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BEFORE THE WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES  
OF THAT AND THE ADJACENT TOWNS.

—●—  
BY CHARLES PRENTISS.  
—●—

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE AUDIENCE.

MADISON——NOTAS VERI, MONITUSQUE DEORUM  
PERDIDERAT.

OVID, MET.

*Little was he concerned about the landmarks of truth, or the ad-  
monitions of Heaven.*

—●—  
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POEM.

EMPIRES are planted—blossom—flourish—fade—  
—Thrice ten and seven swift years their flight have made,  
Since our blest Sires declared these States to be  
One Nation, Independent, Sov'reign, Free :  
And what our Sires declared us we became :  
Led by that HERO, whose immortal name  
Gives to our band, assembled here this day,  
Its living principles, its stamp, its stay.

Our cause was just : Heaven cried itself ; “ Rebel ;  
To slav'ry ne'er your sons and sons' sons sell :  
For, when your rulers, whatsoever their aim,  
To purse and person lay unlawful claim,  
Whate'er the plausible intent assigned,  
If ye submit ye merit all ye find.”

FATHERS, how dwell ye on th' eventful past,  
On scenes of honor high, of import vast :  
How love ye, wand'ring pleased with mem'ry's pace  
Freedom's long various labors to retrace :  
How do ye seem in joyous pain at home,  
In fancy, now, as, erst, in fact, ye roam  
O'er many a gory field, where once ye fought ;



When Liberty was all things—life was nought :  
 When, at the drum's peal, fear made haste away ;  
 And death was busy, but the soldier gay—  
 Fathers, ye know ; for ye were there—'twere vain  
 For me to descant, picture or explain.

BRETHREN and SONS ; as from the lips of age,  
 Or crimson col'rings of th' historic page,  
 You learn your parents' val'rous steps to tread ;  
 How much they suffered, and how much they bled ;  
 And feel, as on this great, dear day you must,  
 For what they battled, and their goal how just ;  
 Let the eye sparkle ; let the warm cheek glow ;  
 And the heart's boiling life blood gladlier flow.

While on such deeds with deep delight we dwell ;  
 The mighty toils of patriots while we tell ;  
 Be we with sentiments like theirs inspired ;  
 With independence warmed, with freedom fired.

Why did we then 'gainst Albion's rule contend ?  
 Our tories told us she was our fast friend :

'Gainst *our own* government to speak and write,  
 Appeared a shocking sound, a sinful sight.

Much did they then of hemp and treason say—  
 —As do their followers of the present day—

They talked : we heard their noisy threat'ning words—

We heard—and gathered muskets, ball and swords.

—Those who, when dangers imminent appear,

The nation's or the high way robber fear,

Lest, “ coming suddenly,” they are ensnared,

In *duty's* path should ever go PREPARED.

'Twas *then* our government, St. James's Court,  
 Who madly of our sacred rights made sport :  
 Can *now* our government—exchange the name—  
 Discourse the same things, and inflict the same ?

Yet 'twas not Britain, with despotic wish  
 That sought to tax a nail, a glass or dish :  
 'Twas her *Administration* ; such too, sure,  
 As slaves or madmen only should endure :  
 Such as, betwixt us ere our peace was made,  
 With the tombed *Capulets* seemed calmly laid :  
 But, oh the hideous spectre of the slain,  
 In square ten miles alas it lives again [1]

When WASHINGTON, our staff of strength and good,  
 The nation's fearless, firm supporter stood,  
 We were, what we professed ourselves to be,  
 One people, independent, sov'reign, free.  
 Dependent then we were not upon France,  
 For skill to lead a maddened country's dance ;  
 We then preferred, all foreign bias far,  
 Old Yankee Doodle to their Ca Ira :  
 Nor did our tickled rulers then aspire  
 To be the string-led babes of any Gallic Sire. [2]

When *Adams* ruled in glory's race we ran ;  
 Grew great, rich, strong—but he was then a man. [3]

Folly with wisdom wrestled—long the strife—  
 At length poor prostrate wisdom lost her life :  
 With her sunk truth, and justice, in disgrace ;  
 And Mr. *Jefferson* usurped their place—  
 Skilled to deceive, inveigle, and entice,



No low intrigue untried, no mean device,  
 The foes of WASHINGTON to power aspired,  
 And baffled honor from the helm retired.  
 Those who their country's bloody battles fought,  
 For merit raised and rev'renced, then were sought;  
 From well earned office tyrannously hurled,  
 And doomed anew to recommence the world:  
 For such had dared prefer—what crime were worse?  
 The Sage of Vernon to "this Country's Curse." [4]

Then blazoned far and wide the boast, that we  
 From taxes, standing armies, loans, were free:  
 That good Republicans must all abhor  
 The din of arms, the deep distress of war:  
 That our wise governors would never cease  
 Their hate of bloodshed, and their love of peace—  
 Our dear "Red Brethren" we were pleased to call  
 Men with our rights, scarce savages at all—  
 Of lands we boasted; acres vacant still,  
 The "thousandth generation" scarce would till—[5]  
 —But who the boasts and promises can tell,  
 From base Deception's honied lips that fell?

Now standing armies are pronounced to be  
 The strongest safeguard of poor Liberty:  
 Now the coy taxes, once so much decried,  
 Which never could republicans abide,  
 Will soon pour on us with a scorching tide.  
 Loans, once sure harbingers of swift decay,  
 No more upon our fiscal vitals prey:  
 Tons, now, of gold a feather's shadow weigh.

Our civil Indians, *Jefferson's* delight,  
 Whom oft we asked beneath our flag to fight,  
 Are bloody savages, whom we comprise  
 Among his British Majesty's allies—  
 For such a change how evident the reason—  
 Their wished alliance was not gained in season. [6]

“Of a vast useless wilderness possessed;  
 How shall so great an evil be redressed?  
 For one great empire amply wide the bound,  
 What mode t' ensure the union can be found?”

Thus anxious asked the Monticellan elf;  
 And bought a *Wen*, in size the nation's self;  
 And on the Union's neck he had it grow,  
 To haste its death most certain, and not slow.

But, “France wants money” was the current cry;  
 And what France wishes who will dare deny?  
 Hence in Gaul's secret paths our troopers prance:  
 Hence Fifteen Millions took their wings for France:  
 O'er parent States the young extend their sway—  
 New Orleans thrives; New England melts away:  
 Their wood we hew, and we their water draw;  
 But, in return, they'll kindly give us law.

Fair Commerce, Agriculture's handmaid, erst,  
 By her ostensible protectors pierced  
 Deep in the vitals, languished long aghast,  
 And on Embargo seemed to breathe her last—  
 Signs of returning life appear—her fees,  
 Delighted with her agonies and throes,



Her bare existence can no more endure :  
"Be war proclaimed," they cry, "and make her death blow sure,"—  
On the topgallant now the redbreast sings ;  
The mildewed canvas to the yard arm clings :  
On our drear wharves, with visage far from blithe,  
Thro' the tall grass the mower swings his scythe :  
Old Ocean's breeze no more our tars exhale :  
Our bankrupt merchants find their home the jail :  
Their blood and last breath, on the clotted field,  
Our brethren and our sons incessant yield ;  
Or, as diseases beckon, far away  
From friends and home, the nod of death obey—  
Wide and more wide distresses around prevail,  
To rust the sickle and to rot the sail.

Not yet returned to his high home above,  
Anxious to save his dearest, first great love,  
When from earth's spheric speck its boast retired,  
Bewailed by patriots as by heaven desired,  
Ere death the noblest of his victims felled,  
In vision had our WASHINGTON beheld  
The haggard portrait of the present day,  
With frenzied mien, in sombrous disarray ;  
How had the prospect dewed his aching eyes ;  
How marred his hope of rapture in the skies :  
With sorrow choaked, convulsed each nerve with fears,  
How had he lingered up to bliss in tears—  
But not to him did fav'ring heaven unfold  
The scenes of sinking greatness we behold.

Yet why these warm complaints, in accents rude,  
 Of waste in treasure or of loss in blood ;  
 Since 'tis a war, whate'er to us the ills,  
 The breast of Gallia's chief with joy that fills,  
 Since *James* the *first* again has seized the throne,  
 Which *James* the *second* soon will make his own.  
 What tho' poor white rob'd Peace a Corse is made ?  
 Contracting vermin flourish where 'tis laid :  
 Long to its livid limbs, the grubs will fix,  
 Then fly off millers in their coach and six. [7]  
 What tho' to flames our cities are devote,  
 The fighting Dearborn flames too—with his coat.  
 What tho' in debt we're sinking to the chin ;  
 The patriots, who collect the taxes, win.  
 What though on ruin's verge the empire quake,  
 One in ten thousand may a fortune make.  
 But "Honor pricks us on"; that pearl of price,  
 In whose repute our lords are over nice.  
 If *England* look askance, we boil with rage ;  
 And *blood*, blood only, can the wound assuage :  
 Yet, whipt, robbed, kicked, and spit upon, by *France*,  
 We treat her with the greater complaisance.  
 However, we *shall* reap the honor sought,  
 Of being soundly whipt—and gaining nought.  
 Nor is this all : ere we of peace are treating,  
 In come th' expenses for th' *poker's* heating ; [8]  
 And, what is worse, while all the world derides,  
 If we survive, there'll be—the *doctor's bill* besides.



Oh then assuredly 'tis a glorious war,  
Which Tories, only Tories, can abhor.

But—truce to sarcasm—Now has come the hour,  
Ere pour the tempests that in full sight lour,  
When FREEDOM'S friends, before the thunder break,  
Her safest shelter it behoves to make.

Else, cent'ries hence, long after we are laid  
In the dark dwelling of the sexton's spade,

Those, to our loins of apathy who trace  
The sluggish parents of a ruined race,

Rattling their manacles o'er where we lie,  
Will mix with curses broad the fruitless sigh;

And ask, as with the weight of chains they reel;  
While to the dust the racing grief drops steal;

“ Ah! was once Liberty New-England's bride;  
Nor could the heedless spouse her charms abide;

Where were the sons of Pilgrims when she died?  
Go to the Revolution's school; there learn

Th' eternal rights of Free-men to discern.  
'Twill teach you equally to disobey

A trans—or cis—atlantic tyrant's sway;  
'Twill teach you slav'ry's gilded pill to shun;

From London brought, Paris or WASHINGTON.  
UNION is dear : Preserve the blessing ever—

Union is dear : Oh may we ne'er dis sever—  
But, if by Union we must bondmen be;

Let the cords snap—NEW ENGLAND SHALL BE FREE.