



The Tarborough Press,

BY GEORGE HOWARD,

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POLITICAL.



FOR THE TARBORO' PRESS.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Tarboro', July 8th, 1842.

WILLIAM F. DANCY, Esq.

SIR: The Committee of Correspondence, in accordance with the wishes of the citizens generally, make known to you the pleasure they received from hearing your excellent and appropriate Oration, delivered on the 4th, and respectfully request a copy for publication in the Tarboro' Press.

With great esteem, yours, &c.

J. D. Howell,
W. G. Thomas, } Committee.
C. G. Hunter, }
K. H. Lewis, }

Tarboro', July 11th, 1842.

GENTLEMEN: I am in receipt of yours of the 8th instant, and the pleasing assurances you convey, of the general approbation with which my Oration was received, has filled me with a degree of gratitude I cannot find words to express. The Oration is long, and would fill more space in the "Press" than could be conveniently appropriated to its publication. I shall therefore strike out the most unimportant portions of it. With this understanding, it is placed at your disposal.

Very truly, your fellow citizen,

W. F. DANCY.

To J. D. Howell and others, Committee of Correspondence.

ORATION.

Delivered before the Citizens of Tarborough, in commemoration of the sixty-sixth Anniversary of American Independence, by W. F. DANCY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: 'Tis not the language of mere idle declamation, when I declare to you the unfeigned diffidence with which I appear before you. However much I might have desired that your choice had fallen on some individual, whose age and experience better fitted him to instruct you in the lessons of the past, and impart to you useful admonitions for the future; yet I did not feel myself at liberty to decline an invitation, coming with such pressing solicitude from so intelligent a portion of my fellow citizens—a people justly esteemed for some of the rarest virtues that dignify and ennoble human kind, yet, even from the heart of this proud and time-honored old county.

It has been a custom among nations, from time immemorial, to celebrate by appropriate rites and ceremonies important events in their national existence. History is replete with examples illustrative of the fact. The untutored savage, destitute of the lights which civilization and religion have shed upon the world, & having every faculty of his soul locked up by the ponderous bolts of superstition and bigotry, conceives an appropriate idea of its usage, and records his simple yet affecting attestation in its favor. The more enlightened man, in the full fruition of those advantages denied to the simple child of nature, borrows the idea and presents it to us, decked in all the gorgeous drapery of modern refinement. The one is the original of which the other is the overwrought copy, the one is the voluntary offering of the heart's homage at the shrine of affection, the other is but too often a bitter mockery of reality.

There is perhaps no principle in the whole catalogue of domestic affections, more deeply implanted in the human breast than a love of country. It animates like the citizen and the statesman, the peasant and the philosopher. It forms a link in the social condition of man, is intimately interwoven with every fibre of his heart, and nerves his arm for the most daring and adventurous enterprises. No people, either modern, ever cul-

tivated this principle in a more remarkable degree, than the ancient Spartans. Such was the great sensibility to shame, inculcated by that brave and warlike people, that the Spartan matron, while hanging with parental devotion over her son departing for the wars, at the same time she imprinted the maternal kiss on his cheek, whispered the patriotic injunction to "conquer or die." Such too was the feeling which prompted the wounded Argive, when dying in a foreign land, to desire a last long look on his "beloved Argos," ere the scenes of time and mortality should close on his view forever! Surely then we, who are bound to the land of our birth by ties still more dear, by the hallowed recollections of a common suffering and a common triumph, by this bright and happy land which freedom has chosen for her sanctuary, and where the sun of liberty shines with undimmed and unclouded lustre; by the free principles we enjoy, and by that glorious Constitution which stands like a "mental pyramid in the solitude of time," the wonder and admiration of the world—surely we shall not be censured for setting apart this day, consecrated to the memory of those whose deeds will be cherished, while valor is esteemed a virtue, and patriotism is regarded as worthy of praise and remembrance.

The civil revolution which severed the ties that bound us to the parent country, is justly regarded as the most remarkable event in the annals of modern times. That a number of independent communities, banded together by no common principle of union, with a sparse and heterogeneous population, differing in sentiment, manners and religion, and destitute of every essential element of national character, should rise in arms to assert those rights which God and nature had given them, was an enterprise for which the world was not then prepared. The political powers of Europe, always accustomed to the language of servility and adoration, regarded the mass of mankind as but little elevated above the other animals of creation; differing perhaps in nothing, save in "form and gesture;" as ignorant and depraved, incapable of attaining any degree of moral excellence, and consequently as fit instruments for the exercise of tyranny and oppression. They had not then learned the sublime lesson in political ethics, which was afterwards taught them by bitter experience, that we are all by nature "free and equal"—that man, in a state of nature, uncorrupted by the debasing influence incident to bad education and government, is susceptible of a degree of moral and intellectual culture, which advances his condition to a participation with the divine original, who "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

The history of the world, from the earliest dawn of authentic, down to the middle of the 18th century, though here and there relieved by some bright spots, on which the eye of the moralist and philanthropist may rest with pleasure, is little else than a record of human calamity, wretchedness and crime. Here some ambitious demagogue, elevated to the throne of popular supremacy by flattering the worst passions of the people, rules for a while with wisdom, moderation, and justice; but finally sinks into the stern and incorrigible despot. There some proud and haughty conqueror, whose political appetite is not yet satiated with the blood and carnage of his fellow citizens, marches his embattled legions over dissolved empires and subverted republics, and contributes his share to swell the bloody tide of human misery and woe. But happily for man, a spirit was aroused in the 18th century, which leveled with the dust this political fabric, reared amid the gloom of feudal barbarity, and erected in its stead the capacious temple of popular liberty. True, it is, that some of the governments of antiquity afforded faint glimmerings of light amidst the general darkness which overshadowed the world. True, it is, that the records of English history afforded frequent evidence of an approach to liberal principles; but like the electric fire, which flashes amidst the darkness of the storm, 'twas but the presage of a deeper and more sombre gloom. And still more true, is it, that the Barons at Runnymede extorted from King John, of Magna Charta memory, certain half-defined principles of liberty and right, which continued to be alternately conceded and denied by his successors, as justice or tyranny was the animating principle of the ruling prince. But yet it was reserved for this country, for the free Anglo Saxons of America, to give birth to that great principle of popular liberty—the right of the people to govern—now regarded as the fundamental maxim of all free governments.

The history of mankind affords no conclusive evidence, that this great truth was ever before permanently recognised either in theory or in practice. Previous to the establishment of this government, the condition of the subject was a state of absolute dependence on the will of the sovereign; and his life, liberty, and property, were held at the pleasure of the

crow. The doctrine inculcated was, that the "king could do no wrong;" and acquiescence on the part of the subject was declared to be in accordance with the will of heaven. 'Tis impossible to imagine a more abject state of servitude, nor one better calculated to repress the noble energies of our nature, and disqualify us for the high purposes of our creation.

[Here the Orator entered into an enumeration of the principal causes of the Revolution, among which the character and operation of the "tea tax, stamp duties," &c. &c. were mentioned—after which he proceeded.]

These details, though comparatively dry and uninteresting, yet serve to show in a remarkable degree, the gradual progress, growth, and ultimate maturity, of those free principles we now enjoy. The time had at length arrived, when it was necessary for man to vindicate his just claims to that freedom of thought and action, which had been for ages withheld from him; or fall forever from his high destiny, and remain in the willing and abject slave of power. And O! if there be a spectacle in the mighty and complicated range of human affairs, for which he may claim the peculiar protection and providence of the Deity, it is that of a brave and gallant people, writhing beneath the scourge of hereditary despotism, animated by one grand and universal impulse, spurning the false and exploded theories of their rulers, determined to be free! Nor were the people of the colonies long in making a choice of alternatives. The cloud of war, which had been long gathering in the horizon, now burst with all its fury on the country. Kings and potentates trembled for their thrones, the corrupt foundations of civil society were broken up, the thunders of popular indignation were heard in loud and reverberated peals echoing through the world, and the political firmament gave signs that the hopes of despotism were about to be crushed forever.

Long and doubtful was the conflict. The nations of the earth gazed anxiously on the scene, each agitated by emotions corresponding to their political condition, and respective sympathies for the belligerent parties, until justice wearied with havoc and bloodshed, decided the contest in our favor. So true was it, in the eloquent language of Burke, that "so paltry a sum as three pence in the eyes of a financier, so insignificant an article as tea in the eyes of a philosopher had shaken the pillars of a commercial empire that encircled the globe."

Amid the crowd of patriots, who like the stalwart champions of Roderick Dhu, "from copse and heath arose" at the first clangor of arms, there was one who stood proudly among the proud, and lofty among the loftiest. Nature, as if ashamed of every model that had yet existed, seemed to exert herself for the production of one against which the breath of scandal should be never breathed, or the voice of slander never heard; and most nobly did she execute the task. He was the man and the only man suited to the temper of the times. Prudence, like a faithful Mentor, was ever at his side; wisdom and justice sat at the council-board of his decisions; while Christianity loaned its soft and mellow ray to gild and beautify the purity of his character. Cool, collected and sagacious, he added to a profound penetration of judgment, that colossal grandeur of soul, which made him at once the wonder and admiration of mankind. Go search the annals of history, roll back the countless ages which the world has measured in its progress, and where will you find a more illustrious monument of human greatness. Caesar was a usurper, Alexander the miserable slave of passion and caprice, Buonaparte a tyrant—yet it was reserved for WASHINGTON to blend in one harmonious whole, the perfection of every principle, and the personification of every virtue.

Where may the wearied eye repose,
When gazing on the great;
Where neither guilty glory glows,
Nor despicable state!
Yes! one—the first—the last—the best—
The Cincinnati of the West,
Whom envy dared not hate,
Bequeathed the name of WASHINGTON,
To make man blush there was but one.

'Twas manifest to the fathers of the Revolution, on the breaking out of the war, that unity and concert of action were necessary to secure to themselves the blessings for which they had taken up arms. They accordingly lost no time in addressing themselves to the task, and this grand result was mainly brought about by the assembling of the 1st Continental Congress, on the 5th Sept. 1774. In whatever aspect we view this assemblage, whether we look to the important causes which brought them together, or the still more remote consequences of their ultimate action, it must be regarded as the most sublime spectacle the world ever beheld. His- tory has exhausted panegyric—philosophy has paid the tribute of its homage—and romance has added the charms of its imagery, in acknowledging the praises of this wonderful assemblage. Nor will my au-

dience wonder when I inform them, that it was the first body of free men that ever assembled in the world!—They had met in obedience to the mandates of a mighty but oppressed people, to deliberate on the best means of securing to themselves the blessings of liberty and peace, and most nobly did they execute the grave and important charge. The vital air of liberty we breathe, our inimitable and yet unimitated form of government, our glorious Constitution, and last—though not least—the privilege we now exercise of assembling in this temple of the living God, are all—al! owing to this first great step in the cause of oppressed humanity.

No doubt now existed in the minds of the colonists, as to the designs of the mother country; and Congress, on the subsequent 4th July, 1776, solemnly published and declared (in the language of the eloquent instrument you have just heard read) that, "these United Colonies are and of right ought to be, free and independent States." Mankind, long taught to regard with reverence and awe the presumptive claim of the "divine right of kings," and to bow submissively to the pomp and pageantry of royalty, now burst asunder the shackles which a long dark night of tyranny had thrown around them, and proclaimed to the nations of the earth a determination to resist the onward march of arbitrary power. Man now for the first time felt the promptings of that "divinity which stirs within us"—which impelled him to look around and examine for himself, the claims of despotism over his personal rights and privileges, which the teachings of a false philosophy had given in.

To North Carolinians, it should be a source of honest exultation and pride, that her sons were the first to raise the standard of revolt, and hurl back defiance to the haughty mandates of an imperious and overbearing mother. On her shores, in 1584, under the auspices of the learned and gallant Raleigh, the flag of England was first unfurled; and she claims likewise the high and distinguished honor of being the first of the original thirteen, to declare herself "dissolved from all allegiance to the British crown." The Mecklenburg Declaration (a document which has excited no little attention among the historians of the day, as well on account of the boldness of its principles and the energy of its language as the recency of its discovery,) has withstood the shafts of criticism and the railings of impotent malice, and will remain a monument of the valor and patriotism of her citizens, more lasting than marble and more durable than brass. The first legislative recommendation of a National Declaration also came from the Provincial Congress at Halifax, more than two months before it was agitated in any other State. These two points in her history, if other evidence were wanting, are sufficient to attest the bravery and energy of her people, and constitute the brightest gem in the chaplet that adorns her brow.

Nor was any county in the State more fixed or forward than Edgecombe, in that dark hour when the "summer soldier and sunshine patriot" shrunk from the service of their country. Though not the scene of any action, yet she was frequently the seat of active military operations. Her citizens were among the most energetic & public spirited, the first to "snuff the very approach of tyranny in the tainted breeze," and the first to lay down their lives in defence of their altars & their firesides. The names of Johnson, Irwin, Toole and Sessums, are intimately associated and blended with her history; and their names will live in the memory of their posterity, while liberty has a votary and chivalrous action continues to receive the plaudits of the wise and good.

I trust I shall be pardoned for offering here a brief passing tribute to the memory of the gallant but unfortunate Col. Irwin. He was long a merchant and a resident of this place, and at an early period of our difficulties became deeply imbued in the principles of the Revolution. A writer has remarked, that great events give birth to great men; and never was any truth more fully exemplified than this, during the war of Independence. Patriots, like the fabled heroes of Cadmus, sprung as by enchantment from the soil, fully armed and equipped, ready to "crusade for freedom in freedom's holy land." Col. Irwin was one of those men whom the times produced. Long ere "grim-visaged war had raised her horrid front" amongst us, and even before the Declaration of Independence, perceiving that an outbreak was inevitable, he had obtained a Lieutenant Colonel's commission in the regular army, and buckled on his armor for the approaching conflict. The quiet and repose of domestic life had no charms for him, when the interests of his country were at stake. His was emphatically the "will to do and the soul to dare." Morally and constitutionally brave, resolute to accomplish and decisive in action, he was one not likely to remain quiet amidst the raging elements of contending factions. He was entrusted with the execution of many and important duties, and the honorable mention of him

by the Provincial Congress at Halifax, is sufficient evidence of the esteem in which he was held by the members of that enlightened and patriotic body. But he was not content with the limited sphere of action in which he moved. His patriotic soul struggled for a more ample and enlarged theatre, and when the shrill clarion of war rang its first peal in the ears of the Colonists, "he bade adieu," says the historian, "to his family of infant children and his ease, and joined the army alas to return no more! He fell at the battle of Germantown, Penn. bravely fighting in the cause of his country. As the enemy ultimately kept possession of the field, his body was never recovered that it might receive the honor due to his merits." Such, my friends, is the testimony of impartial history to the merits of one of our most brave and patriotic citizens. Although no storied urn is left to tell the history of his deeds, and no monumental marble marks the spot of his repose, yet

In memory's silent register he'll live,
Nor ask the vain memorial art can give.

But scarcely had the States succeeded in repelling a common enemy without, when they were torn by factions within, which threatened to sever the feeble bands that bound them together, and cast them again on the broad and tempestuous ocean of civil strife. The elements of discord which had been hushed into silence by a sense of common danger and suffering, burst forth with increased violence on the renewal of peace. The imbecility of the Articles of Confederation which had borne us triumphantly through the war, now displayed itself with alarming rapidity. Adopted at a most important crisis of our political affairs, as a measure dictated by necessity and the principles of self-preservation, they wanted that thorough scrutiny into the nature of compacts and co-ordinate distribution of powers, which more calm and tranquil deliberation would have given them. The federative principle was too weak, and the States jealous of a sovereign power over them, imposed checks on its authority incompatible with a proper exercise of its functions. Resembling, as it did, the leagues of independent States which had existed in other ages, it contained all the beauties of those structures, with some of their most ungainly proportions. There was symmetry and order about the building, but a want of strength and proper arrangement of its parts. In addition to the entire absence of any controlling power over the States, the powers of Congress proceeded from and acted upon the States as political communities. Congress being thus deprived of all power to execute its laws, and the States refusing to comply with the requisitions of the Central Government, "the frail and tottering edifice was ready to fall upon our heads and crush us beneath its ruins."

This was a crisis, the most solemn and momentous in our history. To what purpose was it, that the fathers of the Republic had bared their breast to the fury of the storm, and dashed the poisoned chalice of European servitude from their lips, if all the fruits of the Revolution were to be sacrificed to political dissensions and an unprincipled struggle for power? Why exchange the restraints of monarchy abroad, for the disorganizing principles of anarchy at home? These were questions solemn and momentous, and vitally affecting our political existence. All the toils of a seven years war, the privations and sacrifices of those indomitable patriots, who had laid the foundation of our glory and greatness, were staked on the hazard of a die. Fortunately for the cause of free government and the progress of social improvement throughout the world, the electric spark of liberty which had lain dormant amidst the internal commotion of the States, burst forth with new and increased splendor, and extinguished forever the hopes of despotism.

Amidst this scene of strife and confusion, there was one State which quailed not before the blast, which stood unshaken amidst the storms of political adversity—that State was Virginia. First and earliest to succor the throes of patriotism, she was the last to desert the infant goddess of liberty after its birth. She directed its tottering footsteps, sustained its feeble efforts, and sheltered it from the rude blasts of arbitrary authority. No State, at this day, wields more moral force in the Confederacy. Her power and influence are felt and acknowledged in the most remote borders of the Republic. For fifty years has she continued to pronounce the same unshaken and unalterable decree, in favor of her immortal doctrine of State Rights. Despising the low ambition and miserable intrigues of party and party men, she has attained a rank in the scale of States which others have in vain endeavored to reach. Looking to the Constitution as the grand charter of our rights, and the source of our highest interest and concern, when confined within the sphere of its enumerated powers, upward and onward she moves, protected by the impenetrable ægis of her principles as pure as the mountain