

AN
ORATION,

TO COMMEMORATE THE
INDEPENDENCE

914
189

OF THE
UNITED STATES OF NORTH-AMERICA;

DELIVERED AT ZION CHURCH, IN FOURTH-STREET,

PHILADELPHIA, JULY 4th, 1791;

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY

OF THE
CINCINNATI.

BY ROBERT PORTER, A. M.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY T. DOBSON, AT THE STONE-HOUSE,
SECOND-STREET.

M, DCC, XCI.



E286

P54

1791

Office

AT an Annual Meeting of the *Pennsylvania Society of the
Cincinnati*, held at the State House, in Philadelphia, July
5th 1791—

On Motion, Resolved,

THAT the Thanks of this Society be presented to
ROBERT PORTER, Esquire, for the ORATION delivered
by him *yesterday*; and that he be requested to furnish the
Society with a Copy for Publication.

Extract from the Minutes,

JOSEPH HOWELL, SEC'RY.

TO THE HONOURABLE
HENRY KNOX, ESQUIRE,

Late MAJOR-GENERAL *in the* ARMIES *of the* UNITED
STATES, SECRETARY *for the* DEPARTMENT *of* WAR,
and SECRETARY *of the* GENERAL SOCIETY *of the*
CINCINNATI.

IN contemplating on a character to shield this performance, the youthful essay of dutiful indiscretion, from the darts of the ill-natured and uncandid, I could think of no person more proper than yourself. The patronage of a gentleman, who possesses superior abilities, joined with a generous and noble heart, will draw a veil over its defects. Possibly it may bring to your recollection, some of the scenes of the American Revolution, which you had so great a share in accomplishing. I am a stranger to flattery; but it is notorious that your name stands already recorded in the Book of Fame, among the Worthies, for a continued series of great

and good services to your country. Your conduct in domestic life is as amiable, as it is illustrious in public.

With every sentiment of respect,

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble servant,

ROBERT PORTER.

PHILADELPHIA, *July 6th, 1791.*

AN ORATION, &c.

LADIES *and* GENTLEMEN,

IN those countries, where the love of Liberty has prevailed in the greatest degree, it has been thought wisely conducive, to encrease the generous flame, that Orations should be delivered in commemoration of events productive of human felicity. Revolving years have ushered in the Anniversary of that day, which hailed our country Free and Independent. I have had the honor to be appointed by this respectable Society to prepare and pronounce the anniversary Oration of 1791. I am afraid, that I have undertaken a task not suited to my years, genius, or capacity. It is not enough, that inclination merely should prescribe, and take the lead:

Genius must attend and support her. I am doubtful that in my very out-setting here, I have thrown an insuperable bar in the way of proceeding, as I could wish, with any colour of propriety. Introduced in the early part of my youth among you, my former fellow-foldiers, with rapture I am impelled to pay homage to that glorious conflict, remarkable for the progressive increase of human happiness ; and yet all the homage I can pay, is quite too low for this illustrious subject. And any sentiments I have to offer on this occasion are scarcely worthy of being brought forward, before so polite and discerning an audience. However, in honourable attempts, there may be some merit, or at least admissible excuse, though one should fail of what might be desired. I proceed, relying on your candour and generous indulgence.

I CANNOT help congratulating my country upon the nobleness of our origin. In other nations, their establishment is generally buried in the rust of time, and is totally unknown : or when it has been discovered, it is so mean and contemptible,

ble, that their eloquent writers have been under the necessity of concealing it with all the graces of poetical fiction. Rome, the mistress of the world, owed her origin to a hardy band of ruffians, the outlaws of other societies : yet we find her admired historians so ashamed of their descent, that with the utmost stretch of ingenuity, they attempted to derive their ancestry from the Trojans. It is our peculiar situation that from the first settlement of this country, the love of civil and religious liberty was the predominant passion of its inhabitants. As it has been happily expressed, “ Fierce Oppression, rattling in her left hand the chains of tyranny ; and brandishing in her right hand the torch of persecution, drove our predecessors from the coasts of Europe. Liberty, benevolent and serene, pointing to a cornucopia on one side, and to a branch of olive on the other, invited and conducted them to the American shores.” The security of Property, and Freedom in Religion, roused all the latent powers of industry, and taught our fore-fathers to surmount the greatest obstacles,

and

and convert a dreary wilderness into a prosperous and flourishing country.

For a considerable time Great-Britain shewed a maternal fondness for her colonies. And the colonies acted the part of dutiful children. All was harmony and love. Reciprocal acts of friendship were received. We, foregoing every advantage, which we might have derived from a trade with foreign nations, consented to export to Great-Britain, what it was for her interest to receive. And we received in return whatever was for her advantage to send us. We even exposed ourselves to an enervating luxury, because the mother country was benefited by vending those articles. We sent our raw materials, with which Providence had blessed the country, to be manufactured for us, so that her artizans might meet with sufficient employment. We granted that she should regulate our commerce for her advantage. We fought and bled by her side with bravery and magnanimity against her enemies. She treated us in return as a judicious mother does her dutiful children. She
nourished

nourished and favoured us, and delighted in our prosperity. Her protecting arm was extended to us. She bound us to her, by the strong ties of affection and interest: and contented herself with a moderate share of power. We were rapidly rising to that dignity and honour never before known among mankind. We were the envy and admiration of the world. Great-Britain, when she had thus arrived to the zenith of her political grandeur, and failed the acknowledged sovereign of the sea, suddenly changes from her usual conduct, and contracts all the narrow views of an illiberal step-dame. A country famous for the growth of liberty, which had repeatedly endured the greatest hardships and difficulties, rather than part with that beloved object—it is a matter of regret that this country should entertain such intolerant principles that her children should not participate with her the blessings of liberty; but that she should undertake to sap the very foundations of that inestimable privilege in her colonies. An insidious policy took place in her cabinet. Anxious to support her treasury in all her classes of venality and corruption, she deter-

mines

mines that an arbitrary taxation shall prevail through all her provinces. Intoxicated with greatness, she wishes to imitate imperial Rome, and suffer a glimmering of liberty to remain at the center, but to extend the darkness of tyranny with all its odious trappings to her colonies, and make them groan under the extremity of slavery.

NOTHING was held out to our view, but unconditional submission, and abject slavery ; or else we must unsheath the desolating sword of war in the defence of our rights. It is the glory and boast of America, that in this dilemma she did not pause or ponder ; but nobly resolved to pour out the last drop of her blood at the altar of Liberty, rather than sacrifice the unalienable rights of humanity to the dæmon, Arbitrary Power. It must strike every person with astonishment, that an infant and unformed nation, unpractised in the arts, and unfurnished with the implements of war, should conceive the grand idea of emancipating herself from the shackles of a monarchy famed for military skill and prowess,

efs, and whose fleets and armies had often struck terror into ancient and powerful kingdoms, and shook them to the center. We did not irreligiously rush into the war. But from the one end of the continent to the other, we appealed to our common Father for the justice of our cause. We declared in the face of Heaven, “That we were not the aggressors in the war; and that we meant by it, not to acquire or even preserve dominion for its own sake, not conquest or empire, or the gratification of resentment, but solely to deliver ourselves from oppression; to gain reparation for injury; and to defend ourselves against men, who would plunder or destroy us.” In this awful and tremendous hour of danger, a kind superintending Providence sent a godlike hero, whose capacious soul was a bulwark of safety to his country, to extricate us from this impending ruin. There would be a degree of impropriety for me to attempt to draw the characters of those truly great men, who conducted in the cabinet and field, the American Revolution “From the gloom of unsuccessful supplication to the splen-
dor

12
dior of victory, and acknowledged sovereignty."

It would look like flattery, and might offend the delicate sensibility of many of my audience, who were principal actors in those scenes. Posterity will doubtless do them justice; nay, what is singular, their gallant actions, still fresh in our memory, pronounce their most ample panegyric. The history of the world cannot produce a similar revolution conducted with so much wisdom and prudence. Some future Xenophon will describe, how Franklin, the admiration of the world, unfolded the rights of man to his oppressed countrymen, and began the Revolution by his pen.—He will paint with what bravery and magnanimity, Warren, Montgomery, Mercer, and an host of Heroes, poured out their patriotic blood, in the defence of the standard of Liberty.—He will relate with what zeal, our gallant Governor, roused up the desponding hopes of the citizens, and brought them to act with efficacy, and dispelled the clouds of adversity, which darkened our political hemisphere.

The

THE noble actions of the generous Gates, will afford an ample field for description.--By capturing a British force of 10,000 regular troops, he made our cause fashionable in Europe; "It was the hinge on which the Revolution turned." While military science has votaries, and the Defender of his Country is held in estimation, the name of Knox will be honoured with applause, who conducted with judgment the thunder of war.—The much lamented Greene will produce a pleasing light in the southern war. A brave and good man struggling with adversity, and by the dint of abilities, at last coming off victorious.

WAYNE, that thunderbolt of war, will be held in perpetual remembrance by a grateful country. Lincoln, with St Clair, and many others who might be mentioned, will enliven the picture by their illustrious merits. The historian will describe how the *Most Worthby* with more than human prudence conducted the Revolution with his sword. Nor will the services of the late Superintendent of Finance pass unnoticed,

noticed. It may be truly said of him, that by his credit, he finished the arduous conflict.

AFTER a bloody contest of eight years, our Independence was completely accomplished. It is a Revolution that hath illuminated the world, and reflected the greatest advantages to mankind. How much has France profited by the generous aid she afforded us! Her officers and soldiers were placed in the school of Freedom, and here learnt the beauties and excellencies of that heavenly science. The subjects of France heard we were resisting oppression, and notwithstanding the aristocratic arts made use of to blindfold them, and to keep the causes out of view, which produced those effects; still it roused them to enquire into the principles of the contest, and that inquiry produced the fruits of knowledge, which despotism laboured in vain to destroy.—It was here M. de la Fayette acquired a more perfect knowledge of the rights of humanity. He early discovered a predilection for liberty, and a soul animated by ardour. When but a youth of nineteen years of age, possessed

possessed of the means of enjoyment, he quits the lap of luxury, and embarks in the cause of the Americans with the most disinterested and generous zeal. And this at a time when intelligence had arrived in Europe that the American insurgents, reduced to 2000 men, were fleeing through Jersey before a British force of 30,000. Great and noble character! While gratitude is ranked among the virtues, my countrymen, let the tribute of applause be plentifully poured out upon him. When he was not employed in the field at the head of our armies, he was engaged in learning the great principles of a free government. When the war ended, in his affectionate farewell, he breathed this noble sentiment from his magnanimous soul; "May this great monument, raised to liberty, serve as a lesson to the oppressor, and an example to the oppressed."

By the return of the French officers and soldiers to their native country, the beams of liberty shone with greater effulgence in France. Nothing but an opportunity was wanting to
 establish

establish a free government. Happy, thrice happy circumstance, that opportunity occurred! And M. de la Fayette, and his brave associates, improved it to the greatest advantage, for the benefit of the whole community. A constitution is formed, built upon the pillars of freedom, having the happiness of the people for its basis. France! you are truly fortunate in having a patriot King, who has been greatly instrumental in restoring your rights. By his princely conduct, your freedom cost but a few lives—our's, much blood and treasure. Reason dictated to your chieftain, that liberty should be extended to his people, to make them great and happy. He has proclaimed himself, “ Their father, their brother, and their friend; that he cannot be happy, but in their welfare; great, but in their glory; powerful, but in their liberty; rich, but in their prosperity; and he can only suffer, but in their afflictions.” By his virtue and patriotism, he has acquired a more dignified title than any monarch, the KING OF FREEMEN.

FRANCE

FRANCE has not only profited by our example, but the Old World bids fair to be regenerated by the New. The renovation of Great-Britain herself does not appear to be far distant. The majority of her citizens treat, with contempt, the horrid principles of the courtly Burke, and enlist in crowds under the banners of Common Sense. This is an age of revolutions. And the political heresies of passive obedience, non-resistance, the divine right of kings, and that the people were created to minister to the pride and ambition of their rulers, are fast wearing out; and will cause neither a sigh, nor a groan in the philanthropic mind, at their departure. The world begins to awaken from the slumbers into which she has been lulled by arbitrary power. The cabinet of kings can no longer prejudice nation against nation, by telling them that they are natural enemies. They begin to know one another, and that knowledge begets a love for each other, and a desire to procure happiness for themselves, and the great family of mankind. We have a well-founded hope, that the period is not far remote when the rest of the

B

world

world will follow the laudable example of America and France; and construct governments, that will embrace the happiness of the many, and not of the few. We will shortly see the proud oppressors of humanity struck with terror, and fall down with religious fear at the shrine of Liberty, and ask forgiveness for their manifold sins against her laws. They will receive absolution, upon their binding themselves to venerate and obey her rights for the future. We will behold the oppressed emerging from ignorance, wretchedness and poverty, to knowledge, happiness and plenty, together with all the other concomitant blessings of freedom.

THE sublime science of government, before the American revolution, was but in its infancy. The sons of America have studied the subject; and like true politicians and sound philosophers, have cleared it of the mysteries in which it has been so long involved. Some of our governments were formed in an early stage of the war, upon the spur of the occasion; and of course were crude and indigested in many parts. The en-
lightened

lightened citizens saw the defects and set about procuring a remedy. The fathers of our country were delegated by the people to plan a government, adequate to the exigencies of the union. An efficient confederation arises out of the wisdom of that assembly. The good qualities of the various governments heretofore established were judiciously culled and improved—the noxious weeds were wisely rejected. In the constitution may be observed the dispatch of a monarchy, without its enormous expence and vices. Wisdom and stability, without the insolence of an hereditary nobility, are its leading features. The freedom of the people is secured and guarded beyond the power of anarchy or despotism. It keeps the good of the public constantly in view. It promises a lasting union between the east and south, the Atlantic and Mississippi. If a politician had been told a few years ago, that a government would be thus formed, and established by the people; without hesitation he would have pronounced it impossible. We have solved the problem, and instructed the human race. Pennsylvania, with a spirit of harmony, has lately fol-

lowed this example, and constituted a government which sanctifies every hope of security to life, liberty, and property.

THE excellencies of the federal constitution are not merely problematical ; but when reduced to practice, the most salutary effects have been produced from it. Public and private credit has been restored, which has already become a mine of wealth to this country. Agriculture, commerce, and manufactures are regulated and shine with superior lustre. Every class and denomination of citizens feel the beneficent rays of the new constitution. The various departments of government are filled by men of the first abilities and integrity.

THAT this freedom and happiness may long, long continue—CITIZENS of the United States ! it is a duty incumbent upon you, to guard the avenues to the Temple of Liberty with the strictest attention. It is the nature of the human mind to degenerate into arbitrary power ; and we should be always prepared to nip it in the
bud,

bud, lest it should blossom and produce deadly fruit.

WE have the example of other nations, for many thousand years to point out the rocks on which they have been shipwrecked. From their misfortunes let us learn to be happy,

THE most brilliant imagination cannot form a point of human greatness which the United States may not attain. We inhabit a country enriched by the gifts of heaven, a temperate climate, and luxuriant soil, abounding with lakes and rivers, which, like veins and arteries, circulate the various blessings of life through all the system.

By the generous exertions of the citizens, the hand of art is about to make further improvements in nature. A noble rivalry has arisen between the states in promoting the improvement of roads and inland navigation. By this mean, our internal trade, manufactures and population, will rapidly increase.

AGRICULTURE,

AGRICULTURE, that school of all the republican virtues, has many respectable supporters. It justly commands honour and respect from every citizen. It banishes all effeminacy, and servility, the food of despotism. It keeps alive the noble principle of liberty. It gives an independence of spirit to the manners of the people, and diffuses the most exalted sentiments through the soul. It strengthens the body and invigorates the mind. I know, gentlemen of the Society, that this is a theme you delight to dwell upon. We denominated ourselves the Society of the Cincinnati, from the high veneration which we possessed for the character of that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, who rose awful from the plough to save his country—his country saved, he returned to the plough again with increasing dignity and honor.

THE gradual abolition of slavery is gaining ground, and will soon take place throughout the continent. The time will shortly come, when each state will be compelled to let the hapless African sleep undisturbed upon his native shore.

And

And may every breast glow with a desire to enlighten the natives of this land, who roam through the woods and wilds devoid of every finer art and elegance of life. To civilize them will redound more to our honor than to extirpate them. Our power is so great that we could efface them from the earth ; but we should beware of carrying our resentment too far.

LET us promote their happiness by disseminating among them those arts which embellish and adorn life. In their language, let us teach them to bury deep under ground the bloody hatchet ; and plant the tree of peace. Let us nourish and favour its growth ; and let them remain in tranquillity upon their mats, learning the works of peace and civilization. May the covenant chain of friendship be renewed between us, kept bright, and not suffered to contract any rust.

T H E E N D .