good citizens, are bound to support, until we can destroy the evil, by removing our unprofitable servants from their trusts. Until then, may that God, who holds the scale suspended over the doubtful field, in mercy to the just, spare and protect our injured country.

This is the degrading suramary of the last twelve years of our national history. Who can reflect upon it without strong emotions of the warmest indignation? Who can refrain from pouring forth the patriot's prayer, that there may yet be reserved

Some chosen curse.

Some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven,

Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the men,
Who owe their greatness to their country's ruin.

Do we now search for due praises to the memory of those who conducted the first years of our country's prosperity? The dark night of dishonour which enshrouds her, proclaims the brilliancy of their services.

Would we piously seek a wreath to decorate their silent tombs? Freedom weaves it of the funereal cypress, which shaded her mournful brow in the day of their departure, steeped in the renewed tears of their country, fresh streaming to their memory in this day of her distress.

If, as a fanciful philosophy would teach us, the spirits of the dead re-visit their friends on earth, and take an interest in their concerns—How must the sainted spirits of our revolutionary heroes mourn over their weeping country? How must they lament the ruin of that fair fabric, whose foundations were cemented with their blood. Happy, thrice happy, illustrious chiefs, that ye died in the bright day of our national glory—we remain the sad spectators of our country's dishonour. Yet, although the arm of relief is at present palsied, we do confidently trust that your mantle descended at your departure, and that the same spirit which led us to independence, still remains all powerful to save.

With this assurance, my fellow-citizens, let us on this auspicious day, here, on the altars of the

revolution, solemnly pledge ourselves to guard the sacred interest of our country ; to watch the favourable opportunity, and snatch her like a brand from the burning.

AN
O D E

Composed, adapted to music, and sung

BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY,

OF THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

At their anniversary celebration of the 4th of July, 1812.

BY MR. HILL.

Ye patriots rejoice while ye hail the glad morning,
That dawn'd on our sires at our liberty's birth,
May its radiance extend, distant empires illuming,
And freedom, by commerce, be borne o'er the earth;
Till oppression and slav'ry depart from the world;
Till ambition, with tyrants, in ruin be hurl'd.

*Ye patriots rejoice, while ye hail the bright morning,
That dawn'd on our sires at our liberty's birth.*

May WASHINGTON'S name, his example, his valour,
Inspire us with prudence, our rights to defend;
His parting advice in our hearts be recorded,
Our councils direct, and to ages descend;
Then discord and party shall fly from our land,
Our virtues obey, and our wisdom command.

*Ye patriots rejoice, while ye hail the bright morning,
That dawn'd on our sires at our liberty's birth.*

Columbia, thy name be encircled with glory!

On thee, their *last hope*, freedom's vot'ries depend,
The wiles of fell despots shall harmless assaii thee,
The GOD OF OUR FATHERS our rights shall defend.

Though storms gather o'er us, and dangers surround,
Our faith in his aid shall with safety be crown'd.

*Rejoice then ye patriots, to hail the bright morning,
That dawn'd on our sires at our liberty's birth.*

While the horrors of war shall envelope our country,
And rapine and murder shall stalk o'er the plain,

May the spirit of faction be dormant among us,

Our mild constitution still sacred remain ;

That while we submit to the powers that be,

Our votes may *once more* show the world we are free.

And long may our CHILDREN salute the bright morning,

That dawn'd on our SIREs at our liberty's birth.