

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

SPRINGFIELD, N. J.

ON THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF  
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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# AN ORATION,

*Delivered at Springfield, on the 4th of July*

1815.

**FELLOW CITIZENS,**

WE have convened to celebrate one of the greatest events recorded in history : an event which elevates to admiration, which swells into astonishment, and which absorbs in wonder every faculty of the mind. It is the era of our National Independence :—The duty of addressing you on this interesting occasion, has, by your choice, devolved on me. In attempting to discharge the duty I feel myself oppressed with an embarrassment which I have never before experienced. Wholly unpractised in political declamation, and but very superficially acquainted with political science, nothing but a grateful sense of your indulgence, Fellow Citizens, could have induced me to accept this arduous task.

The ruthless sword of persecution precipitated our ancestors from the Eastern to the Western hemisphere. Oppressed with sorrow they landed on the dreary beach of New-England. Behind them were the raging seas ; before them was a howling wilderness. Penury, disease, and difficulty consigned to the grave the greater part of their number. But the God of strangers preserved their settlement. Inured to suffering, and familiarized to the prowling music of the desert, neither the wretchedness of their domestic fate, nor the horrors of savage torture, could bow their independent spirits to submission ; nor disappoint their confidence in that Eternal Wisdom who planted them across the ocean in a foreign land. Never for a moment would they brook a practical infringement of their liberties. They repelled every species of foreign taxation ; they avenged the first act of British hostility ; and, finally, guided by the finger of Providence, and led

by the victorious arm of Washington, they reached the pinnacle of Independence.—Unhappily the politics of other nations engrossed their attention, and we, their offspring, have but too well improved on their example. Not pursuing our country's welfare as the only safe landmark of our hopes, we have followed the delusive beacons of foreign interest, until we have well nigh bewildered ourselves in the immeasurable latitudes of European policy. Is it not deplorable that party spirit should gain the dominion of the heart? Is it not a subject of gloomy apprehension, that public opposition should be so far indulged as to ripen into private animosity? that a departure from a particular system of political opinions, should be stigmatized with the name of folly, or be branded with the epithet of guilt? that even the dignity of office should but qualify a man to be the recipient of the most pointed calumny, of the most cruel aspersions of character!—Such a train of feeling must not be indulged on the present occasion.

The history of our transmutation from **British Colonies** to **Independent States**, is throughout a tissue of astonishment and admiration. In two important wars the **American arms** have achieved imperishable fame. So far from giving the faintest indication of ambition, **AMERICA**, by the universal suffrage of the world, was loyal to her king, and true and grateful to her mother country. Unsuspecting of the plot which was fast brewing against her liberties, she confided in the justice of **Great Britain**. But she trusted her peace to the winds: she reposed in the arms of a Siren, whom the sense of right could not control; whom the dictate of humanity could not influence. Fatally reduced by lavish expenditures, and exhausted by a series of warlike exertion, **Great Britain** cast about for an expedient by which she might free her treasury department from its financial embarrassments. It was at that political crisis, when every nerve of government was strained, and every sinew of administration was stiffened in bearing up under the enormous weight of a debt amounting to almost 649,600,000 of dollars, that an infatuated parliament determined on a most destructive

system of Colonial taxation. Against such imposition the united voice of America cried out in loud remonstrance. But the thunder of argument rolled unregarded round the battlements of ministerial pride ; or was only answered by the hollow peal of insolence. Enormities of this stamp excited universally an impulse to war. Joy no more perched on the eyelid. The pale garb of sorrow and the crimson flush of indignation mantled every cheek. At length, on the ever memorable 16th of April, 1774, hostilities commenced on the part of the enemy. With the impetuosity of a torrent, the American soldiery rushed to battle. Resolutely they unfurled the star-spangled banner of the Nation, and with a heroism never surpassed, wrote in blood their sentiments of Independence. Why should I mention Bunker's-Hill—or Saratoga's plain—or Carolina's forest—where the wild wreath of victory twined around the blood-stained brow of the American hero. Already the memory of those scenes of your youthful valor awakes into vibration every chord of sensibility. Where is the heart which beat in 1776, that does not throb at the recollection of those times of peril and destruction, when our beloved State was scourged by the predatory vengeance of a hostile army ; when our kindred bled fighting on the thresholds of their dwellings, or on the green fields of their youthful gambols ; when even a sacrilegious fire was kindled in the sanctuary, and the sacred dome erected on *this* consecrated spot, was consumed with flames. These scenes of horror were reversed. Our Independence was publicly acknowledged, The Sun of Peace again irradiated our favored Country.

Still we were comparatively wretched. Without a government suited to the exigencies of the nation ; without a constitution to cement together the multifarious interests of the States, we must inevitably have split into factions and been ingulphed in despotism, had not the happy genius which protected us in military jeopardy, also protected us in civil peril. To complete our national happiness, a constitution, embracing the greatest and noblest civil blessings, was framed and unanimously adopted by the States. This constitution, the sacred charter of our

rights, the great seal of our National Liberties, is without a parallel in the annals of legislation. Philosophers have invented many plausible theories. Secluded from the bustle of the busy world, and unfettered by care, they have traversed in imagination the Elysian fields of political perfection, and ranged in ecstasy the bowers of consummate civil enjoyment. But their roving fancies observed not the stream of popular prejudice widening, and deepening, and swelling into the current of national delusion—observed not the bramble of jealousy, sprouting under the genial influence of public favor—observed not the precipice of faction—the gulph of anarchy. Experience has fully demonstrated the futility of such philosophic reasoning, when reduced to practice. As in the computations of mechanic powers, so in these theories, no allowance is made for friction. The mere force of national spirit cannot always overpower human frailty. There must be some great national machine, which by its operation can so far assist the strength of patriotism, that no motive of ambition or revenge can withstand the effort. Such a machine is a free, an untrammelled Press. We admit, the Press when shackled with legal restrictions, is a great public curse. For, when so restrained, it screens the ruling party from merited animadversion, at the same time that it strips the opposition party of all defence, and exposes it unarmed to the poisoned shafts of slander. But an enlightened press, uncontrolled by statute, exciting no terrors but those of a guilty conscience, exhibiting no follies but those of public mismanagement, exposing no crimes but those of corruption, embezzlement of the public property, and an unlawful exertion of power—such a Press, is one of the noblest concomitants, it is one of the highest prerogatives of civil liberty. It unfolds to public inspection the errors which are committed in the national policy. It holds up to the view of all, the iniquitous schemes of a corrupt ministry ; it moulds those schemes into their proper shape ; it arrays them in their true colours ; it presents them in their genuine complexions, and it brands them with the glowing censure of an exasperated community. This great bulwark of the people's liberties, this strong citadel of virtue, our Re-

publican government should never demolish. Leaving these subjects for the pens of those who are more competent to discuss them, we will now resume the history of our **REPUBLIC**.

Our political career, though short, has been eventful. The most dazzling scenes, and the most gloomy prospects have been alternately presented to our view. Injuries, aggravated by insult, were coeval with our independence, and have kept pace with our prosperity. The detention of the Western posts, in direct violation of the treaty of peace in 1783 ; the occupation of Niagara as the seat of government for Upper Canada, in notorious contempt of our national sovereignty ; the abetment and protection of the hostile Indians in supplying them with provisions and munitions of war ; and above all, the flagrant breach of territorial right in forcibly penetrating our country and erecting a fort on the Miami river, the more effectually to shelter the savage bands in case of defeat ; these were the first complimentary assurances of British friendship, which were given us in our own dominions. Nor was Great Britain more parsimonious of her favors to us in foreign climes. With a gentility which the American might well deem importunate, she effected a reconciliation between the Portuguese and the Algerines. Was it magnanimous in her thus freely to break down every barrier between us and a piratical nation ? And if we will submit to a still closer inspection of her actions in the capture of our commercial vessels, and in the impressment, imprisonment and arbitrary punishment of our honest tars, we shall see in them a height of arrogance and a lust of domination, scarcely paralleled. The November orders of 1793, have stamped indelible infamy on her councils, and fixed an imputation of injustice on her character which can never be effaced.

Spain too has insured a place in our eternal remembrance by her frequent breach of plighted faith. Not content with excluding us our rightful privilege of freely navigating the waters of the Mississippi, as guaranteed to us by the treaty of the 27th October, 1795, what does she do ? Behold her by means of her Intendant at a period of no greater distance than October the 16th, 1803,

interdicting our right of deposit at New-Orleans, which also was secured to us by the aforesaid treaty. So much for Spanish aggression.

France committed insults still more irritating to the pride, and injuries still more deleterious to the interests of our country. In the hour of want, we supplied her with provisions. What return did she make for such kindness? With a spirit of the basest ingratitude, of the most complicated villainy, she fraudulently denied us all compensation. We were subjected to her piracies in all directions; we were forcibly stript of every commercial right, and in the full tide of injury, even our national honor\* received a stab in the persons of our ambassadors, which had well nigh deluged both countries in blood. Happily these, and all other wounds which had been inflicted on our interest and our honor, by three of the most formidable nations of Europe, were cicatrized by the salutary aid of negotiation, and finally were healed by firm and faithful treaties.

We now enjoyed a temporary respite from aggression. This calm was succeeded by a tempest the most violent which had ever raged against the rights of America. France and Great-Britain had embarked in desolating wars. In the prosecution of their bloody contests, neutral rights were trampled upon whenever any present or any ultimate advantage was promised to be the result. By a system of the most unjustifiable principles of retaliation, the entire territories of both the belligerent powers were declared to be both in a state of blockade; and any vessel trading to any port in territories thus nominally blockaded, was declared to be a lawful prize. What was the consequence? Our commerce was swept like the mist from the ocean. Our flag was violated in every sea. Our ships were captured and condemned or burnt. Our most respectable merchants were reduced to extreme poverty. And to fill up the measure of our wrongs, our honest seamen were impressed with genuine certificates in their hands, and against every principle of equity,—against every dictate of

\* The American Ambassadors to France, were refused a hearing, and ignominiously ordered out of the kingdom.

humanity and of honour, were compelled to go on board British men of war, and there coerced by the most cruel bastinading, into what was termed their duty: viz. to fight the battles of their oppressors. Is this fact disputed? Disputed too, when names, and dates, and places of abode are minutely stated? When Decatur, and Lawrence, and Rodgers, and Upton, testify to the truth of it? When the Toulon fleet at the commencement of hostilities, imprisons hundreds of her crew, thus acknowledging them to be American citizens? Away with this palpable falsehood, this unblushing scandal against our naval and civil officers? We do not attempt to justify or to palliate the conduct of either nation. Far be it from me to be the eulogist or the apologist of that *dignified miscreant* who wears the imperial diadem of France. Though I believe him to be a man distinguished by military talents, of the highest order; yet, for his unbounded ambition, for his insatiable thirst of human blood, I must forever hold him in utter abhorrence. But we do maintain that our administration were fully warranted in their course of procedure, by the official dispatch of the French minister of foreign affairs to our minister, then resident in Paris. This letter, dated the 5th of August, 1810, unequivocally announced the provisional revocation of the Berlin and Milan decrees. That France should have unconditionally rescinded her odious decrees, and have made ample reparation for her past aggressions, had been a just, a reasonable demand. Her prompt compliance with such a requisition had merited no thanks from plebian or patrician. But in the cabinet of Great-Britain, not even the forms of justice—not even the semblances of equity were regarded or observed. We negotiated in vain—in vain we manifested our resentment in the successive acts of *embargo*, *non-importation* and *non-intercourse*. The outrageous system of aggressive tyranny was perseveringly and rigidly adhered to until our government, indulgent to a fault, were charged with the basest pusillanimity. With regard to the *policy* of a declaration of war, many eminent statesmen have differed in sentiment. In this subject we have, at present, no concern. It therefore best becomes my youth, to pass



it by in silence. But let me ask : was there no *cause* for war ? Was the destruction of our commerce too trifling an injury to deserve our serious attention ? Was the denationalization of our flag an abuse of such small moment as not to merit redress ? Or, was the impressment and savage treatment of Johnson, and Card, and Heyer, and Nichols, and hundreds of others certainly (several even from this agricultural county) and the absolute refusal of a surrender of this assumed right to impress at their option, unworthy of a declaration of war ! When we had drunk the bitter cup of suffering to the very dregs, should we have held it out again for a fuller and a bitterer draught ! Because our peace was murdered, should we have offered up our honour an expiatory sacrifice !—The call to war was direct, it was imperious. The arm of justice sleeps not forever. Nerved by the dying agonies of freemen, it awakes into action and crushes the oppressor. We declared war. We appealed to God, our witness, who knows the rectitude of our political transactions, and who ever watches over and directs our destinies, to smile upon our cause. And he has smiled upon our cause, smiled ineffably. At the commencement of hostilities, our nation laboured under the weighty disadvantages of unpreparation, of inexperience and of deeply rooted prejudice. Oppressed with a superstitious notion of the naval supremacy and of the overwhelming military superiority of our foe, we looked forward to the events of battle with gloomy apprehensions for our honour. Suddenly the scene changed ! The capture of the *Guerriere* operated like enchantment in the dissipation of our fears. This splendid achievement, pouring unrivalled lustre on the American arms, infused a beam of confidence into the sailors' breast which he had never before experienced. Success so unexpected—victory so brilliant, excited a great and noble emulation in every bosom. Like "the sweet watch light of the Pole," it shed a ray of comfort into the mariner's heart, which cheered him in the gloomiest hour. Our naval skill and prowess were conspicuous and triumphant in the capture of the *Java* ; and again, the conquest of the *Macedonian*, while it dismayed and eclipsed British valour ; added to

American naval glory that signal effulgence which was at length reflected in constellated brilliancy to the Heavens in the successive victories over the Erie and Champlain fleets—the Frolic—the Peacock—the Cyane—the Levant and the Penguin.

Our military character, likewise, has been greatly enhanced by the events of the late war. Here we might pause and dwell with melancholy rapture on the memory of the departed, the heroic PIKE. He was one of our country's brightest luminaries. A ray of private virtues the most transcendant; a gleam of patriotism the most disinterested, illumined the path which led to his grave. And while we mourn the gallant dead, we will not withhold merited encomiums from the illustrious living. Ever shall the benediction of a grateful country rest upon them. Ever shall the glowing tongue of the philanthropist speak forth the plaudits of their valor. So long as the wild flowret of freedom shall bloom on our mountains—so long shall the name of HARRISON inspire every heart with reverence for virtue. The youthful warrior, who pants for glory, shall imitate the example of BROWN, and make his life the model of his military conduct. When the hero of the North led forth his generous bands to battle, the grandeur of the cataract was lost in the sublimity of the warlike scene. Who does not glow with admiration, when he ruminates on the dreadful wonder of that day—when the majesty of nature was sunk in the abyss of human ruin; when astonishment and horror seized conquered legions, and overwhelming transport and surprize pervaded a victorious army?—Nor shall the CONQUEROR OF HEROES, the HERO of the South, escape our distinguishing applause. In the person of ANDREW JACKSON, the dignity and excellence of the military character shine with peculiar effulgence. When he saw the glory of the Western States about to be swept away as with the besom of destruction, his noble soul burnt with virtuous indignation; he rallied his warlike sons around him, flew like lightning to the strand, and like a fierce tornado, hurled death and desolation on the invaders of his country. New-Orleans has exhibited to an astonished world, the unexampled spectacle

of a victory in which the loss sustained by the victors, is to that sustained by the vanquished, not as one to ten, but as one to two hundred. I might go on to mention SCOTT, RIPLEY, GAINES, M'COMB, COFFEE, ADAIR, BOYD, JOHNSON, and many others. In the landscape of your imaginations, these illustrious warriors in the cause of virtue, hold a conspicuous place.

The unrivalled baseness of those persons who have uniformly branded our administration with the *ambition of conquest*, and justified *British atrocity*, calls for a severity of censure and a latitude of crimination, unknown in satire. Nain would I keep silence on such a subject. The murder of the wounded, the savage slaughter of the prisoner, the cool-blooded butchery of the mother and her babe, never admit of silence. It is said, forsooth, that British officers could not restrain their savage allies from the commission of outrage and murder. The assertion is as false in fact, as it is contemptible in principle. What! will it be admitted, that a British commander has no control over his army; or if you please, his allies in the most important of all articles, of murder? We have, moreover, undeniable evidence, that no exertion have been made to check savage cruelty in those in these instances in which it has most signally appeared. Such evidence, creditable plenary evidence, we have in relation to that horrid drama of torture, which succeeded the battle of Frenchtown. The consecrated mansion of the DEITY shall not be profaned by the detail—In what impious strain will the *villain-deeds* of Drummond, of Whitby, of Cockburn, and of Tecumseh be justified? Is it said that the demolition of Washington, of Frenchtown, and of Havre-de-Grace, did but atone for the conflagration of Newark? The conflagration of Newark! The conflagration of a town, furnishing a safe covert to the ruthless savage! The position is altogether untenable.—The blood of Pierce shall rise up in judgment against the ferocious Whitby; and that God with whom is retribution, will terribly avenge M'Donough's murder.

VENERABLE HEROES OF THE REVOLUTION! We trust none among you will raise a voice in defence of *British*

*perfidy*. You have long witnessed the injustice and exaction which have characterized the British cabinet in her intercourse with these United States. In saying this, it certainly is not my wish to revive any animosities which the late treaty of peace may have destroyed or put to rest. But we will not stop our ears against the truth. We will not suffer ourselves to be hoodwinked by *those* who wait only the coincidence of interest and opportunity to manifest, actively and openly, the treasonable nature of their principles. It is a stubborn fact, and a mournful one, that there are many HENRY'S among us, many who are industriously sowing the seeds of discord and rebellion in the public mind; many who are exerting their strongest powers of intrigue to excite insurrection and war. Against these *forked-tongued* emissaries and traitors let your vigilance, let your honest indignation be directed. FATHERS! We wish our country well. We wish to see her placed in that elevated station, and surrounded by those rich blessings which her geographical position, and her salutary government render so easily attainable.

I now turn to the Champions of my Country. BRAVE SOLDIERS! That sword which gives no second wound, the word of death is sheathed. Again the black cloud of war has passed away; again the calm sunshine of Peace has settled on our country. Had we not experienced privations, we should not have known how to prize our enjoyments. Our past pain, and sorrows have but increased our present joys and pleasures, and the remembrance of past misfortunes but enhance the delightful sense of present blessings. These blessings, alas! though valuable, are precarious as the wind, which varies with every changing circumstance. Like blazing comets they quickly disappear, and the time of their return is unknown. Our sky may soon be overcast with an Eastern tempest. But yesterday, and Europe smiled. But yesterday, and the genius of emancipation still lingered on her plains. Now she has fled. Oh! has she fled forever! Shall the reign of military despotism be perennial? Shall the thunder of battle never cease to be the soldier's funeral dirge, and the red glare of the cannon to light him to his grave?

He only knows who holds in his hands the hearts of princes ; whose decrees are inscrutable. Should our country again be deluged by the waters of destruction, your prowess, *brave Soldiers*, will be the ark of our safety. When the scourge of foreign oppression threatens to dissipate our liberties, they shall rest secure in this ark : in it they shall weather all the storms of private apostacy and of public defection. *Brave Soldiers!* while we look to you for safety, we esteem, we revere your character. Yes, there is something in that delicacy of honour, in that superiority to fear, in that practised subordination to authority, in that generous respect for a brave adversary, in that composure and self-command amidst appalling scenes, in that humanity to the vanquished, in that courtesy to the softer sex, in that devotion to his country, and in that noble self-denial which submits the military to the civil authority, and at the proper period cheerfully resigns all the splendour and brilliancy of a military life for the habiliments and occupations of peace—there is something in all this, marking the character of the American Soldier, which *ought* to make it, which ever *did*, and which ever *will* make it, the object of our highest admiration, esteem, and emulation.

**CITIZENS OF UNITED AMERICA!** We hail with rapturous joy this 39th festival of **AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE**. Emerging from a sea of woes in which our joys were drowned, we view with indescribable emotions this interesting scene, a **NATIONAL JUBILEE**. While we rejoice, we also tremble. Our **REPUBLIC**, like all human institutions, is liable to subversion. Corroding faction has already essayed to weaken the mainspring of its existence. Principle is commuted for gain ; and fraud and guile of the blackest character, have set their stamp on a large proportion of the community. As the sovereign power is vested in the people, they, as a body, cannot be checked in the commission of crime or folly. Nothing therefore, can preserve our Republic, perpetually, in being, but the remaining force of virtuous principle in the yeomanry of the country. Guard, therefore, your virtue, Fellow Citizens, as you would rich treasure ; yea, as you would

your life in a hostile land. Remember that virtue is the vital principle of a Republic ; the *lacteal vein* which dispenses nourishment and strength to every part of the body. And will you cut this vein ? Will you plunge into it the dagger of party strife ? No—It cannot be. Never shall it be said, that the American people dug a pit for their Republic. Ever cherish that unity of feeling, that glow of patriotism, which only can quell the violence of political phrenzy. Remember that it is your duty to elicit truth from creditable testimony, united with sober reflection ; to distinguish between genuine emanations of patriotism, and hypocritical professions of it. Finally, remember, and remember it forever, that it is your duty, your fixed, your unwavering duty, to preserve with your heart's best blood the sacred **TEMPLE** of your **INDEPENDENCE**.