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AN ORATION,

DELIVERED JULY FOURTH, 1812.

BEFORE THE

NEW-JERSEY

Washington Benevolent Society,

IN THE

CITY OF NEW-BRUNSWICK.

BY FREDERICK FRELINGHUYSEN.

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AN ORATION,

§c.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

AMIDST the political tumult which now agitates the world, our beloved country enjoys the privilege of commemorating the eventful period that gave birth to its independence. When we reflect upon those awful vicissitudes in government, which in sad and gloomy progression have visited the unfortunate nations of men.... when desolation and carnage clothe the fields of afflicted Europe, and human flesh provides an ample repast to ferocious beasts, will you, my countrymen, withhold your sincere congratulations, your dutiful thanks from the Author of every good, for this day's privilege....a great and mighty people, devoting to a temporary forgetfulness the avocations of personal interest, assembling around the altar of their liberties, and fanning to new life that spark of noble freedom, which blazed in '76. The mind, in the contemplation of great and virtuous deeds, naturally directs its meditations towards those characters who have had an agency in the production of them, nor will filial gratitude suffer a long delay to the merited tribute of praise due the Father and the Friend of our favored land. Although the illustrious WASHINGTON lies mouldering in the corrosive arms of insatiate death....although no proud mausoleum....no sculptured marble....no colossal statuesno polished brass, (the ensigns of a nation's love), points the passing stranger to his grave, or prevents the

rude familiarity of man or beast, in the hearts of the truly virtuous his memorable name will flourish in eternal youth and unfading vigor: the hero who hath caught the courageous infection of his patriotic soul....who hath listened to the encouraging pathos of his martial eloquence....who hath beheld the vast accumulation of difficulties open an undisturbed passage at the approach of his leader, as the ocean, to the mysterious touch of Moses' rod....let him speak his eulogy. The statesman, who daily views the happy realities of his disinterested patriotism,...who aided him in rivetting to our land that golden chain which holds in secure embrace our liberties....let him speak his eulogy. Let all the people who prefer the honied cup of independence, to the bitterness of merciless despotism, who feel the value of those endearing blessings which flow from the exhaustless fountain of domestic peace....sound the general pean of his praises. Great and beatified spirit, these the unadorned thanks of thine honest countrymen do far surpass, in real worth, the "storied urn or animated bust."

It is not my design particularly to detail the various struggles of the revolution. The historic muse, sickened by the painful recital of tyrannical oppression, has long since awakened from the lethargy of ages, and stained her truth-speaking page with the achievements of Americans. Our country, after exhausting the sources of remonstrance, and pleading with all the pathos of a tender and oppressed child, finding Britain a relentless mother, did this day in the year '76, avow her intention to be free. All those evils which necessarily flow from a great inadequacy of the means to the attainment of a proposed end, now burst upon our intrepid forefathers. The puling

voice of peaceful complaint was now to rise in opposition to the thunders of indignant Britain. An unarmed and untutored peasantry were now to present their almost protectless bosoms to the well-aimed musketry of a revengeful foe. Heaven, commiserating this our dark and hopeless situation, imparted to the name of WASHINGTON, the power of an host: he was the rock around which the mutinous wants of the people were satisfied: he, the modern Joshua, who, benevolently burying the recollection of past fatigues and past ingratitude in the grave of oblivion, led us to glory, to happiness, and to independence. In all the scenes of the revolution, the energetic mind of the hero tempered by a cautious prudence the good fortune of the General, attended by a noble and humane philanthropy, shone like the face of the morning, dispensing hope, and gladness, and reliance.

When the tumult of the storm had subsided, and America had purchased a right to her freedom with the blood of her sons, the sighs of her matrons and the tears of her orphans, and that right was secured by the Federal Constitution, WASHINGTON, the brightest jewel in the crown of our liberties, became the Captain of our political bark. Our helm, guided by that prudence and prophetic foresight which ever characterized the man, we securely sailed through those hidden rocks and gaping whirlpools which ever obstruct and threaten the progress of an infant nation in her course to glory and prosperity. Our Statesmen, selected from the most virtuous and intelligent of our citizens, surrounding the illustrious Chief, like inferior stones which shine in the reflected light of the brilliant diamond, borrowed lustre from his example. They were formed amidst the wild uproar of the revolution, and

every feeling, every thought trembled with patriotic anxiety for their country's glory. Then, our Capitol knew not the eloquence of strange tongues, nor were our councils perverted by those native and inbred partialities, which virtuous foreigners ever feel for the sacred spot of their infancy. United by the common dangers and disasters through which they had passed, they, reciprocally supporting one another, laid the noble, the transcendent foundation of our Constitution: and although twelve years of unusual storm have unremittingly beat against its broad but moveless fabric, like the tall oak, highly pre-eminent upon the mountains, the successive blasts have only more deeply rooted its merits in the minds of the virtuous and intelligent. Personal interest and individual ambition, may and have invented plausible pretexts for dissatisfaction; yet these, as the spots which cloud the ineffable glory of the sun, are lost in the contemplation of its unequalled excellence.

The adoption of this Constitution, whilst it secured to us the privileges of freemen, as long as we stood firm in that virtue which emanated pure from the trying furnace of the revolution, still afforded to demagogues and designing men a copious theme for irritated speculation. Talents which Heaven designed for nobler purposes were prostituted to the ignominious office of cultivating the germs of discontent. It was then, at that moment of bitter trial, when a new and troubled scene was opened... when the blood of our worthies and the afflictions of our people had like to have been spilt and endured in vain, that the virtue of WASHINGTON and his tried associates, like a rain-bow, spreading its cheering arch over the heavens, illumined the dark and threatening clouds which

obscured our prospects and terrified our hopes. Europe, in amazement, beheld the growing wonder, and tyranny, as if confounded, sighed at the humanity of the heroes of the West.

Under the WASHINGTON administration of that Constitution, our happy country, hurried along the current of successful experiment, approached with undeviating rapidity towards the goal of affluence and prosperity. In this spring-time of the republic, the husbandmen were alert, and the fostering showers of genial virtue, constantly descending, matured for them an ample reward. The spirit of generous commerce, redeemed from the stubborn shackles of a cramping monopoly, flapped again her thousand wings, and joyfully hailed the rising eagle of America. Our canvass whitened the wide expanse of the immeasurable ocean, and our productions often regenerated the almost famished life of litigious Europe.

It is, my countrymen, a truth beyond contradiction, that injustice and oppression in all national connexions ever flow from great superiority of power. This strong bias to national encroachment is a natural result of man's ambition. Our rulers, in those golden days of virtuous liberty, satisfied that national respectability was alone an ebullition of public strength, began a work, the end whereof was security at home and honor abroad. A navy, the only weapon which could effectually restrain the avaricious injustice of Europe, or raise up a sufficient barrier to the designs of iniquitous power, soon promised protection to our merchants, and respectability to our government. Nor were these promises consummated in idle theory; the achievements of Truxton, of Preble, and the Deceatur, soon published through

the astonished world the maturity of our naval valor, and alarmed the daring encroachments of European insolence. It is absolutely essential in the common concerns of life so far to curb the licentiousness of individual passion that the temptations of iniquity are palsied by these evils which result from a concurrence with their enticements. Infinitely more manifest is this necessity in the relation which subsists between nations who are only bound and cemented together by the frailties of justice and of honor, which "sever like wax at the touch of fire," whenever interest or ambition dictates. Weak! weak indeed must be that government which, knowing this, would ever lean upon these broken reeds.

To raise a naval power adequate to contend with the maritime energies of Europe, would be more useless than extravagant: all that our situation requires, in order to command their respect, is an ability to harass and perplex their trade upon that element where they are welcome to rule. Such we once possessed, and under its protecting flag our commerce rode securely over the seas; our country improved; our cities flourished, and our inhabitants became affluent.

The energy of our government...the unity of sentiment which cemented the hearts of our rulers, and a strict and honorable impartiality towards foreign powers, raised, supported and matured the respectability of the American character. Then the foul demon of discordant party had not corrupted the wisdom of the great body of the people with her irrational prejudices or unjust suspicions; her voice, though heard, was, like the rumblings of the distant thunder, totally disregarded.

The father of his country, after gloriously subduing the revengeful foe, laid down, together with his sword, those justly aroused animosities which summoned it from its scabbard. England and France, in his virtuous day, were equal in the scale of nations; insult from the one and degradation from the other, met with a similar fate....the severe rebuke of his indignant frown.

In this season of jubilee it must be a pleasing task to take a brief retrospect of that enviable character our infant nation had obtained. Britain, recounting the glorious victories which her Edwards and her Henrys had miraculously acquired on the plains of Agincourt and Cressy, blushing at the superiority of American heroism, turns her painful head and unwillingly yields the palm to the achievements of Trenton and of Princeton. These well-fought struggles raise, like twinkling stars, to gild the broad firmament of our glory. The heroic blood of gallant Mercer here extinguished the blaze of his growing fame. Let us heave a sigh of tender sympathy on his premature fate. France, the prolific hot-bed of every human iniquity, where unbridled power rides down virtue, morality and religion, turns pale with envy, whilst she is forced to acknowledge the superior attainments of American virtue. In the East, Lexington, Harlem, White-plains, and Saratoga, rise, the eternal monuments of our never-dying fame. The soul sickens when it turns its reflections to the South. O'er the plains of Monmouth, the sun of our glory arose; but alas! his face was shrouded in blood. Many the widowed mothers who heaved the heart-rending sigh o'er their pallid consorts....many the orphans who felt the loss of necessary protection. The ground on which we tread, my friends,

is sacred....devoted to the genius of liberty, and consecrated to the blood and the struggles of our forefathers.

The feats of the patriotic Leonidas, travelling down the long course of time, had received the merited plaudits of admiring man. Until American patriotism displayed its energy, the voluntary death of this hero and his associates stood in the annals of man like Palmyra the queen of the desert and the wonder of the East. Spirits of the heroes of Stony-point! if you can rejoice with mortals, unite with us in commemorating that grand display of unequalled heroism which sealed your eyes in death!

Since the days of the revolution, impelled by the virtuous abhorrence of insult and injury, we have heard of gallant Eaton's spreading the blaze of our glory over the scorching sands of barbarous Africa. The blood of our heroes has fattened its barren soil; and the inhuman Turk, beholding the bleached bones of our sons strewed around him, in silent wonder asks, whence came the daring spirits that once animated these sad remnants of mortality? Far, very far indeed is the land, but not too far to feel and to revenge an unprovoked injury. Evincing a respect for ourselves, the nations of the world, then, tendered to us justice, and respected the sacred rights of freemen. Men of America! emulate the deeds of your forefathers, and gloriously maintain your liberties! Fair daughters of Columbia! amidst that happiness you so deservedly enjoy, forget not to lend a retrospective sympathy, commiserating the widowed mother, driven from her last asylum by her inveterate foe. Shed a tear of tenderness, whilst in fancy you behold her seeking her solitary way, cheered alone by those friendly rays which radiate

from her burning mansion : at every trembling leaf, or whispering breeze, clasping more closely to her bosom her infant-innocence, and mourning the death of its and her affectionate protector.

Gentlemen of the Washington Society,

WHEN our present rulers were advanced to power, the fondest anticipations of the people were excited. The mourning voice of enslaved commerce, the eloquent necessities of an exhausted treasury, and the fears and apprehensions of our citizens, hailed the approach of Mr. Madison to the presidential chair as the glorious dawn of more prosperous days. But those hopes, those expectations, like the lightning which gleams along our horizon, for a moment cheered the surrounding darkness, and were dissipated for ever. However correct may be his theoretic sentiments, fatally for us, they have not been reduced to practice : nor will they be as long as his counsellors are selected from that ephemeral tribe, whose existence is only coeval with the sunshine of that authority, by whose favouring rays they were generated. Would he but lift his arm with independence, the cob-web bandages would break from around him, and our country be again redeemed from the thralldom of ignorance and impolicy.

Gentlemen, our opposition to the present administration has been imputed to motives as odious as rebellion ; as black as treason. The infamous appellations of traitor and of tory has been so indiscriminately affixed to all who resist the improprieties of government, that to be represented as the one or the other is now al-

most an honour. Whilst we can behold in our lists those who manfully stemmed the tumults of the revolution, we may laugh at the slanders of men whose patriotism has endured no other test than a paper warfare.

When the constituted authorities of a country do an act which all deplore, and which many deprecate, yet it is the manifest and indisputable duty of all to lend their aid and obedience to its exactions: when the oracles of the land order the gates of peace to be thrown open, and the sheathed sword to be drawn from its scabbard, it is the advice of patriotism to obey: yet, my friends, in a country of freemen, where our expressions are as unrestrained as our thoughts, we possess the enviable privilege of commenting upon the measures which are adopted....a privilege which I trust will endure till the last glimmering spark of our expiring liberty shall be extinguished. Long has a bounteous providence protected us from the raging of that political hurricane which has so long devastated the face of Europe: but the cloud so portentous which has hovered over us, hath, at length, disgorged its awful load.... War hath harnessed his fretful steeds to his blood-stained car....Our mothers are again the wives of soldiers; and our citizens will supply the repast of destruction. The measure, although the result of apparent deliberation, appears to be impolitic. When a republican government plunges into litigation, it ought to possess the unlimited confidence of the people: this alone can shield it amidst those disasters which no political sagacity can foresee, and no human energy can prevent. Where is now that confidence? it is buried

with the story which often has informed us that our Treasury was replete with money ; that our relations with France were released from the manacles of the Berlin and Milan decrees, and that our country was in the full tide of successful experiment. There certainly does exist a palpable distrust upon the minds of our citizens ; to remove this, in the present alarming posture of our affairs, requires and demands the agency of all classes of our countrymen. The poverty of the national chest craves the generous assistance of the individual's purse ; but what individual will supply a nation's wants, unless satisfied of their ability and willingness to repay ? The infancy of our army, is yet unable to resist the manhood of European strength ; to fill its lines with the active courage of our citizens, you must assure them that when they ask for bread, you will not give them a stone. The weakness of our naval power, when opposed to that which Britain can set against it, like a pebble in a stream, may occasion a partial ferment, but soon will the overwhelming flood remove its pitiful impediment.

It is, however, said, we are a powerful people ; yes, my friends, but should the daring lion forsake his native plains and plunge amidst the waves to combat with leviathan, his shaggy mane, the emblem of his strength, would only hasten the moment of his destruction.

To carry on an advantageous war, we want men, we want a navy, we want money ; of all these we are, in a great measure, destitute. That spirit of temporizing œconomy, which is contradictory to the advice and example of the illustrious Washington, raised our

prospering navy upon stilts, a prey to worms and storms ...which soothed the cries of popular infatuation by granting a momentary suspension to necessary taxation, has accumulated, in one vast heap, all the evils which necessarily flow from the peculiar distress of our situation. Instead of drawing, by gradual and imperceptible means, the requisite resources from the possession of the people, and fostering them with a watchful care, this destructive frugality must now subject us to the great inconvenience of supplying national wants by individual privation. Many, who would feel no evil resulting from a small extraordinary tax, per annum, would find it impossible to meet the same requisition at the expiration of every twelve years. Our present condition is an ample test of those principles which guided the unerring foresight of our immortal Father!

The causes of the present declaration of war have existed for years; and although, when independently considered, they present a picture humiliating and dishonorable in the extreme, justifying the act, yet, when we associate with it the awful train of consequences flowing from its odious fountain, it must appear inexpedient, impolitic, and destructive. At this time, when municipal restrictions have damed up the accustomed streams of wealth, when millions of our property is sailing unprotected over the ocean, and England is fighting the battles of the world in opposition to unparalleled tyranny, with deference to wiser heads, I must declare my disapprobation of war! Gentlemen, it behoves us, notwithstanding private dissatisfaction, to gird on the sword in the defence of our country's rights; but if this war is intended as the foreboding precursor

of an alliance with France, then let the counsel of Washington, which rebrobrates all foreign connexion, be the guide of our sentiments, the rule of our conduct. A generous, a virtuous person disdains to rejoice in the prosperity of despots ; a noble independence can form no compromise with those whose prerogative and whose practice is to violate the sacred rights of man. Should no more be intended than the redress of national grievances, and the repelling of national insult, our government, though fatally dilatory in assuming their present attitude, may deserve our praise. But if our solitary liberty regales in the converse of oppressors, delights in the gorgeous crown fabricated from the groans of its subjects, and, without horror, views the influence of the tyrant's rod, then, I fear, the hour of our redemption is past. The feelings of uncorrupted freemen are natively incompatible with the designs of tyranny. When such an alliance is proposed, then, Gentlemen, let the sound of prudent remonstrance, let the advice of unprejudiced reason preserve our mantles pure from so foul a stain. The chains of enslaved Europe now clangour in our ears, and pathetically bid us beware of the Corsican's perfidy. That sanguinary usurper who walked to his throne through the blood of slaughtered millions, whose friendliest communication is insult, whose tenderest look is slavery, whose lightest grasp is death, now courts the confidence of our half yielding liberty. His character is written in every province of Spain, who now raises her voice of solemn warning to apprise us of his perfidy and ambition. Her burning cities, her desolated plains, her perishing inhabitants, her bleeding soldiers must touch the tender-

est strings of national pity, and individual commiseration, for,

“To the generous eye,
Distress is virtue, and though self-betrayed,
A people struggling with her fate must rouse
The hero's throb.”

The sacred voice of experience tells us, that his friendship is the herald of his boundless ambition. Holland, that happy land, where temperance and industry showered a grateful profusion ; whose unadorned conduct and artless manners might have dulled the rage of mad ambition : Switzerland, whose rough and barren hills blossomed as the valley, amidst the invigorating songs of jocund liberty ...whose unaffected and economical pleasures might have passed unheeded amidst the affluence and delights of royalty, have both fallen the miserable victims of unfeeling power. Holland, in her prosperity, told a tale at which tyranny blushed ; and Switzerland held up a mirror in which the horrid features of despotism were pourtrayed without flattery. Let us not, by an alliance with France, aid the common enemy of man in raising the massy flood-gates which dam up universal despotism : but, pursuing the advice of our departed Counsellor, which is the only mantle he has left behind him, let us cherish unity among ourselves, impartiality towards foreign nations, and endeavour to attain an honorable independence of all the nations of men. Following this brilliant track, if we desire no other reward for our exertions than what satisfied the prince of heroes....not the sickly fame of popular applause, which too often intoxicates its possessor....not the fair trappings of profitable office....“not the fading echoes of renown,” but the noble consciousness of having acted well, we will prosper !