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Oration Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, NJ... Before the Cincinnati Society by Peter Kean, July 4, 1823

Peter Philip James Kean

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ORATION,

DELIVERED IN

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ELIZABETH-TOWN, N. J.

BY THE REQUEST OF A COMMITTEE OF THE HONOURABLE
CINCINNATI SOCIETY OF NEW-JERSEY,

BEFORE

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, THE HON.
CINCINNATI SOCIETY,

THE INHABITANTS OF THE BOROUGH OF ELIZABETH,
AND OF THE TOWNSHIP OF UNION,

JULY 4, 1823.

[PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS OF ELIZ. TOWN.]

BY PETER KEAN, ESQ.

—“That your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual—that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained—that the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete by so careful a preservation, and so prudent a use of this blessing, as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.”

Washington's Farewell Address to the People of the U. S.

ELIZABETH-TOWN:

PRINTED BY J. AND E. SANDERSON.

1823.

NOTICE

BEING

THE FIRST PUBLISHED COPY OF THE CONSTITUTION

BY THE PEOPLE OF A COUNTY OF THE STATE

AND OF THE TOWNSHIP OF

NEW YORK

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, THE SENATE

AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THE HONORABLE THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

AND OF THE TOWNSHIP OF

JULY 4, 1776

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY PETER KEARNEY

The first copy of the Constitution of the State of New York, as revised and amended, is now published. It is a small volume, and is sold at the price of one dollar. It is a valuable work, and is a necessary addition to the library of every citizen of the State. It is a work of great interest and importance, and is a valuable addition to the library of every citizen of the State. It is a work of great interest and importance, and is a valuable addition to the library of every citizen of the State.

ELIZABETH TOWN

PRINTED BY J. AND E. SANDERSON

At a meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati of the State of New-Jersey, held at Elizabeth-Town, July 4th, 1823—Present, Gen. JOSEPH BLOOMFIELD, President, and twenty-five Members.

RESOLVED, UNANIMOUSLY, That the thanks of this Society be given to Major PETER KEAN, for the very eloquent and truly patriotic Oration publicly delivered by him this day, in presence of a very large and respectable assembly of the public authorities, citizens and military of this borough and its vicinity, convened on an occasion so deeply interesting to the whole American people.

RESOLVED, That the very pathetic and affecting eulogium bestowed by him in his address upon the surviving members, and in an especial manner upon our departed brethren of the Cincinnati, be held in most grateful remembrance by the Society, and that our just sense thereof be manifested by the entry of these resolutions upon our journals, and by requesting the President to cause a copy thereof, under his signature, to be addressed or delivered to Maj. KEAN by the Secretary, accompanied with a request that he would furnish a copy of the same to be deposited in the archives of the Society.

A true copy from the minutes,

JOSEPH BLOOMFIELD, President.

JULY 4th, 1823.

SIR,

BE pleased in my behalf to express to the Honourable Society of Cincinnati, the high sense I entertain of the honour they have done me in their resolutions of this day.

However unworthy the Speech I had the honour of pronouncing before them, of the encomiums the Society's indulgence has been pleased to bestow upon it, and of the distinguished place they have assigned it, I cannot refuse any request made by a body whose claims to respect, confidence and obedience are so transcendent.

With sentiments of the greatest respect and veneration,

I have the honour to be, Sir,

your and the Society's

very humble servant,

PETER KEAN.

To Major General

The Hon. J. BLOOMFIELD,

Pres't of the Hon. Society of Cincinnati.

ORATION.



GENTLEMEN OF THE CINCINNATI,
AND FELLOW CITIZENS!

IF it be wise in other nations to commemorate great events by public rejoicings, we need no apology for this meeting. They celebrate victories and the birth of princes; we, the triumphs of a people and the birth of a nation.

Millions, who this day forty-seven years were not in being, are now assembled to offer up fervent thanksgivings for unprecedented blessings. Our best feelings prompt us to unite in this tribute of gratitude and praise to that Omnipotent Being who has "vouchsafed to guide, govern, and direct us, and to cause all things to work together for our good."

To you, Gentlemen of the Cincinnati, to your brothers in arms, and to your and our common political father, next to God, is our gratitude most justly due. In behalf of my fellow citizens I tender you their thanks, for the zeal, patience, perseverance, gallantry and heroic resolution with which you commenced, prosecuted, and terminated the contest.

Nor are we unmindful of the trials to which you were subjected at the close of the war. Wasted fortunes; ruined hopes; impaired constitutions; "ingratitude, marble-hearted fiend." "You asked for bread and they gave you a stone"—yet you were true to your country.

Treason, assuming the garb of friendship and the language of sympathy, assailed your passions with an ability second only to that of an "archangel fallen:" there was a voice which said to the troubled waves, "peace, be still," and they were calm. The spot the tempter intended to render memorable by your disgrace, was hallowed by the formation of an institution "calculated to inculcate to the latest ages, the duty of laying down in peace, arms assumed for public defence." "Had the trials of March, '83, been wanting, (I use the words of Washington,) the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining."

Gentlemen, on an occasion like this, yours must be no common emotions. With passions and feelings mellowed by age, with minds fraught with the lessons of experience, you stand on the verge of time, a connecting link between your departed brothers and the rising generation. While on each anniversary, you look with satisfaction to the past, and with pleasing anticipation to the future, you are equally called to drop a tear to the memory of companions who yearly precede you to the tomb. "The good that men do lives after them;" the tribute paid to departed worth, is an assurance, that yours will be remembered.

Gentlemen! your country greets you with a fervent prayer, that, the splendour of your setting sun may be as refulgent, as its rise was glorious; that, the gratitude of America, and the consolations of religion, may cheer your latest hours, and that, your sons may be worthy of you.

Fellow Citizens!

The causes that led to the revolution, the victories that crowned our arms, all crowd on the memory. Can words

add force to the statement of the first made in the declaration of '76? What but an inspired tongue can increase the vivid recollections of the last that glow in every bosom? Need we apologize, then, for not dwelling on subjects so deeply engraven on our hearts, that an attempt to illustrate would, like an effort to explain the axioms of science, only render the intuitive perceptions of the mind less distinct? Let us rather attend to their consequences, and endeavour to lay "deep and broad" the foundations of republican principles.

At the end of the war, these United States entered upon "a new and untried state of being." The confederation was soon found inadequate; state interest and state pride militated with the general good; visionaries were not wanting, who believed, or, who affected to believe, that freedom might be maintained without a government; private and public bankruptcy palsied every effort for the attainment of competency; insurrection and sedition were busy; the enemies of freedom smiled, and presaged her ruin; her most sanguine friends were oppressed; the boldest doubted; a gloom diffused itself over the well affected. A paternal voice called on them to rouse from their despondency and save their country—it was the voice of Washington! who could refuse obedience? —The Constitution was adopted.

That it was admirably calculated to effect the ends intended, is proved by the increased and increasing intelligence, wealth, power and happiness of the republic.

Our institutions are founded on the virtue and good sense of the people—the only legitimate source of power. How is the source to be kept pure? It would be worse than utopian for a Christian people, accustomed to consult that Book in which the springs of human action are laid open by "Him who knoweth what is in the heart

of man," not to feel a firm conviction, that they must keep a vigilant guard over their own passions, and use every mean to repress and control inclinations that might lead to ruin. A sincere lover of freedom will never forget, that there is but one step from the excess of liberty to the gloom of despotism, and that that step must be through anarchy and crime. How, then, is the source to be kept pure? Happily, our own history answers the question. It teaches us that the source is to be kept pure, that Government is to be kept in perennial vigour, by the diffusion of moral and religious instruction; by encouraging industry, in all its various branches; by giving a firm support to the authority of magistrates, and yielding a willing obedience to law; by a temperate discussion of public measures; by a frequent recurrence to first principles, and their judicious adaptation to the exigencies of the moment; thus gradually moulding our institutions to conform to that perfection in the moral and physical condition of man, to which the march of mind is in a state of slow but sure approximation.

As citizens of New-Jersey, peculiar duties devolve upon us. All history proves, that, in federate governments, the smaller members are constantly in danger, from the power and ambition of the larger states. It would be sinning against experience to believe that we are to be exempted from dangers that have proved destructive to others. The union then is the only palladium of our state rights, and it is both our duty and our interest to strengthen the hands of the general government in the exercise of its constitutional powers. To this end, our representatives in congress should be men capable of making up by their abilities and statesmanlike views, what they want in numbers; men fitted to command the respect and confidence of the union, in order

to give a due preponderance to a state, which, although small, deservedly claims, from its internal resources, its revolutionary services, the virtue of its people and its tried patriotism, great weight in our national councils.

Nor should we be unmindful of our state affairs. Situated between the two great marts of commerce and manufactures, possessing a territory rich in mineral treasures, and not unfitted for great agricultural improvements, watered by rivers and streams that afford abundant facilities to commercial intercourse and the increase of manufactures, we should be wanting to ourselves were we to disregard these bounties of providence.

Above all, let us not neglect the rising generation. To your maternal care, my countrywomen, New-Jersey intrusts her future hopes. If you love virtue, if you desire praise, if you would deserve the gratitude of your children, cultivate their minds. Teach them, early to tread in the paths of virtue. Let the volume of inspiration be the guide of their youthful ways, and it will be the light of their manhood. Point them to the life of Washington, and teach them to love and venerate his virtues. Bid them practice "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, teach them to think on these things,"* and their after lives will be your reward.

Fellow citizens! Opportunities of performing distinguished services are of rare occurrence; they are afforded by periods of difficulty and danger, that call for the exertion of great powers; but we all have the ability to render essential benefits, and our conduct will be the more

* *Philippians iv. 8.*

meritorious, as it will meet no reward but that which proceeds from a consciousness of duty performed. Your sons are daily migrating; their usefulness and respectability in the new states depend upon their education and on the examples of virtue your lives afford them. Surely you will not count it an unacceptable service, to have aided in the advancement of civilization and the spread of christianity; or reflect with other than pleasurable emotions, on having contributed to the diffusion of happiness.

The reputation of a state and consequently its weight in the union, depends upon its civilization; that is, upon the progress it has made and is making, in wealth, refinement and moral worth. By a fixed law of our nature, these are inseparable from and have a direct effect on political institutions. In Europe, the accumulation of commercial capital and the improvements of science are opening the way for civil liberty. In America, free institutions and the extension of education have given an impetus to industry and laid the foundation of national greatness. The source of our prosperity is the more pure, its effects have consequently been more immediate. No country can remain stationary; its condition must improve, or, it will go back. By what powerful motives then, are we impelled to exertion! To what scorn would we not be justly liable, were we to relax! With what ingratitude would we not be chargeable, were we to refuse to our children, advantages conferred on us by our fathers!

May it please your Excellency! called to preside over a state, capable of high destinies, we look with confidence to the exertion of your best talents. This confidence is strengthened by a recollection of your past administration. Persevere sir, in the liberal policy that has mark-

ed your course ; give force and consistency by your legal learning, to our highest court of judicature ; husband the means set apart for common schools ; encourage well organized schemes for the advancement of the arts ; unite your name with plans of internal improvement, calculated to develop the resources, stimulate the industry and augment the wealth of your native state, and the gratitude of her sons, while it assigns you no undistinguished place among your worthy predecessors, will reward your labours.

The effects of the revolution are not confined to this country. The spectacle of a youthful people successfully grasping with a great nation attracted attention and gave a powerful impulse to the friends of liberal principles in Europe. Unfortunately for humanity, the cause was disgraced by the excesses of its first advocates and a re-action was produced. A bold effort was made to wed the Genius of Freedom with Infidelity and Crime ; she shrank from the contaminating impurity of the base alliance and fled. America was her place of refuge ; the good sense of the American people has preserved her unsullied. Here she found a resting place, where to renew her strength for another and a more vigorous flight. She has ascended, and while with untired wing and undazzled gaze she hovers in mid air, ready to dispense her blessings on Greece, once her favourite abode, and o'er the civilized nations of Europe, no less fitted for her dwelling place, who can be an uninterested spectator of her towering soar ?

Connected with Europe by commercial relations, a common ancestry and a common literature ; anxious, from the convictions of reason and experience, for the extension of constitutional freedom, we deeply sympathize with the liberal party.

At the restoration of the Bourbons it was hoped, that, the governments of Europe would learn wisdom from experience, yield to the spirit of the age and lead the way in reform; that they would adapt the administration of affairs to the altered condition of the people, and hasten to remove the vestiges of feudal institutions that time and civilization had gradually undermined. It was emphatically called, "the era of good feeling," and the friends of humanity longed for its perpetuation. Alas! the feelings have subsided and nothing but professions remain.

The Holy Alliance! I shudder while I pronounce the name. What! a combination to retard the progress of civilization; to benumb and freeze the energies of the human intellect; to revive antiquated and exploded superstitions; to replunge mankind into the more than midnight darkness of the barbarous ages; to arrest the wonder working hand of the Almighty, in its adaptation of human means to the fulfilment of prophecy; undertaken and sworn to in the name in which a Triune God has vouchsafed to reveal his mercies to man, and the earth born worms who have thus dared to profane that name, are spared! Yes they are spared! but only spared to be rendered memorable examples to future generations, and by their signal defeat more assuredly to accelerate the advent of that period, when the human race shall be fitted for the happiness of the latter times.

The indignation due to their enormity is equalled only, by the contempt their imbecility merits. The page of history was open to them, the follies of the house of Stuart were there traced in indelible characters; the glorious revolution of 1688 was blazoned, with no common splendour; yet, they would not read. The hundred days compelled Louis 18th to confess his errors and

to grant the charter to France. Temporary tranquillity has re-produced a blind security ; men incapable of learning the lessons of wisdom, although taught in the school of adversity, again surround his throne and direct his councils. The property, the talent, the people of France have again and again evinced their attachment to civil freedom, yet, her emigrant nobles and her king wage war on Spanish independence.

Not a rivulet, not a fastness in Spain, but tells of triumphs over invading Frenchmen ; not a true hearted Spaniard but is ready to shed his blood for his country's honour ; and yet, a " Son of France" (degenerate scion of a noble stem) leads an army beyond its resources, into the heart of Spain, unappalled by the difficulties of the route, by the retreat of the king to Seville, by the preconcerted abandonment of the country, by the solemn and death like stillness that surrounds his march, giving " dreadful note" of the coming storm. Yes, the storm will burst, the dark and midnight cloud that o'ershadows him will be livid with lightnings and pour out its torrents of desolation. Spain will arise in her might, and hurl the invaders back. From the days of Charlemagne to the days of Napoleon, when was Spain ever invaded with impunity ? The contest will not be confined to her limits ; it will be as dreadful, as its consequences will be important. All former efforts will sink into insignificance, when compared with this shock of embattled millions—all future wars lose their interest in the recollections of this mighty conflict ; but the result will be glorious. Success is insured by the developement of moral causes that no physical force can elude or counteract.

What though the moral elements of Europe be in a state of tempestuous commotion ! what though the

fountains of the great deep be broken up ! the hand that can stay them is raised ; the spirit that will breathe on the face of the waters is ready ; the ark of safety is moored, and the dove will return with an offering of peace. France must and will be ruled by a constitutional king ; Europe must and will be free.

Americans ! Citizens of a free and independent republic ! Descendants of the soldiers of the revolution ! You are this day called, by the wisdom of your institutions ; by the rising greatness of your country ; by the blood of your fathers ; by the silvered locks and honourable scars of the venerable men who grace this assembly ; by recollections of recent victories both by land and sea ; by the loveliness and purity of your wives and daughters ; by the interests of your sons ; by the interests of the whole human family ; by every religious and every moral tie, to fan the sacred flame that is kindled, and by the purity of your lives and devotion to your country, to add new brilliancy to the light that cheers the friends of civil liberty. Will you listen to the call ? or, will you by supineness and indifference hazard its extinction, jeopard your own liberties and the world's, and give cause of triumph to the Genius of Despotism, to whose malignant hate your follies would afford an eternal theme for bitter scorn and derision ? I pause not for a reply. The spirit of your fathers burns within you, and Freedom has marked you for her own.



