

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT KEENE, N. H. BEFORE THE

Washington Benevolent Society,

ON THE 5TH DAY OF JULY, 1813:

BEING THE

ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY PHINEHAS COOKE.

KEENE.

PRINTED BY JOHN PRENTISS.

1813.

AT a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Washington Benevolent Society of the town of Keene, on the 9th day of July, 1813—

Voted; That their Vice President, Mr. PRENTISS, present their thanks to Mr. COOKE, for his Oration on Monday last ;—express their satisfaction with the energetic manner in which it was delivered ; and their approbation of the independent sentiments it contained : and believing that the diffusion of such sentiments would be productive of the most salutary effects, in enlightening our fellow-citizens, the Committee request a copy for publication.

Attest,

A. CADY, *Secretary.*

SIR

EVERY intention of doing good has not always the reward of immediate approbation. Please to tender my grateful acknowledgments to the Standing Committee of our Society for the flattering expression of their approbation. The copy which you do me the honor to request, though hastily prepared amidst various other duties and avocations, is submitted to their disposal.

PHINEHAS COOKE.

Mr. JOHN PRENTISS, *V. P.*

AN ORATION.

THE birth-day of our Country once more returns. How does the thirty-seventh Anniversary find us? Independent? Yes. Prosperous? No. In the possession of liberty? Yes. United? No. National honor and glory retrograde, or progressive? Retrograde. Public faith, public virtue, and public credit, rising or falling? Falling—approaching to insolvency. Such are the different shades which compose the picture that I am reluctantly called to exhibit to you this day.

Variable and fluctuating are the things which are seen and temporal. As in the fortune of an individual, so in that of a nation, every thing is subject to vicissitude and change. On no anniversary morn since our National existence was first announced, has the sun arose with such doubtful splendor, or thrown such tremulous rays over the plains of America, as on the present. But why reproach the sun? and accuse him of veiling his usual majesty, and of shutting his glories in for fear they would fall on creatures unworthy their influence? It is not heaven, but earth that is in fault. Every object in creation performs its incumbent duty, but man. While all things here below are turmoil and confusion in consequence

of man's inquietude, harmony dwells among the spheres. The sun observes his risings, and his settings—the moon, her waxing and her waning—comets, their approaches and recedings—stars, their fixedness and revolutions—while man, unstable as water, and variable as air, has no fixed place, no decisive character. Allow him to revel on all the sweets of paradise, save one, he is discontented until that also is tasted. Settle him on some exalted eminence which overlooks all others but one, he is restless until that is climbed, and no intervening obstacle opposes his avaricious view. Place within his grasp the sceptre of a kingdom, he wields it with restless ambition, so long as another kingdom appears beyond his immediate control. Thus his desires extend until limited by universal conquest. Then, as on the margin of creation, he sits, and weeps for the paucity of worlds.

This being the nature of man, in what part of the world shall we find him most worthily supporting the exalted rank he holds in the scale of existence? Should we view him groping beneath the chilling influence of polar skies, we should hardly be willing to acknowledge him a co-partner in the dignity derived from our common parent.

Should we transfer our observation to the burning line, and there see him breathing nothing but equinoctial air, we should find his mental powers enervated by luxury, and softened by sensuality.

But there is something that has more influence in establishing the human character than climate, *viz* : civil government.

Order, we are told, "was heaven's first law." It was *order*, that circumscribed the limits of the material world; it was *order*, that marshalled every star; and it is *order*, that must limit the desires of man.

Without characterising the different forms of government which now exist, and have existed since the first organization of society, we may venture to pronounce that

form the best, under which its subjects enjoy the most rational liberty, prosperity and happiness, and which is marked with certain features which insure permanency. For what is that liberty good for, which is constantly liable to become the prey of faction ; and what does that happiness insure which is only ephemeral ? The makers of any form of government must have a peculiar regard to the habits and manners of those intended to be governed. Closet politicians may weave in vain their fine-spun theories, but the garment itself, if worn at all, must be worn by corrupt human nature. Hence the *arm* of every government must abound just so much in strength, as the community are lacking in virtue.

Our form of government contemplates for its subjects, if they may be called such, a virtuous, and well informed community. Liberty never basked in freer air, than that which our Republican system breathes. The prosperity which has hitherto attended it, evidences to the world, that under its benign influence, we have sooner arrived to a degree of independence and strength, unparalleled in the history of nations. This reminds us of the gratitude due to those who, under heaven, achieved our precious privileges, and won our dear-bought blessings.

On a day like this, it would be base, and our hearts would be stained with the blackest ingratitude, did we not throw open the temple of fame, and take another lingering look on the departed worthies of our revolution. High in the vaulted arch, pre-eminently raised, sits WASHINGTON, on a pillar more durable than brass—imperishable as time—wearing on his breast this inscription—**THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY—THE FRIEND OF MAN.** On either hand a host of compatriots, decorated with immortal wreathes, plucked from the never-fading laurel. An assemblage of magnanimity, which Rome and Greece would have delighted to honor. There dwell many of those who fought the battles of our country, who subdued

her enemies, and who saw her *independent*. There hang the trophies of victory won in other wars. There dwell the sons of freedom—the chieftains of valor—the offspring of liberty.

But let us close the temple of American honor, lest the Father of his Country should see the degeneracy of his children. For fear he should see that country, which, when he left, was rapidly rising to glory and strength—“now shorn of its beams”—and as rapidly sinking into disgrace and contempt. Methinks I see his immortal spirit bending from its chrysal abode, and weeping over the instability of human greatness. Well may he weep, and well may every son and daughter of Columbia weep; for the beauty of America “is slain—is slain upon our high places.” A new political era has commenced since the days of Washington—a new sect of patriots have arisen; and novel systems, novel laws, and novel proceedings mark the features of the present day.

The good or bad quality of any public act is best known by the effect it has on the community. Observing this, then, surely will be the most candid way of judging the merits of the Federal and Democratic Administrations. That the views of the Washington and Jefferson administrations were very different, will be acknowledged by the candid of all parties. The *former* was a friend, the *latter*, an enemy to commerce. The *former*, an advocate for an active, effective navy; the *latter*, for a fresh-water-gun-boat system of defence. The *former*, avoided war with all nations—preserved an honorable neutrality amidst the convulsions of Europe; the *latter*, has apparently sought for war with the very nation with which it is most for our interest, in every point of view, to be at peace. With respect to the first, *Commerce*:—when the debate was held in Congress, respecting the *Impost-Bill*, Mr. Madison, then a Representative, made use of the following argument: “If it be expedient for America to

have vessels employed in commerce *at all*, it will be proper that she have enough to answer all the purposes intended; to form a school for seamen; to lay the foundation of a navy; and to be able to support it against the interference of foreigners." It ought to be remembered, that in a very short time afterwards, this same Mr. Madison and his party, exclaimed and filled the country with indignation against a *naval armament*: nay, made it a criminal charge against the Federal Administration, that it had laid the foundation of a navy. Knowing that an extensive commerce would need the protecting shield of a navy; by opposing the *latter*, Mr. Madison evidently discovered his hatred to the *former*.

I think fair experiment will uphold us in saying, If we have any wealth—if we have any public credit—if we have any thing, which gives us a respectable standing among the nations of the earth, it is in consequence of a long, uninterrupted, active commerce. It has contributed more than any thing else, to our present aggrandizement. It has been the brightest link in the chain of our national prosperity. It has nerved the arm of industry—brightened the share of agriculture—put in motion the wheels of our manufactures, and been the patroness of the arts.

The effects of the late restrictions on commerce, I need not mention. They are read in the many bankruptcies, with which our public papers have abounded of late—they are depicted in the countenances of many a child of want, who, to avoid the lingering death of famine, have by entering our armies, preferred that of the sword. In fine, there is not a log-hut behind the mountain, but in a greater or less degree, has felt the paralyzing shock. It has dried up the streams of our revenue, and parched even the jaws of our national treasury.

Respecting a Navy—the time has now arrived, and late transactions clearly show, which of the two parties had

the future interest of their country most at heart, those who advocated, or those who opposed a naval armament.

The last time WASHINGTON met the National Legislature, Dec. 7th, 1796, he recommends to them, among other measures, in which their Independence, honor, and prosperity were materially concerned, the gradual creation of a Navy. "To an active external commerce (he observes) a naval force is indispensable. This is manifest with regard to wars, in which a State is itself a party.— But besides this, it is in our experience, that the most sincere neutrality is not sufficient to guard against the depredations of nations at war. To secure respect to a neutral flag, requires a naval force organized, and ready to vindicate it from insult and aggression. This may prevent the necessity of going to war, by discouraging belligerents from committing such violations of the rights of neutrals, as may first or last leave no other alternative but war."

I leave it to others to judge, what protection our commerce has received from Gun-Boats, and what support they afford a nation, towards making its neutrality respected. The time has actually arrived to try the operation of this new species of defence. What have they done? or if their peculiar property is defence, what have they prevented the enemy from doing? I challenge the most enthusiastic admirer of this *terrapin policy*, to shew me a single instance of naval atchievement, in any degree adequate to the pompous predictions of their visionary projector.

Where then redounds the honor of this projection? or rather, where lights the disgrace? The number of these Gun-Boats is nearly two hundred; some of which cost not far from ten thousand dollars. How many frigates of the first or second size, the money expended on these gun-boats, would have built, I am unable to state. But supposing they would have built but one 74; what sea-

man, but would sooner take his chance aboard of her to encounter an enemy, than to avail himself of the whole of the Jeffersonian policy of naval defence? Our little navy, small in numbers, but great in valor and success, shews what might be done, had it been gradually increasing from the days of WASHINGTON down to the present time.— Our ears would not then have been so often filled with violated rights on the ocean; nor our gallant Tars, overlooked, and insulted by a proud, over-bearing nation. We should not have then to explore the wilds of Upper Canada, to avenge injuries done us on the Atlantic, nor with back-woods-men fight neutral rights into respect, five hundred miles from the element where they were violated.

On the subject of involving this nation in an *offensive war*, very different ideas were entertained by the present and former administrations, as the history of the last twenty-four years plainly shew.

Scarcely had our revolutionary tumult ceased, when *maniac* France began her broils in Europe. Restless as the warring elements, she not even knows the blessings of a temporary peace. A claim was soon laid on WASHINGTON, founded on past favors, to unite with her in her sanguinary contests; or in other words, to throw aside our neutrality, and prefer her friendship, even at the expence of the enmity of the world. But our illustrious WASHINGTON, whose eye could penetrate even the mazy labyrinth of French diplomacy, avoided the destructive embrace. It is well known to many present, that WASHINGTON on this occasion received the reproaches of the friends of France in this country, and was accused of the basest ingratitude towards his *august ally*.

At the head of these Frenchified Americans, stood no less a personage, than Mr. T—— J——, performing in the eyes of the United States, the important office of secretary of State; playing in the eyes of France, a very different part. “Whether the morals of that gentleman

were by original nature, or early institution, of that crooked kind, or whether he sucked in his improvement from the exuberant bosom of that mother of all mischief, *the Jacobin club of Paris*, those who knew him in his early days can best tell ; but so it certainly is, that according to the leading maxim of the party, of which he has at once been the head and heart, viz. *the end justifies the means*, that party and their leaders, have left no means untried to make the people of this country wage perpetual war with Great Britain. It will forever remain a historical picture of the blackest and most disgraceful kind, Mr. T—— J—— lending his hand to draw the *Declaration of Independence*, and thereby plighting in the face of heaven, and the world, the faith of his country and himself, to the observance of equal justice to Britain as to all other nations, and then like another Hannibal, laying that very hand upon the Altar, and swearing by all his Gods, eternal enmity to that country.”

But while Washington lived, our political bark rode the storm. The interest of that country, for whose salvation he spent so many wearisome days and anxious nights, lay nearer his heart than the visionary schemes of ambitious France. He knew where duty lay. He knew an honest, generous friend would never expect a favor to be returned, when it should cost the happiness, and even the life of him, on whom it was conferred.

But those days of National quietude and rest are gone. They are descended into the grave, and are entombed with their departed friend and advocate.

As when sober twilight throws her faint glimmerings over the faded cloud ; so darts the painful remembrance of former days, on us. “Like the memory of past joys, pleasing, but mournful to the soul.”

The long projected plan is at last consummated. “The destinies of these United States have begun to develope

themselves." Enough at last has been found in our country, to favor the views of the great Destroyer, who has made Europe an aceldama, a charnelhouse of death ; and who this moment, is mingling his smiles with kindred demons, at the bloody contest in which we are engaged.

Disciples of Washington ! I stand not in this temple of the Most High, to inflame your passions. Different language is wont to become this house. I read in the countenances of this large and respected auditory, different expectations. I see in the face of this assembly, a joy shaded with sorrow ; a light blended with darkness. I see before me, the saying of the wise man verified—" in the day of prosperity, rejoice ; but in the day of adversity, consider."

" Hung be the Heavens in black," and let inanimate nature weep ; for we are the last nation, denominated christian, who have voluntarily plunged ourselves in war. But afflictions spring not from the dust ; neither do troubles rise by chance. Every consequent has its antecedent ; each effect, its cause. If this war was declared more to favor the views of the great Napoleon, than to avenge our country's wrongs, and should the *Continental System* finally prevail, you may now read your destiny on the grave-stones of departed Republics. Go, and in imagination, turn the leaves of future history, and there read the counterpart of Greece and Rome. There, side by side, you will see the two urns standing, which contain the ashes of the ancient and modern Republics.

But amidst all these evil forebodings, there gleams yet a hope. From the shores of the Baltic a murmur is heard, and eastern gales have wafted it to our joyful ears. On the plains of Russia, the foe of liberty, the tyger of mankind, the Apollyon of the human race, has been discomfited. This magnanimous nation, under heaven, have apparently broke the yoke which was preparing for the whole

human race. They have struck a blow which has resounded even to these western shores.

With peculiar propriety, has the Emperor of Russia been styled, "ALEXANDER, THE DELIVERER." He has delivered Continental Europe from her late agonizing throes, and freed the world from immediate bondage — Deeply interested as we are, in the fate of every independent nation, let us rejoice this day that Russia is free. One of the noblest productions of a pious heart, is sympathy. To rejoice with those that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep. One of the greatest incitements we have this day, to rejoice, is, that Russia is FREE, that Russia is POWERFUL, that she has become the chastiser of the scourge of Europe. The awful consequences probably resulting to mankind, had Russia fell in her late glorious struggle, are too numerous now to be mentioned. Had she been subdued, and her immense wealth thrown into the jaws of the *all-devouring Scylla*, England, though she would have done "all that mortal man could do," would not have been able to escape the yawning gulph. Great Britain once subdued—and the few remaining sparks of independence, in Spain and Portugal extinguished—then, O America! would come the day, the solemn day, already foretold by many political prophets, when you would be summoned to lay your Independence on the same funeral pyre of other nations, and the smoke of our torments would ascend up together. But a kind Providence seems to have interspersed the gloomy prospect, with a ray of light.

Will any one forbid us to rejoice, that the counterpoise of Europe is in some measure preserved? Can there be found a person who breathes the air of FREEDOM, but congratulates Russia on her escape? Yes, O MY COUNTRY! there are men in the midst of thee, who, while they suck the breast of Liberty, and inhale the pure air of Freedom, are secretly wishing success to the Emperor of France—who would rejoice to have seen Russia admitted into the school of slavery. These are the men who pre-

tend to be the exclusive friends of their country—the genuine Republicans of the age—foremost in their clamours for exterminating England, and thus open the way to the arms of their beloved Master.

“Whatever might be the views of the authors of the present war, it was so timed, as to have the effect of direct and no inconsiderable cooperation with France. The war of the U. S. against Britain was declared June 18, 1812;—that of France against Russia, July 3d, only fifteen days later. It threw this country into the scale of the universal enemy—it made common cause between us and him, in his attack on the only remaining power on the Continent of Europe—a power too with which we were in amity. By producing an additional pressure on the commerce of England, and rendering considerable force necessary here, it tended to diminish, in no inconsiderable degree, her efforts in the North of Europe, as well as the South; and that diminution was, in the same degree, a loss to Russia.

“It was the act of a man, who, seeing another about to be set upon by a robber and assassin, chooses that moment to attack, under the pretext of some trivial dispute, a third person, going to the aid of the intended victim. It was worse. It was aiding by these indirect, but efficacious means, the most efficacious in our power, in the destruction of this victim, while we professed to be his friend; and when by his fall, the hand of the *murderer* would be rendered irresistibly strong for our own destruction.”*

This was the situation of Russia at the commencement of our present war.

Thanks be to the **DISPOSER** of events, to **HIM** who is Mighty to save, that a brighter prospect gleams on us, than at that eventful period. Our minds have been relieved of part of their burden, viz. foreign fears. Our principal troubles are now of domestic growth: Yet they are such as daily bring ruin to our doors. I sicken, when I read the weekly tales of our misfortunes. Every western gale that

* R. G. Harper's address at the Russian Celebration, in Georgetown, Col.

salutes the ear, is filled with some fresh disastrous tale of woe. We have had wars in other times, when we dared invoke the aid of heaven in our cause. But it would be impiety in our present conflict.

It is often sounded in our ears by office-seekers, and their menials, that the causes which led to the present war were the same, or as pressing, as those which produced our revolutionary struggle. This is an assertion, which the common sense of the common people of this country, have long since refuted. Was it a real, or bastard patriotism, which inspired the armies of our revolution, when our ranks were filled with men, who had something near and dear to protect? Cast your eyes on our *present army*, and see what composes it. Are they the owners of the soil? Have they domestic altars, and fire-sides to defend? I believe this can hardly be said, even of all their officers. Like the ancient heathens, they carry all their household-gods with them, and on them only they seem to rely for protection.

We have of late been told by our chief Magistrate, "that in our present war, we have thus far been successful." After the style of his compeer Napoleon, who, in the midst of the climate of Russia, hunted by *Cossacks* on every side, "*enjoyed* the delightful days of *Fontaine-bleau*."

But such is the infatuation of the times in which we live, that Executive recommendation, and assertion are by many, greedily swallowed, without reflection, and without comment.

My countrymen! I blush for the degeneracy of the age—for the land of my fathers—for the wane of American Glory. For here my friends and kindred dwelt. *Here*, in other days, lived WASHINGTON, the great, and the good: and *here* remains his sepulchre to this day, "and not a stone tells where he lies." *Here*, too, FRANKLIN was born, and here rests his *remains*. Im-

mortal sage ! The elements were at times. thy ministering servants. Hark ! A sigh is heard in the western breeze ; it comes from the Genius of Columbia, weeping over the grave of HAMILTON. Unfortunate Patriot ! Thou was shamefully cut off in the midst of thy days ! On thee should have descended the *armour* of Washington ! Thou should have preserved the diadem of American glory !

But alas ! An inconsiderate flash, which the baser part of the world are pleased to call courage, deprived thee of an honorable death, and thy country of its future prep.*

Slowly dies on our ears the sound of the funeral knell, struck for the departed AMES. He, too, is gone to the sepulchre of his fathers, and left a widowed country to mourn the loss of her greatest *political prophet*.

Is it possible, that the glory of America, in the short space of thirty-seven years, has passed its Zenith ? Have the worthy Heroes of our Revolution, who have departed from the great theatre of action, left behind them no representatives ? None to retrace their hallowed steps ? Has the *patriotic race* become extinct ? No. There is yet a goodly number, and that number is increasing, who are the real disciples of Washington—who are no mongrel breed—no illegitimate race.

Methinks I see many in this assembly, who have never yet forsaken their first love—who, *by the blessing of God*, continue to this day—who, in other times, were no strangers to the “ tented field.”

My veteran friends ! Other men now fight our battles. or rather *their own*. The laurels of modern times are

* The writer needs not be informed, that General HAMILTON'S moral character, was exceptionable. But that WASHINGTON considered him a pre-eminent Statesman, and the most suitable person to command the armies of this country, none will deny ; who will be at the trouble to have recourse to Washington's letters, public as well as private.

plucked by the hands of other heroes. I wish I could present you this day a cup of joy, unmingled with sorrow; for you have drank your share of bitterness. I wish it was in my power to promise you an unclouded sun, to gild the evening of your days. But it belongs not to my short-sighted capacity to explore the womb of my country's fate. There may yet be something good in store for you, and us—your posterity.

It has not been the usual way of Divine Providence to destroy a nation so young as we are. He long forebore with his ancient people the Jews, because they were the seed of faithful Abraham. So far as the prayers of a *pious ancestry* are heard for their offspring, so far I think we may claim the benefit derived from a godly heritage. But I must come to a close.

Friends of WASHINGTON! If we have any occasion to rejoice this day, *it is*, because the power of infidel France has been crippled—*it is*, because Russia is yet independent—*it is*, because the equipoise of Europe is in a measure preserved—*it is*, because there is yet a goodly number in *this land of ours*, who have never yet bowed the knee to the modern *Baal*—but above all, *it is* because the SUPREME ARBITER of nations, lives and reigns, “and has the hearts of all in his hand, and can turn them as the rivers of water are turned.”

