

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE

The Harmony Society,

IN NEW-HAVEN,

ON THE FORTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY

OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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BY AMMI HARRISON, JUN.
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AN ORATION, &c.

A PLEBEIAN, blessed with no peculiar endowments by nature;—destitute of that inestimable gem, a liberal education;—nor yet accustomed to address so respectable an audience; would nevertheless presume to obtrude for a few moments upon your attention, with the humble hope of exciting in your minds the recollection of events which should never be forgotten, and to speak upon a subject which demands—he would almost say—the pen of Inspiration—the anniversary of **AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE!**

However it may be considered in other countries as the exclusive prerogative of nobility, birth, or superior talents, to offer sentiments upon government, the conduct of men in power, or the propriety of measures; it is notwithstanding a right, from the enjoyment of which, neither the laws of nature or of morality, or the principles of genuine liberty, have excluded any, and which (thanks to our forefathers!) has been transmitted unimpaired to us.

On so highly important, so momentous an event, then, as the birth day of a Nation, let me solicit your indulgence whilst I advert to the causes which produced it, which rescued us from the tyranny of kings, the shackles of despotism, and elevated us to that distinguished rank we now hold among the nations of the earth.

Persecuted for their religious tenets, our ancestors left the abodes of affluence and ease, crossed the perilous ocean, and sought a refuge from the storm of bigotry, upon the savage shores of North-America; choosing rather to enjoy the free exercise of conscience in a wilderness, than rove the comparative paradise of Europe, restricted to a fanatic's creed. For a time, these exiles enjoyed the nominal protection of the English government; and as good and faithful subjects of the crown, were obedient to the laws imposed upon them. But the true principles of Liberty, congenial to the soil they now possessed, became so deeply rooted in their hearts, that not even the ingenuity of England could check their progress. Opportunities soon offered to test their forbearance and their courage.

The Parliament of England, jealous of the growing wealth and population of the American colonies, and conscious of their increasing influence in the scale of nations, attempted, by a course of oppressive measures, to cramp the existing spirit of freedom, and render them subservient to their views of wealth and aggrandizement. To accomplish their purposes, they assumed the right of taxing the colonies without their consent; extended the jurisdiction of admiralty courts; deprived them of the privilege of trial by jury, in cases affecting both life and property; suspended the exercise of legislative functions in one colony; interdicted commerce with the capital of another; altered the forms of government which had been adopted by them and guaranteed by the crown; exempted murderers of colonists from legal trial; arrogated the

right to transport to England for trial, persons charged with certain offences; trampled upon their most humble petitions for the relief of grievances; rejected all interference in their favour; let loose the savages upon their frontiers; butchered their citizens; and committed innumerable other outrages shocking to humanity. These indignities were, for a series of years, borne with unparalleled patience, not from a want of courage to resist, but from a love of peace;—until passive obedience became no longer a virtue; until quiet submission was mistaken for pusillanimity and cowardice; until forbearance but invited fresh insult, and encouraged a renewal of hostilities; and until the enormous load of accumulated crimes had annulled every obligation to the crown, and engaged the armies of Heaven to fight our battles. These were among the causes, which led to our *Independence*. And who can for a moment doubt the justness of the measures adopted by our forefathers? Who would not with them have exclaimed, “*Freedom or Death!*”

When Government, which was instituted for the public good, is converted into the tool of Ambition, or the ladder of Avarice to wealth, merely to subserve the corrupt views and private interests of a privileged order, and promotes only the interest of a few;—when, instead of a public blessing, it becomes a public curse; we are no longer bound to obey its mandates, or submit to its tyranny; but can resume those rights which the God of nature gave, and which we had in part only surrendered into other hands, when we became members of the civil compact, for the good of community and the better enjoyment of

the remainder. And whenever these oppressive and unjust edicts are attempted to be enforced with the life-blood of the subject, who will hesitate to declare that he has a right to seize the sword and wield the weapon of death in his own defence; in defence of what is far dearer than life itself;—his wife, his children, his friends, his happy fire-side, his domestic paradise, his religion, his liberty, his country?

It was upon these considerations, that our ancestors were justifiable in making the solemn appeal to arms, and in pursuing that course which alone has saved their sons from slavery, established the free constitution of government we now enjoy, and which has enabled us to hail the dawn of this auspicious day as a political jubilee to the people of America, and an era in the annals of time, never to be forgotten by the sons of Freedom.

But hard, hard indeed, was the contest for Freedom, and the struggle for Independence. The golden sun of Liberty had nearly set in the gloom of an eternal night, ere its radiant beams illumined our western horizon. Had not the tutelary saint of Columbia hovered around the American camp, and presided over her destinies, Freedom must have met with an untimely grave. Never can we sufficiently admire the wisdom of those statesmen, and the skill and bravery of those unconquerable veterans, who, by their unwearied exertions in the cabinet and in the field, achieved for us the glorious revolution. Never can we duly appreciate the merits of a WASHINGTON, who, with but a handful of undisciplined yeomanry, triumphed over a royal army, and prostrated the Lion

of England at the feet of the American Eagle. His name,—so terrible to his foes, so welcome to his friends,—shall live for ever upon the brightest page of the historian, and be remembered with the warmest emotions of gratitude and pleasure by those whom he has contributed to make happy, and by all mankind, when kings, and princes, and nobles, for ages, shall have sunk into their merited oblivion. Unlike them, he needs not the assistance of the sculptor or the architect to perpetuate his memory: he needs no princely dome, no monumental pile, no stately pyramid, whose towering height shall pierce the stormy clouds, and rear its lofty head to heaven, to tell posterity his fame. His deeds, his worthy deeds, alone have rendered him immortal! When Oblivion shall have swept away thrones, kingdoms, and principalities—when every vestige of human greatness, and grandeur, and glory, shall have mouldered into dust; and the last period of Time become extinct—Eternity itself shall catch the glowing theme, and dwell with increasing rapture on his name!

But the services of these revolutionary heroes and statesmen were not limited to the victory they achieved, and the emancipation which by their wisdom and valour they procured. When this great work was accomplished, they foresaw that something further was necessary to render permanent the blessings purchased by their blood. To this end, they established that federal compact, that free Constitution, and republican form of government, which has been, and still continues, the charter of our rights and the palladium of our liberties—That happy Constitution,

which has never had a superior, and which now challenges the world to produce its equal. Whatever might have been the existing opinion upon this subject, at the time of its formation, experience has manifested its efficacy, and testified to its utility. It secures to every citizen of these United States, the uninterrupted enjoyment of those rights and privileges, for which government should be instituted. It protects him from foreign foes; guarantees to him the quiet possession of his "own vine and fig-tree," and the enjoyment of whatever political or religious sentiments he shall see fit to adopt.

The establishment of the Constitution formed a new epoch in our national history. Under the benign auspices of her Washington, Columbia soon recovered from the wounds she had received in the late conflict, and began to assume a degree of importance among the nations of the earth. Peace brightened the prospects of all, and prosperity smiled throughout our land. Commerce spread its thousand wings to every gale; and not a wave that rolled, and not a breeze that blew, but wafted riches to our happy clime. As in war, all had united in the common cause; so in peace, all now joyfully rallied around the standard of Liberty, which they had reared, like children of the same family, contented and happy under the parental administration of their great leader. Seldom, if ever, has a nation so soon emerged from the thick clouds of despotic gloom, and the embarrassments attendant upon a long protracted war, to the full enjoyment of civil, religious and political privileges, and to the attainment of those rich blessings, which at this inter-

esting period clustered around our infant Republic. Never had a nation greater incitements to adore and love Him, whose almighty arm had wrought for them the victory, and whose divine goodness shielded them in the hour of trouble.

The reins of government were now surrendered into the hands of Mr. Adams, whose abilities, unequal to his elevation, led to the adopting of measures which soon hurled him from the giddy height to which he had been exalted. Though a man who had for a long time faithfully served his country, and who undoubtedly wished for its welfare; still he was far from possessing those immutable principles and happy qualifications, which would have enabled him to give that universal satisfaction that resulted from the wise policy of his predecessor. In some respects, he undoubtedly acted upon the principles of Washington. The building of a navy, and preparing for war in time of peace, though disapproved by some, have since been adopted as the best measures to prevent insult and aggression. But the laws restricting the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press, rendered him unpopular with his own party, and obnoxious to the other; inducing a people, jealous of their rights, to think that, for the aggrandizement of his own family, he was making rapid strides towards the establishment of an odious Aristocracy. From the commencement of his administration we may date the rise and progress of that party spirit, which has so long clouded our national councils, and arrayed our legislators against each other in debates, where the good of the country alone should have been the

spring of action, and the spur to eloquence. Its unhappy influence has tended to loosen the cords that bind our Union—to create the most bitter collisions—to dissolve that unity and harmony of sentiment, which pervaded the founders of our Republic—to create a spirit of jealousy between the Northern and Southern States, (whose interests are unquestionably mutual,)—and in fine, to obscure the whole political horizon of our country. But, thanks to the good sense of the people, its virulence is now rapidly abating. Passion, which has so long triumphed over cool deliberation and sound judgment, is now about to resign the helm into the more firm and steady hands of Reason. What may we not expect will be the result of this magnanimous policy? What incalculable benefits will be derived from it to our common country? How will it strengthen our Union—consolidate our Republic—and add the most firm support to the pillars of our Independence.

It was, in a great measure, through the superior management of this powerful engine, this party spirit, which he had greatly contributed to increase, that Mr. Jefferson succeeded in being raised to the Chief Magistracy of the Union. His career commenced with a series of innovations, and its continuation was marked by a long train of visionary theories and philosophical experiments. But his re-election evinced that his measures were more popular than those of his predecessor.

At this time, the wars of Europe threatened to involve us in the conflict of the two great belligerents. Spoliations were by both committed on our com-

merce. "Blockading decrees" and "Orders in Council" were issued, until our trade could no longer be carried on with profit or safety; and our neutrality existed but in name. France, whilst she confiscated our property in her ports, had apparently forgotten what Americans once were; and England, amidst the robberies she committed, and the heart-rending cries of our seamen dragged into her service, no longer remembered the heroes of '76, or the battle of Bunker's Hill.

It was left for the administration of Mr. Madison to avenge the blood of Pierce—the slain of the Chesapeake; and to call England to an account for her outrages and aggressions. War was declared—whether politic or just, it is not for me to determine; but its event will form a proud era in our national history, whilst it adds a new prop to our Independence. It has plucked from the British crown its most brilliant gem, to adorn an unfading garland for Columbia's brows. It has robbed the diadem of a resplendent star, to place in the constellation of our Republic. It has transferred the Trident of Neptune from that "fast-anchored isle" to the land of Freedom; and convinced the boastful mistress of the ocean that she is no longer invulnerable, when opposed to the advocates of liberty and a nation's rights. Proud was Columbia's "march upon the mountain wave," and doubly dreadful was the conflict when she met the foe. Death, the great arbiter of events, stood her chief engineer; and so surely did he aim the fatal balls, that Britain's ships with blood and slaughter groaned, and each surrounding wave became "a war-

rior's sepulchre." Where are now the heroes of Trafalgar, Egypt, and the Nile? Where the pride, the pomp, the magnificence, once attac'ed to those British naval commanders, whose deeds, whose victories, astonished this western world? Eclipsed by still greater deeds! Lost amidst the resplendent blaze of that glory, which envelopes the names and glitters upon the helmets of Decatur, Bainbridge, Hull, Perry, Macdonough, and a host of worthies, who are recorded upon the immortal scroll of Fame. Where are the fancied laurels, which at New-Orleans were to grace the veteran troops of Wellington? Alas! they have withered! They were nipped by the keen fröst of disappointment, and blighted by the pestilential hail of Jackson's musketry; whilst the bright sun-beams of victory ripened into the full bloom of perfection, those fairy wreaths which Liberty had wove, to crown her brave and faithful yeomanry.

But in our admiration of the living, let us not forget to pay that tribute due to the memory of the brave who sacrificed their lives upon the altar of Freedom. Lawrence, Ludlow, Ballard, Burrows, White, and those who fell with them in arms, are now joined with their kindred spirits of the revolution. The thunder of artillery and the loud clarions of war no more shall wake them from their lowly bed—no more arouse them from their iron slumbers, to tread the battle deck, or wield the falchion in the field of Mars. No more the shouts of victory assail their ears, their voice of triumph echo on the gale, or pendant red-cross stoop to own their power. For ever hallowed be their resting-place; and as lasting be the halo of glo-

ry that encircles their urns, as their deeds were transcendantly brilliant.

But the dread clangor of war is no longer heard upon our borders. Peace extends wide her olive-branch, and nations own the benign influence of her power. Europe, so lately and so long the seat of blood and carnage, now rests from the slaughter, and sheaths her guilty sword. The fields of Waterloo, Jena, Borodino, and Austerlitz, no longer fatten with the corpses of the slain, or drink the blood of conflicting armies. South America alone is struggling for freedom from the horrid dynasty of an imbecile king, a bigotted pope, and a wicked and licentious priesthood. The United States have no cause to disturb the repose of the world by assuming the habiliments of war. Their independence is still secure; and, under the direction of the new President, Columbia wears a most pleasing aspect. An unity of sentiment already begins to pervade her national councils. The asperity of party spirit has ameliorated into a state of tranquility, and the happy influence of conciliation, it is to be hoped, will spread throughout the Union. This will strengthen the nerves, and invigorate the sinews of the Republic, until its herculean strength may bid defiance to the united kingdoms of the world.

To you then, my fellow-citizens, who have passed the meridian of your days, (if any there be present,) permit me to observe, that you will probably no more be called to witness your country struggling for the protection of her liberty, or to fight for the preservation of her independence. But you may reasonably expect that your declining sun will go down in peace,

and set upon the illustrious dawn of that political millennium, which is apparently about to illumine our country.

To you also, my young brethren of the Harmony Society, who have called me to address you on this occasion, I cannot forbear to remark, that this is to us a day of peculiar interest. The once dreary wilderness of America, which we now inhabit, our ancestors have caused to "bud and blossom like the rose," and we are now enjoying the rich profusion of its sweets. We are now reaping in joy the harvest of what they sowed in tears. We are now plucking the golden fruit of that tree of liberty, which was planted by them, watered with their tears, and nourished by their blood. Oh! how should our hearts expand with gratitude at the recollection of what they have done for us! And how should our songs of thanksgiving and praise ascend to that all-bountiful Being, who guided their frail bark across the Atlantic, and enabled them, on the ever-memorable day we now celebrate, to proclaim to the world their freedom.

But there is yet another consideration which demands our most serious and careful attention, if we would perpetuate the blessings we now enjoy. It is the necessity of an unity of heart and hand—of cultivating a spirit of harmony, and of that disinterested patriotism, which, disdaining all party considerations, looks only at the good of the whole; which is not swallowed up in the grovelling idea of Mammon, but is absorbed alone in the love of country. However we may differ in non-essentials, or be distinguished by unmeaning names, we are nevertheless all Americans;

we all love our country, and prefer its government to any other. And as WE ARE ONE in the institution of which we are members, so let us remember, that in regard to our country, this maxim should be deeply engraved upon our hearts, that, “*united, we stand—divided, we fall.*”

At present our situation is an enviable one. With a wide extent of fertile country around us, interspersed with innumerable rivers and lakes, and a seaboard open to the commerce of the world, what more can we wish that is not enjoyed, or in prospect? The days of tribulation, and the “times that tried men’s souls,” are past. Through their gloom a bright vista of hope is now opening before us. If, then, we would cultivate a spirit of friendship—if we would endeavour to dispel those dark clouds of ignorance and error which have kept the chains of other nations so long rivetted, and strive to enlighten our minds by the vivifying rays of Science: And if we make Virtue our chief good, it will lead us to prosperity and happiness. Be this, then, our object and our aim, and let not those stars and stripes of dazzling lustre, which so lately waved in triumph on the ocean, be robbed of their splendour by any unworthy deeds of ours. Nor let us so insult the shades of the Revolutionary Patriots, as tamely to submit to a change in our form of government, or suffer an infringement upon our rights. But like the Hindoo female, whose affection for her dead lord leads her to mount the flaming faggot, that her ashes and her soul may amalgamate with his; so let our ardent love of *Liberty* induce us to unite with her, that when she expires, we shall ascend her fune-

ral pyre, and mingle our dust with hers, whilst our spirits shall together soar beyond the tyrant's power to happier regions, where despots and their savage hordes can never come; to realms of everlasting *peace* and *joy*, where Truth and Virtue meet their bright reward, and *Man*, and *Freedom*, never found a foe.

FINIS.