

AN ORATION
COMMEMORATIVE OF THE BIRTH-DAY

OF

American Independence,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA,

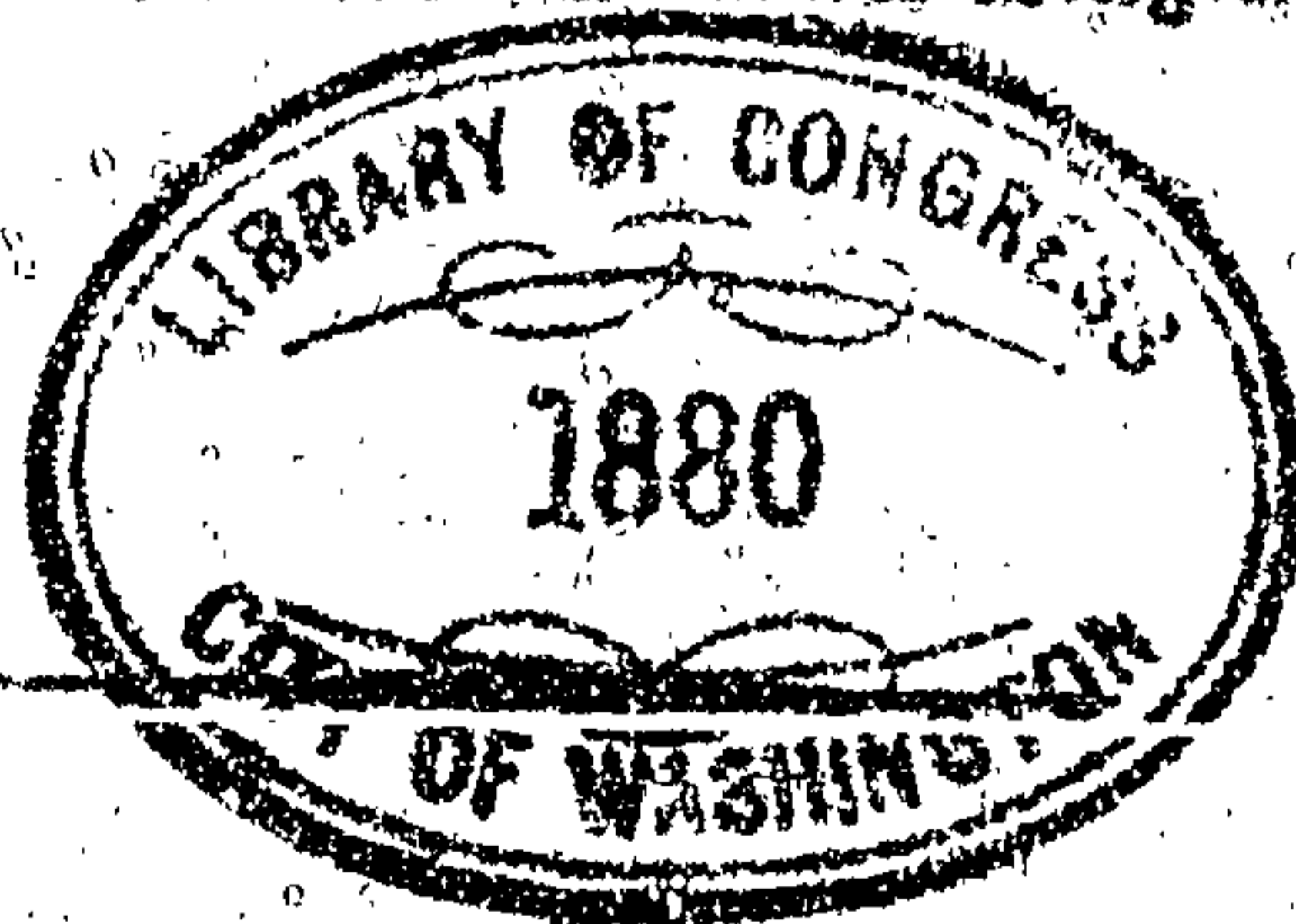
On the 4th of July, 1810.

BY JOHN BINNS.

(PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SOCIETIES.)

Thy spirit, Independence, let me share,
Lord of the lion-heart and eagle-eye;
Thy steps I follow, with my bosom bare,
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky.

SMOLLETT.



PHILADELPHIA.

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1810.

AN ORATION,

Delivered by John Binns, before the Democratic Societies.

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY 1810.

[*Published at the request of the Societies.*]

Would to Heaven, my fellow citizens, that I had discharged the duty which your good opinion has imposed before the Declaration of Independence had been read. Any thing which I can urge will be feeble indeed if put in competition with the concise energy of thought, the manly detail of grievances and oppressions, and the determination successfully to resist or nobly to perish, which characterise that instrument. It is an imperishable monument of the talents, wisdom and patriotism of the men who guided the destinies of America "in the times that tried men's souls." The reasons it advances are clear and convincing, the principles it advocates are founded on the rock of eternal truth, and the tale of wrong and outrage with which it is filled, sinks deep into every heart. That no circumstance might be wanting to impress *our* minds and excite our sensibilities, our local situation is peculiarly interesting. Standing here on this day 34 years past, our ears might have been greeted by the blissful sound of the first tramp of independence which joyed American ears. We almost breathe the air which that congress breathed which made the Declaration; the hall in which they sat is in our sight, and if "the spirits of just men made perfect" "are e'er permitted to review this world" the shades of the mighty dead at this moment hover over us. I see them in my mind's eye. They smile benignly on their countrymen who are faithful to their principles, and before the throne of Heaven they offer up prayers for the welfare of their country.

All hail to the auspicious day which declared America free, sovereign and independent—Ever hallowed be that on which was first proclaimed the equal rights of man—Sacred in the annals of humanity, be the holy day which provided an asylum for the persecuted and oppressed from every clime—and may no evil ever befall mankind on that blessed day when the demon of intolerance was bound in chains of adamant and the temples of the living God thrown open wide to receive the homage of all his rational creatures. “This day shall ne’er go by from this day unto the “ending of the world” without grateful, public and national remembrances of the sages and heroes of ’76 and the hearts of millions yet unborn shall overflow with thankfulness and thanksgiving to that Almighty Being who crowned with conquest the cause of “Virtue Liberty and Independence.” There floats the banner of our country with that honored motto—never may it be unfurled in the cause of injustice—ever, as now, may it proudly wave over freemen and gallant volunteers ;* and ever, as in the struggle for independence may the Eagle of victory be perched upon its standard.

Three centuries have rolled down the flood of time since the adventurous Columbus discovered the shores of the New World. Every fact in its annals is interesting ; every page of its history pregnant with information, but we cannot now even sip their sweets. We must rapidly hasten to more modern times. The struggles in Great Britain in the 17th Century between the Persecutor and the Persecuted were long and sanguinary and led to the most memorable events. Many independent-minded, conscientious individuals disgusted, unsafe and unhappy in England resolved to brave the dangers of the seas, abandon the tombs of their ancestors and the friends of their youth and encounter all the hardships incident to the settlement of a new and unknown country, inhabited by untutored savages rather than remain in their native land and be compelled to submit their persons, their properties, nay their very opinions and beliefs to the caprice of Despots. They embarked and safely landed on the shores of North America. From them and from succeeding emigrants from various climes have sprung the millions of people who now inhabit the United States and who have literally “made the wilderness to blossom as the rose.”

* Capt. Vogdes’ Volunteer Company of Infantry were present when the Oration was delivered.

The hardships endured, the battles fought and the difficulties overcome by the first settlers were many and obstinate. After the lapse of a century and a half, the colonies waxed strong and rich and the mother country viewed their riches and their strength with an avaricious and a jealous eye. They had fought her battles; they had conquered her enemies; they had poured their wealth into her lap, yet was she not satisfied so long as she did not "Lord it uncontroll'd" over the land. She was ever devising means to obtain an absolute dominion and at length insisted upon the right to tax the American Colonies, without their consent, in all cases whatsoever. This pretension was nobly and successfully resisted and it is to celebrate that glorious epoch in the history of man, we this day assemble.

In the present uncertainties and overturnings of the world and in the dangers which threaten the nations of the earth that will not bow down to the Tyrant of the Ocean or the Tyrant of the Land, it may not be unprofitable to enquire *what* was the situation of the United Colonies and of Great Britain, when "all political connection" between them was declared to be "totally dissolved." Such a retrospect, though brief, must inspire Courage and Confidence by impressing conviction that "the battle is not always to the strong nor the race to the swift." He who delivered the Shepherd's boy from the gigantic Goliath will not deliver his chosen people into the hands of the Philistines, neither will He suffer them to be made "hewers of wood and drawers of water" to the Egyptians.

In the hour of peril the Colonies were of immense extent, surrounded by the dominions of Great Britain: thinly populated and vulnerable in almost every point: the people were undisciplined, ill-provided with arms and without ammunition or military stores. They had no riches with which to bribe, nor had they allies with whom to make common cause: all they had was "a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence," a righteous cause, vigorous arms and dauntless hearts.

Who was the oppressor with whom they determined to conflict? A power that could arm, discipline, equip and transport hither not only its own armies, but hosts of "foreign mercenaries"—a power that could "bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the "merciless Indian Savage whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions"—

A power that could "plunder our seas, ravage our coasts, burn our towns, and destroy the lives of our people," whose Navy rode triumphant upon the waters of the earth—whose subjects abroad were more numerous, by uncounted millions, than its subjects at home, who engrossed the commerce of the West and monopolized the treasures of the East.

Such was the disproportionate state of population, arms and resources, when the sword was drawn by the men of America, and they went forth to fight for their dearest rights, their homes and firesides, determined to conquer or die. The result has proved how feeble and inefficient,

"are fifty,

Nay, a thousand slaves, opposed to the sinew
Of a single arm that strikes for Liberty!"

Gages Proclamation of Military Law—the murders at Lexington—the battle of Bunker's hill—the burnings of Charlestown and Falmouth—the appointment of the illustrious George Washington as commander in chief—the taking of Montreal by Montgomery, and the death of that gallant hero at Quebec, were all among the memorable events of the year '75. But these events, highly important as they were, were only the precursors of one infinitely more momentous—one in comparison to which all the preceding were but as isolated rays to the dazzling splendor of the meridian orb of day. Then it was that the glorious Sun of Independence beamed upon the western world, that sun which even now warms us amid the convulsions, wreck and ruin which have overwhelmed, benighted or blotted from the map many great and powerful kingdoms. It was on the never-to-be-forgotten, ever-to-be-held-sacred, fourth day of July 1776, that Congress "in the name and by the authority of the people" did "publish and declare that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States." Here let us pause my fellow citizens, and in the present unexampled and calamitous state of the world, with uplifted hands and sincere hearts, here under the wide-spread canopy of heaven, and in the presence of "Divine Providence, mutually pledge" to our country and "to each other, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honors" to maintain the Independence of these United States, against any, all, and every, Power or Powers which injustice, hatred or despotism may array against them.

It would be gratifying and profitable, if time permitted, to touch upon the dreadful conflicts maintained, the well-fought battles won, and the hardships and privations suffered before the haughty mistress of the ocean, was so far humbled as to acknowledge, by her own act and deed, in 1783, the United Colonies to be "Free, Sovereign and Independent States." The fields of Bennington and Monmouth, the Cowpens and Stony-Point, are bright pages in our history, and will stimulate republican America to future deeds of prowess and of glory. The surrender of Burgoyne and the capture of Cornwallis are full of proud recollections. The names of *Warren*, *Montgomery*, and *Campbell*, who gloriously died that we might live free and happy, will long be dear to every lover of his country. *Washington* and *Green*; *Gates* and *Stark*; *Sumpter* and *Morgan*, and many other valiant commanders will live not only in the annals of their country but in the hearts of their countrymen for ages yet to come. Let us cherish the memories of *Franklin* and *Dickenson*; *Henry* and *Randolph*; *Hancock* and *Adams*, and other good and wise men who devoted their anxious days and sleepless nights to consummate the independence of their country, but above all, upon this day let us do homage to the talents and virtues of *Thomas Jefferson*—that *Thomas Jefferson* who draughted the Declaration of Independence, and who has on so many occasions, rendered to his country the most valuable services.

Let not, however, the feats of heroism, nor the plans of wisdom and patriotism claim all our grateful recollections; let the privates in the ranks be remembered. *Paulding*, *Williams*, and *Vanvert*, are the names of poor and lowly peasants, whose humble dwelling a ray of science had never lighted, but in their hearts honor sat enthroned, integrity beat in all their pulsations, and their labor-hardened hands were pure as the waters of innocence could make them. To their country they faithfully did their duty, may that country as faithfully do its duty towards them, by inculcating their principles and walking in their steps. Of such men as *Paulding*, *Williams*, and *Vanvert*, *Greece* and *Rome* would have been proud in their proudest days! Many a gallant fellow perished in the struggle, whose name is unrecorded, and who never had even his "passing paragraph of praise." Peace to their honest souls! comfort and competence to their families and friends!—There are thousands yet alive, there are many among my audience, who can "strip their sleeves and show their scars and say,

“ these wounds I had in my country’s cause.” May the pillow of tranquility press their cheek, may they know neither sickness nor sorrow, and smooth be their passage to the silent tomb.

Having cheerfully paid our mite of gratitude and praise to those who have done signal services to their country, let us rapidly enquire ; *what* is our situation now, compared with what it would have been had not independence been established ; *what* is our present situation, compared with that of the other civilized nations of the globe ; and *what* is our situation as to the belligerents ?

Had we remained under the galling yoke of Britain, it would have been annually made more and more grievous and burthensome. If we are asked for facts in support of this opinion we turn to the East Indies and to the West, and we point to the brave and generous sons of Erin bending beneath the weight. Their miseries and sufferings would have been ours, for our task-masters would have been the same ; what those are may be judged of from the description given by the super-humanly eloquent *Curran* in an address to an Irish jury who must have known the facts.

“ Merciful God, said he, what is the state of Ireland and where
 “ shall you find the wretched inhabitant of this land ? You may
 “ find him perhaps in a jail, the only place of security, I had al-
 “ most said of ordinary habitation : you may see him flying be-
 “ fore the conflagration of his own dwelling, or you may find his
 “ bones bleaching on the green fields of his country, or he may
 “ be found tossing upon the surface of the ocean and mingling
 “ his groans with those tempests, less savage than his persecutors,
 “ that drift him to a returnless distance from his family and his
 “ home.” What a melancholy picture is this, yet such would
 doubtless have been a faithful sketch of the American colonies,
 had they remained subject to Great Britain. Their substance
 would have been wasted in her liberticidal wars ; that so much
 boasted blessing a National Debt would have pressed heavy upon
 us ; our would-be nobles and “ the best blood” of England would
 riotously squander in luxury and vice money which would
 have been wrung from the hard hand of the Farmer and the wake-
 ful eye of the Mechanic. She would have made her subjects
 “ captains over thousands and captains over fifties,” and the sons
 of Columbia would have fallen in the ranks with other slaves,
 fighting in the cause of despotism. We gratefully acknowlege
 and proudly rejoice that those evils have been averted and put far

The fairest portions of Europe have, for nearly twenty years, been desolated by war, depopulated by famine and their inhabitants drinking deep of the cup of misery, while, within these United States, we have enjoyed the countless blessings of peace and plenty every man reposing under his fig tree and vine and none to make him afraid. Those nations upon which the light of liberty had gleamed, are again enveloped in the thick darkness of despotism, whilst we, a highly-favored people, are progressing in all useful knowlege, and are rich in the enjoyment of freedom, civil, religious and political.

We are the only nation in the world who interfere not with the sacred rights of conscience—we are the only people who have established and enjoy a government founded on the equal rights of man—we are the only people who at regular and frequent periods of time by the exercise of a peaceful act of sovereignty elect our public functionaries from the highest to the lowest—and we are the only people who can produce a constitution which defines the power of all the constituted authorities ; guarantees “ the freedom of speech and of the press ” and “ the right of the people to keep and bear arms. ” These my fellow citizens are high and lofty attainments which are the legitimate offspring of that eventful day whose annual return we this day celebrate. If there be a man from New Hampshire to Georgia, from the Atlantic to the Lakes, whose bosom does not expand with pride at those sublime distinctions, he is a most unworthy citizen and a most thankless man.

The only drop of affliction which falls into our national cup is from the gore-dripping hands of the belligerents. So insatiate is their vengeance, so thirsty their malice and so blind their fury that they think not of the hecatombs they have offered up—the rivers of tears they have caused to flow—nor of the desolation they have spread abroad. Justice and truth, law and treaty, are, without hesitancy, sacrificed, if by the sacrifice either of the hostile powers hope to prostrate the other ; hence, our rights have been sported with—our property seized—our laws mocked at—our citizens imprisoned, impressed and murdered—our national flag has been bathed in our own waters made red with the blood of our citizens—our wrongs are unredressed—our injuries unatoned—solemn arrangements have been faithlessly given to the wind—our credulity laughed at—and our government insulted grossly.

Gracious God *what* have we not borne—*how* have we not borne! I should weep and ye would weep with me if I were to give utterance to the feelings of my soul. Think not that I would allude to the great and mighty indignities which with an unsparing hand have been heaped upon us—think not that I would even hint at the millions of which we have been plundered, they would be but as dross in my eyes. Ah no! I would suppose a single faithful American citizen after a long and tedious voyage in which he had braved many a storm and had many a hair's breath 'scape to have come within sight of his beloved country and almost of "his own home and wife and little ones, who by his labor lived."

With an impatient anxiousness he paces the deck then whistles gaily to the wind to blow briskly and swiftly waft him to the shore. Fond recollections rush upon his mind and while "his manly heart overflows e'en like a child" a ruffian band board his ship, and with savage violence drag him to their floating dungeon and there "chain him, and task him, and exact his sweat with stripes," yes my fellow citizens, *with stripes* and thus compel him to do the work and fight the battles of a foreign tyrant. He fights, he falls.

"Alas!

"Nor wife, nor children more shall he behold,

"Nor friend, nor sacred home."

A widow and helpless Orphans mourn his hapless fate and call upon his countrymen, *you*, his countrymen, to revenge his wrongs. Is this a fancy picture? or is it mere dull, too oft-repeated matter of fact? Let the documents in your public offices answer the inquiry! Let the groans of thousands of Americans who drag on a miserable existence on board British ships of war bear disgraceful testimony to the damning facts!

Fellow Citizens, I regret that I should even for a moment, overshadow your countenances upon this National Jubilee, but I owed it to truth and to you not only to touch upon what we have been but also upon what we are. Let us, though it be with tearful eyes and indignant hearts, still let us look our situation fearlessly in the face. There is no cause to fear. Deep be buried in the earth, every prejudice and every prepossession which could alienate one atom of our affection from our country. By our voices and our votes, let us secure the election of faithful, capable and

patriotic magistrates and legislators, but let neither voice be heard, nor vote be given, in favor of any man who is friendly to any foreign unjust nation. A truly National American spirit must be fostered, one which will neither brook indignity nor submit to outrage. We must know none as friends who are not the friends of America. Have we not all the causes and all the motives which can unite a people? We have a constitution, a government and a country that are worth rallying round and defending at the hazard of all that's dear in life, nay life itself. Should the disturbers of the world's peace come hither, "Fear not their multitude, neither be ye afraid of their assault. Call to remembrance what acts our father's did in their time. We fight for our lives and our laws. Wherefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face, and as for you, be ye not afraid."

"Remember, O my friends! The Laws, the Rights,
 "The gen'rous plan of power delivered down
 "From age to age, by your renown'd forefathers,
 "So dearly bought—the price of so much blood:
 "Oh, never let it perish in your hands!
 "But piously transmit it to your children.
 "Do thou great Liberty, inspire our souls
 "And make our lives in thy possession happy
 "Or our deaths glorious in thy just defence."