

Washington's Birth-Day.

At a meeting of the Washington Society of Alexandria the 22d February, 1805, the following resolution was unanimously adopted to wit:

Resolved, That the thanks of this Society be presented to William D. Simms, Esq. for the elegant and appropriate Oration this day delivered by him, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

Extra!
G. DENEALE, Sec'y.

ORATION.

Gentlemen of the Washington Society.

WHILE I feel my inability to perform the task, your favor has allotted me, I lament that from the number of your enlightened and patriotic members, you had not selected one more worthy to represent you on this occasion.

Associated, however, for the purpose of extending the charities, and rendering an annual tribute of respect to the memory of him, whose name we bear, I feel the cheering hope that your hearts, "open as day to melting charity" for the wants of the distressed, will not be closed to indulgence, for the weaklings of your Orator.

This, my respected audience, is a day dear to the hearts of Americans—'tis the birthday of WASHINGTON.

Amid the glow of enthusiasm which pervades your bosoms at the mention of that sacred name, may a youthful speaker presume to lift his voice to recal to your remembrance, his matchless deeds, his glories and his virtues? But ah! how inadequate are my powers to the expression of one sentiment on this subject, which will not already have been anticipated by the feelings and reflections of this assembly.

On a theme which has so often exercised the talents of the most energetic writers, on which orators have embodied the whole force of their eloquence, where can I find language to excite one new emotion, to add one new idea to the throng which already presses on your imagination?

Could I impart to my style the ardour I feel in my soul, could I with the bold hand of a matter touch the chord of sensibility to which your feelings are attuned, I would make it vibrate the loud note of gratitude to Heaven, which this day gave to America its best its choicest gift, her favorite son, the immortal WASHINGTON.

To perpetuate the memory of men distinguished for virtue, wisdom or valor, by yielding to their actions, the tribute of grateful remembrance, is a custom co-existent with the first dawn of superior merit. Venerable for its antiquity, it is no less useful in its effect, of exciting the emulation of posterity to imitate that conduct, to cultivate those virtues which command the esteem and admiration of after ages.

The heroes of old were immortalized in the rude songs of their bards; the arts of painting, poetry and sculpture were employed in more modern times, and now the voice of the eulogist is raised, though in feeble strains to celebrate the deeds of one who shines the brightest constellation in the resplendent galaxy of heroes.

In tracing the gradual steps by which WASHINGTON rose to be the first among men, where is the American whose bosom will not glow with exultation that he was born this countryman? Venerable old men, you who have followed him in the path of glory, and with admiring eyes marked his progressive advancement to the acme of celebrity, do you not feel the warm blood rushing, to the almost exhausted sources of life, and the palsied arm, nerved with fresh vigor, at the animating recollection? And you my youthful brethren, though born too late to be participators with the hero, in danger and in glory, yet have been taught from the cradle to venerate his name, tell me, does the historic page which records his actions, or the narrative of your fathers ever strike upon your ears without exciting in your bosoms some portion of his heroic spirit? Do you not feel the glow of patriotism, the love of virtue, and contempt of danger, spring up within you?

The name of Washington derives no borrowed lustre from the adventitious circumstances of birth and fortune. Rich in native splendor it is self-illuminated.

Liberally endowed, by nature in person, as well as mind, his appearance was eminently calculated to command the awe and admiration of the beholder. Of stature, lofty and majestic, of countenance open and engaging, the glow of health playing on his cheek, his limbs, fair proportioned expanded in a robust, combination and form indeed where every God did seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man.

The healthful breezes of his native hills, and the salutary toils of rural occupations, had formed his constitution to support the hardships, he was doomed to encounter, to overcome the difficulties of any enterprise to which the daring intré-

pidity that animated his looks, could urge him.

His genius soon disclosed its bias. At the early age of fifteen, when the youthful fancy foars on airy pinions, and the aspiring soul swells high with hopes of future greatness, he felt the martial spirit throng within him.

At that critical and perilous period, before the principles of conduct have obtained stability, when reason affords but a feeble barrier to oppose the allurements of pleasure, and the monitor within is yet too silent to drown the tyrannical voice of dissipation, he would have left the guardian shelter of the parental roof, on the "wide main to fight the battles of his king" had not his filial piety overcome his military ardor. He yields to the solicitations of a fond and timid mother, and remains to cheer the maternal bosom with strict performance of all the duties of a son.

But the duty he owed his country was ever in his breast paramount to all other considerations, and when her voice called him from amid his peaceful groves to defend her western frontier from the incursions of a barbarian enemy with glad alacrity he obeys the welcome summons.

To check the ravages of hostile French and Indians, whose mode of warfare and whose savage barbarity had intimidated the raw undisciplined troops of the country required superior political address, undaunted bravery, and great military talents. The conduct of Washington gave the strongest evidence that he was highly possessed of each; and time early marked the steps of the youthful warrior.

In the unfortunate action of the Monongahela, where the officers were selected as the marks of the ambushed enemy, and many a brave spirit fell under their murderous aim he alone remained to execute the orders of his general, he alone seemed covered with the "protecting shield of a supernal Providence," referred by the care of heaven to be the father, the savior of his country.

This action, disastrous in its issue, yet served to augment the glory of Washington. "His reputation grew with every occasion which called forth his exertion," and he was even then considered as the "pride and boast of Virginia."

As commander of her forces, the duties he had to perform were arduous and interesting. The miseries of a people scattered over a wide extended frontier, to whose defence the force under his command was entirely inadequate excited in his breast the compassion ever inseparable from true bravery, and in the genuine spirit of philanthropy, he was ready to offer himself a willing sacrifice to the butchering enemy provided it would contribute to the people's ease.

But his genius and his perseverance surmounted the difficulties of his situation. When the horrid yells of the savage was no more heard to announce the scene of desolation and carnage:—When the dread tomahawk was no more raised to strike to death the helpless victim: When he and in some measure restored peace and tranquillity to his country—he "loosened the helmet from his brow," and blood-stained Mars for fair Pomona changed.

Embosomed in the shades of Mount Vernon, he resolves to devote the remnant of his days to the indulgence of those social affections, to the cultivation of those milder talents, with which his mind was richly stored. Here in the exercise of every moral virtue, he might have lived a life of peace, and honorable quiet have guided gently down the noiseless vale of private life, known to fame only as the hero of the Monongahela, but for the impulse of that glorious revolution which produced him to the view of an admiring world.

That great event which gave to America a separate existence among the mighty nations of the earth, developed the astonishing powers of Washington's mind.

When Britain assumed the right to tax her American colonies; when the strong arm of the parent was nerved to oppress her weak, her infant children; when petition and remonstrance proved ineffectual to obtain redress; the celestial spark of liberty which had hither fled with our ancestors, from the tyranny and persecutions of the old world, burst into a flame, and fired the breasts of those patriots who with fortitude unparalleled stepped forth to vindicate their rights insulted, their liberties invaded. Foremost of this gallant band stood Washington. From the hands of his country he modestly receives the banner of freedom, and waving it o'er all this western land, he calls Columbia's sons to arms.

Glowing with the unconquerable spirit of freedom, animated by the voice of their beloved chief, they flock to his standard.

Under his forming hand, simple villagers and untrained husbandmen grow into a regular army. Yet still how unequal was the conflict! how vast the magnanimity which could have urged a nation, almost in the cradle of infancy; weak in number, and of slender resources; her soldiers untried and undisciplined—to hazard a contest with one old and experienced in arms, whose numerous fleets covered the ocean—whose veteran armies lined its shores.

To those advantages were opposed the firmness and integrity of the American leaders, the invincible courage of the troops, and a firm reliance on the aid of him, whose arm omnipotent defends the cause of justice, and prostrates before the weak the hosts of the mighty.

Supported by these animating principles, the soldiers of liberty endured hardships almost incredible—with patient fortitude they suffered the fiercest extremes of cold—with naked feet they trod the cutting ice, marking each painful wearied step with blood. But what might not be expected from men who had boldly resolved, that it was better to die freemen than to live slaves!

'Twas this sacred principle which animated the Grecian heroes to achieve the mighty deeds of Marathon. 'Twas this which inspired the brave Leonidas to oppose his little band of Spartans to the countless hosts of Persia. 'Twas this which gave to Rome the supremacy over all the nations of the earth. 'Twas this which filled the generous bosom of Washington, when he nobly dared to risk life, fame, and fortune in defending the liberties of his country.

The vicissitudes of a long and protracted war, developed the varying excellencies of his military character.

While in every instance he evinced the most undaunted bravery, he never was abandoned by that prudent caution which appears first in the catalogue of a soldier's virtues.

Frank, affable, generous and brave, yet dignified and firm, he conciliated the affections while he commanded the obedience of his men.

Unyielding in integrity, steadfast in the fixed purpose of his soul, he was not to be moved from the great line of conduct he had marked out to himself, by the loud clamors of an ignorant and impetuous populace.

His was not that mad ambition which, deaf to the supplications of piety, and blind to scenes of devastation, seeks its gratification in the miseries of mankind. He fought to mitigate the calamities of war, to spare the lives of his fellow creatures, to prevent the effusion of human blood.

The wisdom of his conduct was evinced by the successful termination of the first campaign, and the benevolence of his heart received its reward, in the contemplation of the most important advantages, gained without the loss of a single man. He enters Boston in triumph—its citizens rescued from distress and terror, he illumines their deliverer, and the gratulating voice of a grateful people, vibrates sweetly on the hero's ear.

But ah! too soon the smiling picture is reversed—misfortune spreads her baleful wing over the American standard, and a long train of calamities, with melancholy rapidity, succeed each other.

Washington early discovers the impending cloud, and collect all the energies of his soul to brave the burbling of the tempest. Amid the embattled chaos of difficulties and disasters, which at this eventful period, seemed to involve the fate of America in shades of darkest hue, threatening extinction to all the aspiring hopes, all the high raised expectations of her hero, the calm intrepidity of his mind never deserted him.

Resolving to ride out the storm, or be wrecked a spontaneous martyr to the cause he had espoused, he rose greatly superior to the ills that encompassed him.

His genius penetrated the dense clouds which darkened the American horizon: the sun of liberty bursts forth with celestial radiance; its genial influence rekindles the expiring embers of hope in the breasts of the dismayed soldiery.

Animated by the example and the exhortations of their beloved chief, they rush on to victory, and in one splendid action retrieve the credit of their arms.

The bright beams of hope on a more cheered their desponding spirits, and the ardor of conquest glowed in their bosoms. More wise than the Carthaginian chief, he suffered not that spirit to evaporate in idle exultation—he knew that much yet remained to be done, and seized the auspicious moment to prosecute success.

With unequalled skill he withdrew his army from the banks of the Delaware, during the silence of the night, and ere the morning dawned, the deep toned hummer of his cannon roared loudly o'er the plains of Princeton. The Muses fled affrighted from this favorite seat, and the fair bosom of science was lacerated with the horrors of war. The genius of Columbia mourned the victory of her arms. She wept the fate of her much loved son, the gallant Mercer. Noble, generous hearted chief, the sigh of regret, which mingled with the shout of triumph, and the tear of sorrow bedewed the rough cheek of the soldier, bore ample testimony to thy worth!

From this period a fairer prospect opened to America. I do not aim, my respected auditors, to trace minutely, the chain of events, which led to the establishment of her independence. You all know their issue, and cherish in your hearts, a grateful remembrance of those services, a glowing admiration of those brilliant achievements, which have immortalized the patriots and heroes of that day.

Assisted by the strength of a generous ally, victory crowned the efforts, and a series of successes, mark the progress of the coalesced arm, till on the plains of York, the forces of the contending powers were concentrated to decide the mighty contest.

Here the great question of liberty or slavery was to be determined; here rested the fate of America, here gloriously terminated the military career of Wash-

ington, in the surrender of the British army.

Though the one bright luminary, which shone in this western hemisphere, has attracted the astonished gaze of mankind, yet still, though in lesser orbits, there moved attendant satellites, heroes, who either fell at their posts in the cause of liberty or lived to see their arduous struggle for the happiness and independence of their country, crowned with success.—From the heights of Saratoga to the Eutaw Springs, each field of battle furnished the laurel wreath to deck the brow of some heroic chief.—At the siege of York, the brave, the unfortunate Hamilton, the friend and companion of Washington, evinced his daring intrepidity, his generous humanity.—While with one hand he dauntless storms the out posts of the enemy, with the other, he humanely checks the uplifted arm of the soldier, nerved to revenge the massacre of his comrades. Oh! Hamilton, while to thy virtues, and thy talents, we pay the homage of our praise, we mourn the aberration of thy judgment which led thee to sacrifice on the polluted altar of public opinion, a life which should have been held sacred to the service of thy country.

Having established his claim to rank with the greatest generals of antiquity, by the display of his splendid variety of military talents, having, on the ruins of British tyranny, erected the fair fabric of American independence, Washington willingly relinquishes the sword of war, and becomes the brightest ornament of the arts of peace.

With an aching heart he bids an affectionate farewell to his loved companions in arms—he resigns into the hands of his country the sacred trust he had received from her, refuses the rich rewards her gratitude would confer, and retires from the great theatre of action loaded with the prayers and blessings of his grateful countrymen.

Amid the calm endeavoring scenes of domestic felicity, he contemplates with ineffable delight the happiness of this western world, refulgent with his glories.

He sees the blessings of peace widely diffused o'er all this happy land. The fertile bosom of the earth yields her abundant fruits to the labors of agriculture. The white sail of commerce is untended to wait her produce to distant shores.—Arts, science, and manufactures follow in the train of liberty.

When it became necessary to confer on one person those privileges and those powers which the constitution, framed by the wisdom of her legislators, vested in the chief ruler of America, the concentrated voice of more than three millions of people, dispersed over a vast extent of country, of opposite habits and different manners, all fixing their hopes and wishes on the same man, calls the hero from the peaceful shades of Mount Vernon, to administer to them the blessings of peace, which he had so nobly pursued through the horrors of war.

This was a reward suited to the immensity of his services. This was a reward worthy of a free and enlightened people.

With every virtue to illumine the walks of private life, with every disposition to enjoy the calm of retirement, deriving his greatest happiness from the exercises of benevolence, we see him again relinquish the bust of domestic ease, to launch on the uncertain and tempestuous ocean of public life: and thus too at a period when nature herself seemed to demand repose.

With modest dignity he accepts the office of chief magistrate of the United States, amid the resounding plaudits of the American people.

The spirit of a nation, yet swelling under the recollection of recent dangers and sufferings, like the agitated bosom of the ocean after a storm, cannot at once subside into the calm of subordination.

He pours oil upon the waves; he soothes the angry passions, softens the asperity of party spirit and leads the minds of men to seek their private interests in the public weal.

Order presided in his councils, candor and liberality of sentiment marked his deliberations, justice tempered with mercy shone in his decisions, his choice of ministers evinced his talent in discriminating character.

Above the illiberal views of party animosity, his measures bore not the slightest tinge of prejudice.

Foreign peace and internal tranquillity were the happy result of his political conduct, and for a long time the affairs of America wore the most smiling aspect.—But a cloud gathers in the west. The fell demon of discord aims a deadly blow to sever the bond of union. The torch of sedition is lighted, and threatens to kindle the flames of civil war.

From this worst of evils the wisdom of Washington's council, and the unshaken intrepidity of his soul, saves his country. His humanity views with parental lenity the misguided sons of liberty.

The sword of justice more than half unsheathed gleams dreadful to their affrighted view, and they shrink appalled from the dread face of offended government.—With the feelings of a parent, on the first signs of contrition, he pardons and forgives them.

The commencement of the French revolution, was a period fraught with danger to this infant republic.—The sympathies of the nation were strongly excited to take part with a people avowing the

same object, professing the same principles, whose influence he had so lately felt. A people too, who in the hour of danger had generously stepped forth to lend their aid, whose blood had mingled on the same plains, contending against a common foe. Indulging in those generous sentiments, it was long ere the American people could be taught to believe, what to the unprejudiced was but too apparent. That in France the licentious fury of faction had banished religion, liberty and order, and that under the specious pretence of extending the liberties of mankind, they aimed at universal domination.

The artful emissaries of a secret and intriguing enemy, leagued with the agents of Jacobinism, labored to excite in the people of our country disaffection towards their young governments. The passions of men were arrayed in opposition to the wisdom of the watchful guardian of their liberties.

Faction reared its Hydra head, and the best patriots of our country, her most virtuous citizens, were vilified, calumniated, and abused. Even thy pure, thy perfect character, Oh! Washington, did not shield thee from that abuse which in ours, as in all other countries, is too often the inheritance of virtue and patriotism.

'Twas indeed a fearful moment, enveloped in clouds dark and portentous. The protecting powers of France and of Europe relinquished their guardianship; the fends of murder assumed the regency, and the beautiful prospect which rose so fair and promised such vast emolument, dissolved like the baseless fabric of a vision.

Dazzled by the broad glare of the revolutionary torch, we have seen the republics of the old world yield up their liberties to the fury of demagogues. We have seen Italy and Holland plundered, prostrate, and enslaved, paying their whole wealth for their freedom, and their liberties yet at nurse under the bayonets of fifty thousand Frenchmen. We have seen Venice given away at a bargain and Swiss mountains, whose bare and icy breasts upheld liberty to the heavens, penetrated, vanquished and enchained.

This the discerning eye of Washington had foreseen, and by preserving her neutrality inviolate, he reserved America "a solitary monument on the desolate plain of liberty."

After having devoted the best years of his life to the service of his country, the laureled veteran seeks to repose the evening of his days on the bosom of domestic ease.

Amid the striking detail of brilliant exploits and great public acts generally more interesting than the more humble portrait of private life, the virtues of the man are too often lost in the glory of the warrior.

But in the breast of Washington: humanity and beneficence were the companions of wisdom and valor. His heart was a copious reservoir whence issued in quiet and constant streams, the healthful waters of charity.

Those little children, who, but for the aid of his humanity, might now have been pining in all the wretchedness of cold and hunger, exhibit nought but the appearance of comfort and content.

The seeds implanted in their infant minds, which neglected and abandoned might have grown into the rank weeds of infamy, and vice, under his fostering charity may expand into the fair blossoms of virtue and utility.

How many, who may now join in diffusing the beams of truth, might have been lost to obscurity, their opening talents nipped in the bud by the chill blast of poverty, had not his benevolent wisdom devised a plan, and his liberal hand founded an institution to extend to them the blessings of education.

Ye offspring of his care; improve the opportunity he has afforded you of becoming useful and respectable citizens, cherish in your hearts an affectionate reverence for your's and for your country's benefactor; view him as a model by which you should estimate real patriotism, preserve his example ever before you, a sacred talisman to guard you from the paths of evil.

Thus will the views of your beneficent patron, receive their consummation, and though his mortal part lies buried in the silent tomb, yet will his spirit, from the realms of bliss, look down with pleasure on your happy efforts.

Thus will you become the living memorials of the virtues of Washington; recalling to the remembrance of his countrymen, the glorious actions of his life, the pure and correct principles he ever inculcated on religion, morality and government.

Illustrious shade! may the degeneracy of thy countrymen, never forfeit thy rare acquisitions of thy wisdom and thy valour. May they be ever ready to offer up their lives in defence of that independence which they received at your hands, against the assault of every foreign foe; while with equal firmness, they shield from the rude attack of licentiousness, those political institutions, which receiving the sanction of thy approbation, have become the safeguards of their liberties. May thy memory ever live in their hearts, green as the vernal leaf of the oak which shades thy tomb.