

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED

JULY 4th, 1817.

BY HOOPER CUMMING, A. M.
Pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Albany.

ALBANY:

PRINTED BY I. W. CLARK.

1817

Albany, July 23, 1817.

REV. MR. CUMMING,

SIR,

I have the pleasure of enclosing a copy of a resolution unanimously passed by the Common Council of this city, requesting me to furnish a copy of the Oration pronounced by you on the 4th of July inst. for publication. The Committee most earnestly mingle their own individual wishes with those of the Common Council in this request, and they are persuaded that the community will be alike gratified with the publication.

I am, Rev. Sir,

with the highest respect,

Your most obedient

Humble Servant,

J. STILWELL.

Chairman of the Committee.

(By order)

City of Albany.

IN COMMON COUNCIL, JULY 14, 1817.

Resolved, That the thanks of the Corporation be presented to the Rev. HOOPER CUMMING, for his eloquent and patriotic Oration delivered on the 4th of July inst. and that he be requested to furnish this Board with a copy for publication, and that Messrs. *Stilwell* and *Mayell* be a Committee to present this Resolution.

Extract from the Minutes,

GEORGE MERCHANT, *Clerk.*

Albany, July 28th, 1817.

MR. JOHN STILWELL, *Chairman, &c.*

SIR,

I am highly honoured by the communication from the Common Council, which you were so polite as to present me on Wednesday last. In compliance with their request, I herewith transmit to you a copy of the Oration which I delivered on the 4th inst.

With much respect, Sir,

I am your obedient servant,

HOOPER CUMMING

TO THE
CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF ALBANY,
AND TO THE
MEMBERS COMPOSING THE MILITARY ASSOCIATION
THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS,
WRITTEN AND DELIVERED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS DEDICATED,
WITH THE SINCEREST RESPECT, BY
THE AUTHOR.

N. B. The Author's absence from town, since the 7th until the 22d inst. is the reason why the following pages have not been presented to the publick at an earlier date.

Albany, July 28, 1817.

ORATION.

TIME, inflexible to his purposes, persevering in his onward, steady course, has fulfilled the high and varied trusts committed by the Eternal, during another twelve-month, and has once more permitted us, in unison with our brethren of this great and rising Republick, to pour forth a nation's gratitude, and reciprocate the most patriotick and joyous feelings. Empires have been subverted, the thrones of mighty potentates have tottered to their base, and revolutions the most sudden, the most devastating, have swept away the fabrick of ages in the eastern hemisphere, while *Americans*, with but one comparatively short and trifling interruption, have unmolestedly pursued their career of national happiness and grandeur. Forty-one times has earth performed her annual circuit around the glorious orb of day, since the dauntless representatives of an oppressed but high minded people, having exhausted the gentle spirit of entreaty, and become persuaded of the utter uselessness of all further attempts at conciliation, dared to raise the arm of independence. In the name of the God of justice, the Arbiter of the destinies of men, they made a solemn appeal to all that was magnanimous in the heart that panted after freedom. The country, bleeding at every pore, but not disheartened, reciprocated the lofty sentiment, and confiding in the equity of their cause, looked to heaven, and then aimed a death-blow at the head of tyranny. 'Twas one of the sublimest spectacles earth ever witnessed. Foiled in many an attack, but not despairing, they resumed the contest, and when the laurels of victory seemed to thicken on the brow of the opponent, the view served but to stimulate to fresh exertions, to more signal devotedness, to more desperate

struggles. Already had the finger of Providence pointed to him who blended in his character the prudent forecast of a Fabius with the fearless intrepidity of Leonidas—to him who united the practical wisdom of Miltiades and Xenophon with the death-contemning courage of Hannibal and Themistocles—to him who possessed alike the self-devotedness of Regulus and the cool calculating spirit of Epaminondas, the moderation of Aristides, and the valour of Rome's second founder—to him who added the integrity of Cato to the bravery of Julius Cæsar, as the main instrument of effecting the hazardous enterprise. The blood of heroes had already flowed at *Lexington* and on the heights of *Bunker*; already did the streaming tears of the widow, and the piteous moans of the orphan, gloomy presages of future evils yet more worthy of deprecation, give point to the arguments of the desponding—but those who affixed their signature to the magnanimous avowal which this day commemorates, and **WASHINGTON**, the commander of their choice, remained undaunted. The retreat from *Dorchester*, the overthrow at *Brooklyn*, the rapid flight through *Jersey*, filled with panick the bosoms of the timid, and lighted up the beams of exultation in the hearts of tyranny's abettors—but freemen despaired not. *December's festive night returned*. 'Twas the death-warrant of oppressors' hirelings—the hour of gladness to the defenders of human rights. The small but intrepid band pursued their victory, and on the plains of *Princeton* where **MERCER** bled, freedom raised high that standard which proved the rallying point of her hitherto almost expiring hopes. I glory in the fact, that the state which gave me birth was the scene of such exalted triumphs: *Mercer* lives, and shall live ever in the hearts of freemen.

“ On the whirlwind of the war
High he rode in vengeance dire ;
To his friends a leading star,
To his foes consuming fire.

Then the mighty poured their breath,
Slaughter feasted on the brave ;
'Twas the carnival of death,
'Twas the vintage of the grave

Charged with valiant Mercer's doom,
 Lightning wing'd a cruel ball,
 'Twas the herald of the tomb,
 And the hero felt the call :
 Felt, and rais'd his arm on high ;
 Victory well the signal knew,
 Darted from his awful eye
 And oppression's force o'erthrew.
 But the horrors of that fight
 Were the weeping muse to tell,
 O 'twould cleave the womb of night,
 And awake the dead that fell.
 Gash'd with honourable scars
 Low in glory's lap they lie,
 'Tho' they fell they fell like stars
 Streaming splendour through the sky.
Nassau's tones triumphant pour
Piercing through the hero's grave,
Life's tumultuous battle o'er,
O how sweetly sleep the brave !
 From the dust their laurels bloom
 High they shoot and flourish free,
 Glory's temple is the tomb
 Death is immortality."

ALTERNATE elevations and depressions followed, 'till from the blood-stained fields of *Saratoga*, *Monmouth*, *Germantown*, and *Eutaw*, Liberty rose with renewed strength and animation, and pointing with prophetick accuracy to *Yorktown*, led her favoured sons to the consummation of all their hopes. There, the minions of despotism cowered, and *Thirteen United States* were freed from bondage. The same benignant Providence which had hitherto guided the footsteps and crowned with success the efforts of the pilgrims' sons, consolidated their happy union. Rival interests yielded to the general good, and the *Federal Constitution*, that matchless production of human wisdom, recognizing the sovereignty of the individual states, yet blending them into one, controlling within proper limits, yet extending sufficient power to the higher departments of the government, was adopted with an unanimity of spirit which the most sanguine calculations could hardly have anticipated. Its practicability has been tested. And during the collisions of party, the interference of variant interests, and the trials of a recent war, it has been demonstrated, that a people who will be free, shall continue so.

FELLOW-CITIZENS, when we turn our attention to other parts of the globe, and take but a cursory view of events which have there transpired since we became a sovereign and independent nation, how can we repress the feelings of gratitude the most fervent to God our Deliverer and Protector.

BLESSED in his government, founded as it is on the principle of equal rights, the citizen of America is alike free from the toils of war, the oppression of the despot, and the rage of anarchy. Uninjured by lawless power, he peacefully pursues the objects of honest industry and enterprise, and with delight surveys the happiness of his country, unmoved, save by the distresses of his fellow-men in other lands. But his motives for gratitude are infinitely multiplied, while he contemplates the cheerless, gloomy, distressing state of myriads upon myriads, in the most extensive and populous districts of the world.

AFRICA is overrun by cruelty and oppression, ignorance, the grossest impurities of worship, and perpetual feuds of savage and opposing banditti. To these dire calamities, the barbarity of civilized man adds others the most tremendous. 'Tis true indeed, that of late years the accursed slave-trade has been shorn of its strength by the Christian efforts of a Wilberforce and his coadjutors. But yet in instances alas! too numerous, profiting by the advantages which culture has bestowed, the heart of covetousness plots the scheme, its arm tears from their kindred and their home, many a hapless victim of toil, and penury, and despair. On the banks of the Gambia and the Niger, they once breathed the air of freedom. The morning sun rose but to cheer them, and sat without a cloud. But 'twas the dream of youth. The white man came. Avarice barred his heart against the suggestions of humanity. He came the prowling Panther: He came the fell destroyer of repose. Snatched in a moment from all that earth holds dear, they are immured in a floating dungeon, borne across the Atlantic wave, consigned to the tyranny of a pitiless task-master, doomed to wear out life in cruel bondage, and under the lash, like a very brute, obliged to labour without respite for the gratification of the lusts of a pampered glutton. The morning sun no longer cheers them. It rises but to tell them that another day of oppression has commenced. The evening is no longer decked

with smiles. Chill dismay broods o'er their heart. Their eyes are sunken. They remember the land of their fathers—the liberty they once enjoyed—the delights of their early years—the beloved companions from whom they were torn away, now perhaps like themselves doomed to perpetual servitude—Tears of anguish roll down their furrowed cheeks, and their wearied limbs, no longer able to support their burden, sink to the earth. O was there ever human being more pitiable, more degraded! Africa! thy wrongs, thy varied, congregated miseries demand and receive compassion's tear. The artist's pencil is inadequate to the portraiture; the imagination of the most vivid poet unequal to half the extent of thy wretchedness. Humanity recoils from such a scene, and hopes in ASIA to find a joyous contrast. But the prospect brightens little on the view. The parent and nurse of arts and arms is bound in fetters. The vigour of her sons has been transplanted into other breasts, and the edifices of her power lie crumbled in the dust. The firmness of her warriors, the dignity of her patriots, are sunk in apathy and immersed deep in the gloom of ignorance. The sleep of death has seized her governments, which are hastening to that grave where lies buried all the splendour of time. Her Darii and her Xerxes are gone, and the same torpid, gloomy pantomime is still acting which for centuries has been performed, save where the hard-heartedness of other nations on the adjoining continent, has disturbed the repose of unoffending millions.

IF we turn to EUROPE, what do we behold? The commotions of jealousy, the rage of ambition, and the convulsions of rival power, have, 'tis true, for the present, yielded to a peace for a long time fervently desired, and become, in fact, indispensable. But exhausted treasuries, butchered millions, overgrown, enormous, terribly destructive vices, ungratified resentments still burning and inextinguishable, a spirit of general disquietude and restlessness, are the consequences of past conflicts, and the precursors of miseries yet to be repeated.

SPAIN is degraded by despotism, enervated by luxury, and oppressed by superstition. She is a nation of slaves, destitute of that vigour which once made nations tremble, and grasped the empire of Europe. Her conflict with Napoleon partook, indeed.

more of meanness, and fortitude, and devoted patriotism, than her history, since Peruvian gold corrupted her, led us to anticipate. But that conflict was full of woe. Tens of thousands were hurried to the eternal world, while contending merely for the choice of masters. The nation preferred one despot to another, perhaps less ambitious, but not less sanguinary; less inclined to wield the sceptre of universal domination, but at home far more ferocious. They threw off the chains of an usurper, but fastened around their necks the yoke of a persecuting Bigot. If, however, they are disposed to hug their miseries—if they prefer to the rights of conscience the accursed Inquisition, that scourge of humanity and virtue, that darling child of Satan—if they would rather crouch to the imbecile, besotted, priest-ridden *Ferdinand*, than delegate the powers of government to rulers who shall be amenable for their conduct to the people from whom they derive authority, we can only drop over them compassion's tear, and be doubly grateful for our exalted privileges.

FRANCE, after a revolution, whose commencement promised much to the cause of equal rights, but whose progress was marked by an atrocity of crime, a thirst of blood, a depravity of principle, unparalleled in the history of civilized ages, bowed to the sceptre of the Imperial Corsican, whose insatiable ambition and pride of conquest desolated her fertile provinces, and cut down the flower of her hopes; and having at length deserted him in his misfortunes, has again submitted to tyranny, again embraced the fetters which enslave her, and clasped the rod which enforces her subjection. A *legitimate* king has been imposed upon her—*legitimate*, while, and not a moment longer than the nation thinks proper to deem him so;—but the accession of the Eighteenth Bourbon, has been the instrument of stifling freedom of inquiry, and prostrating liberty of conscience before the fooleries, and blasphemies, and oppression of the Man of Sin. Hapless nation! her cup of misery is not yet full! her calamities seem to darken in futurity!

ITALY was once “the mistress of the world, the seat of empires, the nurse of heroes, the delight of gods.” She once exhibited taste, knowledge, freedom and valour, but is now depraved

haughty, servile, extravagant, revengeful. Her sons scarcely boast of that fire of genius and liberty which once burned in the bosoms of their ancestors, but of which now, not even embers nor smoke remain. The descendants of those heroes who blew the clarion of independence, saw their eagle proudly triumph on the turrets of their foes, and shook the universe by their deeds of valour, are doomed to servitude, and the voice of liberty only echoes from distant regions to remind them of their chains. “The toil of fate, the work of ages, the Roman empire fell,” and with it, expired all the sentiments of freedom in Italian breasts. Mementos of ancient greatness every where remind the languid traveller, that he treads on ground once consecrated to liberty and science—that there Philosophy unfolded her truths—that there wrote the Venusian satyrist—that there sung the Mantuan bard—that there pleaded the immortal orator of Rome. There once fought her patriots—there bled her warriors for the blessings of independence. But how striking is the contrast she now presents! Ruins, devastation, meanness, servitude and ignorance have usurped the seats of grandeur, magnanimity, power and knowledge. Italians have lost every spark of Fabian and Decian worth, and are miserable as their ancestors were happy.

GREECE is debased. Her ancient sons of freedom, who made the field of Mars to tremble beneath their valour—the temple of Apollo and the groves of science to glitter with the coruscations of their genius—are gone; and with them has forever vanished the glory of their country. Rome produced warriors never surpassed in prowess—Greece men of genius and eloquence who never yet were equalled. But the change in both is infinitely deplorable. The inhabitants of Greece seem only to exist that they may be despised for their ignorance and stupidity. They scarcely know that ever there was a Thales or a Solon, a Chilo or a Pittacus, a Periauder, a Bias, or a Cleobulus. Every principle of action is torpid—all their souls are enervated. *Athens*, where Demosthenes thundered, and Socrates soared the towering edifice of wisdom, lies buried in ruins. *Sparta*, *Thebes*, *Argos*, *Corinth*, immortalized in history, are scarcely to be found for the rubbish of time.

**Lover of literature and science! canst thou behold the desolation
and not shed tears for the fall of greatness?**

SWITZERLAND, but why should I attempt the tale?

“ O'er thy mountains sunk in blood,
Were the waves of ruin hurled,
Like the waters of a flood,
Rolling round a buried world.

On St. Gothard's hoary top,
Once the ark of Freedom sat,
But that ark by tempests tost
Foundered in the swallowing waves.”

THE ravages of tyrants on the plains of Brunnen, of Morgarthen, where Shawembourg's treachery made the victors slaves, and in the lower valley of Underwalden—the miseries of Berne and Stantz, of Glarus and Schaffhausen, furnish a tragical disclosure sufficient to wring “tears from marble eyes.”

“ Fierce amid the loud alarms
Shouting in the foremost fray,
Children raised their little arms,
In their country's evil day.

On their country's dying bed
Wives and husbands poured their breath.
Many a youth and maiden bled,
Married at thine altar, Death !

Virtue, valour, naught availed
With so merciless a foe ;
When the nerves of heroes failed
Cowards then could strike a blow.

Cold and keen the assassin's blade
Smote the father to the ground,
Through the infants breast conveyed
To the mothers' heart a wound.”

Thus expired Switzerland. “The miracles her champions wrought,” came too late. Foreign influence had already sapped the foundations of her freedom. A solemn lesson, teaching us, Americans, to scowl at the dawnings of disunion, and, perpetually alert, to guard our institutions against the very semblance of invasion's first unhallowed touch.

AUSTRIA, Germany, Prussia, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, they are now emancipated. But since this beloved land first raised high the pæan of thanksgiving, oppression's ruthless grasp has often torn away their fairest comforts ; and even now, compared with us, their blessings are but woes.

POLAND, thou hast been dismembered a second time. 'Thy government annihilated, thy resources emptied into the coffers of thy desolators. Well art thou called *Poland, a territory fit for hunting*. Thy liberties have been hunted down on thine extensive, beauteous plains. Ignorance broods o'er thy people—Despotism crushes thee beneath its iron rod.

“ Oh bloodiest picture in the book of time,
Sarmatia fell unwept without a crime ;
 Found not a generous friend, a pitying foe,
 Strength in her arm, nor mercy in her woe ;
 Dropped from her nerveless grasp the shattered spear,
 Closed her bright eye, and curbed her high career :
 Hope for a season bade the world farewell,
 And Freedom shrieked as Kosciusko fell.”

SHOULD we extend our views to Russia and Britain, to Sweden and Norway, while the heart of Christian benevolence would rejoice at the conquests which the *Bible* has achieved, and is still achieving over superstition and bigotry, ignorance and crime, there would be much left deeply to deplore. There, the efforts of honest industry, in a thousand and ten thousand cases, are palsied by the extravagance, the dissipated habits, the avarice, and selfishness of the government. The lusts of a licentious nobility are fed by the hard earnings of the subjects, who toil almost in vain from month to month, from year to year, and wear out life in all the sad variety of vassalage.

BUT, *Americans*, from scenes so gloomy and disgusting, let us fix our delighted view on this favoured soil, the asylum of oppressed humanity, the genial clime of liberty, the “ world's last hope.” Here no despot rules. Here all power emanates from the people, the rightful sovereign, and yet 'tis delegated to officers whom they appoint, in a manner, which, with equal vigilance and certainty, preserves the republick from a monarch's grasp, the pride and pol-

lution of an aristocracy, and all the evils incident to the supreme authority of a mob. Here, no ecclesiastical establishment rears its haughty crest, and demands subjection, on pain of anathemas, and persecution, and death. The church and state are kept distinct. So may they ever be. And while religion is preserved from insult and molestation by the guardian spirit of the laws, may that spirit exert no further influence, but leave the rights of conscience unshackled as the God of nature dictates. Should bigotry ever raise her hydra head, and attempt the overthrow of that precious article in our confederation, which grants to every man the privilege of worshipping his maker in the way which most accords with his own views of duty, may ten thousand swords leap from their scabbards, and the Herculean energy of persecution's foes point the bayonet of death to that bosom which dares to cherish a thought so subversive of true religion, which always flourishes most, when left most free.

FELLOW-CITIZENS! We meet this morning to rejoice in the goodness of our God. He was our Fathers' God, and we will praise him. He is our God, and we will glorify his name. We meet with thankful and rejoicing hearts to commemorate *the birth-day of a nation*.

PATRIOTS of '76, to you the scene must be most animating. You toiled, you suffered, you were willing to bleed and die in the glorious cause. Never can we lose sight of that immense obligation which your persevering, successful valour has imposed upon us. May this right arm perish from its socket, may the tongue which now addresses you be palsied, whenever that day arrives in which I shall forget your struggles, your more than human fortitude. My venerable father fought by your side in many an arduous conflict, and with you shouted on the field of victory, *Death to tyrants, Freedom to the United States*. He would have gladly tarried and met you here.* But that institution, founded by your revolutionary brethren, whose appropriate name is *Cincinnati*, that institution whose beneficence wipes away the tears of the soldier's widow, otherwise left to cope with the rude

* The author's father had recently been on a visit to him, and had returned but two days before the Oration was delivered.

blasts of poverty—that institution which on this day revives in the bosoms of revolutionary officers the vicissitudes, the sufferings, and the transports of former years, required his return. Peace be to your spirits, Fathers of my country! As you hasten down the hill of life, to meet in the sepulchre your brothers who have gone before you, guardian angels minister to your protection and your comfort! We will weed your grave clean! We will tread lightly on your ashes! We will cherish the animating hope, that having, by divine grace, been prepared on earth for the retributions of another world, your souls enjoy the eternal liberty of the sons of God.

Ye military men! behold the Fathers of our revolution. Cherish that spirit of sound discipline which they observed. Like them, be ever ready to bleed and to expire on the altar of your country's liberties. It may seem inappropriate for a servant of the Prince of Peace to exhort and animate the soldiery. But the best of means for avoiding war, is a state of constant preparation to meet its fury. There is nothing in the gospel of Christ incompatible with the ancient sentiment, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*" To you, our wives and children, our sanctuaries and fire-sides, look with confidence for protection. Become then perfect in the art of self-defence, the rules of honourable warfare, and the most devoted patriotism. May you never be obliged to shed the blood of enemies, but should Providence call you to the duty, remember that inspiration has declared "The righteous are bold as a lion," and that experience attests the fact. Seek first then the good part which shall never be taken from you—even an inheritance among them that are sanctified. While your attachment to the cause of civil liberty burns and increases, glory in the name of Christian. Think, speak, and act for GOD and for your COUNTRY.