

AN  
ORATION,

DELIVERED

IN THE DUTCH CHURCH IN SCHENECTADY,

AT THE REQUEST OF

*THE PHILOMATHEAN SOCIETY,*

ON THE 4th OF JULY, 1803.

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BY MILTON MAXCY, A. B.  
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*Schenectady, 7th July, 1803.*

SIR,

IN the name of the Philomathean Society, we return you their thanks for the Oration delivered by you on the Anniversary of American Independence, and request a copy for the press.

GARDNER B. PERRY,  
CHARLES A. FOOTE,  
CORNELIUS C. CUYLER, } *Committee.*

Mr. MILTON MAXCY.

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GENTLEMEN,

IN compliance with your request, a copy is delivered to you for publication.

MILTON MAXCY.

Messrs. GARDNER B. PERRY,  
CHARLES A. FOOTE, COR-  
NELIUS C. CUYLER.

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*ORATION, &c.*

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**T**WENTY-SEVEN years ago, America shook off the fetters of dependence and declared herself free. Assembled to commemorate that important day, which recalls for a moment a portion of that spirit which animated her citizens in the achievement of her independence, and brings to our view the brightest period in her annals, we must mingle many melancholy reflections with our joys. Of the warriors who crowded our fields, of the patriots who rose against our oppressors, and of the statesmen who filled our councils, in a revolutionary contest hitherto unprecedented, many have descended to their tombs, and left to their posterity the mournful recollection of their sufferings, and the grateful remembrance of their valour and their virtue. They left a patrimony bought with their blood, their treasures and their wisdom; a country vast in extent; a government free, yet energetic; a constitution, not drawn from the closets of modern philosophers, or from the cells of monks, but compiled from the wisdom and experience of other ages; laws originating in justice and embracing the public welfare, and a reputation, which men only like themselves can preserve.

THE events of our revolution have often furnished a theme for former orators. Our pride has been heightened, our passions warmed, and our patriotism kindled by the splendid picture of a nation rising from the desolations of war to freedom, prosperity, and renown. The canvases of the painter, the pen of the poet, and the tongue of the orator, have immortalized every scene of our hostilities, of our defeats and our victories. The sublimest efforts of the imagination, the profoundest reason, the acutest invention, and the most splendid eloquence, have been called forth to perpetuate the glory of our country. The names of our heroes have been registered on the golden scroll of immortality, and our nation enrolled among the happiest and the freest on the globe.

LEAVING to others the recital of those deeds which gave renown to our revolution; leaving those scenes over which the flowers of rhetoric have been so often scattered, I shall, on the present occasion, call your attention to the importance of a firm and decisive National Character. The acquisition of our independence would ultimately be of but little consequence, should we not raise some barrier to prevent the encroachments of our future enemies, and to guard us against the possibility of future dangers. This barrier must be formed, not by our strength, our opulence, or our numbers, but by the minds of our citizens. Nations, like individuals, receive the stamp of in-

famy, or of greatness, from their respective characters. Ignorance and pusillanimity, weakness and timidity, will always bear the reproaches; while wisdom and courage, firmness and magnanimity, will meet with the applause and respect of mankind. The generous indignation and the hardy boldness with which a nation defends its rights, and the steady dignity with which it supports its station in the world, impress the mind more forcibly than the cold calculations of its extent of territory, or its multitude of inhabitants. It presents us with a grand and sublime spectacle, over which the imagination may range without satiety, and which reason may examine without disgust. Fear to resent an injury, and acquiescence in insult, will soon render a people too dispirited to resume their proper courage, or too weak to repel their aggressors. Consciousness of a character never degraded, and of an honor never stained, as it gives fearlessness to an individual, gives energy to a nation.

To support our national honour, to strengthen our independence so dearly purchased, to give dignity to our country, to perpetuate the renown acquired by our ancestors, and to continue to us the blessings of peace, a national character must be established; not such an one as depends on temporary expedients, the miserable refuge of a weak statesman, nor which owes its existence of the situ-

ation, the temper or the imbecility of other nations; but one that shall extort the respect and compel the fear of our enemies, however formidable their strength, or inexhaustible their resources. The bold defenders of our freedom have sketched the outlines of such a character, and it remains for you to complete the picture.

OTHER nations have originated in darkness and obscurity; their progress unknown or unobserved, until they had slowly risen to power, to splendor and prosperity. Time, co-operating with exertion, accident or revolution, has given permanence to their laws, and stability to their governments. The origin of ours was widely different. Casting back our eyes over two centuries, we behold the unfortunate and oppressed of the Eastern World leaving the abodes of civilization to found an empire and cultivate a wilderness. The fictions of ancient poets, which have won the approbation and commanded the wonder of ages, contain nothing which could equal an enterprize like this. Separate companies landing on an extensive country, formed distinct communities, regulated by different laws, and subjected to different authorities. Strongly connected neither by the ties of friendship, of allegiance nor interest, they nourished the seeds of discord, of jealousy and opposition.

OUR constitution was formed amidst the tur-

bulence, weakness and confusion, in which a long war had left this country. To accommodate it to the various dispositions, expectations and wishes of the people, to satisfy their prejudices and calm their passions, while the ruins of war were still smoking around them, were beyond the power of man. Our legislators, though they had before them the models of every form of government from the simplicity of a Grecian Republic to the complexity of a British Monarchy, though they were aided by the researches of the most profound statesmen, and though they borrowed light from every luminary of ancient or modern age, well knew they could not indissolubly unite in one compact body so many discordant and disordered communities. God had endued them with no such miraculous powers, and when they had performed their task, they might well exclaim in the language of Solon, though we have not given you a perfect form of government, nor a perfect code of laws, we have given you the best that your country can bear. Their wisdom foresaw the necessity of an union in manners, in morals and in laws.

THE proud sovereignties of the different states were yielded to national supremacy with cautious circumspection and jealous timidity. Men with difficulty submitted to a government, whose external form bore a strong resemblance to that from

which they had recently emancipated themselves. They expected it would smother that noble spirit of liberty they had imbibed, and chill that patriotic ardour which had led them from toil to toil, from danger to danger, and from victory to victory. They were not anxious to bind round their ancles the fetters they imagined they had shaken off, nor would they rivet round the necks of their posterity the chains they had once broken over the heads of their tyrants. Such were the agitations of those times, and such the phantoms conjured up by the magicians of the day to disquiet and divide. Our legislators beheld these unhappy differences, but could not remedy them. They wisely left it to time to strengthen, cement and polish the fabric they had erected. Though their exertions were partially crowned with success, they looked forward with anxiety to the completion of their grand and noble design.

THE hand of time has not yet moulded into similarity the various descriptions of inhabitants who have flocked to our country from every quarter of the globe. The change in their situation makes no rapid change in their discontented minds. Transport them to the naked wilds of Siberia, or to the burning deserts of Arabia, and they would retain their habits, their morals, their religion, their opinions, their language, and even their prejudices. Forming a motley assemblage of virtue

and vice, of wisdom and weakness, they have retarded our acquisition of a firm national character. They have transplanted the arts of the old world, which we must nourish; but they have sown the seeds of dissipation and luxury, which we must eradicate.

THE turbulence of that party spirit, which ransacks the abodes of private life for tales of slander, which corrupts the minds and poisons the felicity of our citizens, and disturbs the ashes of the dead, requires a correcting hand. Some noble object must be placed in view, which will animate our pride, unite our exertions, and repay our industry. In vain should we search for such an object amid the splendors of a monarchy, or the terrors of a despotism; in vain should we search for it, in the vicissitudes of a turbulent democracy, or in the pomp of a ferocious consulate. It can only be found in the realms of liberty and peace. Such an object we may yet have, in acquiring and supporting a firm national character; a character which may give splendor to our country, and do honour to human nature. The welfare of the United States imposes this task upon you. The minds of our countrymen are flexible. The means are in your hands to give them a proper direction, and can only be lost or misapplied by our jealousy, or our negligence, our ignorance or our corruption. Shielded by a vast ocean from

the forms of foreign war, and spreading over a territory unequalled in fertility, comprehending the fairest inheritance on earth, we may have a prospect of greatness which ambition can never tarnish, which the united efforts of our enemies cannot destroy, and of a renown which the lapse of ages cannot diminish.

Good faith towards other nations is the foundation of national honor. In the vast variety of connexions which it is necessary for us to form by means of convention or treaties, we must strictly adhere to the severest maxims of justice. On the sacred observance of every stipulation made by us, and a quick resentment and prompt punishment of every injury depend our commercial prosperity, and what is still more valuable, the respectability of our country. The faith of a nation once solemnly pledged and wantonly broken, renders her not only infamous, but contemptible. The indignation of mankind will follow her perfidy. Punic faith was once synonymous with treachery; and Carthage could never retrieve her lost character by the valour of her armies, the strength of her fleets, or the opulence of her cities. Such will be our fate should we ever encroach upon the rights of other nations, or wantonly violate those obligations by which we have once solemnly bound ourselves. Treaties are the bonds by which the vast societies of the earth are connected together, and the infraction of

their minutest articles attaches an indelible stigma to the national aggressor.

OUR intercourse with other nations must be protected by something more formidable than the bare threatenings of our vengeance. Menaces are the impotent weapons of impotent statesmen. Situated at such a distance from countries with which we have important commercial connexions, we must make them see and fear, if not feel, our power. Hence arises the necessity of a naval force to protect our defenceless merchants from the plunderers of the ocean, and to maintain our respectability abroad. Look at Britain; not so large as some of our states, yet her naval victories have procured her the respect of the world. Her sails are seen from the stormy coasts of Greenland, and the thunder of her cannon is heard beyond the Pacific. Without the aid of her fleets, she would long since have been enrolled among the petty realms of some successful tyrant.

STRICT attention should be paid to the qualifications of persons clothed in diplomatic characters. They should be selected from among those who are revered for their virtues, their wisdom, and their experience; not from the dregs of a party, or the sycophants of power, but from among those who would despise the petty ambition of rising to official stations without talents to execute their duties, and who would disdain to be habited in the trappings of power, unless to benefit the

country which required their services. They are chosen to represent the dignity and defend the rights of their country ; and can those who have neither probity nor patriotism, firmness nor honour, accomplish the important objects of their missions ? Mankind are apt to suspect that a nation which elevates the vicious or the weak, the ignorant or the intriguing, to such stations, has no dignity to represent, no honour to maintain. Motives of temporary policy should never influence our rulers to make such appointments, or to sacrifice to expediency the permanent welfare of their subjects. Conscious of its importance, they should transfer no power to those whom temptation would induce to betray their trust ; they should distribute no douceurs to bribe the menials of a foe, nor depend upon favourable contingencies to purchase the rights they are afraid openly to defend. Guided by the maxims of wisdom, and the voice of experience, they should delegate their authority to those only who have a reputation to preserve, and interest to defend, and ability to revenge the injuries done to their country.

TURNING to our own country, we discover an ample field for improvement. Nothing raises the reputation of a country more than the cultivation of literature. It encircles her national character with a glory that can never fade, and transmits the exploits of her heroes for future ages to admire and imitate. Letters have consecrated to

immortality the names of those nations which have been swept from the face of the globe by the ravages of time, or the devastations of war. They leave on the ruins of those countries, the noblest trophy, the pride, the power, or the wisdom of man can erect. We gaze upon the records of their existence, their glory, and their fall, with enthusiastic ardour and hallowed veneration. The destruction of those transitory objects which have roused ambition, or called forth avarice and rapacity, excite no emotions but those of scorn and disgust in the bosoms of mankind; but it kindles their indignation, when the ravagers of the earth display the torch of war in the shades of philosophic repose, deface the monuments of art, or destroy the records of science. Literature is the mother of all the milder virtues. The arts and sciences require the protecting hand of national power to raise from their present degraded situation to that perfection of which they are capable. A National University would be considered by wise Legislators as an object of the first importance to our country. It would foster that noble pride and dignified independence of the mind which are ever the attendants of true patriotism. The youth of our country would no longer be compelled to resort to the repositories of learning in Europe to acquire an education which their own country would be better able to bestow. A spirit of emulation would pervade our institutions, and

an ardour for improvement would awaken our students from the slumbers of dulness and pedantry. An uniform system of education throughout the United States would facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, enlightening and polishing society, reforming the manners, correcting the habits, and cultivating all the virtues which adorn human life. To harmonize the discordant modes and systems of education which prevail in our country, requires the aid of gradual change and gentle innovation. Rapid alterations would disorganize rather than unite the community.

THE laws of our country are the securities of all the peace and happiness we enjoy, when undisturbed by foreign foes. They are the ramparts which surround our life, liberty, and property. A small knowledge will inform us that good laws are the result of time, of study, of wisdom and experiment. Their defects must be supplied, and their errors corrected as their inconveniencies are felt, or as observation adds to the stock of human knowledge. Where the rich can neither oppress the poor, nor the flagitious injure the honest, the most fruitful source of oppression is destroyed; but if once the sanctuary of justice is invaded, and the judicial tribunal corrupt, we may bid farewell to our happiness. To be able to obtain redress for our wrongs, the limits of our duties and our rights must be accurately known; but such is the dis-

cordance of the laws in the different parts of the United States, that a stranger, in passing through them, would one day find himself governed by the mandates of a tyrant, and the next, by the regulations of a mob. By assimilating the laws of the different states, a more perfect and beautiful system of jurisprudence would be formed out of the incoherent mass which now disgraces our country. State partiality, prejudice and jealousy, would no longer disturb our repose, and the pillars of our national fabric be strengthened.

In a representative government, caution and circumspection should watch over the private characters of candidates for offices. Private dishonesty, and public treachery are nursed in the same bosom. Selected as the guardians of our national welfare and national honour, they would but ill deserve their stations, did they not possess that firmness which would resist the calls of ambition, and that courage which would defend their country in the hour of danger. Jealousy for liberty should mark with a vigilant eye and a firm hand the conduct of our rulers, but not embarrass their measures with unfounded complaints, indiscriminate opposition or bold menaces. In selecting our rulers we should throw aside the petty distinctions of party, and give our confidence to those only, who merit our reverence for their virtues, our applause for their wisdom, and

our admiration for their magnanimity. They will give an unbending firmness to our national character, and add an untarnished glory to our country.

LET the purest principles of morality and religion be inculcated from our pulpits, and the chastest manners exemplified in the circles of our societies. Let fathers instil into their children the sentiments of humanity, of generosity, of justice, and of national honour. Spartan firmness, Grecian wisdom and Roman patriotism, may revive in our country. Those principles which are now imbibed; those manners and habits which are now formed, will give a tincture to distant ages.

DESTROY not those gradations in society, which education, the endowments of nature, or the smiles of fortune have formed. By breaking a link in that chain which connects them in beauty, in order, in proportion and harmony, and you level in the dust the proudest fabric of human glory. You let loose the angry passions, the tumultuous desires and the licentious ambition of man, which, like a torrent, sweep away all the land marks of society. No man can restrain their ravages or prescribe bounds to their course; but by preserving and strengthening them, you act in subservience to the dictates of nature.

By such means our national character would rise in the estimation, and command the applause

of mankind. Americans would have a new obligation to bind them to their country. It would reward them with that honour which titles cannot bestow nor wealth purchase. It would nourish that noble enthusiasm of the soul, that love of virtuous fame, which softens all the toils and braves all the terrors of life, which leads through the paths of danger and adversity to immortal renown. America, reposing on the grandeur of her national character, formed by her just laws, upheld by the arts and sciences, strengthened by the pure manners and strict morals of her citizens, ennobled by her justice towards other nations, and rendered illustrious by the wisdom of her rulers, might withstand the united efforts of the world to enslave or divide her. While thus increasing in prosperity, every wave of the Atlantic would waft to our shores the produce of every climate, agriculture would brighten our western mountains, and our classic domes would rise, where once the calumet of the savage streamed on the desert air.

RICHES may corrupt but cannot ennoble a nation. The poison of Spain has flowed from the caverns of the Andes. That country once renowned for her generous pride; her dignified loyalty, her courage, her magnanimity and her fearless honour, is now sunk into the vilest sloth, ignorance and despotism. Her sons can no longer be

roused to exertion by recalling to their minds the examples of their ancient valour. They can no longer be waked by the clarion of renown to follow in the bright steps of their ancestors. But America has a nobler prospect. Undisturbed by the commotions of the eastern world, yet feared and respected, she would no longer be influenced by the precarious friendship, or dependent on the treacherous alliance of other nations. Whatever was dignified in ancient or in modern times, whatever was worthy in character or noble in conduct, would be imitated by her sons. Equally despising the illustrious villainy of a modern usurper, or the ungrateful perfidy of an ancient tyrant, they would endeavour by their actions to render themselves worthy of the country which gave them birth.

THE loss of a firm national character, or the degradation of a nation's honour, is the inevitable prelude to her destruction. Behold the once proud fabric of a Roman Empire—an Empire carrying its arts and arms into every part of the eastern continent; the monarchs of mighty kingdoms dragged at the wheels of her triumphal chariots; her eagle waving over the ruins of desolated countries. Where is her splendor, her wealth, her power, her glory? Extinguished forever. Her mouldering temples, the mournful vestiges of her former grandeur, afford a shelter to her muttering Monks. Where are her statesmen, her sages, her

philosophers, her orators, her generals? Go to their solitary tombs and enquire. She lost her national character and her destruction followed. The ramparts of her national pride were broken down, and Vandalism desolated her classic fields.

CITIZENS will lose their respect and confidence in our government if it does not extend over them the shield of an honourable national character. Corruption will creep in and sharpen party animosity. Ambitious leaders will seize upon the favourable moment. The mad enthusiasm for revolution will call into action the irritated spirit of our nation, and civil war must follow. The swords of our countrymen may yet glitter on our mountains, their blood may yet encrimson our plains. Drawing aside from such a scene the curtain of futurity, we might behold our enemies entering upon the breaches of our civil distractions, the flames of war blazing from one end of our country to the other, the brave and the good retiring in despair to the tombs of their ancestors, and forming with their bones their last rampart against the destroyers of their freedom, and desolated America split into jealous and turbulent confederacies, or crushed by the iron hand of a despot.

SUCH the warning voice of all antiquity ; the examples of all republics proclaim may be our fate. But let us no longer indulge these gloomy anticipations. The commencement of our liberty

presaged the dawn of a brighter period to the world. That bold enterprizing spirit which conducted our heroes to peace and safety, and gave us a lofty rank amid the empires of the world, still animates the bosoms of their descendants. Look back to that moment when they unbarred the dungeons of the slave and dashed his fetters to the earth, when the sword of a WASHINGTON leapt from its scabbard to revenge the slaughter of our countrymen. Place their example before you. Let the sparks of their veteran wisdom flash across your minds, and the sacred altars of your liberty crowned with immortal honours, rise before you. Relying on the virtue, the courage, the patriotism and the strength of our country, we may expect our national character will become more energetic, our citizens more enlightened, and may hail the age as not far distant, when will be heard as the proudest exclamation of man, I AM AN AMERICAN.

### TO THE MILITIA.

To the gentlemen of the Militia it must afford peculiar pleasure to join in celebrating the day which gave us independence. To you we look up for the defence of our country in emergencies, which it is impossible to foresee or completely to guard against ; and though the garb of peaceful life may be exchanged by you for the habiliments of war, yet the feelings of the citizen

ought ever to be intermingled with the bravery of the soldier. Warlike atchievements give a splendor to the human character which we are compelled to admire, while we deprecate their necessity ; but liberty sometimes requires, and justice sanctions, a recourse to the sword. Patience and obedience, humanity and courage, are the first virtues of a soldier ; industry, honesty, and generosity, are the first duties of a citizen. Combining these qualifications, you are treading in the path which your ancestors brightened by their example. You have a vast country to defend, and we know not how soon she may call for your services. Uncertain what may be our future fate, yet anxious for our peace and safety, we look round upon these waving ensigns with an assurance, that they will never be deserted in the hour of danger ; and those arms tell us, that while your bosoms throb with life, our enemies shall never enter beyond the threshold of our country. Nourish in your bosoms that generous pride, that dignified sense of honor, which is as prompt to repair an injury as to revenge an insult ; which leads the youthful warrior to deeds of renown, and bids the scarred veteran throb with transport, while his eyes are closing on the field of battle. Patriotism is the attribute of every good ; virtuous ambition the characteristic of every noble mind. Animated by them both, you require no other motives to rouse your exertion, and conduct

you to that success which will confer lasting honour on our national character.

THE Matrons of Sparta could once proudly exclaim, We have never beheld the smoke of an enemy's camp. The Matrons of America were doomed to a severer misfortune. They beheld their habitations wrapt in flames, their friends, their husbands, and their children butchered before their eyes by a merciless enemy. To prevent the repetition of such dreadful scenes, you are embattled as the guardians of our repose, our safety, and our honour. Connecting the military with the civil state, you strengthen the bonds of society, affording protection from insult, and a shield from invasion. In recalling to your minds the examples of your forefathers, who are now mouldering in their tombs, and pointing to the soil on which you tread, as the patrimony they have left you, you will consider its defence as the defence of yourselves, and of every thing dear to you in life. When the protection of a country is trusted to mercenaries, its independence is precarious. The sword, which is drawn in its defence, may be plunged in its bosom ; but the citizens of a country, by turning their arms against it, enslave themselves. The era of our independence reminds us of the glorious struggles of our infant militia, when veteran valour yielded to undisciplined intrepidity ; and the voice of liberty, echo-

ing in thunders across the globe, summoned our youth to the field of battle, warmed every heart with courage, and nerved every arm with strength. Cultivating their prudence, their courage, their patriotism, and their magnanimity, may you add splendor to the brave accomplishments of the foldier, and dignity to the mild virtues of the citizen.