



JOHNSON'S
ORATION.



JULY 4, 1812.



AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED IN
ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH;
BEFORE THE INHABITANTS OF
CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA,
ON SATURDAY THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1812,
IN COMMEMORATION OF
American Independence;
BY APPOINTMENT OF
THE '76 ASSOCIATION,
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BY THE HON. WM. JOHNSON, JUN.
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Oration, &c.

THE heart, my Fellow-Citizens, that dilates not with extraordinary emotion on the return of this day, must be insensible to some of the finest feelings that animate and give dignity to our nature. How vast, how august are the objects that now rise on our view! A world emerging from night; a nation rescued from bondage; millions of grateful beings lifting their hearts in humble devotion to their God, and solemnly renewing their annual vows upon the altar of freedom.

Sacred to the recurrence of the most ennobling recollections, be the return of this day! Ominous will it prove to the cause of liberty, whenever its first dawn shall no longer be announced by the cannon's voice, and the exhilarating sounds of martial music, when it shall cease to be hailed as a day of rational festivity, or the orator refuse a well meant effort to contribute to its celebration.

Consider it with a view to its origin, progress and termination, or to its present, past, or future effects upon the world, and the event, which we now meet to commemorate, is calculated to excite in the patriot bosom the finest glow of sentiment, to gladden the heart of the Philanthropist, and to make the humble Christian exclaim "this is thy work, Parent of Good."

Long had the Western world been hid from the enquiries of the Eastern. Often in the course of those revolutions, to which all human things are subjected, had science reared her head, and again sunk overwhelmed by barbarism. The bold enquiries of two great and enlightened people had pierced the clouds of ignorance, and rioted in the most unbounded speculations: Often had reason and conjecture been occupied in investigating the regions of a world beyond the grave; but never had the most daring flights of Grecian, or of Roman imagination, ventured to scan the limits of the Western Ocean. The ancient world beheld the God of day retiring to the chambers of Thetis, or extinguishing his chariot wheels in the waters of Ocean; but never did they imagine that whilst yet his parting rays still lingered on the tree tops of the distant Thule, his morning beams awakened the superstition of another world.

When real science had developed the great truths of creation, and the follies of polytheism had vanished before the light of revelation, the Eastern world still saw the sun wasting his beams upon a cheerless expanse of ocean, nor conceived an idea of the treasures of beauty, and of plenty, which his genial warmth elicited from this favored region. To modern times was reserved the distinguishing honor of tearing away the veil which concealed the two hemispheres from each other, and of presenting another world to the wants and adventures of man.

In the fullness of time, the almost supernatural powers of the magnetic needle were revealed to

the mariner, and the first bold adventurers who availed themselves of the discovery, returning home laden with honor and with spoils, every bark was launched into the ocean in quest of fame, or fortune. As yet, none had conceived the bold idea of penetrating the boundless ocean which terminated the European horizon, and of reaching the great object of their researches, by a shorter rout. This was reserved for the immortal Genoese. Ignorance, superstition, envy, timidity, in vain reared their mounds against him, his soul grew with danger, and he dared, and achieved, what even to himself, might have appeared chimerical.

Yet it was not he—the Master hand of greatness, and of goodness, “was in this thing.” Pause—and consider the state of the world at that interesting era.

Europe had long slept unconscious of the shackles which superstition and tyranny had thrown around her: A torrent of religious maniacs had swept over Asia and Africa; and the propagation of religion, by the sword, had long been the pretext of bloody ambition and designing hypocrisy. But the time was now approaching, when the expansive powers of the human mind were no longer to be repressed, when the torch of reason was to be lifted on the dark designs of tyrants and of hierarchs, and when, man, resuming his long lost rights of action and opinion, should burst his fetters and assert his affinity to the Deity. Bloody was the conflict that ensued, and dubious the event! But who that is sensible of the value of

the object, ever shrunk from the sacrifice necessary to its attainment? Then it was, that to cheer the struggling patriot, Providence directed his eye to this new land of promise, this ultimate resort of persecuted freedom, this asylum, to which, with sure hope, she might fly for safety when driven to the last verge of the ancient world. Desolate had been the condition of the votarist of Liberty, but for this city of refuge. Whither could he flee; the waters of despotism covered the whole earth, leaving not one solitary olive branch to him. Two little spots of earth, sheltered by fens and rocks, afforded refuge to all the freedom that the world could boast of. That daring intrepidity, that bold and dauntless spirit, which braved death in all its horrors, in vindication of his ravished rights, designated him as the object of persecution and vengeance: It was, amongst the tyrants of the earth, that mark, for which every one that met him would have slain him.

How cheering to the souls who disdained their chains, but who knew not whither to escape, must have been the view of a retreat beyond the iron grasp of tyranny! With what rapture must they have hailed the prospect of a new world, whither the oppressed of all nations might flee for refuge, and where one great effort might yet be made for ameliorating the condition of man.

Yet, when our fathers had braved the horrors of unexplored deserts, and a trackless ocean, tyrant power sought them in their new retreat, and meanly grasped at the precious blessing that had

sustained them in their toils and sanctified their labors. Indignantly they arose at the unhallowed attempt, and bursting the bonds that connected them with their unnatural parent, gave her to know that man, determined to be free, may be destroyed, but cannot be subdued.

Conceived in wisdom, prosecuted with vigor, and concluded with glory, the American Revolution is one of those events which, at times, are presented to the world, as a "a pillar of fire," to conduct man to that high destiny for which his powers are calculated. Absorbed in the ordinary cares of life, too often benumbed by the icy hand of poverty, or the paralyzing influence of bad education, or of bad government, we slumber away our lives unconscious of the torpor that pervades us, and of the splendid powers which we are capable of displaying when roused into action. But let a picture of the American Revolution, portrayed by a hand that dares to give it its true colouring, be presented to the mind, and while we trace the great actions of our Revolutionary heroes, who is there who will not imagine a voice from Heaven, saying "go thou and do so likewise," or whilst we consider the scenes of desolation, and of bloodshed, which defiled the fair face of this smiling country, whilst we view the widows weeps, and the sable covering of the weeping orphan, who will not fly to the altar and call on heaven to witness the dedication of all his powers to the protection of his country?

But where shall we begin? Where close our remarks upon the splendid picture? Glory sheds

around it a lustre which scarce permits the eye to dwell upon individual objects.

“Tho’ Cormac’s hundred bards were there to give the war to song, feeble were the voices of an hundred bards to send their deeds to future times.”

Shades of Warren, Montgomery, Mercer, and thou Father of thy country, who, though thou didst not end thy career of glory on the field of honor, yet expiredst amidst the sighs and tears of an adoring country, pardon me, if despairing to do justice to your exalted merits, I leave your greatest actions to the eloquence of some more favored rostrum.

Why look beyond the limits of my own country for subjects worthy of admiration? Ample are the objects which she too presents for the plaudits of posterity. Honest is the pride, and just the pretensions, which claim for her a high place in the ranks of patriotism. ’Twere disgraceful, meanly to derogate from the just pretensions of others, but to assert the fair well founded claims of our own ancestors, is what we owe to ourselves and to posterity.

Another state has acquired the epithet of the cradle of the revolution, but may it not be said of this, that she nursed it with the fabled tenderness of that bird, which furnishes an emblem of eternal love? Promptly she stood forth the first, to constitute that body which organized opposition, and e’er the general voice had called into action the eloquent pen of a Jefferson, Carolina was already free. Already had the standard of

the oppressor been trodden under foot, and the aspiring Palmetto, bearing on high the emblems of war,* announced to the world that, with their lives and fortunes, her sons were ready for the conflict. The first to adopt the boldest measures of a fearless spirit, never afterwards did she falter in the prosecution of her great object. How much had she to fear, how much to lose ! Without, an enemy bold from the lists of victory, vigorous from recent repose, aiming the first efforts of his vengeance at our forward zeal. Within, a monster, tearing the vitals of a parent, and an inherent disease, converting her aliment into poison. Need I insist upon the prodigality with which she lavished her treasure and her blood.—how far her exertions transcended her wealth and population, or, how supereminent were her sufferings from the ravages of war. Eyes that see me, ears that hear me, were witnesses to the constancy and firmness which this country displayed, and fresh in the recollection of him who addresses you, are many of the appalling scenes of the Revolution.

How did the trembling mother shrink from the view, and press the clinging infant to her bosom, when in martial array, armed for the destruction of their husbands and their brothers, your ***** paraded these streets. And how did the Patriot heart weep blood ! daily, as the groaning wheels of the loaded cart bore to their humble

* "ANIMIS OPIBUSQUE PARATI," is the motto of the State Arms. The device, a Palmetto bearing two shields.

graves unshrouded hecatombs of victims to the horrors of a prison ship!

Need I recount the instances of individual bravery, and suffering firmness, which distinguished that eventful period? Some few it were unpardonable to omit. When the commander of some great enterprise, or one whose station lifts him to the notice of the world, yields up his life a willing offering to a nation's good, his last moments may be consoled, not less by a consciousness of high desert, than by the flattering hope of fame. But what is to support the obscure or undistinguished individual, in "seeking reputation even at the canon's mouth," save that grandeur of soul, which, casting off all thoughts of self, exclaims in the language of a heroic friendship.—
 * Me, me, adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum? It is impossible but this reflection must obtrude itself upon the mind, when we hear the humble M'Donald, with his last sigh, breathing out exhortations to his surrounding comrades, or contemplating the actions of the obscure but heroic Jasper. How sacred in his eye was the standard of his country! Once had he signalized his intrepidity in its defence, in the view of this admiring City. But again we find him foremost in the onset, baring his bosom to the bayonet, in another place. Already had the intrepid Hume planted the standard on the ramparts of Savannah, "when death met the young warrior in the first of his fields," and the sacred charge fell from his

* From the Episode of Nisus and Euryalus in Virgil.

relaxed grasp. With the flight of the eagle, urging his way to where nought but death awaited him, Jasper seized it, bore it to his friends, embraced it, and expired.

I would not harrow up the souls of those who hear me, but there live some, to whose recollection I could bring a noble instance of patient and heroic suffering. Not amidst the hurry of battle, where the din of war, the trumpets sound, the clamor of contending armies, and the consolations of honor, may make at times the coward bold—but where ignominy, added to the sting of death, called forth every effort of the human mind, all the resources of the citizen, the soldier, and the christian, to support it. Do none, who hear me, remember the solemn procession which traversed this mourning city on the fourth day of August, '81? In the midst of it marched the victim destined to be immolated to ruthless tyranny. How sublime was that expression of resignation which sat upon his brow! Others wept, he smiled—and when his eyes met the last adieus of his despairing friends, how cheerful was that look which said, “I suffer for my country, fear not, my blood will water the tree of liberty.” Vainly had the resistless charms of weeping beauty sued, vainly the clasped hands of infancy soliciting a parent's life; nought could subdue the stern heart of practised barbarity. Oh! how his murderers bit the lip of envy, when, as he passed, the tearful eye, and wavering handkerchiefs of his fair country-women,

met his view at every window, telling him, in language that no tongue could utter, "we know it is for us and our sons you suffer." What, amidst a scene so touching—what, but the enthusiasm of liberty, or supernatural support, could have sustained his equanimity? We will drop the curtain over the melancholy sequel. May we be able to emulate his firmness—God will avenge his wrongs.

But, the enemies of our country bore testimony to the firmness of its sons. Where else was it deemed necessary to tear the father from his weeping family, and in contempt of the most solemn pledge of faith, in war, to incarcerate him in a distant land, the destined victim of anticipated conquest? Yet did the streaming eyes of an infant family, or the last strained embrace of conjugal affection—did the pointed bayonet, or the horrors of uncertainty cause one soul to yield? Thanks to that power that strengthens the patriot's heart, unyielding, unappalled, invincible in their fidelity, they shrunk not from the trial—many sleep.--" 'Tis not on earth that virtue asks reward"—some still survive and live, to frown into annihilation the degenerate soul that could ponder on a like occasion.

One venerable hero, the united wish of all who hear me, points to, as meriting distinguishing attention. Who can forget the patriotic Gadsden? Boldness and decision marked his every thought, energy and firmness characterized his actions.—His elevated soul had fixed on freedom for its object, and his ardent mind sprung to the goal of his wishes, with a celerity that distances the ordi-

nary conceptions of man. Serene amidst conflicting elements, his soul knew not the form of fear, and in the damp of a dungeon he could court that security, which he disdained to owe to the will of a faithless enemy. Venerable man! it were injustice to a character which must long be cherished among us, to omit to add, that whether in the councils of thy country, in the busy scenes of war, or the assiduous discharge of every social duty, thy actions were all humbly laid at the feet of him "who sitteth high in Heaven."

* Once, and but once, was the hated name of submission whispered in our councils. Whilst gratitude pours its tears over the memory of those who have deserved well of their country, let him, who has dared to tarnish her laurels, tremble at the dread tribunal of impartial posterity. Yes, once was the hated name of submission whispered in our councils. Vainly did the rage of Gadsden, the indignant tears of Edwards, the firm opposition of Ferguson, the flashing eye of the animated Laurens, oppose the fears of a panic stricken majority. But fame, with her hundred tongues, soon told the appalling tale abroad. One burst of indignation echoed through the ranks of citizens; firmly they awaited the onset of the enemy—absorbed in the cause of honor, and their country, their souls shrunk not from the approach of death. But aghast at impending infamy, with one voice they exclaimed "disgrace us and they die," the arm that is raised for their defence shall destroy

* See Moutrie on the proposition to surrender Charleston to Provost.

them.” Timidity shrunk abashed from the indignant glance of patriotism, and the threatening cloud was dissipated e’er it burst and overwhelmed us with shame. Moultrie, our gratitude for this—But for thy firmness, we might now have called upon the rocks and mountains to cover us. Thy valor had already humbled the pride of our enemy; thou didst more, in saving thy country from humiliation.

But whither am I hurried! how do justice to the host of heroes that crowd upon recollection. Shall Marion, Sumpter, Roberts, Wilkins be forgotten? Or shall the innumerable worthies who shone in our councils, or the field, depart without their fame? *Here in my view a widowed mourner weeps o’er the ashes of her fallen hero. † There parental tenderness has reared a monument to a son, who also sealed our charter with his blood.—Time will not permit me to dwell upon individual merit. Embalmed in the recollection of a grateful country, whilst worth remains on earth, they cannot be forgotten. Often will the mantling blood thrill through the veins of posterity, whilst contemplating the actions of their fathers, and with honest pride will future orators support me in asserting the just claims of the sons of Carolina.

But, whilst we dwell upon the worth of those who fought and bled in the service of their country, let us not be unjust to those who inspire “ the

* Monument of Major B. Huger—A female embracing an urn, erected by his widow.

† Monument of Philip Neyle, erected by his mother, both in St. Philip’s Church.

poets lay, the patriots noblest thought." Vanquishing that timidity which forces them into the arms of man for protection—they too exhibited, on all occasions, the dignifying influence of the spirit of freedom. Lives there, on record, a mother, who refused her son? A wife, who refused her husband to the calls of her country? And how often, when bathing with their tears, the wounds of him, in whom had centered their hopes, or their affections, would they heroically exclaim "I had wept more, had he been faithless to his country." Cheerful amidst every privation, firm in the hour of trial, and of danger, inspired by the most elevated sentiments, how often did the mother bring the little Hannibal to the altar, and make him swear to avenge the wrongs of his country! Deeply into the infant heart will sink those lessons, that are uttered by the loved lips, and impressed by the moistened eye of a mother.

But again the time is arrived, to call into action every latent virtue. Soon must it be determined, whether we will support the well earned honors of our forefathers. The same insidious foe, the same determined enemy, vanquished on these shores, now assails our independence on the highway of nations. Proud in his wealth, elated by that navy which vexes the whole earth, another Xerxes casts his chains upon the ocean. Beyond the Hellespont lay Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Platea.

Already has British gold excited the yell of the savage, and our citizens have bled beneath the tomahawk, and the scalping knife. The securi

ty of the sleeping hour, the sanctity of the cradle have been invaded. Infancy could not smile down the savage fury of the English ally, or kneeling beauty stay the uplifted arm of the man of blood. "Passion is reason, transport, temper here."

Perhaps the pallid lip of fear, the tongue of calculating avarice, selfishness, coiled in itself like the unsocial serpent, may whisper danger! Promptly indignant Patriotism replies, avaunt the thoughts of danger. Does not the shriek of infancy and age, mingling with the savage yell, affright our forests? Is not the low moan of our entombed seamen, borne to us on all the winds of heaven? My friends, the last of national evils is conscious degradation. This sinks the soul below the conception of elevated sentiments, unnerves the arm that lifts the shield before a nation's liberties, and makes man bend a willing neck to slavery. Shall it be told to those who read of us, "their enemy was powerful, the conflict had been sanguinary, therefore they bartered half their rights for a disgraceful peace?" Who is there, who hears me? Who had not rather it should be related, "long they fought, covered with glory, and forced to yield to overwhelming power—a few brave hearts survived, and lived to bear with them their freedom, beyond the reach of tyranny."

Purposely I omit to dwell upon the estimate of danger. Too well I know the spirit that animates my countrymen, to suspect them of pausing long upon that consideration.

But what have we to fear? Whilst true to ourselves, where is the power on earth that can as-

fect us? A want of unanimity—a narrow minded distrust of the rulers of our choice—cold and reluctant contributions to the exigencies of war; these might excite alarm, but these will not exist. Do not millions of freemen now crowd around the standard of their country? Is not the post of danger the object of solicitation and of rivalry? Who waits until the casual designation of blind fortune shall summon him to the tented field? No. The spirit of the revolution still moves “on the face of our waters,” and the impatient patriot scarce brooks the grave movements of the machine of government. Internal discord, lifting the dagger at a parents heart, no longer stalks among us. Vanished are the materials once so successfully employed in kindling the flames of civil war—and the sons of the deluded citizens of other times, now pant for an occasion to signalize their devotion to their country. One little speck alone is seen on our otherwise unclouded horizon. The wily serpent of disunion has stolen into the cradle of the revolution. But fear not, it contains an infant Hercules. Soon will the sounds of war arouse him from his slumbers, and the strangled monster writhe his folds in vain.

There is not a more common, or more abundant source of error, than that which arises from the humility of the pretensions of the present, to emulate the actions of the times that are past.—Man, with the same principles, the same motives, the same means, and the same education, is ever capable of the same efforts, when roused into action. Seen through the vista of ages, many bril-

liant actions, many patriots and heroes crowd at once upon the view, and overwhelm us with admiration. Adorned by the pen of Plutarch, or Thucydides, of Livy, or of Tacitus, a lustre is thrown around the actions of antiquity, that dazzles and humbles us. But let us not be discouraged; seen under equal advantages, modern times have exhibited men and actions, which Rome would have boasted of, and Sparta applauded. Already are the revolutions of Helvetia, the Netherlands, and of these states, related as “the tale of other times.” If more recent examples are required, will my auditors attend me to the desolated plains of weeping Poland, or the bleeding vallies of the land of Tell?

In vain had Kosciuszko and the Pulaskis breasted the torrent that Russia poured upon their country. Suwarrow, reeking from the fireets of Imael, swept o’er her fields, fattening the soil with the blood of the peaceful cultivator. Freedom, driven to the last ditch, sullenly retired within the walls of Warsaw, resolved behind the ramparts of Praga, to make her last convulsive effort. Nought could withstand the impetuous valor of the half civilized Russian. Mounting over ditches, filled with the bodies of their comrades, thirsting for blood, the myriads of the famished Tigrels, have forced their way beyond its ramparts: But why that pause? What rolls the tide of battle back upon itself, and for a while arrests the victory? There stood a remnant of the sons of Israel, mindful of the better times of their nation, when the swords of Joshua and of Gideon flamed on the rear of a

devoted people ; or when the myriads of Syria melted like the morning mist before the prowess of the Maccabei ; with their lives they manifested how faithful they could be to that country that had cherished them. Five hundred chosen youths stood forth, the champions of their nation's honor, and five hundred prostrate bodies marked the line on which their standard had been planted. " Stranger, go tell at Lacedemon we died fighting for our sacred country."*

A more magnanimous struggle, in the cause of freedom, the world never beheld, than that which in our time has been exhibited on the mountains of Switzerland. What age has boasted a hero of nobler mind than Reding ; or more determined valor than that of the few small cantons which resisted usurping France. Shall I point your attention to the plains of Morgarten—to that host of soldiers, the victors and terror of Europe, sinking beneath the valor of a handful of herdsmen ? But those herdsmen were the descendants of Tell, and of Werner ; and solemn was the compact by which the leader and the soldier had vowed themselves to death or victory. The world has long hung with rapture over the picture of the last of the Romans, sinking with dignity beneath the ruins of the republic. But how much more rationally correct, and not less dignified, was the conduct of the generous Swiss, when convening his little band of freemen, we hear him address them thus, " Brave comrades, dear fellow-citizens, the

* See Suwarrow's campaign, v. 2, P. 124.

decisive moment is at hand. Surrounded by our enemies, abandoned by our friends, nought remains for us but to imitate the example of our ancestors. An almost certain death awaits us. If any one fears it, let him retire, no reproaches on our part shall attend him. As for myself, I will never desert you, even in the greatest extremities. Death and no retreat. If you share my resolution, let two of your numbers come forth from your ranks, and swear to me, in your name, that you will be faithful to your words."—The oath was sworn with rapture. Such men were necessarily invincible. Death turned aside his dart from the immortal leader.*

Shall I not rescue, from unmerited oblivion, the unconquerable spirit of the valiant Houser? Intrepidly to meet the approach of death, calmly to smile upon his impotent terrors, has ever commanded the applause of the world. Pages of eloquence, of history and poetry, had been dedicated by antiquity to bravery like his; yet scarce has fame founded his name to the modern world.—Fain would I lift his laurels from the dust; Fain would replacethe wreath upon his brow—Prostrate on the field of honour, the invigorating stream of life had issued from an hundred wounds; yet nought escaped his half closed lips, even when his spirit seemed winging its way to eternity, save, Oh my country! Oh! for strength to defend her!

* For this and the subsequent fact, see the History of the invasion of Switzerland; by H. Zschokke, translated by Aikin.

Examples like his are too precious to be lost to the world.

If other instances, in support of my position, be required, where did the world ever witness a more obstinate, more determined conflict, than the expiring effort of the canton of Unterwalden? No age or sex refused the combat. Resolved not to survive the last sigh of their expiring liberty, they courted the merciless bayonet as their refuge from tyranny.

One Spartan survived, to tell the fall of Leonidas, and on the plains of Platea, extinguished, with his blood, the blushes of his country. But who lived to relate the fall of those two hundred brave youths of Schweits, who flying to the aid of their unhappy neighbors, plunging into the thickest ranks of the invader, firewing the field with the minions of usurpation, fell the willing martyrs of freedom?

My friends, we too have glorious examples before us, and when, in another world, we shall meet the august eyes of the heroes of the revolution, devoutly I will hope, that with humble confidence we may say, "we have not disgraced your memory." If, after the lapse of ages, we find the unconquerable spirit of freedom, still flourishing on the mountains of Helvetia, and in the plains of Sarmatia, rapid indeed must have been our decline, if a few short years should have extinguished it amongst us. But no, our lamp burns bright. The sacred flame still animates each bosom, still lightens up every countenance. Daggers would pierce the hearts of all who hear me, the averted

eye, the bending head of shame would await it, if a noble consciousness of devotion to your country did not glow in every bosom.

Long may the love of country be the animating principle of the sons of Carolina. May her untarnished laurels descend to ages of virtuous posterity, and canopied by Almighty Power, may she ever remain the consecrated abode of Rational Liberty.

NOTE.

On the occurrence alluded to, at the end of the 13th Page, there are persons, now living, who can testify to the fact. The threat was deliberately and explicitly made, on the hornworks, and would have been executed, had the town been surrendered on the terms proposed.

ERRATA.

- Page 5, 15th line, after yet, *put* (,)
 — 6, 10th line, after flee, for (;) *place* (?)
 — 8, 14th line, after rostrum, for (.) *place* (!)
 — 9, 8th line, for (loose,) *read* (lose.)
 — 9, 19th line, after war, for (.) *place* (?)
 — 10, 16th line, for (language of a heroic,) *read* (language of heroic.)
 — 11, 22d line, for (contemplating) *read* (contemplate.)
 — —, last line, for (wavering,) *read* (waving.)

