

Springfield 1846

MR. LEE'S ORATION.

AN

A. 1792. 3. 11.

ORATION

Delivered at LENOX, the 4th July, 1793, the Anni-
versary of

American Independence :

By ELISHA LEE, Esq.

STOCKBRIDGE :

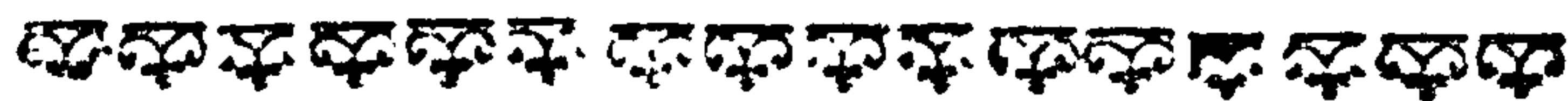
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—APOLOGY—

IT was not the intention of the Author to submit the following pages to the publick, through the medium of the Press. A very short time intervened, from the notice given him by the Committee appointed to make arrangements for the celebration of the Anniversary of American Independence, of their choice of the person to deliver a publick Address on the occasion, so the day on which he was to meet his fellow citizens, for that purpose—— The critic will make allowance for ideas thus hastily arranged, while the exercise of the candour of a very respectable list of subscribers, at whose earnest request the work has been committed to the Press, cannot with propriety be doubted.



RESPECTED FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

AGREEABLY to arrangements made on the last anniversary, by a committee of patriotic gentlemen, we are now convened to celebrate the auspicious day that gave birth to the liberty of America. Seventeen years have this day elapsed since the declaration of her INDEPENDENCE.

From the multiplicity of objects, which, upon this interesting occasion, force themselves upon the imagination, what choice for your entertainment shall be made by the speaker? Shall he trace the more hidden and remote, or point out the immediate causes of the event, which we celebrate? Shall he pronounce a panegyric upon the ardent and heroic spirit of our countrymen, who were the immediate actors? Shall he recapitulate the consequences which have resulted from the revolution, or, with a prophetic enthusiasm, anticipate those which yet may ensue in the future happiness of our country?

When I look around upon an audience so numerous and respectable; when I consider the novelty of my own situation, and the arduous task assigned me, I feel a diffidence, which I cannot conceal. When I reflect that the INDEPENDENCE of America has annually been the theme of the learned orator, and experienced Statesman, shall I not despair of furnishing any thing, either new or entertaining? But I am relieved from this embarrassment, by a reliance on the candor of the auditory, who will reflect that the performance is designed for their gratification: I am encouraged by a belief that the emancipation of our country, and the freedom of man, will never be too often the subjects of popular applause, nor ever become uninteresting to the PATRIOT and PHILANTHROPHIST.

If we consider the causes, which contributed to the establishment of American INDEPENDENCE, we cannot overlook the character of our ancestors, or the circumstances which induced their emigration from Europe. The rage for *uniformity*, during the reign of the first JAMES, resulting from his bigotted attachment to the *hierarchy*, and the penal laws made against non-conformists, were the immediate causes of the
first

first settlements in America. Men, whose minds had but just been liberated from the shackles of the Papal tyranny, and whose hearts were impressed with the awful dignity and sublime simplicity of the sacred writings, (not long before committed to their hands,) were fired with indignation at such severe restraints. Unable to escape the lash of the penal laws, and ardently desirous of establishing a *pure church*, they formed the adventurous project of withdrawing from their native country, and of settling in the wilds of America.

Perhaps there is no passion, which rouses the human mind to such a height of *magnanimity* and *heroism*, as the indignation, which religious enthusiasm feels, under the scourge of oppression.

The love of religious and civil LIBERTY is intimately, and necessarily allied: Our ancestors, who first settled in America, keenly felt their united force; and, during the progress of their arduous undertaking, stood in need of all their inspiration.

The very great equality in the circumstances of the first emigrants, and the natural independence inspired by a situation at the distance of three thousand miles from the parent country, were favourable to civil liberty. The same period, too, which, during half a century, saw a violent contest between the *rights* of the people and the *prerogatives* of the Crown, furnished new emigrations to America. These consisted of men, who were universally the partizans of LIBERTY.

The forms of government which were established by the colonists, were in a high degree democratical. A division of the legislative powers, in imitation of the British Constitution, was very generally and judiciously retained. At the same time an *hereditary order* of nobility, and the *unequal, unnatural, and absurd* arrangements for the election of the members of the British House of Commons were, from obvious causes, with equal propriety discarded.

In addition to the circumstances already mentioned, calculated, we may observe, to inspire our ancestors with rational ideas of Liberty, and preparing the way to INDEPENDENCE, some of their civil institutions discovered the highest wisdom, and conduced directly to the same illustrious event. As a proof of the justice of this remark, need I mention the *parceling* the country into small *towns* and *districts*; giving to the inhabitants of each *corporate powers* and *privileges*; obliging them to estab-

lish

bliss and *support* SCHOOLS for the education of youth, and to *settle* and *maintain* teachers of morality and religion? These institutions, which obtained more especially in New-England, diffused among the whole body of the people, a greater degree of *useful*, *moral* and *political* knowledge than, perhaps, ever before existed among the people of any other country.

The war, which broke out in the year 1755, and which was compromised by the treaty of Paris, hastened on this glorious EVENT. During that war, the principal seat of which was in America, the number and exertions of the colonial troops gave the parent country an exalted opinion of our wealth, population and resources. The conduct of that war, under the auspices of the immortal CHATHAM, was the most glorious in the British annals; but its conclusion left the nation encumbered with an immense addition to her debt. Hence originated the *system* of American taxation—To carry this *system* into execution, there ensued a *black* catalogue of oppressive measures, taken up injudiciously and upon slight consideration, laid aside upon the appearance of opposition, capriciously reassumed, and eventually, with a fatal blindness and obstinacy, pursued, from the *era* of the *Stamp Act* to the final disunion of the empire.

Upon this occasion, and before the gentlemen who are now present, a justification of the opposition of America to that iniquitous *system*, would be unnecessary, perhaps impertinent—The claim on the part of Great Britain of a parliamentary power to levy taxes without the consent of the Colonies, and to bind them in all cases whatever, was a palpable deviation from every principle of reason and justice, and a pointed violation of the *chartered* rights of the Colonists, and of the spirit of the British constitution itself. To have made such claim, required the *unprincipled wantonness* of power, to have acquiesced in it, the *baseness* and *timidity* of slaves. These belonged not to Americans. They opposed every appearance of the exercise of that claim, with a *firmness* and *unanimity*, which nothing but the most enlightened attention to their rights, and a sacred regard for their preservation, could have entured.

More than eighteen years have now circled through the heavens, since the blood of brethren was first spilt in the guilty contest that ensued; since fate withdrew the gilded curtain from the *villain* despotism, and pointed

pointed the indignation of astonished man against the *author* of his political misery!—Upon thy clouded brow, O LEXINGTON, on that eventful day, hovered the GENIUS of EMPIRE, and the DESTINY of MAN! The remembrance of that day, when thy green bosom was sprinkled with the blood of thy sons, is like the shock of the lightning, like the inspiration of a divinity!

The commencement of hostilities animated the freemen of America, with one soul. Whilst *imagination* fails in the attempt to paint that ardor of enthusiasm, which from Saint-Croix to St. Mary, agitated the bosom of America; PHILOSOPHY will forever, with exultation, recollect the dignified proceedings of the AMERICAN CONGRESS, and with a sacred pride, hold them up, for the imitation of future ages—So great fortitude in the midst of dangers, such cool and temperate firmness in the most alarming and tumultuous periods, such candor and sobriety triumphing over the phrenzy of passion, in no *deliberative bodies*, of other ages or countries, were before ever exhibited!

The situation of America, from the commencement of hostilities to the public declaration of INDEPENDENCE, was a *solecism* in the history of political revolutions. The whole continent rung with the din of arms hostile to the invading troops; but the people had not yet contemplated the idea of a separation from Great Britain. The Congress pursued the most spirited measures for the prosecution of a defensive war; and yet they presented to his British Majesty a humble and loyal petition for the redress of grievances.

This petition, to the perpetual disgrace of British politics and humanity, was treated with indignity. Contracts were entered into for the hire of *German mercenaries*. Measures the most *irritating* and *alarming* were adopted by the British administration. The consequence was such as might reasonably have been expected; the eyes of America were opened to see the natural issue of such a contest, and the dream of reconciliation was dispelled. The idea of petitioning with one hand, whilst the other brandished the sword of defiance, was finally discarded. The propriety also of strengthening the cause of America, with foreign alliances, early occurred. To negotiate these with any probability of success, required a renunciation on the part of America of all political connection with Great Britain.

The ERA had now arrived, for the establishment of the EMPIRE of LIBERTY, in the NEW WORLD.

The GENERAL CONGRESS, on the ever memorable fourth of July, in the year 1776, "appealing to the SUPREME JUDGE of the world for the rectitude of their intentions, solemnly published and declared that the United Colonies were; and of right ought to be, *free and INDEPENDENT STATES*; and that they were absolved from all allegiance to the *British Crown*. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence, they mutually pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor."

The remembrance of that august transaction we now celebrate. This day, this glorious day, by the united voice of the millions of America, is dedicated to the exultations of PATRIOTISM, the triumphs of LIBERTY, and to *gratitude to HEAVEN*!

The sacred "*pledge*" of American "*honor*" was not forfeited; her "*reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence*," was not in vain; and the Supreme Judge of the world, to whom she had appealed, justified "*the rectitude of her intentions*," by accomplishing, after an eight years war, the object for which she had fought!

The most illustrious actors on that theatre of honor, have survived the storm of war; they enjoy the rewards of patriotism, in the highest offices of the government; they still continue to bless their country.—Whilst the names of WASHINGTON, ADAMS, and HAMILTON, give a lustre and dignity to virtue; dear to America, and forever sacred be the memory of THOSE, who fought and bled in so righteous a cause.

Are not the spirits of MERCER, MONTGOMERY, and WARREN, from the regions of immortality, looking down, with the sublimest transport, on the present felicities of their country? Do I not hear a celestial choir chanting that consolatory Ode "*Tis delightful, tis honorable, to die for our country.*" (a) Others, who lived to see the cause of Liberty crowned with glorious success, have since taken the highest stand in the TEMPLE OF FAME. There a splendid wreath of military honor encircles the brow of GREEN; and SCIENCE, rejoicing in the acquisitions of her empire, and HUMANITY, brightening with new irradiations of benevolence, minister to the immortal spirit of FRANKLIN.

(a) *Horace.*

The magnitude of the American revolution, and the consequent happiness of our country, deserve our attention—America, from a state of undefined dependence on Great Britain, has assumed an illustrious rank among the nations of the Earth. Her trade, no longer the monopoly of a single foreign nation, has extended itself to every quarter of the globe. Mercantile enterprize, no longer restricted, has penetrated the remotest regions. The Baltic and the Mediterranean, the Brazils and the Bay of Hudson, China and the Indies, the immense Eastern and Pacific Oceans, are witnesses of our commerce.

Whilst our citizens have enriched themselves, by their commercial industry, the means have been furnished, by the most imperceptible species of taxation, to establish funds adequate to all the objects of national justice and policy. The permanent resources of our country, constituting the common stock of the happiness and enjoyments of our citizens, in their hands remain untouched: These await her call, if any great occasion should render them necessary.

America, from her fortunate situation, and from the mild spirit of the government, is a stranger to that system of *war* and *taxes*, of *ambition* and *miser*y, which is the scourge of Europe, and which subjects to the ex-tremest wretchedness nine tenths of her inhabitants:

Where "one man,
Compounded and made up like other men
Of elements tumultuous, in whom lust
And folly, in as ample measures meet,
As in the bosoms of the slaves he rules,
Becomes a despot absolute, and boasts
Himself the only freeman of his land ;
And when he pleases, and on whom he wills,
Makes war, with any, or with no pretence
Of provocation given, or wrong sustained ;
Forces the beggarly last doit, by means
That his own humour dictates, from the clutch
Of poverty, that thus he may procure
His thousands, weary of penurious life,
A *splendid opportunity to die !*" (e)

(e) *Cooper's Poems.*

To a system so replete with *debasement* and *misery*, may America forever continue a stranger!

The encrease of our population, and the extension of our settlements, have been still more considerable than the growth of our commerce. The circumstances relative to this subject, which will not fail to astonish posterity, can neither pass unnoticed, or unadmired by the present generation. History furnishes us with nothing similar to the amazing occurrences which in this regard are taking place in America. That a country of such extent as the United States, should, in a period little longer than a century and an half, be converted from a *wilderness* covered with forests, into the *busy haunts* of men, is a spectacle never before presented to human observation. The enquirers into the ancient population of *Europe*, have doubted whether the number of her inhabitants have greatly increased within the last two thousand years. The *small republics* of Greece were founded many ages before the time of Solon and Lycurgus; *Italy* also saw a long period intervene between the building of Rome and the establishment of the consular power: And yet many centuries elapsed after the times last mentioned, before those *minute regions* became generally occupied by the genuine Greeks and Romans. In *America*, since the commencement of the war, a million souls have been added to our population; within the same period a country as extensive as the Island of Great Britain has been covered with people! The eastern counties of our own Commonwealth, the northern counties of New-Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, the western districts of New-York, and the back country of the Southern States, will amply prove the truth of this remark.

Within the last eighteen years the GENIUS of CULTIVATION has explored his way over the *appalachian hills*, descended into the fertile regions on the *Ohio* and *Mississippi*, and conducted to the bosom of that *delightful wilderness* more than SEVENTY THOUSAND inhabitants—In consequence of the American Revolution, political knowledge has emerged from her state of pupilage, and directed her attention to its most deserving object, the equal happiness of all men.

The doctrine of an equality of rights, as founded in nature and the reason of things, has been vindicated. The system of representative governments, grounded on the choice of the people, as the legitimate source

source of authority, has extended itself; and been more firmly established. The right of a people to alter the forms of their governments, or, to establish new ones, whenever it becomes necessary to their political happiness, has received the fortunate sanction of American experience.

The animating principles of civil Liberty have not been confined to America. The FIRE that was kindled here, and which spread its *salutary light* over the NEW-WORLD, has beamed its rays on the EASTERN HEMISPHERE, and *burns* in Europe. During the last age, a spark was struck out by the collision of the *Parliaments* and *Clergy* of France: This had not become extinct at the period of the American war. The French troops, who fought in America, returned to Europe the *advocates* of freedom. PHILOSOPHY too raised her piercing voice, and *despotism* trembled for his fate. A new order of things commenced in France, and we have seen the immense *fabricks* of *religious superstition* and *civil tyranny*, swept away with the besom of destruction.

Whilst the enlightened sons of FREEDOM, and the children of BENEVOLENCE have compassionated the groans of their oppressed brethren, whilst with transport they have seen the *debasing corruptions* of the old world shrink at the *regenerating touch* of LIBERTY, and a new vista opening into future times, for the happiness of men; Ah! how have their souls been sickened with the *sad reverse*! How weeps HUMANITY the outrages she endures!

O, LOUIS! thou mildest monarch of a race of Kings, the SWORD which thou heldest out for the defence of American Liberty, hath *pierced* thy generous heart! LIBERTY is wounded by the atrocity of thy *unworthy* fate—INDIGNANT JUSTICE has flown from the *unblessed* scene—and *anarchy* and *assassination* are prowling o'er thy tomb!

The flame of Liberty, which in America was mild and benign, in France has become a Volcano of fire, that threatens to bury in one promiscuous ruin the monuments of *despotism*, and all the works of *civilization*.

In America, justice, moderation, order and religion disdained not to follow in the train of Liberty: in France—But perhaps I am entering on dangerous ground: Perhaps a revolution from the extremes of *Arbitrary Power*, to the fair mid-way region of temperate LIBERTY, without a vibration towards *Anarchy* and *Licentiousness* is impossible. Whilst all

our speculations are confounded amidst the contradictory variety of European information, there is perhaps but one point at which it is safe to rest. If the renovation of France be the design of heaven, it will not *ultimately* be defeated, neither by the crimes of the dæmoniacs of Paris, nor by the efforts of a *confederacy*, the most extensive and formidable, that ever astonished mankind.

Whilst Europe is involved in the horrors and devastations of war, AMERICA is reposing in the calm *sunshine* of PEACE; her *prosperity*, the *envy*, and her GOVERNMENT the *ambition*, of the eastern world. To trace the vestiges of so unparralleled a progress in the career of glory and happiness, is beyond the scope of the present address. A single sketch is all that can be expected.

The dissolution of the Colonial governments, at the time of the declaration of Independence, was followed by the establishment of Constitutions chosen by the citizens of the respective Colonies—Each Colony became an independent republic—To combine these in one general union, articles of *confederation* were adopted—By virtue of these articles, the federal representatives were invested with little more than a mere nominal power, or the authority of recommendation—The *pressure* of the war, and the *enthusiasm* of Liberty, produced a patriotism and unanimity which superseded the necessity of energetic laws, and concealed the weaknels of the Federal Government. Upon the conclusion of the war, the debility of this system became palpable.

America was threatened with a universal disorganization. The *dissensions* and *jealousies*, the *interested politics*, and *wild anarchy* of the Grecian Republics, were about to be repeated on the great theatre of America. In this gloomy eclipse of the hopes of our country, a light sprung up from the midst of darkness. The CONSTITUTION of the United States was formed by a Convention of the most illustrious characters, and adopted by the citizens of the respective states. To this *source*, we trace the present happiness of America. This *event* forms another glorious ERA, in the history of our country. The leading speculations of gloomy politicians, on this subject, have been convicted of sophistry, by the irresistible light of truth and experience—Under the AUSPICIOUS ADMINISTRATION of this CONSTITUTION, have we not seen the accomplishment of all the great objects, for which it was designed?

signed? Have we not seen a *more perfect union formed, justice established, domestic tranquility ensured, and the general welfare GLORIOUSLY promoted?*

YES! all America, in the particulars I have mentioned, realizes the most important blessings—*Disorder and confusion* have fled beyond the Atlantic Ocean—The *dæmon insurrection*, divested of his savage nature, has assumed the mild virtues of humanity, and become a partizan of ORDER—PUBLIC CREDIT has obtained a glorious resurrection; and the hearts of the war-worn soldier; and of the destitute widow and orphan, have been made to sing for joy.

An Eulogy upon the FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS, and other great and wise measures of the Congress, since the adoption of the CONSTITUTION, is superfluous;—Their highest praise is written in the most SPLENDID CHARACTERS, on the WHOLE FACE of our country; it is painted in the most *amiable colours*, on the HAPPINESS and PROSPERITY of all our citizens!

Yes, my respected auditors, amidst the convulsions and miseries of Europe, every true friend of America finds new motives of attachment to his country—Where shall we find a region blest with so great natural advantages? Where shall we discover so much *useful knowledge and information* so equally, so universally diffused, amongst all classes of the people? look thro' every quarter of the globe, examine the history of all past ages, where shall we find an example of equal happiness and prosperity enjoyed by any other people on the earth?

Whilst the face of our country, under the improving hand of agriculture, brightens with smiles, and the wilderness blossoms like the rose; whilst industry is sure of the reward of opulence, and enterprise opens a thousand avenues to wealth; whilst the hearts of all our citizens are filled with food and gladness, and the cherub health, with that rosy bloom which

“*Nature's fair and cunning hand laid on*” ¶

Gives the highest relish to every enjoyment; have we not reason to love our country?

Whilst the fabric of our government unites with the blessings of LIBERTY, the dignity of ORDER, and the energy of POWER; whilst

¶ Shakespear.

impartial

impartial justice administers the laws, in protecting innocence, and guarding the acquisitions of industry ; whilst the rights of nature are secured from the ravages of *anarchy* and the grasp of *oppression* ; have we not reason to venerate that government ?

YES, my fellow citizens, we LOVE our COUNTRY ; we GLORY in her CONSTITUTION ; and we HONOUR her illustrious ADMINISTRATORS !

Let *baggard envy* calumniate those virtues which she cannot imitate : Let *anarchy*, under the semblance of PATRIOTISM, bellow his apprehensions of the dangers of LIBERTY, whilst he conceals a *poignard* to stab her to the heart : We know their *false* and *bollow* voice ; their malice shall not disturb our tranquility : We respect those VIRTUES which have dignified our COUNTRY !

Whilst, on this occasion, we celebrate the commencement of AMERICAN LIBERTY, to secure the perpetuity of HER reign, let us rally around the standards of order, stability, and obedience to the laws. Let PEACE and GOOD WILL towards men be the scope of HER *ambition*, and the badge of HER *distinction*, and we may hope that her EMPIRE will be IMMORTAL !

T H E E N D.