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Gleason, Benjamin, 1777-1847.

An Oration on the Anniversary of American Independence.

Boston, Munroe & Francis, 1802. 16 pp.

MWA copy.

AN  
ORATION

ON THE  
ANNIVERSARY

OF  
*American Independence.*

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PRONOUNCED BEFORE

THE SENIOR CLASS OF RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE,  
*In College-Chapel,*

ON

THE EVENING OF THE 5TH OF JULY, 1802.

*At their particular Request.*

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BY

BENJAMIN GLEASON.

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“Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country,  
that country has a right to concentrate your affections.

“The name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you, in  
your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride  
of PATRIOTISM.”

WASHINGTON.

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BOSTON:—Bunrot & Francis, PRINTERS.

1802.

AT a meeting of the Senior-Sophisters, in Rhode-Island College, *Voted*, That the thanks of the Class be presented to Mr. BENJAMIN GLEASON, (member of said Class,) for his ingenious and patriotic Oration, delivered in College-Chapel, on the Evening of the Anniversary of American Independence.---*With a request for publication.*

A true Copy,---*attest*,

JOHN HOLROYD, Sec. S. C.

*R. I. College, July 6, 1802.*



GENTLEMEN,

YOUR thanks are accepted with a satisfaction, which does you honour.....To answer the demands of friendship; and, with a view to gratify public expectation,---our hearts and our hands should ever be engaged, unaccompanied by the blush, or the tear of regret.

With unfeigned esteem,

Gentlemen, yours, &c.

BENJAMIN GLEASON.

*Providence, July 6, 1802.*

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# Oration.

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**LIBERTY** is the brightest gem in the circle of human blessings ! The most invaluable deposit which enriches the existence of man ! Our **BIRTH-RIGHT**, and our **GLORY** !

**DAUGHTER** of heaven !----Parent of human felicity !----thy presence is more cheering than the lucid beams of day : thy virtues imperishable as the stars : and thy affections involve the ultimate hopes of humanity. Thy temples are crowded ! The incense of patriotic fervor, and affectionate gratitude is rising from a thousand altars ! The "shrill clarion" of **FREEDOM** resounds on the highest key of enjoyment, attuning the hearts of millions to the celebration of thy praises ; and the grateful reverberations spread, diverging, to the remotest regions of the globe.

**THE** hearts of a **FREE** American people exult, and rejoice, and beat high, in perfect unison with the joys of general festivity. The celebration of American Independence is the theme of our joy ! and, like the *sons of Fingal*, while *the torch in our halls beams on the bosom of night* ; while "the strength of the shells goes round," and "the souls of warriors brighten with joy," we call on our "hundred harps" "to raise the song of peace !" "To celebrate the exploits of our heroes !" and "to soothe the soul" after the rage and ravages of battle.

**THE** "anniversary of American Independence" has been a theme for the best and brightest abilities ; and, with unremitting zeal in the "good old cause," for years has been celebrated to the great honor of our country. Stimulated by a laudable ambition and the true spirit of patriotic virtue,----we reach forth the hand, with the best affections of our hearts, and proffer our *mite* to the increasing honours, which consecrate and immortalize **THE DAY** !

**WE**

WE are not emulous to excel ! Our Fathers have felt the fire, the force, the ardor, the energies of Freedom ; and, from the fulness of their incorruptible hearts, are capable, in the language of irresistible feeling, to express the “ big emotions ” of their souls ! But, though our hearts throb with delight in the participation of their virtues,---our experience and our expectations rank us *only* with little IULUS, *to follow with “ unequal steps ;”* or like ÆNEAS himself, desirous of sustaining the honorary parental burthen,---we vouchsafe our services, and rise to the honor of our venerable Fathers.

THE Young Gentlemen in this respectable Seminary of Science, do, this day, greatly distinguish themselves by performing the honors of the six and twentieth anniversary of our national Independence.---It is to our honor ; and it is of the greatest importance to us, children of fathers who have sacrificed their property and their lives for the privileges which we enjoy, to imitate their efforts, by a recapitulation of those principles, which led to a Revolution, considered, in its effects, as the most honorary, and extraordinary, recorded on the annals of history.

It will inspire the true principles of PATRIOTISM !---*Will inspire the principles ?* do I say !---Let it forever remain problematical, Whether it be possible for an individual, born and educated on this side the waters of the Atlantic ; who has exchanged his toys and trifles for years, sense, and understanding,---who has put off the *toga prætexta*\* of infancy, and put on the *toga virilis*\* of his manhood ! I say, let it forever remain problematical, whether it be possible for such an one to be a *negative patriot* ?---No !---We are not ; nor have we among us, one known *negative PATRIOT* !---We all, in a greater or less degree, feel the importance of our numerous obligations in Society ; and it is presumed that all must rationally believe PATRIOTISM is the only *public debt*, which can possibly be a *public blessing* ! and for *such* a “ BLESSING,” may we ever delight to pay *interest*, without a diminution, or redemption of the *capital*.

THAT patriotic fervor which animated our Fathers, in the embattled field, we trust is not extinguished in their bosoms, nor is it extinct in ours. No ! its fires remain, to quell the  
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\* *The toga prætexta, among the Romans, was a robe worn by youth till they were 17 years of age, and then exchanged for the toga virilis ; at which time they became men.*

the evils of Infurrection,----to oppose Innoyation,----to suppress Sedition,----to prevent Disunion,----and to ornament the character of the illustrious citizen !

WELL may we exclaim, how transcendently superlative are the blessings which enrich our country ! We boast ourselves, AMERICANS ! Our enjoyments, our individual independence, and our national happiness, are derived from a source of the most generous exertion. They are the blessings of political and ecclesiastical toleration. Free, and independent, we regard with contemptuous indifference the menaces of supercilious, *factious juntos* ; we spurn the manacles of superstition ; and we hold in utter abhorrence the terrors of despotism !

THE altars of our Independence are consecrated with the highest dignities of a FREE PEOPLE ! And the "oil of gladness" and the joys of unfeigned affection flow around them in plentiful profusion !

OUR Fathers, our Brothers, Ourselves, our Sisters, are patriots !----Yes ! we have some even among ourselves,----*witness our little HAMLINS\**,----who, like "CÆSAR meditating on the life of ALEXANDER," though not fired with the same ambition, yet like him, contemplating the portraits of their veteran and worthy Fathers, are burning for the opportunity to become distinguished in the services of their Country.

SHALL we ask,----Wherefore our Fathers fought ? wherefore they bled ? Wherefore, in competition with the RIGHTS OF MAN, their lives were *un-estimated*, hazarded and sacrificed ?

LET history.....let tradition.....let our feelings answer the question. Ask the Child ! *He* will answer you with the tears of instant affection sparkling in his eyes ! Ask the war-worn Soldier ! The dignified emotions of his soul, in smiles of triumph, glowing on his veteran brows, evince..... the effect is glorious !

THEY fought for FREEDOM ! They obtained the conquest ! They triumph in victory !

THE prowess of American arms was unequalled by the greatest exertions of a well-disciplined, regular British soldiery ; and the humiliation of the first generals in Europe proves the assertion to be well grounded. Yet, far from being influenced or inflamed with the "Macedonian Madman's

\* See the Order of the Day.

man's" frenzy,---our countrymen never "wept that there were no more worlds to subdue"! But, having obtained their RIGHTS by conquest, they esteeme it a task sufficient "to subdue themselves"! and they conquered! they became civilized!----became citizens! and are now happy and free! The conquest of worlds was not their object,---It was the acquisition of Independence! They fought on the defensive---It was the right of nature; and they sealed their charter with their best blood. Their conquest is ours!----They obtained the invaluable prize: be it ours to be grateful and enjoy.

EUROPE, our *quondam* mother-country, looks with wonder on the undulating banners of Freedom, and, to the "list of enrolment," would fain affix the seal of her empire! But, alas! her revenues, her expenditures, her armies, her navies, her wars, her government, her oppressions and distresses,---in multiplied, and haggard forms, are so many obstacles to prevent her advancement to the TEMPLE OF FREEDOM.

ASIA hides herself in her own magnificence, unable to contemplate the grandeur and brilliancy of the scene; and like the "strong man," duped to the fascinating provocatives of DELILAH,---lolls supine, in the lap of effeminate luxury and sensual gratification, in the full possession of nominal pleasures, unreal happiness, imaginary greatness, and ostensible wealth and power. But the sigh for humanity escapes us, when we reflect on the weakness and depravity of man,---whose delight is *avarice*,---whose inheritance is *miserery*!----who, instead of walking with undeviating exactitude in the paths of peace, truth, and virtue, have degenerated from their primeval dignity, and now "grope, debased and blind," in the hard and rugged road of intolerance, superstition, and sensuality.

UNHAPPY Africa! far from thy sister nations, thou art fallen prostrate; unable even to mix thy tears in the oblation of persecuted humanity. But thou thyself shalt one day rise, and thy oppressors shall tremble!

THE poor Slave rests on his oar; he hears the shouts of Freedom; his heart burns within him; he rises to revenge himself on the violators of human rights!----But, alas! *his chain*!----The sigh of despondency starts the tear from his soul! and he falls insensible to pain or pleasure. O God! be merciful to the oppressed, and hasten the day when man shall

