


AN
ORATION.



A N
O R A T I O N,

I N C E L E B R A T I O N O F
A M E R I C A N I N D E P E N D E N C E ;

DELIVERED AT BELCHERSTOWN. July 4th.

1797.



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*“ For the kingdom is the Lord's ; and he is the Governor
among the nations.”*

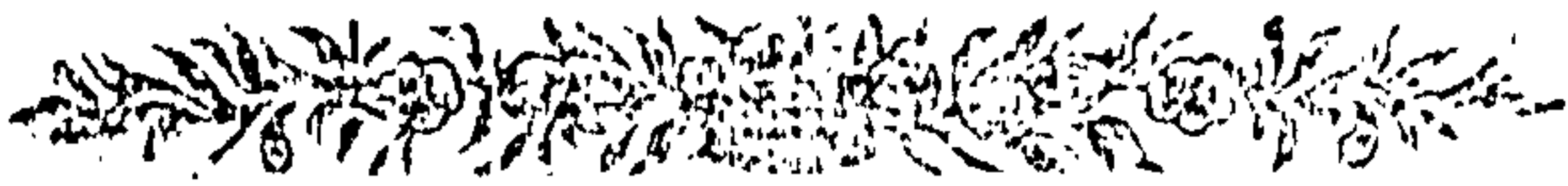
*“ Render, therefore, unto Caesar, the things which are Cæ-
sar's ; and unto God, the things which are God's.”*



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M.DCC,XC,VII.



ORATION.

THE CONNECTION OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT WITH MANNERS AND TASTE.

EVERY thing, which respects the happiness of human society, is interesting. The progress of reason and taste, the various changes in civil government, considered in relation to this, are not more pleasing to the curious, than important in the science of humanity. To inquire minutely into the causes, which, from its institution, have continually varied the face of society, would be a task too arduous to engage. These afford ample materials for historical researches, and philosophic investigation. You will not expect the speaker of the day to enter a field so large, or to invite your attention to so copious a subject. *It is my design to shew the connection of civil government with manners and taste.* And here, the inexperience of youth, attended with a debility of body, would ask the benevolence of my Fathers and Fellow-countrymen.

THERE is a fitness in all the economy of nature. It extends through the different orders of creation, from the most exalted intelligence, down to the meanest

all reptile that creeps in the dust. This is called, *The fineness of things*. We discover it, not only in the laws of the material system, the growth of vegetables, and the life of brutes ; but, in the operations of the human mind. These are grounds for rational inquiry. Moral causes control all natural effects. And their influence, in society, depends on principles as firmly established, as the constitution of things. The laws, therefore, which regulate the changes in civil government and manners, are as fixed and as certain, as those, which regulate the revolutions of nature.

When we compare the rudeness of ancient times with the refinement of the present age, a field is open for candid investigation. How one generation may become wiser, by the wisdom of a former, is easy to determine. But, how the whole group of human beings should emerge from native ignorance, and rise to elegance in taste, is a problem harder to solve. This, however, may be generally ascribed, to the natural growth and improvement of the intellectual powers ; and, particularly, to the aids of civil government. This is the guardian of human rights. Laws are grafted on the peculiar nature of those, over whom they are exercised. Hence, according to the original constitution of society, they are connected with manners and taste. This connection lays the foundation of national happiness. This is the principle, which regulates political law.

The principles of government have an influence on manners and taste. The spirit of its different forms gives a different complexion to the habits and genius of a people. This is deduced from facts and the history of national police. Simplicity of manners characterized the ages of the Patriarchs ; pro-
fusion

fusion and luxury, the reigns of the Babylonian and Persian kings. The States of Greece were as distinguished, for their patriotic virtues, under their Solon, Lycurgus and Aristides, as for their perfidy and vices, under the successors of Alexander. The Roman soul, in the time of the Republic, was the seat of greatness; under the Emperors, it was the sink of every passion, which was mean or fordid. Let us consider the round of dissipation, in which the subjects of a Turkish despot continually walk; the jealous cruelties of a Venetian aristocrat, and the constant fidelity of a republican Swiss. Were it needful, we might say, the virtues of American citizens would be strangers, in the gaudy realms of eastern monarchs, or in the dominions of European kings. Were it needful, we might say, the vices of those countries would be vagabonds, in this free and independent commonwealth. But, modesty forbids.

GOVERNMENT, being connected with the constitutional taste and manners of a people, improves with the progress of refinement. No nation ever commenced a political existence, and expired, under the same constitution. Science and a knowledge of things enlarge the mind, and direct its views to more noble objects. Refinement and the Arts introduce a sentiment in taste, and a decorum in manners, worthy the dignity of *a rational soul*. The passions and the powers of imagination grow up to maturity, before the judgment and solid sense. Men enter into the beauties of descriptive, before they reason justly, in the connection of cause and effect. They are poets and orators, before they are philosophers and politicians. The savage, though ignorant of the principles of civil government, and the operations of nature,

ture, yet feels warmly the affections of the heart, and the ties of blood. In a similar stage of civilization, government partakes of the same feeble, though expressive powers. It rests, solely, on the acts of native sympathy and persuasion—its views terminate in self-defence. Each individual assumes the prerogative of redressing his own private wrongs—the sword becomes the minister of justice, and the arbiter of right.

Laws, in their origin, like society, were rude and imperfect. Their seeds were sown in the constitution of man. Warned by the influence of the social sun, they sprang-up. They have grown in every climate; and their branches have born a fruit more salutary to human kind, than even the air which they breathe, or the other elements on which they live.

The original state of man was a state of universal strife and perpetual war. Individuals were so many independent sovereignties, continually at variance with each other. These interfering claims not only endangered the rights of personal safety, but the progress of rational happiness. The natural reason of mankind, therefore, pointed-out mutual associations, as their only safety; and a common deposit of a certain share of their natural rights, as the proper mean of securing the rest. These surrendered rights existed somewhere; they existed in the body of the community, vested in some person or persons, as the bond and seal of their union. This was the origin of delegated power. These were the rude beginnings of that policy, which has so liberally conduced to the happiness and respectability of society, and which now wears the name of *civil government*. Hence, government comprizes those rights, which
individuals

individuals of a community have thrown into common stock, and vested in a political head. And as it neglects the use of these, or assumes the exercise of more, in the same ratio, does it verge towards effeminacy or usurpation. In what form, it first existed, whether these rights were vested in the whole community, in a part, or in one person alone, let the curious solve. It is sufficient to my present design, to observe, that it now exists in as many forms, as there are nations on the globe. For these I am to account.

We need not distort the features of government, into the monstrous shapes of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, which are found, in their purity, scarcely in nature, or among the societies of men. For myself, I know of no *elementary forms of government*, other than those, which arise from the constitutional taste and manners of nations. Power, being originally in the people, is delegated by their consent; and it is the part of their united wisdom to determine, by whom, and in what manner, it shall be exercised. Hence, forms of government vary with taste. And this is as various, as the several stages in the progress of civilization, or the countries inhabited by men. Our own observation and the experience of mankind assure us, that civil policy has ever found its interest, in conforming to the prevailing sentiments and disposition of its constituents—This is its nature, and this is according to the moral fitness of things. The nations, which overspread Europe, in the fifth and sixth centuries, were bent on military, and enveloped in scenes of war. Their civil constitution, which was the famous feudal system, breathed the same warlike spirit. In the ancient simplicity of times, we have examples of a

whole tribe's convening together with their leader, to consult on affairs of common importance. In the same country, after the revolving of a few centuries and their consequent improvements, we find the like powers residing in the king alone. We next find them shared by the most eminent and distinguished in the nation. They were next distributed to a third order, in the legislature. And, we now find the same powers forming a constitution, justly admired by an enlightened nation. Such have been the progressive effects of civilization and taste.

THE jurisprudence of a refined people would appear as ridiculous, as unintelligible, to the uncivilized. The savage, whose form of government is as simple as his manner of life, reposes with confidence his rights, in the bosom of his chief, or in the council of his fathers. He knows not the distinctions in civil policy, neither does the simplicity of his society require them. But civilization naturally gives birth to intriguing politicians, and the schemes of ambition for dominion and fame. It was on this ground, that the several branches in civil government were first introduced. To check the natural progress of usurpation, and to circumscribe the designs of an aspiring mind, as men grew in the habits of social life, it was found necessary to vest, in one body, the right of making laws; and in another, the power of executing them. The system of checks, therefore, becomes more necessary and complicated, in proportion as society advances in refinement. Hence, we find those in a republic, which are unknown in the cabinet of kings. To balance these checks with delegated prerogative, so as to preserve the rights of the people, and yet to throw a suitable weight in-

to the scale of government to give it energy and force, is the *grand secret* of legislation.

Lest I should prejudice the philosophic mind, or lead its inquiries from the line of truth, in justice to my subject, permit me here to remark; that the different systems of jurisprudence, which the several nations of the world have adopted, may, in part, be ascribed to physical causes, as well as to the reason of things. The climate, and the natural qualities of the soil, produce a surprising effect on the human constitution. These combined have introduced that distinguished variety, in the descendants of Adam, which has led some to doubt their common original. They have not only differently modified the coats of the skin, and the organs of the body, but the texture of the mind. They have not only cloathed the African with a tawny garbe, but obscured the brightness of his intellect. They have not only grossly organized the bodily system of the polar inhabitants, but constituted their minds of the grosser materials of passive insensibility. And, they have not only endowed the inhabitants of the temperate zones, with the nicer symmetry of external form; but, with the richer ornaments and elegance of the mind.

In the warmer climates, the soil is either very barren, or very productive. And such is the genius of its inhabitants. Vices are its spontaneous growth, and passions are breathed in the warm diffusions of the air. Thus influenced by native pathos, and a lively imagination, society is subject to frequent and alarming changes. And this has been eminently the case with the southern parts of Asia, a theatre of the most astonishing revolutions, which the political world has ever experienced. But, in
the

the colder regions of the north, the whole animal, as well as vegetable tribes wear a coarser stamp. Men are void of the finer sensibilities, which intertwine the nerves of social affection.—Too insensible to feel oppression—too indolent to grasp at dominion, or to aspire after the cultivations of taste, their manner of life is inoffensive; and their rules of governing, though few, are seldom invaded. But to leave extremes. In the temperate climates, in which we live, nature seems to have combined her powers, to aggrandize the intellectual world, and to complete the circle of rational enjoyment. Here she has planted her garden, adorned with the richest fruits, and the finest flowers, which can either improve the taste, or please the fancy, of intelligent beings. And here she has prepared a *banquet for reason*.

SUCH is the philosophy of nature. These causes contribute, to produce a variety, in the constitutional taste and manners of nations; and this variety is the ground of that difference, in jurisprudence and civil government, which they severally present.

FROM the same source, are the reasons, why similar actions have been esteemed morally right, in one country, and morally wrong, in another. In Tartary, it is considered a mark of filial piety and moral virtue in children, to expose their parents grown feeble by age, to the mercy of the elements, or to put an immediate period to their existence. Such, in the civilized countries of Europe and America, would be deemed crimes against the original compact of society—crimes against nature—and treasons against the dearest rights of humanity. Modestly would blush to mention the savage insensibilities of the Esquimaux-tribes, or the unfeeling practice of
those,

those, who feed on human flesh. Such are the effects of climate or taste.

MORE thoroughly to investigate the connection of civil government with manners and taste, and shew their reciprocal influence ; let us, for a moment, draw aside the curtain, and view them struggling in those scenes of barbarism, which claim the *tears of humanity*. On the demolition of the Roman empire, the victorious tribes, like all conquering nations, not only dictated their principles of civil policy, but sowed the seeds of their barbarous taste, in the very vitals of their more civilized captives. These, in contempt of social fitness, soon sprang up, and became more powerful than former habits of propriety. The luminary of science, whose resplendence had been so conspicuous in the meridian of ancient glory, declined below the mental horizon. Reason fell asleep on the ruins of intellectual improvement, and every passion of an uncultivated mind roved without restraint. We shall not, then, be surpris'd at the phrenzy, which rendezvoused all Europe at Palestine ; or alarmed at the extravagance of bigoted opinion.* Jurisprudence suffered equally with sentiment. Civil magistrates were vested with powers, too feeble to enforce their laws—too small to command respect.† Perhaps the state of so-

ciety

* In the tenth century, an opinion prevailed in Europe, that the end of the world and the dissolution of all things were then at hand. Their state of society favoured superstitious imposition. A universal panic seized all Christendom ; led by pious zeal, under the command of an Augustine Monk, they swarmed in millions to Asia, in order to redeem the holy land, or Palestine, from the dominion of the Turks, or Infidels. This was deemed a necessary preparation for that grand and awful event, *the end of time*.

† It was not uncommon for Judge, while pronouncing judgment, to be challenged by the offended party, to vindicate the justice of his sentence with the sword.

ciety was never more deplorable, than during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Mankind had lost their original independence and simplicity of manners; but had not yet acquired that sense of propriety, which results from a just conception of things. Not comprehending the moral government of nature, they were ready to suppose, the established order of things might be reversed, to gratify some favorite prejudice or passion. Their appeals to the decision of Heaven, by ordeal and by combat, and the sanction given them, by judicial authority, at once shew the bigotry of taste, and the depression of civil law.†

Towards the close of the eleventh century, society had arrived at its lowest point of debasement. From this period, it presents a more pleasing prospect to the friends of man. Reason, by degrees, threw off the mias, in which she had been for centuries entombed, and began to put on some features of humanity. Several causes contributed, jointly, to the revival of jurisprudence, and to the improvement of taste. The establishment of communities, or cities corporate, in Italy, led the way to these

† By Ordeal, the accused was allowed to purge himself of the crime and attest his innocence, by lifting red-hot iron with his naked hand; or, by walking, blindfold and barefoot, over red-hot plates of iron, placed at different distances, without receiving injury to his hand or feet. Likewise, by plunging his uncovered arm into a chaldron of boiling water, without scalding or injury. There were many other ways equally absurd and preposterous.

By judicial combat, the parties disputing, or their representatives, came with other weapons into a circle, on one side of which, to give solemnity to the transactions, sat the Judge. The combatants whom began their conflict at sun-rising, and continued till sun-setting, unless one were previous vanquished. The right in dispute was adjudged to him, who overcame. And, the victor considered the decision of Heaven.

these interesting events. The knowledge, which the Italians had acquired, in navigation, introduced them to the notice of the west, and to the commerce of the east. And, by their intercourse with these nations, they had acquired some faint ideas of rational dignity and human independence. These led them to persevere in obtaining charters of liberty for their cities, or large towns, which charters soon made their way into Germany and France. To these we owe the first ideas of political union and municipal right. Next followed the return of science, and the institution of the learned professions, which have rendered such essential services to the commonwealth of manners. The passion for the adventures of chivalry was not more romantic in its nature, than beneficial in its consequences to the progress of reason and taste. It was moved by the powers of sympathy, and the feelings of the human heart. It refined the points of honour and natural justice. It gave rise to that delicacy in sentiment, and refinement in taste, towards the support of which, an impartial friend to virtue would even dare to compliment *the sensibilities of the fair*.

FROM these sources, government and manners acquired original virtues and permanent force.— These have enabled them to triumph over barbarous usage, and to demonstrate to the political philosopher, that their progress depends on *their mutual aid*. This has clothed nations and kingdoms with grandeur and resplendence. It has made the children of nature *citizens of refinement*! We have heard of its effects, and we have seen its influence, united with the purity of our own country.

THE connection of civil government with manners and taste is the point, on which the scale of national
happines.

happiness turns. When this balance is destroyed, either by the too bold strides of the one, or by the rapid progress or decline of the other, convulsions ensue, and such convulsions as rend the political soul. These have made tottering states and jarring empires ! We have heard of the dissolution of eastern monarchies ; we have heard of the fall of Rome and our own age has witnessed the commotions of Europe. These all proceeded from the same cause. And whether an ally-nation has not pushed its civil government one step farther than its social state allows, admits a rational doubt. Where the principles of representation are too imperfectly understood, to be quietly enjoyed, a popular constitution is generally attended with alarming innovations.

I NEED not spend time, to prove the equality of men, or the unalienable rights of humanity. You, my country-men, *feel* their reality. They are a sacred deposit in the bosom of every American.

LET us, therefore, digress, for a moment, to consider the country in which we live.

ENJOYING a happy temperature of climate, it possesses the bounties of nature, with few of her inconveniences. A rich variety of soil invites the labours of the husbandman ; a salubrity of air, the inquiries of genius. Being unknown to the other nations of the globe, till within three centuries past, it seems to have been designedly removed, by the Author of creation, from the seat of tyrants, in order to become the nursery of freemen.

HAVING been settled, not two centuries ago, by colonies from Europe chartered by the king of Great Britain, who claimed the soil by right of discovery, it enjoyed peace with the parent-country, during the first hundred and fifty years. The years
'sixty-four

'sixty four and 'sixty seven were destined to open the plot of that grand drama, whose issue was the establishment of American independence, and the down-fall of British usurpation. Several acts of Parliament, among which were the famous "stamp act," and an act imposing duties on tea, and other articles of domestic use, justly alarmed the Americans. These, together with the stationing of an army, at BOSTON, to enforce their unwarranted exactions, were considered a signal to rally to the standard of arms, and to seek an assylum under the banners of Liberty. Lexington became a scene of blood;—carnage and human gore spread their clotted garments, on Bunkers'-hill! There groanings were heard, to the extremities of New-Hampshire and Georgia. The natural sympathy of the mind kindled in the American bosom a universal glow of patriotism, which needed but the following aggressions of Britain, to burst into conflagration. Provincial assemblies, and conventions of the states, served to animate and confirm the united body. There is something in reason, which commands the attention of rational beings! All seemed inspired with that universal soul, which breathes its influence around creation. The period had now arrived, which was to decide the fate of Americans. Independence, or slavery, was the only alternative. In attempting to describe the magnanimous anxieties of this eventful crisis, I should efface their impression, from the memory of those who felt them. Suffice it to say, that, on the fourth of July 'seventy-six, in defiance of the thunders of British omnipotence, to the astonishment of an admiring world, and to the universal joy of the American people, *as by an ordinance from Heaven*, Congress declared these United States "FREE AND INDEPENDENT!"

This is the day, fellow-citizens, which we celebrate. Let us remember it, with grateful hearts, to that Being, who said; “*Let there be light, and there was light.*” Let us cherish the invigorating flame, which then burned in the bosom of our fathers and patriots, and hand it *glowing* to posterity. This is the day, which calls forth the sublime feelings of independence, and the congenial flow of American souls. We do not celebrate the romance of departed heroes, but the achievements of our fathers. We do not celebrate the feasts of heathen Gods, but the anniversary of reason. We do not commemorate the building of thrones, or the coronation of kings; but, we commemorate *the nativity of a nation*, that memorable day, on which three million people were born to freedom! Let us remember, we are no longer subjects of ghastly tyranny; but *the citizens of an unalienable commonwealth!*

HERE let us pause. A declaration of rights was not all. They were to be obtained, by bloody conflict and manly exertion. I will not attempt to paint the horrors, which, at this ominous moment, stood on every side the American cause. It is sufficient to say, that the same undaunted fortitude and greatness of soul, which dwelt with the patriots of 'seventy-five, still found a welcome residence with the heroes of 'seventy-six, and 'seventy-seven. In view of independence, property and even life was deemed too mean a sacrifice to purchase so *glorious a prize*. I might mention the bloody tragedy of Bunkers'-hill, the bold invasion of Canada, the surrender of Burgoyne, the battle of Brandy-wine, and the capture of Cornwallis. But these are fresh, in the
memory

memory of you all. These, with other equally distinguished events, ushered in the full and quiet possession of American independence !

WHILE we repeat our thanks to the actors, in these scenes of tragic distress, can we, fellow freemen, partakers of the same human nature, repress our tears of sympathy for those, who poured out their bleeding lives, to save our common country ? Where are our fathers and brethren, who fell at Bunkers'-hill ? Where are WARREN and MONTGOMERY ? *Cold and bloody on the field of death !* Let us intomb them, in the lasting memory of our country ; let us spread over them the laurels of everblooming gratitude ; and may the glorious cause, in which they fell, be an eternal monument to their fame !

AFTER the peace of 'eighty two, on the change introduced into the federal economy, new ground was opened, for the exercise of American talents. To adjust the interests of the several states, and to originate a constitution, which should embrace the manners and genius of so extensive a people, required stretch of wisdom in the cabinet, equal to their former prowess in the field. These, however, guided by the same principle of wisdom, and the influence of Heaven, they were enabled happily to effect. A constitution, which guaranteed to the people equal rights and equal privileges, and yet preserved a suitable dignity in government, was a phenomenon in the political world, as well as the ornament of an enlightened people. Its operation has evinced the justness of its principles. By a steady adherence to these, United America has become proverbial for prosperity, so far as she is known on the habitable globe. Her civil and commercial interests have increased, beyond the most sanguine computations.—

Her arts and sciences have flourished, without a precedent. Her foreign relations have become equally respectable. Since the establishment of her independence, she has entered into treaties of mutual advantage, with all the considerable powers of Europe, not to mention those with the states of Barbary, and the western savages. *Herself the garden of nature*, she has become preeminent among the nations of the world. We may truly say, “*he hath not dealt so with any nation.*” Here, the Genius of civil and religious liberty first found an asylum. And here this celestial fugitive enjoys a most sacred retreat, embosomed in the arts and the virtues of peace.

Though misunderstandings with France now agitate the public mind; yet, relying on the Arbiter of nations, we may, at least, hope, and even expect, an honorable accommodation, by the wisdom and integrity of our federal government. We have a man at helm, who has grown grey, in the services of his country, and in the applauses of his countrymen. Nevertheless, should farther aggressions require decision, it belongs to us, Americans, who have fought for our rights, to exclude from the rank of citizen, him, who will not defend his country against these lawless invaders.

It is of importance, that we adhere *firmly* to the principles of federal union, and to the spirit of our constitution. These are the palladium of our liberties. Free elections are the life of a representative government. When these are corrupted, then is the constitution subverted. And these are corrupted, when electioneering newspapers become the oracles of popular truth; when groveling candidates stoop to the detestable acts of bribery, duplicity and felicitation:

solicitation ; and, when men in public trust sacrifice candid opinion, on the altar of popular caprice. When this, I say, is the case, public virtue has only a name. But, may this never be the case with these United States ! May it never be said, they *once* were free, they *once* were independent ! *May they possess themselves,* and brand with infamy the wretch, who would dare to seduce them from religious purity and moral justice. May they continue, *in reality,* as well as in name, *United America,* till the kingdoms of the world shall be lost, in *the kingdom* of the Ancient of days !

We have seen aspirers after tyrannic dominion, and friends to faction, in the very bowels of our union. We have seen Catalines in miniature, and despots in infancy. But, let not such think to shake the principles of our constitution. They are as firm, as the foundations of the earth, or the pillars of Heaven ! Let national virtue, therefore, be our watchman, on the walls of this American Jerusalem. This shall secure us against the insinuations of European intrigue. And, let our days of public election be as sacred to the investigation of truth and patriotism, as sabbaths to the worship of God ! Let us set this, a seal on our liberties, and shew to the world : “ that a nation can be governed, and yet be free.”

I should do violence to original virtue, and to my own feelings, should I pass, in silence, the man, who has been our shield in war, our council in peace, GEORGE WASHINGTON, the illustrious patron of his country. The calm serenity of a pure unclouded mind shall *still* attend him, through the shadowy vale of declining age. The plaudits of an admiring world shall ever remain, a diadem to his memory, in the crown of heavy justice. The chair of guardian

april,

aphs, who have protected him, through the perils of life, shall pitch their tents, in calm repose, around his venerable head, and softly tune their harps, to breathe his praise.

WHILE we congratulate, with a cordial embrace, our brethren returning from the slavery of ALGIERS, we *can* not, fellow-freemen, forget that distinguished friend of man, the MARQUIS FAYETTE. Though envious kings may confine him, with bolts and with bars ; yet, his love of liberty shall be known and revered, so far as the empire of freedom extends. His virtues, too luxuriant to flourish in European soil, shall vegetate even in a dungeon. They shall be nourished by the Genius of kindred souls ! Remember, he fought for the fourth of July ; and let us not pass the solemnities of this joyful day, without visiting his chains with a sympathy of affection.

WHILE we dwell on the superlatively happy condition of United America, it is but just to feel for the miseries of the eastern continent. The true spirit of freedom and the noble sentiments of independence have just made their way, into two quarters of the globe. The other quarters are not *yet* prepared to entertain these celestial guests. Europe is still struggling with right ; Asia is the seat of despots, and Africa, the commonwealth of tyrants.

BUT, from the present eventful period, may we not indulge the hope, that the field of blood may soon be converted into *the garden of peace* ; and the whole rational family partake, with us, the blessings of *the fourth of July*. May we not pursue the pleasing analagy of events, to that auspicious day, when the connection of civil government, with man-

ners and taste, shall be complete, in the happiness of nations ; and when a universal jubilee, to the rights and liberties of men, shall be proclaimed and enjoyed, throughout the confederated world. Then shall “ the morning stars,” again, “ sing together, and all the sons of men shout for joy.”

F I N I S,