

AN  
**ORATION,**

DELIVERED IN THE

**PRESBYTERIAN MEETING-HOUSE,**

IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,

ON THE

**ANNIVERSARY**

OF

**AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,**

**JULY 4, 1807.**

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

**Albany Military Association.**

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BY **ELIJAH THOMAS, ESQUIRE.**

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1807.

*At a Meeting of the ALBANY MILITARY ASSOCIATION, held at Lewis's City-Tavern, July 4th, 1807.*

**RESOLVED**, That the thanks and approbation of the Association be presented by Lieut. Col. *Trotter*, Major *Lansing* and Capt. *Herring*, to Paymaster THOMAS, for his Address delivered this day, in commemoration of the Anniversary of *American Independence* ; and that they request a copy thereof for publication.

*A Copy,*

**S. VISSCHER, Sec'ry.**

## AN ORATION.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE revolution of time has again returned to us the birth-day of our nation. It is due to the occasion ; it is a pious and sacred duty we owe to our great and glorious ancestors, who achieved our independence ; it is a high and holy obligation we are under to that Almighty Being, whose omniscient wisdom and omnipotent power, directed their councils and conducted their armies to so happy an issue, on every return of this day, to pay it the tribute of a grateful, a joyful and a devotional commemoration.

*It is a sublime spectacle to behold a great people assembling in their public sanctuaries to celebrate the anniversary of their national existence. 'Tis the divinity in man which inspires him to such an observance. It is the exercise of the highest and the noblest qualities*

of his nature, to review and contemplate the past events of time ; to recal the days of his youth and of his infancy ; to trace the line of his ancestors, and to mark their conduct and their character : to view their rise and progress ; to observe their manners and their customs, their virtues and their vices, their maxims and their laws, the form of their government, the nature of their religion, the importance of their exploits, and the auspices of their fortune : to examine himself and the present, and behold in prospective the destiny of his country. And in such an exercise we are peculiarly happy. Other nations must trace their origin to ignorant heathens and filthy and ferocious savages, and most of them must view their progress from odious barbarism to civilized slavery. Even the interesting ancestors of the Caledonian Bard form but a partial exception. We must acknowledge the sublimity of their valour, the nobleness of their generosity, the strength and tenderness of their affections ; but their history is a continued series of clanish and family wars ; and his songs in their praise, even

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his songs of love, are encumbered with battles, and stained with blood.—But the story of our forefathers yields entire admiration. The time when they appeared, the country whence they came, the laws and government to which they had been accustomed, the religion which they professed and practised, the causes of their emigration, the land in which they settled, all conspire to shed an air of divine mystery over their enterprize, and mark them as selected to peculiar destinies. The great continent to which they had embarked, as if reserved at the creation for some remote and favorite purpose, for more than five thousand years had been concealed from the knowledge and preserved from the crimes of the old world. On the east, and the south, and the west, its extended shores were laved by the pure waters, and protected by the mighty billows of three vast oceans; and on the north it was barred by an impenetrable and incorruptible frost. The gloomy, inexorable reign of despotism, the insatiable sword of ambition, the blood-stained banners of fanaticism, had been confined by an interminable sea.

At the close of the fifteenth century, when the light of science had begun to scatter its rays through the lurid and baleful darkness that reigned through the kingdoms of the earth, and true religion to purify itself of the corruptions with which the blindness of superstition had enabled the lust of domination to defile it, the time for its discovery arrived. A favorite son of genius, of science and of virtue, was inspired to explore the western sea and ascertain the surface of the globe. He entered upon his voyage, and was conducted to the new world!—But he was permitted only to behold it. Ages of reformation were yet to pass upon the old world before any of its inhabitants would be worthy to possess the virgin residence of native liberty and peace. Some vile bands of plunderers, indeed, were suffered to violate the sacred territory, to commit every enormity of murder, desolation and rapine, and to erect the institutions of despotism; perhaps to provide an example for the sons of virtue, to admonish them against degeneracy and corruption.

At the opening of the seventeenth century, human nature had considerably emerged from the criminality and wretchedness which for ages had overwhelmed it. The empire of reason was supplanting the reign of superstition ; learning was revived ; science was cultivated, and every where raising her trophies ; true religion was recovering its original purity and influence ; agriculture was improved ; manufacture increased ; commerce extended and flourishing : the United Provinces, by an unexampled bravery and heroic patriotism, had recently freed themselves from the most odious and wicked tyranny, supported by the most formidable power the world had ever witnessed ; had erected themselves into an independent republic, and compelled their despotic master to acknowledge them, and the surrounding kingdoms had justified their resistance and rejoiced in their success. This period of instruction and invention, of universal improvement and amelioration, had been assigned for the commencement of the legitimate settlement and cultivation of the

new world. The island of Great-Britain had ever been the boasted seat of law and liberty. The privileges of its subjects, the mild, intelligent and free spirit of its government, were the pride of its inhabitants, and the wonder and envy of the surrounding nations. From this favoured people were selected the founders of the new empire. And it is not partiality, it is not extravagance to say, that a more virtuous, pious, intelligent and worthy race of men could not have been selected under the whole heaven.

In the early stages of study and refinement, the human mind i excessively addicted to dispute and controversy. Though limited in its views, and perplexed in its operations, and frequently extravagant and wild in its conceptions, yet it is acute and subtle in its inventions, active and zealous in its pursuits, and confident and tenacious in its opinions. And such was the character of the age and nation before us. The theological and political dissentions which had thus arisen, became inveterate, and produced the most memorable consequences. A speculative discussion of the capacity and



limits of royal prerogative, and of ecclesiastical authority, between the monarch and his subjects, in the metaphysics of the times, led them into opposite extremes, and induced a practice which convulsed the kingdom and subverted the throne. During these contests, those chosen emigrants, our first American ancestors, restricted and opposed in their religious exercises and opinions, offended and disgusted and alarmed at the papal practices and growing authority of the church, and the arbitrary measures of the crown, and inspired with a pious spirit of liberty and adventure, resolved to abandon their native country, and to plant themselves in a region out of the reach of every species of arbitrary power, where they could freely practise and enjoy their civil and religious principles in their own way, in security and peace. They came out under nominal allegiance to the British crown, and it was the wisdom of divine dispensation that they should do so. Had they openly commenced in independence, when their possessions had become valuable the agents of royal plunder would have

seized them. But their religion was unrestricted, and their government was in their own hands. They began their establishment with a measure characteristic and worthy of its destiny. They paid to the native proprietors an equitable and satisfactory consideration for the territory upon which they entered, and thus laid the foundation of their empire on the righteous basis of justice. Some degree of religious intolerance had accompanied them and appears to have been the only vice that detracted from their character; and this, as they assimilated to the genius of their new country, became utterly and publicly renounced. Mildness and plainness of manners, sincerity of heart, piety of spirit, seriousness and regularity of behaviour, friendship and affection in social intercourse, industry, frugality, temperance and fortitude, bravery and enterprize, were among the christian and moral virtues which governed their conduct, and aided their progress. The blessing of heaven was upon them; they grew with unparalleled rapidity, and succeeding generations flourished

through ages of uninterrupted prosperity. But at length a season of troubles arrived. The lowering elements of adversity collected over the prospect of the New World, and portended its ruin.

The British nation, as their American colonies were rising to importance, became covetous of their wealth and jealous of their power. Not contented with deriving from them an increase of their manufacture, an augmentation of their commerce, an improvement of their navigation, an extension of their dominion and fame, in the true, insatiable, unrelenting spirit of avarice and haughtiness of domination, they conceived the design to assume the absolute disposal of their property, and for that purpose the unlimited control of their persons : asserted their absolute dominion over the liberty and services, the lives and fortunes of their colonial subjects ; their sovereign right to bind them at their arbitrary will, in all cases whatsoever, and proceeded to establish and enforce a colonial revenue. So aggravated, so flagitious an usurpation was unparalleled

in the annals of despotism. Vain was the resort to the names of sovereignty and allegiance, to justify the enormity: Vain was the pretence that the British government was the government of the colonies, and that subjects must obey and support their government. The attributes of sovereignty are qualified and limited by the nature and extent of allegiance, and the nature and extent of allegiance are correspondent to the relative condition of the persons in subjection. The condition of the colonies, in reference to the British government, rendered the relation of allegiance and sovereignty between them, from the constitution of the subject, and in the nature of things, necessarily merely nominal. The fundamental principles of the British constitution and the colonial charters, established and confirmed upon it that character. It is the boasted excellence of that constitution, that its subjects can be bound by no laws but those made by their own consent. This is the reigning principle which gives the character of freedom to the British government: a principle which

the subjects of that government have claimed from time immemorial, as their constitutional right and privilege, and as the common law of their land : in support of which they have repeatedly encountered all the evils and horrors of civil war : for which they have repeatedly overturned the throne, beheaded one monarch and expelled another and his family for ever from their country : a principle to which the reigning sovereign then owed his title to the crown, and which he was bound not to violate by every tie of honor, of law, of morality and religion. This principle, thus prized and thus established, could not be enjoyed by the colonial subjects, if governed by the British parliament, in which they could have neither agency, nor influence, nor common interest. From their geographical situation, it was impossible that they could enjoy the privileges and possess the liberty of British subjects, unless they had a separate government of their own, and this had been expressly and fully granted to them by their charters. And their own governments thus established, were essen-

tially exclusive. A government not exclusive but dependent, and subject to foreign control, is but mere form and mockery of government. It may multiply the objects of expense, and extend the sphere of corruption, but can afford no protection to privilege nor security to liberty. The colonies had not, they could not beneficially have, they did not desire to have, they would not accept the government of the British parliament ; and by the sentiments of common justice, and by the rules of legal right, by every principle of political morality and of political law, the subjection of the one and the dominion of the other existed but in name. The colonial revenue was not in the nature of a tax justly levied upon a people by their legislature for the maintenance of their government : it was a naked tribute arbitrarily imposed by a foreign power, to enrich itself at the expense of those upon whom it could confer no political benefit, and with whom rightfully it had no efficient political connexion.

The colonies discovered the views and measures of the British government in re-

gard to them, with mingled emotions of astonishment and alarm, of grief and indignation. They saw in them the beginning of a system, which in its full establishment would reduce their property into an absolute estate of the British nation, and their persons into their public slaves to work and cultivate it. Their generous souls revolted at the prospect. They spurned the infamous bondage designed for them, and resolved to assert and maintain their rights, and preserve their freedom, at any hazard and at any sacrifice.— But their first measures of resistance were pacific and conciliatory. In the language of reason, and in the spirit of virtue, they stated their rights, related their grievances, and solicited redress. They petitioned the throne ; they addressed the parliament ; they appealed to the people. They respectfully and amicably entreated them to relinquish their usurpations : they pleaded the nature of their situation, the usage and example of their ancestors, the common law of England, the principles of the British government, the terms of the colonial charters. They em-

ployed all the topics of argument, and all the considerations of justice. But vain was the voice of reason, and vain were the calls of virtue. Their petitions, their addresses, and their appeals, were despised as foolishness, and reprehended as presumption. It was denied them to question the authority of their oppressors, or to complain of their oppressions. Every severity, every violence of arbitrary civil authority was practised upon them ; and to suppress the risings of discontent and stifle the murmurs of sufferance, an armed host was sent and quartered upon them, to awe them, and if necessary to force them into subjection. They saw themselves reduced to the extreme alternative : they had either to yield an unlimited submission, or to resist aggression by the force of arms. To repel hostilities the most unwarrantable, the most wanton and the most excessive ; to arrest the progress of an invading and overwhelming oppression ; to save the fairest empire upon which the sun had ever shone from the destructive rage of avarice and domination,



from slavery and ruin ; in defence of every thing valuable and interesting to man ; appealing to the world for the rectitude of their conduct, and committing themselves upon the righteousness of their cause, and upon the favour of heaven, they took up arms, and resolved not to lay them down, until their enemies should render to them the justice which they demanded, and to which by the laws of God and man they were entitled.

Their bold unyielding opposition, and this decisive and daring measure, drew upon them all the vengeance of the British power. They were denounced as rebels and traitors, who had forfeited their property and their lives, and were subject to military execution : their coasts were invested and covered with hostile fleets and armies : their treasures were rifled, their towns were wantonly burned, and slaughter and devastation were spread throughout their land. The merciless savage was excited to butcher their innocent and defenceless citizens, and foreign mercenaries, who traded in death,

were hired to assist in the work of destruction.

Seeing that the storm of war had closed upon their hemisphere, and that they could neither limit its duration, nor determine its consequences : finding their enemies determined to destroy and exterminate, if they could not subdue and subject them ; that they disregarded all the laws of honourable warfare, and conducted their hostilities with the perfidy and malice of assassination and massacre, and despairing of liberty or friendship in a political union with them : to gain a more advantageous ground in the contest, to define and determine their object in it, to increase its value, to heighten its glory, to facilitate its attainment, to secure its preservation, they resolved on an entire and eternal separation from them. In a solemn proclamation they announced it to the world. They for ever abjured and renounced all political connexion with the British realm, and declared themselves sovereignly free and independent : sacredly pledging their honour, their fortunes and their lives to maintain the declaration.

This was a measure worthy the memory of their ancestors, worthy the cause of freedom, worthy the fate of America. By assuming to themselves the name, the functions and the character of a nation, they prosecuted the war with greater advantage and with better prospects. It confirmed resolution, elevated expectation, and animated exertion at home ; it excited admiration and procured confidence and favour abroad.

Long, bloody and doubtful was the conflict. The American forces were small and scattered, unpractised in the art and unprovided with the weapons of war. Various was the fortune of her arms ; but her sons had sworn to triumph or to die. No gold could corrupt, no terror could dismay, no disaster could discourage them : and her fair ones, assuming the affecting, the enchanting name of the DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY, were devoted to her cause. They adorned it with their beauty ; they chastened it with their purity ; they consecrated it with their innocence ; they pub-

lily engaged in the contest, consoling suffering, animating depression, inciting perseverance ; or they retired to solitude, wept over the distresses, and bewailed the fate of their country. But, as if the justice of heaven had become impatient of the spectacle, the rage of war began to abate its violence, and soon subsided into peace. America triumphed ! With the simple energy of native virtue, in the spirit and in the name of the living God, she had combated the lion and the bear, and she slew them.

She had sacrificed in the contest much of her treasure, and much of her choicest and noblest blood. But she had freed herself from an impending servitude, had gained her independence and secured her liberty.

She framed to herself a government adapted to her new political character and condition ; and prosperity returning with peace, she renewed her advancement to glory and felicity.

And it becomes us who have succeeded to this heaven-born and heaven-protected empire, to be worthy of our possession ; to

know and remember its importance, to esteem its value and to preserve its character. May it retain the favour and the guardianship of heaven.

### The MILITARY ASSOCIATION.

*Fellow Soldiers,*

IT belongs to us, with sentiments of particular interest and sympathy, to commemorate the anniversary of American independence. This was a season of war—a day of battles. We kindle at the martial ardour which glowed in the American soldiery of seventy-six. The unprovoked and outrageous violence that had driven them to arms ; the magnitude and the sacredness of their cause ; the affecting interests which they sustained, defending from destruction or slavery their parents, their wives, their children, and all the endeared connexions of domestic and social life, communicate to martial sympathy, all the impulse, all the spirit and soul of the times.

The sword of our country is committed to our charge. It never was stained with innocent blood—it was never sullied with the baseness of dishonour. Let us preserve its purity and its fame.