

A

FUNERAL ORATION,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON:

DELIVERED AT RHINEBECK FLATS,

FEBRUARY 22.

By *JOHN B. ROMEYN,*

MINISTER OF THE REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH,
RHINEBECK FLATS.

The memory of the Just is blessed.—PROV. X. 7.

POUGHKEEPSIE:

STATE OF NEW-YORK—PRINTED BY JOHN WOODS.

—1800.—

S I R,



IN obedience to the request of the officers and citizens, together with the brethren of Montgomery Lodge, who convened on Saturday the 22d inst. for the purpose of complying with the request of Congress, and for paying their last tribute of respect to the memory of the illustrious Washington—We beg you to favor us with a copy of the Oration delivered on that day, for publication.

We are, with great esteem,

Your obedient servants,

ASA POTTER,

JOHN V. H. HUYCK,

} Committee of
Arrangement.

To the Rev. Mr. J. B. ROMEYN.

Rhinebeck, 25th Feb. 1800.

ADVERTISEMENT.

AFTER one refusal, and upon a renewed application of the committee, the author now sends forth this Oration to the world, conscious of its imperfections, but satisfied that he has not willingly obtruded it upon public view.



FUNERAL ORATION, &c.

FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN AND
FELLOW-CITIZENS!

COLUMBIA this day sits a disconsolate mourner at the tomb, "weeping for her WASHINGTON, and will not be comforted, because he is not."—Death, regardless of his intrinsic worth, and his accumulated honors, has laid him low in the dust. That heart, which once glowed with celestial fire, has ceased to beat, and the shadows of the long night stretch over his remains. The remembrance of his goodness, and of his greatness, however, like the mild glory of the evening sun, sheds a placid influence of delight over the soul, and softens it to tender regret. What tho' he has rested from his labours, his works do follow him, and proclaim aloud his excellence. His memory is embalmed in our bosoms, and forces from us the grateful, tho' feeble tribute of a tear—HE was, under God, the *Grand agent* in connecting us, and preserving us—in animating us, and controlling us, during the critical period of our national infancy.—Rivalling the glory of ancient and modern names, in heroism & skill, he far surpassed them in humaneness—in integrity—in disinterestedness. Combining in himself every requisite for a model, as a Citizen, Soldier and Statesman, HE was one of those extraordinary personages, who seem born to effect great and surprizing revolutions.

By nature fierce, and violent in his disposition, his first contest was with himself. Fortunately for his country, his judgment gained the victory over his passions. This paved the way for his future greatness—for who so fit to command others, as HE who can command himself.—Thus calm and self collected, prudence, firmness and moderation characterized every action—He had but few confidants—depending upon the resources of his own mind. His judgment seldom deceived him—as his perception was clear, rapid and true.—His bosom was a stranger to envy—at least HE never gave occasion for slander to fasten an imputation of this kind upon his character—He cherished talents where he saw them, and praised men when it was their due. Though

his ~~own~~ merit was distinguished, and commanded universal admiration and love, yet was HE unassuming. He rather retired from, than obtruded himself upon, public view—and when HE did appear, it was the unsolicited voice of his country that had called him.

View him in the walks of domestic life. Order and regularity prevailed throughout his household. Strangers, who visited Mount Vernon, saw contentment & tranquility pictured in every scene. Here licentiousness was a stranger, and immorality obliged to assume a virtuous disguise. Such was WASHINGTON's force of character, that the profligate bowed before it, and approved what they could not imitate. HE professed himself a *Christian*! And who will attach to him the imputation of hypocrisy? His strong capacious mind, no doubt, saw the *weakness* of infidelity, which, to support its cause, must overturn all evidence, and rest upon speculation—uncertain as the “baseless fabric of a vision;” and his moral principles cannot but have shrunk back from a view of infidel practices—for where infidelity commences, strict morality generally ceases—it then assumes the form of an accommodating, a versatile philosophy, encouraging the unrestrained enjoyment of every vice.—Convinced that no society could exist without *religion*, we heard him uniformly recommend it to his fellow-citizens—and would to GOD! that they who are now so furiously zealous, for his name, as to clamor merely for sins of omission against WASHINGTON, would so far reverence his memory, as, in this particular, to obey his precept.—It was a precept sanctioned by *example*. He not only joined in the sacred rites of *religion*—but he also performed those actions, which, as a member of society, as well as a Christian, he was bound to do—thus connecting what our divine Savior emphatically call “works of sacrifice with works of mercy.” To the stranger he was hospitable—to the poor, charitable—to his equals, dignified—to his inferiors, affable—to his friends, kindly affectionate—and in his dealings an *honest man*. Blessed with those rare qualifications which entitled him at all times to govern, when his lot came to be governed, we beheld in him the prompt and obedient *Citizen*. To the laws and constituted authorities he ever paid that respect which was due. In his enlarged view, every situation in life, where virtue ruled, was honorable—With him, in fine, nothing human was too little, because nothing human was too great!

But, my fellow-citizens, it was not in the private walks of life that our WASHINGTON discovered his singular and ex-

alted talents. Had he not appeared on a more conspicuous theatre, he would have had many rivals in worth—'Tis not a calm sea, a mild sky—but it is the storm, the tempest, that tries the skill or the fortitude of the pilot: In the first, the gaiety of a sunshine scenery chases away all apprehension—In the last, the darkened clouds, the rolling thunder, and the forked lightening, arrest the senses, and spread a general confusion over the mind. Thus, also, in the humble vale of retirement, the scenes that present themselves to view are too uniform—the circumstances that occur are too uninteresting to draw forth the full force of a man's character. 'Tis in the rugged and diversified scenes of trouble—'Tis in the interesting and uncommon circumstances of danger, that the soul of man is aroused—that his latent faculties are called forth into action—in fine, that he discovers himself **WHAT HE IS!**

It was in a dreary wilderness—amidst savage foes—in the horror and dismay of a savage slaughter, occasioned by imprudent bravery,* that the superior genius of our **HERO** first displayed itself with uncommon splendor—He arrested the progress of death—He reanimated his drooping companions, and, like another Xerophon, led his little band safe to Virginia, through a country mostly inimical, and affording but few, if any necessaries.

Though his fame was now established, it had not reached its zenith. He was only advanced one grade in the climax of his greatness. God, who had thus favourably ushered him into public life, was preparing new laurels to encircle his brows. An event soon occurred, embracing every thing singular in its commencement, difficult in its nature, striking in its developement, and terrible in its consequences, if unfavorably terminated, but glorious if otherwise, which called forth all the great resources of **WASHINGTON**, and displayed unto us, to his enemies, and to the world at large, his pre-eminently exalted character. This event, was that revolution in which we so justly glory, and which has laid the foundation of our national independence and consequence. At the first dawn of our troubles, he took a decisive part: It was a part adopted from a conviction of its justice, and sanctioned by Nature and Nature's God. Need I mention, it was a part against the ill-timed—the preposterous—the unnatural pretensions of Britain.—When the troubles were drawing to an awful crisis, and a resort to arms was unavoidable, the eyes of our Rulers, attracted by the glories of a

* The event here alluded, was Braddock's defeat.

L V J

rising sun, fastened upon *the hero of Mount Vernon*, and they unanimously called him to head the undisciplined armies of his country. He accepted the appointment of *Commander in chief*, though with diffidence—He doubted his abilities, and in those doubts, was seen that modesty which ever accompanies real merit.

Behold him, now in the field, directing the movements of an army, half formed, scarcely clothed, and with little or no ammunition—His task was Herculean—the labour attached to it enormous!! Yet nothing could *deter* him from his undertaking, or intimidate him in the completion of it—neither the celebrity of British valor, matulated by repeated victories, nor the greatness of British resources, increased by a series of prosperity, nor even the imputation of an unjust and wanton rebellion, so bitterly painful to a mind conscious of its integrity. It was justice—the justice of an injured people crying for reparation, that *nerved* the arm of WASHINGTON, and inspired his bosom with heroic ardor. Feeling its power, and following its impulse, he dared to oppose the armies of a nation, grown grey with conquest. His success was astonishing, and was effected, not so much by bloody battles, as by skill and prudence, in warding off dangers when foreseen, and seizing advantages when offered. His great desire was to prevent *an unnecessary effusion of human blood*—His heart bled for the victims of war, and he has even been seen to drop a tear in the midst of battle. How unlike those heroes, so greatly celebrated in the pages of ancient and modern story! They have added tenfold to the horrors of war, by their brutality and intemperance. And tho' they may have made themselves praisèd while living—yet their memories are branded with infamy—They were, undoubtedly, the destroyers of the human race.—Not so our WASHINGTON—He displayed, in the late contest, an humaneness of disposition, that forced an universal tribute of honor and love. The tears of the widow and the orphan, wantonly injured by him, can never have disturbed his repose: but his reflections, in this particular, must have been “pleasant, like the memory of past joys.”

My countrymen, need I enlarge upon his military achievements? Shall I picture to your imagination the battles won by his valor, or the advantages obtained by his skill? In the volume of history they are recorded, and on the tables of our hearts they are engraved. Though he had illustrious compeers, who assisted in the sublime struggle, and who are entitled to the just tribute of enthusiastic praise,

yet, under God, HE was the principal instrument. Like a firm and massy pillar in a tottering fabric, he supported our precarious and sinking nation. Superior to adversity, his firmness never forsook him. Even when the prospect of success was awfully forbidding and gloomy, HE was calm and undismayed,

"As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,

"Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm ;

"Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,

*"Eternal sunshine settles on its head."**

Other generals would have sunk under such reverses as his country experienced. But WASHINGTON rose superior to every misfortune, and thus, when all appeared to be lost, literally saved our country. Never, never can we forget our forlorn condition, when the poor remnant of our army had fled beyond the Delaware. The tempest of war was pouring in a main upon us—our hands hung in despondence—gloom sat depicted in every face—despair reigned in every heart—our national existence was at its last gasp—it was struggling in the agonies of an untimely death—When lo ! guided by the God of Battles, WASHINGTON, with the sudden and rapid force of a mountain torrent, fell upon the British at Trenton and Princeton, and put them to flight. Like Ossian's hero, "he moved like an angry ghost before a cloud, when meteors enclose him, and the dark winds are in his hands." Victory thus once more perched upon the American standard, re-animated our expiring country, and caused her to look forth with all the fond anticipations of hope. Nor was she disappointed ; Heaven, in pity for her struggles, which were many and great, inspired a foreign power to send assistance to our coasts. The armies and fleets of Louis the XVI seconded our efforts with such energy, as to hasten an honorable peace. WASHINGTON directed the whole, and, like "a stream of many tides," rolled on in his course with majesty and power, paralyzing every opposition. With one hand he upheld a diversified confederation, and with the other smote the enemies of his country. Thus he progressed in prosperity and fame, till the valor of Americans, under his guidance, forcibly wrung from Britain, what justice, what honor, what honesty had not been able to obtain ; and the acknowledgement of our independence rewarded our toils, our hardships, and our sufferings.—At this time, had WASHINGTON had the least spark of ambition in his bosom,

* GOLDSMITH.

the wind of popular applause would have blown it into a blaze. But no ; ambition lurked not in him ; he was the true patriot. Not all the enticements of military power, so long enjoyed, or the insinuations of some fellow-officers, could divert him from his steady purpose. He had drawn his sword for American freedom, and when this was obtained, HE sheathed it, magnanimously resigning his command, and retiring to his estate. Here, fellow-citizens, were wisdom and resolution displayed, to which history can afford no second. The conduct of our chieftain was wise ; for lawless power has a tendency to corrupt the mind, and strangle fellow-feeling ; it affords the means of sensuality, and engenders depraved habits. Had WASHINGTON seized the opportunity which offered, this day would probably have been a day of rejoicing, for a tyrant would have been no more. The conduct of our chieftain was resolute ; for the love of power is one of the strongest passions inherent in human nature ; it is coeval with the first exertions of reason, and accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life.

While in retirement, unlike those turbulent spirits, who are ever dissatisfied unless they direct public affairs, WASHINGTON was the quiet, though usefully active citizen. He did not indulge himself in inglorious ease, but attended to the pursuits of science, and the employments of agriculture. Thus, in the peaceful shade of his villa, he enjoyed the refined luxury of an "*otium cum dignitate*."

His retirement, however, was short. A sense of duty again obliged him to take an active part on the grand theatre of life. The impotence of the old confederation was soon felt, and its imperfections universally acknowledged. The serpent of disunion was charming us to ruin, and destruction creeping imperceptibly upon our infant nation ; when, by a strong, though peaceful effort, we strangled the first, and arrested the progress of the last. *A New Constitution*, without an armed force to impose it, was adopted by our country, and WASHINGTON was called, by the unanimous voice of his countrymen, to the responsible office of supreme magistrate. The joy expressed on his acceptance, as you know, Americans, was unbounded. Wherever he came he was received in triumph, and, from every quarter, congratulations were sent, breathing nothing but gratitude, love and admiration. These general applauses, which were bestowed upon WASHINGTON, did not inflate him with pride, as it would have done weaker minds. They were, so

doubt, pleasing to his bosom, and had a tendency to stimulate him to new displays of zeal and attachment to his native and newly emancipated country.

HE now entered on the arduous, the difficult, the important, and, to him, untried duties of a *statesman*.—He trod a path that had misled many in its intricate windings, and which, like the fabled Minotaur of old, had proved their ruin. But, like Theseus, he escaped unhurt; his Ariadne was *Integrity*; no intrigues stained his politics; no corruption marked his measures. That same love for his country, that same regard for her welfare, which had heretofore discovered itself, still actuated him. His situation was novel, and called for uncommon prudence. The principles of republicanism had never prevailed in their purity—at least *no modern example* offered. Of course the idea of rational liberty, upon a republican plan, must have been imperfect till our revolution. He had then no model for his conduct but his *own* mind. Besides this, he presided when the old world was horribly convulsed with *war*, and such a war as was unexampled in the annals of *history*, for its atrocities, and its woeful slaughter; like a tornado, it whirled through Europe with such direful violence, as to root up prejudice itself, and threaten the dissolution of society.—Gratitude for a recent and splendid benefit, interested America on one side of the contending parties—Prudence and interest forbade an interference with either. Thus critically situated, WASHINGTON, by his wisdom and moderation, steered the vessel of which he was pilot, safe through the strait in which it lay, “leaving Scylla on the left, and Charybdis on the right.” To say that he satisfied all his countrymen, would be saying what experience denies.—The voice of some, who had a right of thinking, as well as he had a right of acting, arraigned his policy, and doubted his gratitude. The energy of that voice was, however, soon lost in the remembrance of his past services. No one could, with any justice, attach *improper motives* to him, who, under God, principally established our independence, and who had so magnanimously resisted the allurements of ambition, when presented. That HE was liable to error, could not be denied. He was a *man*, and, as such, necessarily imperfect. He never, however, erred upon principle. The defects of his administration, when they occurred, proceeded not from the *heart*, but the *head*. His heart still beat for his country—his affections plead all for her interest.—His judgment, indeed, was capable of deception, and yet such was the clearness of his comprehension, that he com-

mitted less mistakes, perhaps, than any statesman that preceded him. Although he ruled over a people jealous of their rights to an extreme, the exceptions to his conduct were, comparatively, small. His administration, as to its general complexion, was *impartial*. He made no pointed invidious distinctions in the choice of officers. He considered himself as a public character, and, of course, was not swayed by private attachments. Besides, he knew full well that government was intended for the good of a whole community; and, as such, that the smile of government ought to extend upon every member of that community. He had yet to learn the incomprehensible paradox, that *political opinion*, which is as diversified as human dispositions, constitutes the alone and perfect criterion of merit, of abilities, of morality, nay, of *Christianity*! He grasped in his enlarged embrace the whole American nation. They were his brethren, and he felt that he was exalted above them solely for their good. Wealth was not his object—he only regarded it for the necessities of life. You all know how he nobly refused compensation for his services. His great object, as a statesman, was your happiness—your prosperity. For this he devoted his time—his faculties—his property—his life. Deaf to the insinuations of flattery, he was also regardless of reproach, when his actions originated in his mature judgment. The breath of popular applause or popular dislike never influenced him to swerve from his purpose. A manly decision formed a prominent trait in his character; and yet it was tempered with so much *modesty*, as even to disarm the violence of party. He never arrogated any importance to himself, but arrested the attention, and pointed it to the *source* of his greatness. His magnanimity could not stoop to that *contemptible littleness* of soul, which, in the contemplation of second causes, forgets the Supreme First Cause. He rendered tribute where tribute was due, and gratefully acknowledged, that God alone had made him great.

Compare HIM with those *illustrious* statesmen that preceded him; where will you find so few striking defects, so many uncommon excellencies? We may at least assert, that none of them exceeded, and but few rivalled him. In the systems of the ancients, we find much rudeness; and in those of the moderns, much inconsistency. Both ancient and modern stand attainted with the charge of dishonesty, and both discovered but little sense of their dependant nature.—An unmanly pride for the most part tinctured their character, which urged them to exalt a worm to the throne of Jehovah, and made the wretched reptile arbiter of his own fate.

WASHINGTON, advancing in the vale of years, felt fatigued with the burden of public affairs, and wished for ease in his old days. This however would not have been consulted, if duty had still required his labors—for to this he uniformly sacrificed private feelings—But he had finished the work which his country had assigned to him. The new government was organized, and bid fair for perpetuity—Power had now no charms for him—HE returned once more to the bosom of his country, and, like another Cincinnatus, resumed his agricultural employments. This step, like the rest of his conduct, was exclusively his own. It displayed the man! The more we consider it, the more admirable and uncommon does his disinterested patriotism appear. The possession of power was here consistent with duty. He might have again aspired with the greatest justice to the first office of his country. Our eyes were still fixed upon him, to follow his movements and obey his authority.—But he retired from our view, and secluded himself once more in the recess of his dear villa.

Whilst there, his country was threatened by a foreign nation, who once were our friends, but now appeared to assume a hostile aspect. A resort to arms became a matter of expediency. WASHINGTON was a third time called forth upon the public stage, and consented to take the command of our armies. Before a new trial of his valor and prudence occurred, the Angel of Death summoned him to the tribunal of his God! He descended to the grave in the full blossom of age, “bearing his blushing honors thick upon him.”*

In reviewing every circumstance of WASHINGTON's life—considering the temptations accompanying popularity like his—the many trying and novel scenes in which he was placed, and then recollecting his uniform patriotism—his undeviating integrity—his unshaken fortitude—his humane bravery—his uncommon modesty—and, above all, the brilliant success which attended him thro' life, we may boldly assert, that the world has never seen one superior to the Hero of Mount Vernon. Others, indeed, have been splendidly great, but none, like him, connected moral goodness, in so great a degree, with his greatness. The beauties of his character are so many, and so interesting, as to cast the mantle of Forgetfulness over his blemishes. “Illustrious man! to whose tomb posterity shall come and say, as Pericles did over the bodies of his deceased fellow soldiers, you are like to the divinities above us—You are no longer with us—You are known only by the benefits which you have conferred.”†

* SHAKESPEARE. † FLOOD—THE IRISH ORATOR.

Such was WASHINGTON, whose loss we this day mourn. How strange and sad the reverse which a year has produced! On this day, ere now, the sound of joy re-echoed through our land. It was the birth day of our Illustrious Favorite. But now—Righteous God! how solemn and instructive thy lessons!!—now HE is gone to “that land, from whose bourne no traveller returns”—and instead of commemorating his birth, we lament his death! . . . Ideas the most mournful rush to our minds, and force open the flood gates of grief. He is gone from us forever. Our eyes shall no more see him till on that day, “when the Angel of the Lord, standing with his one foot on the sea, and the other on the land, shall lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by HIM that liveth forever and ever, that time shall be no more!

But, Americans, although dead, his example still remains, and affords us emphatic lessons, worthy of our reverence and obedience.

To you, soldiers, its language is, “unsheathe not your swords for the purpose of shedding blood, except it be for self-defence, or in defence of your country, and its rights—and, in the latter case, keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in your hands, to their relinquishment.”* In your warfare remember you are men, and add not to the miseries of war. Avoid rashness, and false courage. Be temperately brave, intrepid and prudent. Bear up against reverses of fortune, and rest your hopes on the God of Battles.

To you, Free and Accepted Masons, the example of WASHINGTON enforces the practice of those virtues, which constitute the external objects of your institution. Let your love be without dissimulation, and your charity not to be seen of the world, but to dissipate human woe. Connect love to God and the precepts of Christianity, with love to the Brethren and the precepts of morality. Study to shew yourselves workmen that need not be ashamed, right-ly performing your several duties.

To us, fellow-citizens, the example of WASHINGTON recommends reverence for religion, obedience to the laws, and the cultivation of social love. Be upright, disinterested and virtuous—avoid dissensions—annihilate the infernal spirit of party, and let harmony reign throughout our land.

But his example, Americans, does not only instruct us. From his tomb a voice proceeds, impressive and awful, and speaks to you—to me—to us all, with energy, “PREPARE TO DIE, AND MEET YOUR GOD!”

* WASHINGTON'S WILL.