

AN

ORATION,

UPON

The DEATH of

General Washington,

BY GOVERNEUR MORRIS.

DELIVERED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CORPORATION OF
THE CITY OF NEW-YORK, ON THE 31ST
DAY OF DECEMBER, 1799.

And Published by their Request.

Sed quisnam merito divinas Carmine Laudes
Concipere, aut tanto par queat esse Viro?

Aurel. Brand.

New-York, printed by John Furman, opposite the City Hall.

1800.

ORATION, &c.

Americans,

ASSEMBLED to pay the last dues of filial piety to him who was the father of his country, it is meet that we take one last look at the man whom we have lost forever.

BORN to high destinies, he was fashioned for them by the hand of nature—His form was noble—His port majestic—On his front were enthroned the virtues which exalt, and those which adorn the human character. So dignified his deportment, no man could approach him but with respect—None was great in his presence. You all have seen him, and you all have felt the reverence he inspired; it was such, that to command, seemed in him but the exer-

cise of an ordinary function, while others felt a duty to obey, which (anterior to the injunctions of civil ordinance, or the compulsion of a military code) was imposed by the high behests of nature.

He had *every* title to command—Heaven, in giving him the higher qualities of the soul, had given also the tumultuous passions which accompany greatness, and frequently tarnish its lustre. With them was his first contest, and his first victory was over himself. So great the empire he had there acquired, that calmness of manner and of conduct distinguished him through life. Yet, those who have seen him strongly moved, will bear witness that his wrath was terrible; they have seen boiling in his bosom, passion almost too mighty for man; yet, when just bursting into act, that strong passion was controlled by his stronger mind.

HAVING thus a perfect command of himself, he could rely on the full exertion of his powers,

in whatever direction he might order them to act. He was therefore, clear, decided, and unembarrassed by any consideration of himself. Such consideration did not even dare to intrude on his reflections. Hence it was, that he beheld not only the affairs that were passing around him, but those also in which he was personally engaged, with the coolness of an unconcerned spectator. They were to him as events historically recorded. His judgment was always clear, because his mind was pure. And seldom, if ever, will a sound understanding be met with in the company of a corrupt heart.

In the strength of judgment lay, indeed, one chief excellence of his character. Leaving to feebler minds that splendor of genius, which, while it enlightens others, too often dazzles the possessor—he knew how best to use the rays which genius might emit, and carry into act its best conceptions.

So modest, he wished not to attract attention, but observed in silence, and saw deep into the human heart. Of a thousand propositions he knew to distinguish the best; and to select among a thousand the man most fitted for his purpose. If ever he was deceived in his choice, it was by circumstances of social feeling which did honour to his heart. Should it, therefore, in the review of his conduct, appear that he was merely not infallible, the few errors which fell to his lot, as a man will claim the affections of his fellow men. Pleased with the rare, but graceful weakness, they will admire that elevation of soul, which, superior to resentment, gave honour and power, with liberal hand, to those by whom he had been offended. Not to conciliate a regard, which, if it be venal, is worth no price, but to draw forth in your service the exercise of talents which he could duly estimate, in spite of incidents by which a weaker mind would have been thrown from its bias.

In him were the courage of a soldier, the intrepidity of a chief, the fortitude of a hero. He had given to the impulsions of bravery all the calmness of his character, and, if in the moment of danger, his manner was distinguishable from that of common life, it was by superior ease and grace.

To each desire he had taught the lessons of moderation. Prudence became therefore the companion of his life. Never in the public, never in the private hour did she abandon him even for a moment. And, if in the small circle, where he might safely think aloud, she should have slumbered amid convivial joy, his quick sense of what was just, and decent, and fit, stood ever ready to awaken her at the slightest alarm.

KNOWING how to appreciate the world, its gifts and glories, he was truly wise. Wise also in selecting the objects of his pursuit. And

wise in adopting just means to compass honorable ends.

BOUND by the sacred ties of wedded love, his high example strengthened the tone of public manners. Beloved, almost adored by the amiable partner of his toils and dangers, who shared with him the anxieties of public life, and sweetened the shade of retirement, no fruit was granted to their union. No child to catch with pious tenderness the falling tear, and soothe the anguish of connubial affection. No living image remains to her of his virtues, and she must seek them sorrowing in the grave. Who shall arraign, 'Oh GOD! thy high decree? Was it in displeasure, that to the father of his country thou hadst denied a son? Was it in mercy, lest the paternal virtues should have triumphed (during some frail moment) in the patriot bosom? AMERICANS! he had no child—BUT YOU—and HE WAS ALL YOUR OWN.

LET envy come forward if she dare, and seek some darkened spot in this sun of our glory. From the black catalogue of crimes envy herself must speak him free. Had he (a mortal) the failings attached to man?—Was he the slave of avarice? No. Wealth was an object too mean for his regard. And yet œconomy presided over his domestic concerns; for his mind was too lofty to brook dependence. Was he ambitious? No. His spirit soared beyond ambition's reach. He saw a crown high above all human grandeur. He sought, he gained, and wore *that* crown.—But he had indeed one frailty—the weakness of great minds. He was fond of fame, and had reared a colossal reputation—It stood on the rock of his virtue. This was dear to his heart. There was but one thing dearer.—He loved glory, but still more he loved his country. That was the master passion, and, with resistless might, it ruled his every thought, and word, and deed.

We see him stepping, as it were from his cradle, into the fields of glory, and meriting the public confidence, at a period when others too often consume in idleness the moments lent for instruction, or (in pursuit of pleasure) waste their moral energies. While yet his cheek was covered with the down of youth, he had combined the character of an able negotiator with that of a gallant soldier. Scarce had he given this early pledge of future service, when he was called on for the quick performance—He accompanies to the western wilds, BRADDOCK, who, bred in camps of European war, despis'd the savage. But soon entrapped in the close ambush, military skill becomes of no avail. The leaders, selected by unerring aim, first fall—the troops lie thick in slaughtered heaps, the victims of an invisible foe. WASHINGTON, whose warnings had been neglected, still gives the aid of salutary counsel to his ill fated chief, and urges it with all the grace of eloquence, and all the force of conviction. A form so manly

draws the attention of the savage and is doomed to perish. The murdering instruments are levelled—the quick bolts fly winged with death, and pierce his garments, but obedient to the sovereign will, they dare not shed his blood. BRADDOCK falls at his feet; and the youthful hero covers with his brave Virginians, the retreat of Britons, not less brave, but surprized by unusual war.

THESE bands of brothers were soon to stand in hostile opposition. Such was the decree of HIM to whom are present all the revolutions of time and empire. When no hope remained but in the field of blood, WASHINGTON was called on by his country to lead her armies. In modest doubt of his own ability, he submitted with reluctance to the necessity of becoming her chief; and took on him the weight, the care and the anguish of a civil war. *Ambition* would have tasted here the sweets of power, and drunk deep of intoxicating draughts, but to the *Patriot*, these sweets are bitterness.

INDUSTRIOUS, patient, persevering he remained at the head of citizens scarcely armed ; and, sparing of blood, by skill, rather than by force, compelled his foe to seek a more favorable theatre of war. And now all hope of union lost, America (by her declaration of independence) cut the last slender thread of connection.

SHE had hitherto been successful ; but was soon shaken by adverse storms. The counsel of her Chief had been neglected. His army had been raised by annual enlistment. The poor remnant of accumulated defeat, retreating before an enemy flushed with success, and confident in all superiority, looked with impatience to the approaching term of service. The prospect was on all sides gloomy ; and sunshine friends (turning their halcyon backs to fairer skies) sought shelter from the storm. But though betrayed by fortune, his calm and steady mind remained true to itself. Winter had

closed the campaign. Solacing in the enjoyment of what their arms had acquired, the victors tasted pleasure unalloyed by the dread of danger. They were sheltered behind one of the broad barriers of nature, and, safely housed, beheld upon its farther shore, a feeble adversary, exposed beneath the canopy of heaven to the rigors of an unpitying season. It was hoped that, their term of enlistment expired, the American troops would disperse; and the CHIEF (in despair) throw up his command. Such was the reasoning, and such reasoning would (in ordinary cases) have been conclusive. *But that CHIEF was WASHINGTON!* He shews to his gallant comrades the danger of their country, and asks the aid of patriotic service. At his voice their hearts beat high. In vain the raging Delaware, vexed with the wintry blast, forbids their march. In vain he rolls along his rocky bed, a frozen torrent whose ponderous mass threatens to sweep the soldier from his uncertain footstep, and bear him down the

flood ! In vain the beating snow adds to the dangerous ford a darkened horror ! Difficulties and dangers animate the brave. His little band is arrived ; WASHINGTON is within the walls—the enemy is subdued !

FORTUNE now smiles, but who can trust to that fallacious smile ? Preparations are already made to punish the AMERICAN LEADER for his adventurous hardihood. And now he sees, stretched out before him in wide array, a force so great that in the battle there is no hope. Behind him the impassable stream cuts off retreat. Already from his brazen throat the cannon gives loud summons to the field. But the setting sun leaves yet a dreary night to brood over approaching ruin. The earth is shrouded in the veil of darkness ; and now the illustrious Chief takes up his silent march, and in wide circuit leads his little band around the unwary foe. At the dawn, his military thunders tell them their reserve posted far in

the reat, is in the pounces of the American Eagle. They hasten back to revenge; but he has already secured his advantage, and (by a well chosen position) confines them to inglorious repose. The armies now rest from their toil. But for him there is no rest. His followers claim the double right of returning to their homes, and he stands almost alone. He dares not ask for aid, lest the enemy, emboldened by the acknowledgment of weakness, should dissipate his shadow of an army. Nothing remains but to intimidate by the appearance of a force, which does not exist; and hide from his own troops their great inferiority. Both are effected by skill rarely equalled—never excelled.

SCARCE hath the advancing season brought forward a few recruits when he begins offensive operations. His enemy foiled in each attempt to advance, is compelled to ask from the ocean some safer road to conquest. The propitious deep receives on his broad bosom the invading

host, and bids his obedient billows bear them to some shore, where they may join the advantage of surprize with those of number, discipline, and appointments. The hope is vain!

WASHINGTON had penetrated their views, and stands before them! He is unfortunate.— Defeated, not subdued—he leads on again to new attack.—The half-gained victory, snatched from his grasp, at the head of an inferior, twice beaten army, he passes the long winter in an open field, within one day's march of his foe.

HERE he was doomed to new difficulties, and dangers unknown before. Faction had reared (in the American counsels) her *accursed* head, and laboured to remove him from the command. That measure would at once have disbanded his affectionate troops—the country around them was exhausted. He had no means to clothe or feed his army—none to change their position.—Many perished—each day the numbers were alarmingly diminished, and rein-

forcement was dangerous, because it might encrease the famine. Under these circumstances, a new system of organization and discipline was to be formed, introduced, and enforced, while the soldier could seldom obtain even his poor pittance of depreciated paper.—

—————“ Who then hath seen
 “ The gallant leader of that ruined band,
 “ Let him cry praise and glory on his head.”

It was in the solitary walk of night—it was in the bosom of friendship, that he could alone unburthen himself, of the vast woe which weighed upon his heart—Here was indeed no common nor vulgar care. HONOUR—LIBERTY—His COUNTRY, stood on the dangerous margin of uncertain fate, and no human eye could pierce the dark cloud which hung upon futurity.

From this black night of gloomy apprehension, broke forth the sun of golden, glorious Hope!—A mighty monarch had connected his

fortunes with those of America—In her defence the flag of France was unfurled, and gratitude hailed the sixteenth Louis, protector of the rights of mankind. His powerful interference took off from what remained of the war, all reasonable doubt as to the final event. After a varied scene of adverse and prosperous circumstances, that event arrived, and a solemn treaty acknowledged your Independence.

GREAT was the joy and high the general expectation, for the political state of America was not duly considered. Her band of federal union had been woven by the hand of distrust. The different states had been held together, in no small degree, by the external pressure of war. That pressure removed, they might fall asunder. There existed various causes of discontent, which the intrigues of European policy might ripen into disgust. Those who shared in the public counsels were filled, therefore, with deep apprehension.—The army, taught by years

of painful experience, became a prey to sinister forebodings. Connected by the endearing ties of soldierly brotherhood, these gallant sons of freedom anticipated with horror the moment when they might be called on to unsheathe their swords against each other : and pour, in impious libation, the purest of their blood upon the altars of civil war. Some of the more ardent spirits, smarting from the past, and fearing for the future, had formed a wish, that the army might be kept together, and (by its appearance) accelerate the adoption of an efficient government. The sentiment was patriotic—the plan of doubtful completion—the success uncertain—but the prospect was fair if the CHIEF could be engaged.

He knew their wrongs ! He knew their worth ! He felt their apprehensions !—They had strong claims upon him, and those claims were strongly urged. Supreme power, with meretricious charms, courted his embrace ; and

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was clothed, to seduce him, in the robes of justice. If, therefore, ambition had possessed a single corner of his heart, he might have deliberated. But he was ever loyal. He bid a last adieu to the companions of his glory, and laid all his laurels at the feet of his country!

His fame was now complete, and it was permitted him to hope for ease in dignified retirement. Vain hope! The defects of the Federal compact are soon too deeply felt not to be generally acknowledged—America directs a revision by persons of her choice. He is their President. It is a question, previous to the first meeting, what course shall be pursued. Men of decided temper, who, devoted to the public, overlooked prudential considerations, thought a form of government should be framed entirely new. But cautious men, with whom popularity was an object, deemed it fit to consult and comply with the wishes of the people. **AMERICANS!**—let the opinion then delivered by the greatest and best of men, be ever present

to your remembrance. He was collected within himself. His countenance had more than usual solemnity—His eye was fixed, and seemed to look into futurity. “It is (said he) too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God.”—This was the patriot voice of WASHINGTON; and this the constant tenor of his conduct. With this deep sense of duty, he gave to our constitution his cordial assent; and has added the fame of a legislator to that of a hero.

AGAIN, in the shade of retirement, he seeks repose; but is called, by unanimous voice, to be the first magistrate of the United States.—Scarce are the wheels of government in motion, when he is struck by the view of that enormous re-

volution which still torments and terrifies the earth. The flames of war were spread throughout Europe, and threatened to waste the globe. The delegated incendiaries found America filled with inflammable matter. All the bad passions, with some that were good, stimulated her to engage in the contest. But the President, still calm, discerning, and true to your truest interest, proclaimed, observed, and maintained an exact neutrality. In vain was he assailed from abroad—In vain solicited, excited, urged, by those around him. He stood immovable! Vain also were the clamors of mistaken zeal, the dark efforts of insidious faction, and the foul voice of mercenary slander. You have all lately seen his firm administration, and all now enjoy the rich result of his inflexible wisdom.

THOUGH he still turned with fond desire towards his domestic shade, he never left the helm during the fury of the storm but remained till he had the well founded expectation

that America might enjoy PEACE, FREEDOM, and SAFETY—and then at last he claims the right of age. A venerable veteran, in all honourable service, having consecrated to his country the spirit of youth, the strength of manhood, and the ripe experience of laborious years, he asks repose. His body broken with toil must rest.—No—He is called forth again—again must he gird on his sword and prepare for the battle!—And see! fresh in renewed vigor, he decks his hoary head with nodding plumes of war, and mounts the barbed steed—With countenance erect and firm, his eagle eye measures the lengthened file. Wonderful man! he seems immortal—Oh no—No—No, this our pride, our glory, is gone—He is gone forever.

BUT yet his spirit liveth. Hail! happy shade—The broad shield of death is thrown before thy fame. Never shall the polluted breath of slander blow upon thine ashes—We will watch with pious care the laurels which shade thy urn,

and wear thy name engraven on our Hearts.—
 Oh! yet protect thy country!—Save her!—She
 is an orphan—Her father is mingled with the
 dust.

NO! HE LIVETH—HE SHALL LIVE FORE-
 VER!—And when the latest of your children's
 children, shall pronounce his dear, his sacred
 name, their eyes shall be suffused with the tear
 of GRATITUDE and LOVE.

[D O N E.]

Errata.

☞ In the *eleventh line* of the *eighth page*, for “affection,”
 read “AFFLICTION.”

☞ *Page twelve, fifth line from the bottom*, in the () paren-
 thesis, read, “(turning their *balcyon* BEAKS to fairer skies.”)

☞ *Page twenty-third, last line but one*, read, “of slander blow
 upon *THINE* ashes—We will watch, &c.

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