

AN

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ORATION

DELIVERED AT

PATERSON, NEW-JERSEY,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1825.



BY JAMES B. SHEYS.



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TO THE PUBLIC.

CIRCUMSTANCES have existed to prevent an *earlier* publication of the following ORATION. But the lateness of its appearance may be of some advantage to the fame of its *author*, as the good people, will be enabled, at this season of the year, to sit down to the reading of it with *cooler* faculties—and whether they applaud or condemn it, their decision will be justified by calm deliberation. If the piece may be considered worthy of applause, the author is happy in feeling that it is not too *late* to acknowledge a kindness—if its doom is to be *death*, he trembles to know that there will be sufficient time for a jury of critics to record their verdict.—It only remains for him to assure those who honour him with a perusal, that the piece is now published, precisely as it was spoken; and, thus publicly, to return thanks to those gentlemen who honoured him with their notice and attention on the memorable day which called it forth.

J. B. S.

Paterson, December 1st, 1825.

ORATION.



FELLOW CITIZENS:

THE man who fired the first shot at Lexington, may, long since, have gone to his reward. The wild flowers of the valley may now shed their embalming dew upon his undistinguished grave: the breeze may sing its saddest requiem over the place of his rest, nor be answered by a single heart! The traveller may tread where the first hero of the American Revolution slumbers in peace, and give to his memory not even the tribute of a tear. No epitaph shall there arrest his attention—*there* no monument declares a nation's remembrance. No record remains of a name, which, if now discovered, would be graven on the highest pinnacle of the highest hill: would be placed conspicuous as the unclouded sun; and the plaudits of happy millions, should, on this day of grateful recollections, sanction the merited honour.

And not only *here* should that honour be awarded—not only here: the patriots of every land should bless that name; should revere the man who bore it; should inspire their youth with emulation of his character, and point to the example of his glory, as to the guide of their ambition. Wherever hearts might glow with a generous admiration of greatness, an ardent love of liberty and a veneration of its bravest defenders; wherever a sentiment of universal benevolence was cherished, wherever the oppressors of mankind

found one true hand to oppose them, the name of the man who fired the first shot at Lexington would be breathed forth in the speech of every clime, mingled with the enthusiasm of feeling, and the acknowledgments of gratitude. That shot broke the charm of the tyrant's boasted invincibility—gave the great question of redress or submission to the impartial decision of omnipotence—called from the virtuous employments of peace, a hardy and fearless race to the defence of their rights, their laws and their homes; to bleed, to struggle, and to die for those unalienable privileges of human nature, free government and equal representation.

But history has not transmitted that name. Let us hope, as we are bound to believe, that he who bore it is now, with the thousands of his gallant compatriots whom this world shall view no more, enjoying the unchanging bliss of immortality—looking down from the blue arch of the silent skies upon the greatness, the happiness, the prosperity of emancipated America; won by their valour—secured by their prudence—and hallowed by their sufferings.

Fellow Citizens! We this day assemble to celebrate the anniversary of our independence; to recall with fondness and enthusiasm, the virtues and achievements of our fathers; to commemorate, with rational festivity, the day that ushered our nation into existence; to return thanks to the Almighty ruler of the universe for the peculiar blessings we enjoy. The first light of this day comes to the feelings of the American, wheresoever his fortunes may lead him, with the songs of his youth—with the breath of his native land, waking up in his soul the sweet remembrances

of her fruitful fields, her smiling skies, the wisdom of her sages and the triumphs of her heroes. Fancy conducts him to the sacred graves that enclose the forms of her departed saviours, and amid the adoring throngs who gather around the failing few remaining to recount the legends which this day will recall. The first light of this day breaks upon the dreaming sleep of the millions who claim this favoured land for their *home*, as the smile of heaven's messenger, come to call them forth to the great jubilee of freedom. How small is the number of those devoted men who reared that home, now lingering in life to hail that light, or joining in the rejoicings of those who bless it!

Departed fathers of America! Soldiers, Sages, Patriots, Statesmen! as firm to her welfare in the darkest as in the brightest times. Soldiers, fighting uninspired by the hope of plunder! Sages, free from the vanity of knowledge! Patriots, uninfluenced by power or the visions of office! Statesmen, too honest for bribery and for flattery too independent! The grave has closed upon you forever, yet you live in our fondest affections. Time may scatter his moss upon your tombs, yet the evergreens of fame shall obscure it; the tears shed at the places of your repose shall glisten in the light of your glory.

Surviving fathers of America!—the purest thoughts of the heart are often beyond the expressions of language: receive our looks as the eloquent evidences of our gratitude. Worthy companions of Washington! the happiness of a nation rewards your privations—the praises of a world are the admissions of your services. With love we greet you,—with pride we claim you as our kindred—with obedience we hail you

fathers ; and though the eye saddens as it glances round, to miss some venerable man—to see the veteran's sacred place vacant and desolate, or occupied by the stranger: though each year finds your numbers diminished—though we feel that even *good* men pass away like the splendor of evening—that they flit from sight like the shooting stars which sink into the sky no more to be visible on earth—yet fate cannot rob us of the consolation of knowing that their virtues survive on the imperishable tablets of memory—that their fame shall remain with succeeding ages, like the fixed planets, resplendent and unchangeable !

And who can turn over the pages of our history without being arrested by the remarkable situation of affairs at the commencement of that war which gave us freedom and a rank among the nations? A country partially cultivated and thinly inhabited—without public magazines or manufactories of arms—without a national treasury or a foreign credit—a people inexperienced in military science, or the profound systems of civil organization—opposed to the inexhaustible wealth, the imposing force, and the perfect preparation of Britain! An extensive line of coast to be defended, without a regular navy, against the power which then ruled the ocean, and on the land—the tried and tested veterans of Britain to be met by a band of husbandmen! In whom did our fathers trust? In Him, who dropped these worlds from his hollow hand and whom the echoes of the mountain praise! Strong in the consciousness of a just cause, they went forth to the fight, fearless and confiding; sincere in their intentions, the hopes and the prayers of a bleeding land were with them; patriots from principle, they shrunk

from the degradation of slavery : they felt the disgrace of submission ; well knowing the nature of those rights for which they had vowed to contend— they trusted in the might of truth—they confided in the God of Heaven! Unused to perilous and uncertain war, they yet obeyed the call of honour and their country ; and on the fields of Lexington, of Saratoga, of Monmouth, and of Yorktown, they proved that the buoyant spirit of freedom's volunteer is superior in the fight to the cold and hesitating pulse of the hireling. *There* they reared the monuments of their prowess—*there* they left the legacies of their glory!

Yes! it is to the reflecting intelligence, the deliberate courage, and the disinterested patriotism of her hardy yeomanry that America owes her largest debt of happiness ; and it is scarcely possible to be too prolix when dwelling upon the inspiring subject which their actions afford. When we remember that they fought, not for hire—that they struggled, not for an increase of dominion—that they bled, not for the flattering applause of the world—that they died, not to gratify the reckless ambition of a conqueror : while we feel that they fought for their sacred homes—that they struggled for rights endeared to every rational being—that they poured out their blood freely as flows the mountain spring, to gain a refuge for the persecuted of every land—that they died in the holy cause of freedom—the proud sensation amounts almost to ecstasy ; and the contemplation of our revolutionary worthies conveys to the mind an enlarged idea of moral sublimity.

Americans by birth! sons of heroes! Americans by adoption! liberal and reasonable men! All who

have assembled *here*, in cordiality and love, to return thanks to the Almighty ruler of the universe that a home has been reared in the west for persecuted humanity, I greet you *all* as brothers. Freedom, like genius, owns not the shackles of prejudice ; her blessings are confined to no locality ; she traverses the globe to scatter the seeds of happiness wheresoever a soil is fitted to receive them. But hither she oftenest returns—*here* her labours have been gloriously consummated ! Here her smile, like the light of day, shines equally around the poor and the rich—sparkles over all the plains, or cheers and brightens the mountain solitudes. Let no fatal jealousy, no blighting distrust create an estrangement between the *native* and the *foreigner* ; be united in hopes, interests and in resolve, and against the despots of the earth you shall prove invincible. Americans by adoption ! still give to your birth-place the thoughts of fancy or the tears of remembrance ; but, in choosing residence, government and laws, let reason dictate, and deliberate judgment decide. Americans by birth ! venerate the departed fathers of your country, and turn with manly affection to the snowy locks of the living. Persevere in the liberal and enlightened policy of giving the talent, enterprize and intelligence of other nations a refuge in America ; and the prosperity of the *present* shall be lost in the magnificence of the *future* : from the shores of the Atlantic to the far bounds of your republic, the forests shall have fallen, and the seas of the west shall be whitened by the sails of commerce.

Persevere in that policy, suggested as it is by wisdom, and sanctioned by experience, and the hopes of your fathers shall be realized, and the high trust repo-

sed in their children be nobly executed. Perish the parsimonious, the degrading prejudice, which would prompt you to sit down at the delicious banquet spread by freedom, in selfish enjoyment or in bigotted exclusion. You are but stewards of that banquet, appointed to see that the oppressed of all nations who make application with honesty of purpose, be there entertained in friendship, and that no distinction be made among the guests. For let these truths be ever remembered, to the honour of our ancestors; they fought—they suffered through a protracted war—they broke the chains of their country—they established the first republic. But they fought—they conquered in the name of *universal liberty*; they triumphed under the sanction of the broadest principles of religious toleration; and they rested from their labours, that all the victims of oppression, from every land beneath the sun, should rest with them. Possessed of this knowledge, that American who would seek to exclude his fellow man from a full participation of the blessings of freedom, because he may not be a *native*, it is not uncharitable to declare, would prove himself a traitor to the spotless memory of his fathers—regardless of the national dignity and blind to the true interests of his country.

But such a feeling *cannot* find entrance to the heart of an American; and those, not such by birth, can rejoice in avowing themselves Americans in sentiment. The scene which I have now the honour to survey, establishes most forcibly that beautiful truth, that, “here men from every climate meet as friends.” And it proves, that, in thus mingling cordially with *foreigners* in the celebration of their country’s independence, A-

americans retain a warm recollection of the services rendered by *foreigners* during the glorious war that won it. And who shall name La Fayette—who shall name Montgomery—who shall name Kosciusko, nor perceive the light of pleasure dance in every eye—the glow of honest gratitude mantle every cheek? Thus, my countrymen, thus we may show, that, where the people are intelligent and the government is in their hands, a sense of past obligation can be cherished; and that gratitude for benefits conferred upon the nation, is numbered among the public virtues.

It is not pretended that this favoured country can ever discharge the heavy debt which it owes to that incomparable man who, bound to it by no ties of kindred, owing no obedience to its laws, no allegiance to its government, left the fascinations of the gayest court in Europe; the blandishments of a young and lovely wife; the temptations of unbounded preferment—for the comfortless shelter of a soldier's tent in the wilds of America: That man who, declining the exalted station of a marshal of France, came, in the generous ardour of his titled youth, and accepted the garb of a subaltern in the unpaid and undisciplined army of struggling America: That man who came to us, like the rising sun, diffusing joy and brightness, where gloom and despondency had rested before, and awaking the wanderers of the night to a sense of returning hope! It is not pretended, that, from such obligation a people can ever be released: but in the heart-felt enthusiasm and the affectionate attention which have greeted and accompanied him, now that he has returned to us in all the greatness of unsullied age, it is discoverable that Americans cannot be forgetful of their

Washington's accomplished fellow-soldier; the man without fear and without reproach, whose name alone is an eulogy—**LA FAYETTE.**

And the brave, the good, the gifted Montgomery, the gallant son of oppressed and injured Ireland! the undaunted soldier—the blameless man! Where breathes the American who has not thrilled with admiration at his brilliant and rapid career, or melted with sorrow at the story of his early death? Born in a land where the scourge of tyranny is ever dropping blood—where the spirit of a generous people is shackled and debased, he saw and deplored evils which he could not redress, and he hastened to die for the cause of his adoption, the cause of freedom and the rights of man, where a new flag had been unfurled, and the call of nature was echoing among the mountains. Erin boasts of him as her son—but she weeps while compelled to add his name to the countless host who have been in vain her sons! America remembers him as her champion, and ranks him among the thousands of his countrymen, who nobly aided her triumphs; who died, to win imperishable fame—far from their homes in the green isle of the Ocean!

And unfading shall be the laurels upon the grave of Poland's immortal patriot, the disinterested Kosciuszko. While America is identified with his achievements, and her people are sensible to the blessings of independence, his memory shall be cherished. While this day shall restore to their recollection the sacrifices, the perils and the sufferings of their fathers, his services shall not be forgotten.

Fellow citizens! In every section of these United States, the wine cup is now sparkling, the glow of the

soul is kindling: the stream of feeling flows unchecked, while the light of gratitude shines upon it unclouded: the heart speaks out its thanks to Him who sitteth among the stars, while due honours are paid to departed and living *men*, the cares of life are for one day unfelt! But there is yet a melancholy duty to perform—to dwell, for a few moments, upon the unparalleled miseries, and wants, and indignities the men of the revolution endured in times of misfortune and defeat, that we may know how to prize the benefits arising from their final triumph. I would not recall these facts to excite anew the hostile feelings that once animated us against our parent country, or to cloud your day of joy with saddening reflections. But it is necessary to bring up the sorrow of the *past*, in order to enjoy, by contrast, the *felicity* of the *present*. “It is necessary to show how dearly our liberty was purchased; that, by the greatness of the price, we may the better know how to appreciate the blessing.” Let, therefore, your imaginations follow me to those floating hearses, the prison ships which, during several years of the revolutionary war, were moored in the harbour of New-York! *There*, shut out from the light of day and the pure breeze of the valley; far from the wife of his bosom—the home of his youth; the scene of many an hour of domestic joy and fond endearment; the much-loved spot where centred all his felicities—*there* behold the free-born husbandman of America loaded with chains! Mark his haggard cheek, his fevered lip, his sunken and languid eye. Oh! listen to his feeble cry for one draught of water—for one crust of bread—for one sight of his distant home and the loved ones *there*—for one word of blessing from his aged parent—one parting

glance of affection from the wife of his youth! But famine and cruelty sit brooding near; his supplications are unheeded—his faint voice is hushed amid the groans of death and the shrieks of anguish! No water moistens his parched and quivering lips; no crust is bestowed—no parent blesses him at the hour of dissolution—no fond wife bends over him to soothe the tortures of pain with one meaning look of eloquent love! The spirit of the soldier is broken—but the feelings of the patriot and the man come to instruct his ebbing heart: he turns—he struggles—he bends from his comfortless couch with straining eyes to catch a last view of his hearth's smoke as it rises to mingle with the blue sky of his country: he gazes—he sinks, and expires! And this was the death-scene of a defender of liberty! this, this the fate of an American patriot! Yes! thus have our imprisoned fathers suffered; thus miserably and afar from all sympathy their heavy hours have flown; thus lonely and friendless they have perished! And how fared they often on the march or in the field? Again, let your imaginations trace the foot-prints of that destitute remnant of the American army which so nobly adhered to the immortal Washington during his memorable retreat through the Jerseys—at a time when destruction was behind and uncertainty before! Those foot-prints were marked upon the frozen earth vividly in their blood! Yet, broken but not disheartened—reduced in numbers, but fearless in courage—wanting every thing but honor, devotion to their country, and attachment to their general, they marched with a soldier's steady step, they murmured not, and the republic was saved! Oh! there is no man claiming them as his kindred, and feeling a

portion of their blood now thrilling through his veins, who does not rejoice at the ennobling affinity, and thank the God of nature for his inestimable birth-right !

Fellow citizens ! At the close of the revolution, the war-worn soldier turned to his long-deserted home : again he folded to his heart the wife of his affections ; he gathered his beloved children once more around him : he threw open the casement to the breezes of summer ; he inhaled their fragrance, and then, Oh ! *then* he felt, for the first time, that he was free ! But how dreary was the prospect ! his fields, from long neglect, wore the aspect of desolation ; his country was without credit or any immediate resource : unsettled at home and incapable of repelling aggression from abroad, he returned slowly and dejectedly to the peaceful plough, scarcely venturing to indulge the hope that the national distress and the ravages of war could ever be repaired.

The great experiment of the capacity of a people to govern themselves, had yet to be tested by the severe ordeal of *practice*. The despots of the world were watching our movements, keenly desirous of profiting by any appearance of weakness they might discover in the young republic. They had not yet learned to pardon that nation which was the first to strike for the rights of man ; the first to disseminate these pure and liberal principles of republicanism, destruction of hereditary distinctions, equality of privileges, universal suffrage, and offices of trust and power conferred, by election, upon the *people* !

At that gloomy period, a Franklin or a Washington might not despair, yet the multitude was disturbed by

fearful apprehensions. But light broke in upon the darkness! the songs of prosperous industry rung cheer-ingly through our smiling fields, the forests fell before our hardy yeoman. The spirit of freedom had triumphed; the God of heaven gave a continent as the acquisition. Wisdom went forth to instruct the children of heroes, rich in the experience of other times and other lands, and the refuge of persecuted man was secured against invasion and destined, as we may confidently predict, to the enjoyment of increasing prosperity. And the great plans of improvement now agitating the public mind at home—the respect our country commands abroad—the flourishing condition of our manufactures—the extensive operations of our commerce—the perfect toleration in matters of religion, and the complete separation of church and state secured by our matchless Constitution—all give to our minds the inspiring assurance that the times of gloom shall not return—that the sufferings of the fathers shall not descend to the children. *America is free!* A mighty family of republics is rising around her: from the blue billows of the stormy Atlantic to the calmer Pacific, her dominion spans a continent! Roused by the example of the North, the South hath nobly shaken off her chains—hath achieved her independence, and commenced the cultivation of the more gentle arts of peace. The stirring war-cry of Liberty, no longer awakens the Peruvian to battle, and from the high Andes the exulting goddess hails another kindred flag floating secure upon the breeze of heaven. Yes! the spirit of liberty hath gone forth to regenerate the earth; superstition, slavery and prejudice are becoming buried amid the ruins of thrones and dungeons; and merit,

and genius asserting precedence of wealth and birth, now rule the destinies of nations. The strong-holds of tyranny are crumbling into dust ; and, rising amid returning light, like a giant from his sleep, the Grecian hath caught the glow of his country's ancient glory ; hath girded on his father's sword ; and the Turkish crescent bows before the Christian cross !

Sons of America ! for *this* your fathers fought—that all mankind might partake of the treasures their valor and their perseverance won. Would you fulfil the duties enjoined upon you—preserve those treasures against the ruthless invader—share them with the persecuted exile. *Daughters of America !* you whose smile is our reward in war—whose voice is our music in peace—to *name* you is to speak all of praise or admiration that language can convey. How peculiarly are ye blessed ! dwelling in the only land where the claims of woman are willingly acknowledged—where she is allowed that high rank in society to which, by nature and her own surpassing worth, she is so eminently entitled. Here your influence is fully admitted—here you are the beloved companions by the domestic fireside—the inspiring graces of the festive board. Here, like sparkling and fragrant flowers blooming on the rugged rock, you reflect beauty upon the aspect of ruder man, and lend sweetness to the air that floats around him ; and *here*, like the buds which smile up to him through the dews of the morning, he places you nearest his heart. America demands a wise exercise of your influence.

Fellow citizens ! How enviable are your fortunes ! how sublime your destinies ! A government of your own creation, a country almost boundless in extent,

a climate and soil adapted to every product which necessity may require—commerce transport—or ingenuity improve. How heavy the obligations imposed! how important the trusts confided! The world is gazing upon you—the spirits of departed patriots are watching in anxiety over your proceedings. How shall you best discharge those obligations and execute those trusts? By hailing *every* lover of liberty and the rights of man as a friend and a brother, by spreading the light of education and the principles of a pure and rational religion among your children, and by transmitting to *them* unimpaired, the free institutions bequeathed by your fathers. Teach them to *know* their rights, and they will find weapons for their defence—teach them to know that, in a *republic*, the highest honors are not beyond the reach of talent and integrity, and our country shall never want a Benjamin Franklin or a Patrick Henry. Give your children education, and you invest them with power; give them religion and you preserve their virtue. Give them education and should your shores be invaded, a private soldier may lead your armies! Should your rulers prove traitors to their trust, cherish *education*, and, from the humblest rank of life, may spring forth a second saviour of your country: Heaven may reward, and earth venerate, another Washington!