

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

T H U R S D A Y, NOVEMBER 22, 1798.

The following oration, delivered by the author, Mr. John Hankin Thomas, one of the graduates at the commencement held on the 9th inst. at St. John's College, for conferring degrees of Bachelor of Arts, is published at the request of the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, and a number of the members of the legislature.

An ORATION on PATRIOTISM, 1798.

PROPERLY to discharge our duties, my respectable hearers, it is necessary that we first justly understand and duly appreciate them. As then this day, which forms so important an era in the views of early life, offers us as it were from the tranquil scenes of collegiate employments into a situation on which, in some degree, the active duties of citizen are first supposed to be attached, the virtue of patriotism appears to be a subject which must interest and concern us all. In endeavouring to deliver to you the native effusions of a youthful mind, and the results of my short observation upon this topic, I shall use that language which I trust will ever be agreeable to the American character, the pure language of sincerity. Too young to have yet acquired the craft of adulation, or perhaps to know the full necessity of a dissembling policy, it is to be hoped that I am fortunate in addressing myself to an audience who can prefer the honest path of truth to the vain trial of flattery, and can make a liberal allowance for the zeal and ardour of juvenile sentiments.

At this eventful period, when the spirit of political strife has gone forth through the world, when it has become of peculiar consequence to strip from error and vice the veil of truth and goodness, the real characteristics of patriotism should be distinctly marked, and well ascertained. How often, my respectable audience, have the judgments of mankind been enticed, and their passions enlisted by the mere personal merit of words! Men in all ages have been desirous of rendering the world deserts under the best and most popular names, except sometimes where a people have been so far corrupt that vice has openly triumphed over virtue. If confirmation were wanted for this remark, it is amply to be found in the annals of modern times! Since the mighty revolution in Europe,—the revolution which in its sanguinary progress promises to subvert all order and regularity, and to confound all moral distinctions.—Patriotism has almost become the watch-word of anarchy and rebellion. In one devoted part of the old world the sacred title of Patriot has been arrogated by wretches who have imbrued their impious hands in the blood of their brethren, and violated the altars of God! In other countries the title has been claimed exclusively by the discontented, the factious and seditious,—by men, the quality of whose patriotism is displayed in efforts to vilify their own government, to prostitute the interests of their own country, and to promote civil broils and dissension. Such votaries true patriotism abhors and rejects; nor can the view without detestation their pretended offerings. The spirit of real patriotism consists in a noble and disinterested love of country, which produces in the possessor a constant desire to promote, by all just means, the general happiness. Whoever possesses this desire, however lowly his estate or humble his situation, may be pronounced a genuine patriot. It may exist in every rank and department of civilized life, and may be evinced by exertions as various as there are different spheres of action. The honest farmer, who by his patient and peaceful labours helps to diffuse the blessings of plenty, the industrious mechanic, who increases the conveniences of living, and every man, however private his avocation, whose general conduct tends either to alleviate the miseries or promote the good of society, is as equally entitled for his patriotism to a proportionate share of public esteem, as the able statesman or enterprising warrior. Sound wisdom, as well as justice, disclaims the illiberal policy which would confine the possession of this heroic virtue to those only who are urged by their restless tempers, or compelled by the duties of office, to engage busily in national concerns. Wisdom also teaches us, with an earnestness highly deserving attention, that the practice of religious virtues is essentially necessary to the happiness, if not to the very existence of social union; and it thence inculcates, what should be for ever impressed on our minds, that no man, however serviceable accident may have rendered him, or however glorious his talents may be, does possess the real spirit of patriotism, whose usual tenor of morals is not conformable to the standard of rectitude. For how can we believe that the man, who in his private department shall have evinced a common disregard of all virtue, can feel the pure flame of that virtue whose trials are often most arduous and severe? Can he, who in his domestic concerns has neglected the natural ties of kindred and family, be justly supposed sensible of his obligations to society? Can the indolgent, who has been even devoted to dissipation and sensual pleasures, of the avaricious being, whose

idol is self-interest, yield to the mandates of patriotism, in obedience to which every personal consideration of pleasure and interest is to be sacrificed to public good? Common sense replies no; nor can it perceive any good reason why the man of immoral life, who has despised the duties which he owes to religion and to his God, should ever be thought capable of discharging, with integrity and purity of motive, the duties which he owes to his country. But, my audience, amidst the busy and turbulent scenes which are sometimes exhibited in the world, the voice of common sense is frequently silenced and overcome by the more powerful pleadings of passion and prejudice. In judging of the public virtue of men there has been a habit always too common, of omitting every consideration of private character. This is a spurious generosity, unfounded in reason, and which, when long continued, must tend to promote an entire corruption of the body politic. A desire of the good opinion and applause of our fellow-citizens, whether ingrafted in our nature or suggested by self-interest, is almost universal. When the gratification of this desire is made greatly to depend on our moral conduct, it has a proper influence to encourage the good and depress the dissolute. But when in distributing the desirable laurels of patriotism, the course of our decrees holds out an idea that virtue is not an essential recommendation to public esteem and gratitude, we remove one of the strongest barriers to vice, and a very general inducement to goodness. Let every friend to virtue then be cautious of prostituting, from selfish or political motives, his applause and regard to men, whose lives or whose principles are at war with morality and religion. Except the influential Christian, whose actions daringly and flagitiously contradict his professions, it is impossible perhaps that there can exist in human shape an enemy, ultimately so malignant to public order and happiness, as the infidel whom either rank, fortune or talents, may enable to propagate his opinions. Such a man may be entitled to our thanks for temporary services, but upon no consideration should he be ever honoured as a patriot, in as much as no good he can do will counterbalance the evil and horrid tendency of his principles. Let those who are disposed to doubt the justice of this rule consider the direful consequences which must ensue, whenever the prevalence of infidelity becomes general in a country. In searching for examples they need not turn their eyes to distant ages and remote periods in history: France immediately rises to view—France—formerly the "bright domain of gentle manners," refinement and hospitality, now a ferocious monster in iniquity, a purpled vortex of injustice and misery, a dreadful picture of what every nation must be when it is induced profanely to destroy the temples of holy worship, and to deride the sacred volume of life. Instead then of ever being prevailed upon to confer the honours of patriotism upon man, avowing tenets like those which assisted to change a civilized and polite people into a horde of savages, we should rather regard them as objects of scorn and virtuous execration. On the contrary, the same policy dictates that we reverence, as worthy and valuable patriots, all those, who by sincerely preaching the sublime lessons of Christian morality, inculcate truths necessary and important to every political society, and thus promote our temporal as well as eternal welfare. In the view I have taken of my subject, my hearers, it appears neither expedient nor just that the trump of fame should only announce to the world and posterity the deeds of ambitious warriors and statesmen, that it should only be sounded to heap glory on the claimants who figure in the bold and noisy pursuits of life, while the more useful services of quiet merit are forgotten or neglected. The ingenious teachers of wisdom, and the votaries of science, who by their literary exertions have much improved the public manners and understanding, have conferred benefits more important in my estimation to their countrymen, than all the splendid achievements of the aspiring conqueror. With this impression it is that I would raise monuments and weave crowns of honour to the memory of an Addison, while the name of an Alexander might sink into the pool of oblivion. Addison, by the elegant efforts of whose pen more moral refinement was perhaps produced, than the lapse of another century would of itself have afforded, should assume a rank among the wisest of patriots; while the exploits of the Macedonian chief, and the numerous leaders who have sacrificed justice and their country's peace to their own ambition, should be no where recorded but in the list of plundering and lawless invaders. It has been a question, my respectable audience, to which some modern incidents have given consequence, whether or no the duties of patriotism are not in some degree inconsistent with the spirit of philanthropy? In widening the channel of the stream it may be observed that its rapidity is always diminished; and judicious persons have considered, that amidst the general benevolence which the philanthropist professes, and the multiplicity of concerns which he feels, the

force of that affection by which he is attached to the land of his birth must necessarily decrease. In case of collision of interest, between the community to which he belongs and a foreign power, it is argued, that, even if he is not treacherous, he will at least be found wavering when he ought to be acting.—That he will be engaged in settling the tender scruples of conscience, and discussing with himself the rights of the parties, when the voice of patriotism loudly calls him to arms and to battle. Although an absolute rule upon this subject cannot perhaps be properly established, yet it must be confessed, that the disorderly and clamorous spirits, who in the present convulsed state of society have proved themselves unfit subjects for any government, have been most of them violent pretenders to philanthropy. It almost indeed appears to be an article in the counterfeit philosophy of which the age has been so fruitful, to love any other country, to admire any other political union, and to esteem any other climate but our own. The disciples of this chimerical philosophy, whose patriotism is such that the most trifling dissatisfaction can induce them to emigrate from their native soil, are generally observed on trial to be haunted by the demon of discontent in every situation. Instead of deserving the title of citizens of the world, they are rather found to be outlaws, unfriendly to social happiness and order: Instead of being real philanthropists, their charity evaporates in the fume of words, and they are discovered to be entirely void of those active virtues which can alone render benevolence extensively useful. The present century has however been illumined by one bright instance of exalted worth, who combined in a manner as glorious as wonderful all the excellencies of philanthropy and patriotism. While disinterested goodness continues to have an admirer, the memory of the humane Howard will ever be cherished and respected. Although we cannot boast, my friends, that this god-like character was our countryman, yet America, in common with all mankind, is bound to honour the name of him who evinced himself "a friend to every climate, a patriot of the world." I rejoice that the labours of this excellent personage were of such a nature as render it proper in a discourse on patriotism to pay him the small tribute of my applause and reverence. For, if the great part of a long life spent in relieving not only the ordinary woes of the distressed, but in successfully prosecuting the most arduous schemes to meliorate the condition of afflicted captivity, and thereby performing the most benign services to unfortunate thousands of the present race in Great-Britain, and perhaps to millions of posterity; if all this can entitle a man to the esteem of his countrymen, then should England be proud to regard, in the late Mr. Howard, one of the noblest of her sons, and a gem of inestimable value. To obtain information how he might best conduct his original plan of benevolence at home, and actuated too by feelings of universal charity, this great and indefatigable patriot visited the most dismal mansions of pain and sorrow throughout all Europe, and surveyed all the dreary scenes of misery and depression, even in the very northern wilds of Russia. Wherever he went, he appeared like an angel of mercy sent forth to disperse the evil spirits of guilt, calamity, and sickness: The widow, the orphan, and the wretched tenants of dungeons and prisons, hailed his arrival, and blessed him as he passed; while, like the industrious bee, who at every flight returns laden with materials to work upon, Mr. Howard, in whose breast the amor patriæ was always predominant, came back, furnished by every journey with a fresh fund of knowledge and observation, which he employed to promote the most laudable improvements in his native land, and to instruct his countrymen in his favourite objects of humanity. Here is a sublime example of patriotic virtue, which exhibited in the singular though truly pious mode that it was; we cannot hope will often have an imitator; but which, my friends, is surely worthy of a grateful mention, and should frequently be presented to the recollection of an admiring world. In descanting on the noble love of country, were I to consider it as peculiar alone to countries under particular modes of government or circumstances of situation, the notion would be highly unjust and illiberal. Nature has imparted the generous flame to her children of every region; and, though difficulties of condition may depress it in some countries; yet it can never be entirely extinguished but by a total depravity of heart and corruption of morals. It is the influence of this flame which attracts the savage to his native deserts and the tribe in which he has lived; and it is this which would render the really good man a faithful citizen, had he been born a subject even to Turkish despotism and rigour. It will not be pretended however but that the incitement to patriotic deeds must be much stronger among a people whose freedom and rights are protected by law, than in a land where every thing is subject to the will of an arbitrary sovereign. In the early ages of Greece and Rome, when those nations possessed so much of their liberty,