

J. Smith

AN ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

PHILADELPHIA VAUXHALL GARDENS,

ON THE

FORTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY JAMES N. BARKER.

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AN ORATION, &c.

Friends and Fellow Citizens—

Your request, while it conferred on me an honor and a distinction which were equally unlooked for and unmerited, imposed also a duty which no distrust I might have felt of my ability to discharge it properly, could authorise me to neglect. And indeed, if there be a subject which can animate and inspire the speaker; or an auditory whose presence can encourage and embolden him, I shall have but little to dread on the present occasion; for my theme is the happiness, the glory, the independence of my country; and my hearers are my countrymen, my townsmen, my friends.

The event we have this day met to celebrate, considered in itself, or in the events which have flowed from it, has no parallel in the history of the world. Other nations have, it is true, had their revolutions, some of which have even been boasted of, as glorious and happy, But tracing these back to their causes, marking them in their progress, and contemplating them in their consequences it may be confidently asserted that ours is still unrivalled. It did not take its rise in partial or local feeling; in the spirit of mercantile monopoly or individual ambition; in sectarian animosity or baronial pride, or vulgar envy. It was not pursued in cruelty and bigotry; it did not end in the substitution of one superstition for another, or in the mere change of tyrants. With us, an entire people having borne and endured while their burdens were supportable or endurance possible, at length arose in the majesty of their strength; threw off the fetters of colonial bondage, and assumed the port and bearing of freemen. But no excess stained the purity of their cause, no persecution tarnished its lustre. They did not render it hateful by their inhumanity, or contemptible by their fickleness or frivolity. After success their energies were never spent and wasted in wild and wanton barbarities; nor, after defeat, did they sink into weak and powerless despondency. With a modera-

tion in prosperity equalled only by their fortitude under adverse circumstances, they advanced sedately, calmly: but firmly steadily towards their glorious object, the independence of a fourth part of the earth. But not even here; not on the American continent do the consequences of this day's declaration end; the whole world will have felt the influence of our example. The declaration of our independence must form an era in the history of man. The period of its promulgation was that at which the shackles fell from the HUMAN MIND. Shackles imposed and fitted by artful tyranny, and welcomed and riveted by ignorant credulity; which the simple wearer was taught to hug to his breast, though the iron entered his heart; that time strengthened instead of destroying; that the rust of ages sanctified and secured instead of cankering and consuming. At the sound of the trumpet which proclaimed our independence, the modern miracle was witnessed of strong built walls crumbling and falling; not, indeed, to admit the victor to slaughter, but that the imprisoned mind might pass out to freedom. At that moment it commenced its march towards the bright goal it is destined to attain. It is in vain that obstacles oppose it: the mightiest river that mingles with the ocean has been at first fretted in its course by rocks or shoals. The spirit of emancipation is still alive and active, in defiance of force and fraud, of royal coalitions, or papal or archiepiscopal fulminations. On this continent among our brethren of the South, the work of liberty is rapidly advancing. And even in the old world, in despite of the unholy league of despots, though hidden, it is still in progress: and it will never pause, until a general and a rational political freedom and a liberal toleration in religion shall be built up over the fragments of those petty tyrannies, civil and ecclesiastical, into which the fair globe that Providence bestowed upon his creatures, has been divided and parcelled out.

It has been customary, fellow citizens, on similar occasions, to call your attention to a review of those acts and designs of the mother country which drove her colonies into remonstrance, resistance, rebellion, revolution; her insulting pretensions, her insidious artifices, her oppressive tyranny: And, notwithstanding that they are portions of our history with which none of you are unacquainted, it is fit that on the return of this anniversary they should be brought fresh and

mutilated original

vividly to your recollections. But permit me to pass them over : they are recited in the immortal production which you have just heard read with a fulness and a faithfulness which makes repetition unnecessary ; and with a vigor and a warmth which would render amplification cold, feeble, and spiritless.

The eulogy of those whose wisdom and whose valor watched over our rights and redressed our wrongs, would form a topic that might be interminably dwelt on. But who shall attempt their eulogy, with a hope of adding a single beam to the brightness of their fame. Their virtues and their deeds are familiar to every American who is worthy of that name : they are the study of the statesman and the soldier, and the delight and admiration of every class of citizens. All that praise, speaking the language of sober truth, can bestow upon them, is already theirs. Had they flourished at a darker period of the world, many ages would not have elapsed, before history might doubt whether such virtues had belonged to mere humanity ; while poetry, and painting, and sculpture with the license of the genius of the time, would eagerly have elevated them to the rank of immortals.

An assembly so august, so enlightened, so virtuous, as the Congress from whom emanated the declaration we now rejoice in, never before met in deliberation. And we must thank a beneficent Providence for this his admirable adaption of the means to the end ; for never before has such an assembly been required, and at that time such an assembly only could have been competent to fulfil his great design, of shaping out anew the destinies of man. In that luminous body were concentrated, as in a focal point, from every quarter of the confederation, the light of intellect and the fire of patriotism. And had there been less wisdom, less inflexible virtue there, without a doubt, our liberties had been sacrificed. For it was surrounded and assailed by complaint and clamor, that they deliberated ; the press teemed with libels on their proceedings ; corruption tried the power of gold ; the ignorant and the timid were worked upon and used by the agents of the enemy, the well-affected but mistakenly-pious trembled in lifting the parricidal hand against the parent country ; and many of the wise and good, who were willing to contend for

final separation from Great Britain. But our sages rightly judged that such a separation alone could save us : and with all the certain evils of a lengthened conflict full in view ; with all the hazards their sagacity could not but perceive, they took the decisive step. Calm in the midst of turbulence, unshaken though encompassed by the wavering ; collected dignified, godlike, they sent forth the awful protestation which severed the globe and changed the fate of empires.

And nobly were the efforts of our statesmen seconded and supported by our warriors of the revolution. It was theirs to encounter more than the common dangers of war, to endure more than the ordinary privations and fatigues of the campaign. The face of the country was in many parts wild and uncultivated, the population widely dispersed and tainted with fear and disaffection, the government was scarcely organized, the treasury was empty. Under these circumstances a well appointed, a powerful and a practiced enemy, invaded the land on the side of the Atlantic, while his savage auxiliary, prompt and expert as cruel and ferocious, was let loose on our defenceless inland frontier. And who were to meet and to contend with those invaders ! The honest yeoman, the industrious artizan, called hastily from his plough or his peaceful occupation. It was these formed the body of our force ; and they were led by officers unused as themselves to the hardships of the camp, and almost as unexperienced in the science of war. Without pay, almost without clothes, often without food, those heroes sustained a seven year's warfare. They fought, were overpowered and scattered, but rallied and fought again. Their unconquered spirit rose fresh and vigorous, even from disaster and defeat. To them climate offered no change ; the season no vicissitude which was not met with cheerfulness ; whether they pitched their tents in the dank and deadly march of the south, or pierced the unexplored wilderness to the frozen region of the north.

Such, fellow citizens, were our soldiers of the revolution. And, be it heard as it is spoken, with an honest pride, such were the men who, in the memorable winter of 1776, left, with the ardor and alacrity of genuine volunteers, all the warm comforts of their home, and marched from *this* city at the invitation of danger. Can any one forget the history of that eventful time, when the most sanguine trembled, and

the fate of the country hung poised and doubtful. A flushed and triumphant foe had driven our Washington with his little band—little, and yet our all—from post to post, from field to field, across a neighboring state to the very shores of the Delaware. It was from thence he called upon the men of this city, to hasten to his aid, to succour his army and to save their country. And they went. Yes, townsmen, let us exult whilst we repeat it—our fathers went. The masses of floating ice which filled the river presented no barrier to their passage. They crossed. For successive days and nights they tasted neither food nor rest, while their path might be tracked on the frozen earth by the blood from the iracerated feet. But what was the result? O! it was spoken in thunder by their cannon at Trenton and at Princeton. The country listened and rejoiced; the enemy heard it and was appalled; for it spoke the fate of battle turned; the vanquished had become the victors, America was rescued.

If such were our fathers, fellow citizens, such also were our countrymen in many another splendid scene. Such were they throughout the contest from its commencement at Lexington to its brilliant close at Yorktown. And shall these men be forgotten; shall Warren, and Mörceer, and Montgomery sleep in oblivion; shall the sneers of the cold and heartless banish them from your memories; shall a sickly affectation rob them of their honors! Never: rather let all the pomp and pageantry of the profession they so honored give a grace to the day which revives them in our recollection. Let the banner wave, the drum and trumpet sound, and the artillery peal to Heaven, and let the festive board be spread, and the song be raised, and the oblation flow to their memories.

But can we speak of war, and not advert to our late conflict; can we mention well fought fields and forget New-Orleans and the shores of the Niagara? Our Navy too: who can forget that? Not Britain, surely; at least while the Ocean and the Lakes remain. But the deeds of our latter warriors are still recent; their glories yet sparkle before you; and to point them out would be to direct your gaze to the bright sun in the firmament. Higher praise cannot be given than is contained in the simple affirmation: that they were not unworthy of their sires: that what their fathers nobly won, they as nobly defended. And even if the late war had

produced no other benefit, this were well worth the cost, that it has taught, a second time, the nations of the earth to know us and respect us.

War, fellow citizens, I am aware, has been deprecated as a curse ; and orators have declaimed against it ; and peace societies have been formed, whose ostensible object was to prevent it. But such societies, most generally grow out of the rankest hypocrisy, or the grossest ignorance. How weak ! as if folding your arms would prevent the blow from reaching you. How preposterous ! as if the phenomena of the moral, were not as natural as those of the physical world. War as necessarily proceeds from the conflicting passions of man, as the thunder storm issues from its elements. We cannot prevent either ; but we may avert the evil, perhaps, which would else follow its visitations ; not indeed by declamation and inaction, but by proper precaution and preparation. The lightning of the enemy will play harmless upon the points of our polished bayonets ; and his angry bolts will roll innoxious down the iron sides of our impenetrable ships of war, or fall spent at the foot of our “ towers along the steep.” Be assured that the best, the only association for securing peace, is an association of patriots ready to rush to arms in defence of their country. Then let us turn from the execrable cant of those who have peace in their mouths and rancor in their hearts : who would have resisted their mild and beneficent government, “ even unto blood,” and yet deem it “ unbecoming a moral and religious people” to rejoice in their country’s victories. You have lately had the gratification of seeing your beloved chief magistrate on his progress through the United States, with the view to further the completion of our military defences ; and it is a subject of congratulation that the man of your choice commences his administration with this act of wisdom : We know he loves and will cherish peace : we see that he is determined to be prepared for war.

The election of this virtuous president, the third in the regular succession of sages, who have blessed and are to bless this favored land, has been called the death-blow to Federalism ; and if it were so, it would be wanton and barbarous to assail the dead. But permit me to caution you fellow citizens to beware of supinely reposing in a false security. Federalism, or let me give it its true appellation, Aristocracy, is not extinct ; it cannot be extinct, because its principles are

inherent in the nature of man. It is the desire of self-aggrandizement at the expense of others; the lust of distinction and place, of power and privilege.

The political party, anomalously termed *Federal*, professes to be in opposition to democracy, and, therefore, if it be not monarchical, must be *aristocratical*, under whatever quaint name it may hope to impose upon us. There are, in this party, many good and sensible men, but how they came there it would be difficult for me to guess, and, probably, impossible for them to tell: it is not of those I would speak. There are others not quite so sensible, who are federalists merely by association, who have chosen that party, or rather fallen into it, because it appeared to be the least vulgar. This portion of the federal party is composed, for the most part, of the weak-headed and the vain, who have an ambition to be genteel at all events, and who follow the best dressed leader: these gentlemen would most probably become democrats, if they should, by some accident, happen to learn that there were in old times, many well bred and polite people in the Republic of Athens. But it is not against those honest persons I would caution you. It is not a vulgar jealousy of wealth, or what is termed rank in society, that should characterize a democrat. Civil society will naturally divide itself into classes. Education and taste, and other circumstances, will give to each class its own proper manners and usages. And let it be so. It is, in fact, fit it should, while those classifications extend no further than the fire side. Far be from us those visionary levelling principles which our enemies have falsely imputed to us. Let those of cultivated mind have their peculiar coteries, the unlettered would find no pleasure among them; let the fashionable, if they choose, claim their exclusive assemblies, the rustic would feel but little at ease in their circle; let the rich retain their possessions, the idea of an "equal distribution of property," if ever seriously conceived, could have entered the mind only of the most dishonest as well as of the most foolish of mankind. It is impossible and ridiculous, and those who propagated the vile libel against the democratic party, that they had cherished the idea, deserve the party's execration. But when the designing and ambitious few carry their unthinking multitude of followers to the election, then aristocracy becomes dan-

gerous. Nor is it necessary that men quite so notorious as those who met at Hartford should lead the rout, in order to alarm us to opposition: when ever aristocracy displays itself upon the field of politics, democracy should promptly meet it. They are the evil and the good principles of our political nature, and their struggle is eternal. It is the strife of simple man, contented to be free and happy, with man, gifted by accident with something adventitious, birth, wealth, or an aspiring mind, who would, and thinks he should, be great and powerful. In Europe, the evil principle has, for the present, got the ascendant, and it has not been wanting in its efforts to gain it here.

The PEOPLE of this nation had scarcely declared themselves free; the enthusiasm of revolution was hardly suffered to subside; before it showed itself throughout the country; and even dared to uprear its head and make its propositions in the convention which gave us our Constitution. If it could not bless you with a king, at least it hoped to bestow upon you a nobility: or, since you were resolved to be a republic, it would have made you, in this respect, such a republic as Rome, divided into patricians and plebeians. So far has its effrontery been carried, even in the councils of this Commonwealth, that you have witnessed ignorant, upstart, bloated wealth proposing that none but the sons of freeholders should be allowed a voice in the choice of their governors.—This æmon still prowls throug the land. It presumes not to attack you openly, but proceeds by stratagem, and leagues with disaffection, to compass its sinister ends. Need I tell you that you have in your own hands, the means of keeping down this restless monster! Union and the exercise of your elective franchise; these are your safeguard and your sword:—meet it at the polls, there you can always quell it. And when we meet it there, never let us forget that by its very essence it is inimical to the spirit of our free institutions; that in whatever guise, and with whomsoever joined, it is, it must be still our natural foe. It is not easy to discover from what fancied analogy between this nation and the nations of Europe, the principle I have attempted to describe derives its extravagant expectations of ever succeeding in its enterprize against our liberties. Aristocracy ought to know that we have willingly exchanged for solid and substantial good the tinsel frip-

peries of other countries, where man appears to be divided into two great classes of masqueraders and paupers, and nothing is natural but misery. The causes of our first emigration; the character of our revolutionary struggle; every thing in our beginning as a people or a nation, tended to stamp us with features of originality. In making our government Democratical, in extending the right of suffrage to every freeman, in diffusing information, in annulling titles of nobility, destroying the right of primogeniture and abolishing church establishments, we have made ourselves a distinct and peculiar people. It is not, therefore, by servile imitation we are to fulfil our destiny; our ambition should be of a nobler strain: And if our aristocracy are not content with present happiness, let them, with us, lift up the veil which conceals the future, and behold to what greatness and grandeur we are destined. The eye aches at the magnificence of the prospect. We have a territory sufficiently extensive to contain countless generations, a climate and a soil of every variety, a people, virtuous, hardy, enlightened, brave and free; a government, mild and benignant, yet energetic and powerful. To what may not such a nation look forward if it remains united. Our enemies have, indeed, exultingly cited the examples of other republics, as auguries of our downfall; but it has been the fortune of our enemies always to mistake us. We began like none of those republics, we have nothing in common with them in nature or conformation, and we shall not end as they did. Our laws rest on the will, the good sense, the well understood interests of the governed: their only object being to increase the sum of human happiness: Our government has nothing perishable in it; it never decays, never dies, but, like the Phoenix, renews itself at certain periods from its original elements.

For these reasons, fellow citizens, we are permitted to indulge the hope, and let us add to that hope a fervent prayer—
THAT THE REPUBLIC MAY BE PERPETUAL.