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ORATION.

MORE like fiction than reality is the history of the event we celebrate, and of the momentous occurrences which followed. To those of us who have merely heard of these events, the proud structure, whose foundation was this day laid, often seems to have been reared like the splendid fabricks of the Genii of Eastern Romance. But, on the return of this proud anniversary, that illusion is dispelled: the suggestions of fancy give place to the evidence of fact: we are reminded that our Temple of Freedom was not erected by magick, but by persevering toil, amid continual peril and the severest trials, and at the expense of much treasure and suffering and blood: we involuntarily recur to that period when the assembled delegates of the American people deliberately declared these States, "*Free, Sovereign, INDEPENDENT*"—when, regardless of the menacing posture of the British Lion, they plucked the richest gem from the Royal Crown, and displayed it to the astonished world as the bright token of a Nation's birth.

While contemplating this stupendous event, we want language to express our emotions. It is a theme "which makes breath poor, and speech, un-able."

It is unnecessary to rehearse, to an audience like this, the events which led to the declaration and establishment of our National Independence. Some of my hearers were witnesses of them; and those who were not, can remember that the history of these events was among the earliest lessons of their youth.

Nor is it necessary to trace the subsequent history of our Country. This has, on similar occasions, been too often done to leave sufficient novelty or interest to the subject. Besides, the *past* might be the occasion of discord among those whose feelings are in unison when contemplating the *present*, and whose hearts beat with the same joyful anticipations of the *future*. There would be danger of reviving distinctions which, we trust, are here forgotten, or remembered only to enhance the pleasure that arises from their being, this day, laid aside.

And who does not rejoice that they are, this day, laid aside?—that those who had heretofore, on this National Festival, estranged themselves from each other, have shaken off the manacles of prejudice, and, once and again, cordially joined hands round the altar of Freedom?—that the same festive board is to be surrounded by those who have the same liberties to preserve, the same Constitution to defend, the same happy Country to protect?

When we survey the Country we inhabit, we are ready to suspect the imagination of wandering in fairy land. When we reflect on its almost boundless extent; its numberless rivers, wafting

on their bosoms the rich and varied products of its soil; its numerous cities and towns, resounding with the ceaseless hum of Commerce and Industry; its busy population, increasing with a rapidity which outstrips calculation, and possessed of an enterprize that penetrates every clime, whitens both hemispheres with their commerce, and “vexes every sea with their fisheries”—we ask ourselves, in astonishment, Is this the Wilderness, which, two centuries ago, owned no inhabitant but the savage?

Whose bosom does not glow with gratitude to Heaven, that he has a part in this “goodly heritage?”—that this fair country is “his home, his native land?”—And while he rejoices in its internal prosperity, and in all the rich bounties scattered over it by the munificence of Heaven, how does his heart swell with honest pride at its honourable and commanding rank among the empires of the earth. But forty-two years have elapsed since it claimed a place among nations, and already do the monuments of its greatness and glory overtop those of some of the oldest empires. Less than forty years since, its inhabitants were stigmatized as rebels: Now, the appellation of *American* is “praise and boast enough in every clime.” At a still later period, it had no government to command respect abroad, or to secure confidence and tranquillity at home. Without a treasury, without energy, and without any organized physical force, it seemed hastening to the ruin which the enemies of Freedom had predicted. But in a few short years, with

a government at the head of which was WASHINGTON, its sleeping energies were roused into action; it resolutely demanded respect, and prepared to enforce the demand, had respect been withheld. And at the present day, with an ample revenue and abundant resources, and with a Navy, its glory and defence, our Country is regarded with increasing respect abroad, and is tranquil and happy at home. Even the Barbary Corsairs, who have been accustomed to respect no nation, and who prey, with comparative impunity, upon the commerce of the most formidable empires, dare not now insult the American Flag.

To our Navy are we indebted for much of this respectability and security. Its thunders have struck terror into those who calculated on our weakness; while the daring and successful heroism of our tars has inspired respect in those who were disposed to indulge in contempt of American prowess. France has felt the effect of their gallantry: they have chastised and humbled the pirates of Barbary; have struck the sceptre from the hand of the "Mistress of the Ocean:" while the blaze of their numerous victories has dimmed the glory which shone round the names of Howe and Nelson, the Nile and Trafalgar.

On this high festival, we are at liberty to boast of our Country and of its institutions—especially when we recollect the numerous calumnies upon both, which have been uttered by European ignorance and envy. Although as a nation we command respect from other nations, there is not wanting, abroad, a disposition to vilify our institutions,

to slander our literature and genius, to libel our state of society, and even to represent Nature as having wrought here upon a diminished scale.

Most of the Europeans who visit this country, come desirous of finding fault rather than with a disposition to be pleased; and either travel in too much haste to have opportunity to become acquainted with the country, or possess too little capacity to take properly into view the wide field of observation which lies before them. From the statements of such travellers have been derived much of the materials for the volumes of slander which have been written against us.

Our Country has been represented as the diminutive work of Nature; and it has been said that animals and the race of men here degenerate: Let those who give credit to such stupid representations, cast their eye over the map of this Country; let them survey its vast extent, number its inland seas, trace the courses of its mighty rivers, and *then* ask themselves if this is Nature's *diminutive work*. Let them note, as they pass over the map, the names of Bunker's Hill, Erie, and New-Orleans, and they will the better remember that, in this country, the *race of men degenerate*.

When such misrepresentations are resorted to, it is to be expected that our state of society, literature and institutions will be calumniated. It is, therefore, no disappointment, to hear it said that the Americans are semi-barbarians, without literature and without genius; that their Legislatures are assemblies of blackguards, and their Courts of Justice a burlesque on Jurisprudence.

It is, however, a matter of much indifference to Americans, whether they are called barbarian or civilized, so long as they enjoy the blessings of liberty, education and plenty, with the multiplied charms and endearments of society.—They can endure the reproach of want of literature and genius, when they can already boast of their Historians, Poets, and learned Divines; and while they behold the monuments of genius erected by Stewart, and Trumbull, and West.—They can forgive the slander upon their Legislative Assemblies, when they recollect the eloquence of Ames, and remember their living statesmen and orators.—When their Courts of Justice are ridiculed, they can, with triumphant pride, select from a constellation of luminaries the names of Parsons and Dexter—those Suns, which, though set, still illumine the heavens.

How vain are the efforts of Europe to conceal, by her calumnies, her envy at the happiness of our Country; her jealousy of its rising greatness and glory, and her vexation that both are beyond the influence of her arts and her arms.

But, my countrymen, it would ill become us, on this day, to forget the patriots, heroes and statesmen, to whom we are so largely indebted for this happiness and greatness and glory.

It was no ordinary patriotism, evaporating in mere professions, by which Otis and the Adamses, Hancock and Henry, with their coadjutors, were urged on in the dangerous path to Independence; and no common courage that enabled them to persevere in it, until they reached the long-wished-for

goal—until they witnessed the event which we commemorate. They led the way where others only dared to follow. They struck the string whose tones were echoed throughout the country.

But the courage and fortitude which achieved our Independence were no less conspicuous than the bold patriotism that devised and asserted it. Who does not dwell, with enthusiastick delight, on the history of the fluctuating fortunes of the Revolutionary army—of the disinterest and devotedness of its great Leader—of its fortitude in suffering, its courage in danger, and its moderation when a series of victories had crowned its efforts with success?—How large the debt of gratitude which was due, from their country, to this band of heroes. How rich the reward which a grateful people must have bestowed. But do I speak of *gratitude* and *reward*! Their country never, more than nominally, paid even their promised stipend. It, indeed,

“kept the word of promise to their ears,
“ But broke it to their hopes.”

They who had endured the severest hardships and privations, to obtain for their country the richest blessings, were, many of them, left to want and wo.—Blush, my Country, for ingratitude like this. The brightest blaze of glory can never hide this deep stain on thine escutcheon.

But although it is now too late to wipe away this reproach upon our country's honour, it is gratifying to reflect that, even at this late period, something has been done to cheer the last days of the surviving soldiers of the Revolution—that the

doors of the National Treasury have been thrown open to relieve their wants, and to mitigate their woes.—Honoured be his name who advised this act of justice. More honour to the country, were the justice complete.

While we remember the worthies who planned and who achieved our Independence, let us not withhold the tribute due to the statesmen who formed the Constitution, which is its bulwark, and the shield of our personal liberties. To the result of their wisdom and labours must be attributed our Country's prosperity and greatness. But for them, the Independence of these States would, not improbably, have, ere this time, been lost; or, if preserved, would have been hardly worth possessing.

The Temple of Liberty had already begun to totter, and its feeble pillars were fast crumbling to dust. Jealousy among the States had weakened the bond of union which a common danger had created, and their community of feeling was destroyed. At this alarming crisis, when many friends of their country began to waver, and the gloomy forebodings of the timid seemed about to be realized, the framers of our Constitution assembled. With a magnanimity worthy of imitation, they sacrificed much of individual opinion for the sake of *union*. A spirit of compromise guided them in their labours; and the result was the establishment of that admirable form of government, under whose operation our country has attained the proud eminence on which it now stands. They need no voice to speak their praise—no monument to perpetuate their fame. Their works

praise them, and themselves have reared the proudest monument.

Let us, my countrymen, preserve inviolate the work of their hands. It is the main pillar of our liberties. Let us be cautious lest we weaken it, in attempting to perfect its proportions; for, if it fall, the whole fabric it supports will sink in ruins.

We have, fellow-citizens, cause for heart-felt gratulation, that, year after year, we assemble to commemorate our nation's birth-day, with increasing evidence of the strength of our free institutions, and of the disposition and ability of the nation to maintain them. Who does not know with what doubts and anxiety our government was put in operation? Europe was filled with predictions that it would soon be destroyed—that Civil War would desolate the country, in the furious struggle for the highest honours of the State—and that another and more bloody revolution would close the direful drama, which had opened with the declaration of our Independence. Thirty years have, however, elapsed, and our form of government has been upheld in the midst of the most tremendous commotions which the world ever witnessed.

But what in the mean time has been the condition of Europe—Europe, so confident of the instability of our government, and so assured of the permanency of her own institutions?

The whirlwind of revolution has swept over her plains, and spread, in its progress, desolation and death. Thrones which had acquired solidity through a long lapse of years have been overwhelmed and dissolved in blood. Crowns have

been made the foot-balls of Fortune. Kings have bled on the scaffold—have wandered in exile and beggary, doomed to behold “their crowns emblazon other brows—their sceptres glitter in other hands.”

France, madly in quest of boundless liberty, subverted all her ancient institutions, crimsoned her fair fields with blood, and converted her groves into charnel-houses. But, misled and betrayed by the phantom she followed, she has learned from the cruel sufferings she has undergone, that her bloody sacrifices were unhallowed offerings on the altar of Liberty.

The fields of Germany have been “fattened with the blood of her sons”—her territories ravished by the hand of the spoiler—her cities pillaged, and her princes made captives in their own capitals.

Russia has drunk deep of the cup of suffering; and the proud city of her Czars, with its thousand temples and palaces, wrapt in flames, has blazed, the direful token of the consummation of her wrongs.

England, during the progress of all this desolation and death, has been compelled to struggle for her very existence. Though without the immediate influence of the storm which has desolated the continent, her numerous widows and orphans can testify to her share of the general suffering.

Some good has, however, resulted from the awful judgments which these portions of Europe have experienced. The condition of man is there, in some degree, meliorated. Princes are beginning to learn that it is their interest, as well as duty, to consult the welfare of their subjects; and it would seem that they could not fail of being con-

vinced, from an illustrious example constantly before them, that he reigns the most securely whose throne is stablished on the affections of his people.

But Spain, oppressed and miserable Spain, enjoys no recompense for her share in the sufferings of Europe. It is a spot on the globe where the eye finds nothing on which it can rest with complacency. All is "gloomy as the grave, and motionless as death."

For six years did she gallantly struggle with the colossal power that had entrapped and dethroned her monarch. For the sake of that monarch, she encountered all the horrors of a war of more than ordinary atrocity, and paved the way for his return, with the bones of her slaughtered inhabitants. But what is the reward of her constancy and sufferings?—Her king has regained his throne, but reigns with a mind, narrow as the prison from which he escaped. Surrounded by an ignorant and bigoted nobility and priesthood, he forgets the brave people who rescued him from bondage, and gratifies his highest ambition in embroidering, with his own hands, a garment for a statue of the Virgin. In the mean time the ill-fated Spaniards do not possess even the semblance of Freedom; and the gallant spirits who led them on, while fighting to redress Ferdinand's wrongs, either have perished on the scaffold, are immured in dungeons, or exiled forever from their native land.

How animating the reflection, that, amid all the stupendous revolutions of empire which have made Europe one vast "place of skulls," we, my countrymen, have not only escaped the ruin that

was predicted, but have afforded a tranquil asylum to those who have fled from the storm of war : that our free institutions, instead of being tempest-tost on the waves of anarchy, are now borne, on the swelling tide of prosperity, safely and rapidly along their destined course.

With fond solicitude does the mind inquire what is to be the fate of our Republick ; whether it will endure, unshaken by the assaults of Time, or flourish for a short season only, and then droop, decay, and die ?

If we consult History on this subject, and acknowledge her responses to be the voice of Fate, we may demolish the gay fabrick of Hope, and resign ourselves to the contemplation of the inevitable destruction that awaits our Republick. But, though History imparts much political instruction, yet, on this subject, we are not prepared to acknowledge the authority of her decision. Though the Republicks of Greece and Rome have long ceased to exist, and those of modern times are already no more, still why should we anticipate a fate similar to their's, while the resemblance between them and our Republick exists only in name ?

Shall we anticipate ruin from the same causes which have occasioned the destruction of other Republicks ?—Need we fear that we shall be overwhelmed by foreign invasion, and that our liberties will be wrested from us by another Philip, or trampled under foot by a second Napoleon ?—Is our danger the same as that of the feeble and disunited States of Greece ?—Or are we situated, like Genoa, Switzerland and Holland—a lamb surrounded by wolves ?

Need we alarm ourselves with the apprehension of being cheated of our liberties by another Augustus?

Here is, indeed, room for apprehension, if it is to be at all indulged. It is far more reasonable to fear that our free government may, like that of Rome, become the victim of the arts of domestic ambition, than that it will perish, like the Republics of Greece and of Modern Europe, by the hand of foreign violence.

But when we reflect on the fate of Rome, we should remember that the boasted liberties of its citizens never consisted in much beside the privilege of designating their rulers. They never enjoyed that sort of liberty which, in this country, conveys through countless channels its rich blessings to the door of every citizen. They had comparatively little to lose—too little, enfeebled as they were by luxury, to rouse them to any effort for its preservation.

But Americans have too much to lose, to be indifferent about preserving their Freedom, and are too strong in their own means of defence, to suffer it to be wrested from them.

The fate of Rome, therefore, need not alarm our fears; unless, indeed, we can suppose that the time will arrive when the innumerable benefits, which result from our free government, will be considered as possessing no value.

What, then, is there to repress the fond hope that our Republick is not destined to perish until the general wreck of empires?

But if this hope is not chimerical, how safely may we indulge in the brightest anticipations of our Country's future greatness and glory.

Already, in the infancy of the nation, is our Temple of Glory hung with the trophies of War—ere long it will be decorated with the more glorious trophies of Peace.

True, lasting, National Glory is not acquired by War. Happily for us, our National Greatness cannot be promoted by War. Our very ambition counsels peace. With a territory so vast, that conquest could add little to its extent, and nothing to its strength, we are under no temptation to retard by War the progress of our Country to the summit of true Greatness and Glory.

It is not, then, my Countrymen, the extravagance of enthusiasm to anticipate the period when the unexplored regions of the West shall be thronged with a busy population—when the banks of our numerous rivers shall be lined with towns, and the spires of splendid cities shall be reflected from the waters of our immense lakes—when Commerce shall find sufficient employment in interchanging the products of our own Agriculture and Manufactures—when the States shall equal empires in population and wealth, and the whole Union shall rival, in strength, the congregated power of Europe—and when, in the full enjoyment of Peace, of Religion, Literature, Science, and the Arts, too powerful to be oppressed, and too great to do injustice, our Country shall be hailed, by every Nation, as “the Queen of the World, and the child of the Skies.”