an

ORATION

commemorative of the

ABOLITION

of

THE SLAVE TRADE

in the United States,

delivered before the

WILBERFORCE PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION,

in the

city of New-York,

on the Second of January, 1809.

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By JOSEPH SIDNEY.

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TO

THE MEMBERS

of the

WILBERFORCE PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATION,

in the city of New-York,

THIS ORATION,
delivered and published by their request,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

by their very obedient humble servant,

J. SIDNEY.

New-York, 10th, January, 1809.
Friends, Countrymen, and Fellow-Citizens,

Deeply affected with the various sensations and emotions which the occasion is so peculiarly calculated to excite, I rise to address you. We, together with our fellow-citizens at large, this day celebrate the commence-
ment of a new year. This day is observed throughout the United States, as one devoted to joy, to festivity, to mutual good wishes, and to the thousand civilities of social life. But in addition to the general joy which this day occasions to the American empire, and in which are, in common with our fellow-citizens, participate; I say, in addition to this cause of general rejoicing, the return of this day opens to us, my countrymen, a newly discovered source of joy, of which ourselves, and the sympathizing friends of suffering humanity, are the exclu-
sive partakers. On this auspicious day, we celebrate the anniversary of that glorious aera, which, in these United States, put a period to that inhuman species of traffic, that, with relentless cruelty, had so long plundered unhappy Afric of her sons.

My friends, 'tis not an illusion of fancy, 'tis a truth recorded in the annals, and enrolled among the statutes, of the United States, that no African, nor a
single individual descended from African ancestors, shall henceforth be imported into this country as a slave. — What a stride is this towards the total abolition of slavery in America! what a progress towards the consummation of our fondest hopes! what a presage that the exertions, the good wishes, and the prayers of the humane and benevolent, will finally triumph! — And with what transports of joy may we not hail the return of this memorable, this auspicious day — this jubilee of freedom!

My countrymen, you will probably expect something from me on the subject of the African Slave-trade. But to undertake to show its inhumanity and injustice, or to demonstrate its inconsistency with the principles of sound policy, would inevitably lead me too far from what I conceive to be the more immediate duty of an orator on an occasion like the present. Besides, the inhumanity, the injustice, and the inexpediency of the Slave-trade, have been so often and so illustriously exhibited by so many celebrated champions of African freedom, that for me to insist on these truths, would be merely to recapitulate the arguments which have been variously and successfully urged by others, and which no efforts of mine could possibly enforce. These are truths which seem to have been universally conceded. And the very event which we are assembled to celebrate, proves,
beyond controversy, that, in these United States, reason, truth, humanity, and freedom, have finally obtained a glorious triumph over sophistry, falsehood, cruelty, and tyranny.

Since, then, the Slave-trade is by law forever abolished, may we not, my countrymen, without incurring the imputation of rashness or presumption, look forward to the period when slavery, in this land of freedom, will be unheard of and unknown? Yes! this is what we most ardently desire, what we fondly anticipate, and what, I think, we may with certainty expect to realize.

The immediate emancipation of all our brethren in the United States, is an event which we cannot reasonably expect; and, perhaps, ought not to desire. For it is a lamentable fact, that our brethren in the South are in a state of deplorable ignorance. Uneducated as they are, and unacquainted with every thing except the plantations on which they toil, and from which they are never suffered to depart, it is incredible that they can possess sufficient information to render their immediate emancipation a blessing either to themselves, or to society at large. But a want of information, on the part of our southern brethren, cannot be urged as an argument against their gradual emancipation.

For the purpose of showing that no evils would result from the gradual abolition of slavery, I need only refer you to some facts and considerations which relate to the
people of the New-England states.

The enlightened people of New-England, immediately after the American revolution, feeling that slavery was perfectly irreconcilable with the principles for which they had fought and bled, seriously and deliberately formed a plan for its gradual abolition. Their plan was successful. Their legislatures enacted laws which suddenly inflicted on slavery a death-wound; and in consequence of this, no inconveniences, but blessings incalculable, have resulted to that people.

To thee, New-England! to thee, belongs the honour of making the first exertions towards ameliorating the hard condition of my unfortunate countrymen! Yes! thou land of patriots, and thou nation of freemen, in abolishing slavery from within thy borders, thou hast exhibited to the world a signal example of humanity and justice! And oh! may I not indulge the hope, that ere long thy southern sisters may be induced to imitate this splendid exhibition of thy magnanimity!

New-York and several other of the middle states, actuated by a spirit similar to that which animated the sages of New-England, have obeyed the voice of humanity; and are gradually abolishing slavery. Would to God that I could say the same of the southern states! but truth compels me to observe, that in the southern section of the United States, and particularly in Virginia, slavery still exists in all its horrors, unrelieved by the slightest degree of mitigation!
Alas! what is man, and of what is he formed! How contradictory in his professions! how strangely inconsistent in his actions!

No people in the world make louder pretensions to "liberty, equality, and the rights of man," than the people of the South! And yet, strange as it may appear, there is no spot in the United States, where oppression reigns with such unlimited sway! It is here we may see human nature sunk to the lowest state of degradation; and human misery exalted to a height, which, if transcended, would be beyond human endurance. 'Tis here we may behold our wretched brethren smarting under the lash of tyranny, and retiring in sorrow, to eat their hard-earned pittance, moistened with their tears. 'Tis here that the ear is stunned with the cries of those hapless children of wretchedness, whose sighs and groans are wafted on every breeze. And 'tis here, in sad succession, they spend their days, friendless, comfortless, oppressed, and forlorn, until, at last, the grave, less savage and unfeeling than their remorseless persecutors - the grave, that "house appointed for all the living," compassionates their sufferings, and opens its capacious doors to receive them!

Pardon me, my countrymen, for thus intruding on your joy; but whilst engaged in taking a short survey of our present prospects and of our future hopes, I could not avoid, even on this day of festivity, shedding a tear of
commiseration over the cheerless condition of our southern brethren.

Heaven grant that some Wilberforce, some champion of African freedom, whose warm, whose expanded, whose benevolent heart, is capable of beating in unison with their sufferings, may arise in Virginia; assert the long neglected and abused rights of Afric's sons; and institute that plan of gradual emancipation, which has been so successfully adopted and pursued in New-England and New-York! Then shall their sorrow be turned into rejoicing, their sighs into melody, and their groans into acclimations of joy!

But I shall wave these reflections, and proceed, my countrymen, to suggest to you, some of those duties which have devolved on us, in consequence of our having recently obtained our freedom, and which appear to me peculiarly to be called to mind, on the present occasion.

Freedom has broken down that wall of separation, which formerly distinguished our rights and duties, from those of the white inhabitants. Our rights and duties have, of course, assimilated to theirs. And, permit me to add, that the judicious exercise of these rights, and the punctual performance of these duties, involve considerations, which are all-important, both to ourselves and to our country.

Among the most valuable of our newly acquired rights, is that of suffrage. This right is particularly valuable,
inasmuch as it enables us to express our choice with respect to our rulers. Good rulers are a blessing, but bad rulers are, and must be considered, a curse to any nation. The right of suffrage, brings with it a duty of the highest obligation. For as this right gives us the power of voting, so it devolves on us the indispensable duty, of bestowing our votes on those, and on those only, whose talents, and whose political, moral, and religious principles, will most effectually promote the best interests of America.

My countrymen, you cannot be unacquainted with the fact that there has existed, for some time past, in our country, two great political parties. At the head of the Federal Republican Party was the immortal WASHINGTON, the Father of his country. Hamilton, Jay, Adams, Pinckney, King, and Pickering, together with most of our old revolutionary officers and soldiers, were among the illustrious characters, who attached themselves, through principle and patriotism, to this party.

After achieving the independence of their country, this distinguished band of patriots formed the federal constitution; and from that circumstance, were denominated Federalists, or Federal Republicans. The single object of this party was, to preserve the liberty, to promote the happiness, to increase the prosperity, and to extend the respectability of the United States. Being satisfied as to the immense advantages which are to be derived from
commerce, and knowing, that the interests of the middle and eastern States are intimately connected with it, this party, while in office, gave to commerce every possible encouragement. To this end, a small navy was built to protect our vessels from the armed ships of foreign nations. So long as Federalists remained in office, so long this country enjoyed an uninterrupted state of increasing prosperity - And so long as this happy state of things continued, so long did agriculture and commerce unite hand in hand, to diffuse their riches, and to extend their blessings to every class of citizens.

'Twas then, that lofty forests bowed their heads, at the approach of agriculture - and the "wilderness and the solitary place blossomed as the rose!" 'Twas then, that the cheerful hum of industry, and the jocund song, were heard throughout our happy land! 'Twas then, that American commerce extended her dominion to every sea, and spread her canvass to every breeze! And 'twas then, that America, being a nation of patriots, was therefore terrible to her enemies, "as an army with banners!"

Such was the state of our affairs, when the Anti-federal or Democratic party, consisting of a set of ambitious, designing, and office-seeking men, first adventured from its native cave of filth and darkness into open day. A number of abandoned printers, mostly foreigners, enlisted in the service of this party: and from that moment, commenced a persecution against federal men and
federal measures; which persecution, for cool and malignant cruelty, can never be exceeded. To destroy the reputation of distinguished federalists, calumnies the most vile, were daily circulated through the country. Even the virtues of Washington did not prove a shield sufficiently broad, to protect him against the envenomed shafts of malice. The Father of his country, was branded as a "traitor" - and the venerable Adams was stigmatized as "a hoary-headed incendiary!"

Thus feeding on detraction, and fattening on the mangled reputation of federalists, the democratic party became a majority - and thus their leader, Mr. Jefferson, became the President of the United States. And from that insuspicious day, though the current could not instantly leave its wonted channel, yet, the tide of American prosperity soon ceased to flow, and all our godly prospects vanished.

One of the first acts of the present administration, was to displace those revolutionary officers whom Washington had placed in office, as a small reward for all their labours, toils, and dangers. Washington placed in office real patriots and statesmen, who fought to procure our independence; others have bestowed these high dignities on foreigners, probably as a reward for their insurrection and slander.

Our infant navy, the protector of our commerce, fell an early victim to the fury of the Virginian Junto. Nor
could that fury be apprised, until our commerce itself had received the stroke of death. Yes, my countrymen! an unlimited embargo, wielded by the mad democracy of the southern states, has, like the beacon of destruction, swept our commerce from the ocean!

Time would fail me, to give even a sketch of the calamities produced by this self-destroying measure.

In the eastern states, it has fallen with tremendous force. To destroy their commerce, is to pour out the life-blood of their prosperity.

Nor is it in the eastern states only, that this rash measure is felt. We all, my countrymen, most sensibly feel it. The poor and the labouring class of people, in every state, are peculiarly its victims. Yes, we do feel, and we shall indubitably continue more and more to feel, its hard and partial operation. Nor do we find a probability of relief, in the partiality of our democratic rulers for underserving emigrants to our shores.

The middle and New-England states are all commercial states. But the southern states, on account of their local situation, can, comparatively speaking, derive but little advantage from commerce, and therefore probably wish to destroy it altogether. Its destruction, they imagine, will put an effectual check to the increasing prosperity and influence of their rivals, the middle and eastern states. Now, the southern states, which comprise the great body of the democratic party in our country, being hostile to
commerce, and this party having laid the embargo, and being still the ruling party, we cannot rationally expect that commerce will again flourish, until the general government shall be administered by federalists, the real friends of commerce, and the genuine disciples of Washington. It is not within the limits of probability, that a change of measures for the better, will be effected, in any other way than by a change of men.

How important then, that we, my countrymen, should unite our efforts with those of our Federal friends, in endeavouring to bring about this desirable change - this change, so all-important to commerce, to our own best interests, and to the prosperity and glory of our country!

But there is another consideration, which appears to me worthy of being suggested. The great hot-bed of democracy is Virginia, and the other southern states. All the democratic members of Congress, who have any considerable influence in directing the machine of government, belong to the South. And almost all the free inhabitants of the southern section of the United States, are of the democratic party. And these are the very people who hold our African brethren in bondage. These people, therefore, are the enemies of our rights. And as the democrats in this state are acting with these, our enemies, we should not only be wanting in duty to ourselves, but we should be destitute of the spirit of freemen, were we not to turn
our backs upon democracy, and unite with our federal friends, to place men in office possessed of humanity, justice, firmness, and American patriotism.

Besides, is the great idol of democracy our friend? That he is not, is evident; else he would respect the rights of our African brethren; several hundreds of whom he keeps as slaves on his plantations. What did Washington? This illustrious and humane man, feeling that slavery was incompatible with the principles for which he fought, most generously emancipated every slave that he owned, and gave to each a portion sufficiently large to answer his exigencies, until he could procure employment.

Can you then, my countrymen, for a moment hesitate in choosing between your enemies and your friends? between slavery and freedom? Will you run into the camp of your enemies? Will you flock to the Slavery-hole of democracy? - Or will you patriotically rally round the standard of liberty? - a standard which was erected by the IMMORTAL WASHINGTON; and which has been consecrated by the blood of the MARTYRED HAMILTON.

Before I conclude, permit me, my countrymen, to impress on your minds a duty, which it is our highest interest ever to observe. This duty consists in endeavouring unceasingly, by pure and upright conduct, to convince the world that we are not only capable of self-government, but also of becoming honourable citizens and useful members of society. Let it be our business to demonstrate
to the conviction, even of the enemies of our freedom, that sobriety, honesty, and industry, are among the distinguishing traits in our characters; that we know too well the value of liberty, ever to abuse her inestimable privileges; and that although the "Ethiopian cannot change his skin," yet his heart may, nevertheless, become an habitation for all the virtues which ever adorn the human character.

A conduct, on our part, in all respects dignified and proper, will effectually put to silence every cavil which may be offered against African emancipation, and must eventually convert our enemies into friends.

I need scarcely to remind you, my countrymen, on an occasion like this, that all those whose exertions have, in any degree, contributed to bring about the interesting event which we this day celebrate, and, in particular, "The Manumission Society of the City of New York," whose kind interference has greatly ameliorated our condition, are all eminently entitled to our warmest gratitude. - Long may they all be remembered, and amply rewarded for their "labours of love!" - May they have the satisfaction of realizing that their efforts for our happiness and usefulness in life, have been crowned with success! And may we always be possessed of that evidence of gratitude to these our benefactors, which springs from pure and upright conduct!
And let me add, that such a conduct is the best evidence which we can possibly produce, of that gratitude which we owe to the God of Mercies, for his interposition in our behalf. He has ever been our kindest benefactor; and, as such, we owe him a debt of gratitude, which we can never cancel. While we therefore, my countrymen, in unison, lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving to this God of mercies, let us supplicate, that by a more general extension of freedom and of pure patriotism throughout our country, every return on this anniversary may be accompanied with additional causes for joy and rejoicing.
CELEBRATION

Of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the United States,

January 2, 1809

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The "Wilberforce Philanthropic Association," assembled at Liberty Hall, together with the Musical and Maritime Associations, agreeably to the orders of the committee of arrangement, appointed by the general meeting of the people of colour; and marched in procession, up Leffoard-street, down Broadway, to the Lyceum in Warren-street, in the following order, viz. The Grand Marshal; two Africans, escorted by the deputy Marshals; the Committee of Arrangement, the Chairman and Secretary, the Orator and Reader, the Wilberforce band of Music, with the Association, the Maritime and Musical Associations, decorated with their badges, and accompanied with their appropriate banners. The novelty of the procession attracted the notice of an immense concourse of citizens, and presented a spectacle both grand and interesting. It was the Jubilee of Liberty; the triumph of Philanthropy.

Previous to the day of celebration, the Committee published the following notice.

"National Jubilee of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade."

"The undersigned committee of arrangement, appointed
by the general meeting of the people of colour, for the celebration of the national jubilee, most respectfully inform the public, that they will assemble at Liberty Hall, on Monday morning, January 2, 1809, at 9 o'clock, and march in procession, if the weather will permit, with the societies, with their badges and banners, accompanied with a band of music, up Leonard-street, down Broadway, to the Lyceum in Warren-street, where an Oration will be delivered, and anthems sung suitable to the occasion. A collection will then be made to defray the expenses, and the surplus, if any, will be given to the Mamumission Society. After the service is over, the procession will form again, and march through Broadway down Pearl-street, through Wall-street, up Broadway to Liberty Hall, and dismiss. Every exertion has been made to fulfil the intentions of their constituents, to show their gratitude in the most public manner, for so great a blessing; and they cannot but lament that a division should exist, and indulge the flattering hope, that all dissensions will cease.

John Robison, Peter Bane, John Bolt, Alexander Sutelif, John T. Tate, Thomas Smith,

William Wiltshier, Jupiter Burns, Samuel Glass, Robert Ash, Aaron Connor, Samuel Reed,

ROBERT Y. SIDNEY, Sec'y.
N. B. The Committee, after service, shortened their route on account of the numerous spectators, and dismissed at the place of rendezvous, with the greatest acclamations of joy.

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ANTHEMS,
COMPOSED BY R. Y. SIDNEY,
For the National Jubilee of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, January 1st, 1809.

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1. Dry your tears, ye sons of Afric,
   God has shown his gracious power;
   He has stopt the horrid traffic,
   That your country's bosom tore.
   See through clouds he smiles benignant,
   See your nation's glory rise;
   Though your foes may frown indignant,
   All their wrath you may despise.

Chorus.

Dry your tears ye hapless nation,
   Banish all your cares away;
God has given great salvation,
   On this ever glorious day.

Solo.

O raise to heaven a grateful voice,
   Through every age rejoice, rejoice.

Recitative.

What objects meet the piteous eye,
   What passions fill the soul of man,
To see a hapless nation rise,
   And all its various actions scan,
In deep disgrace, depriv'd of peace,
   And every blessing dear,
Now blest with peace, rais'd up in fame,
   And free from every fear.
2. Thus the clouds the light obscuring,
   Vainly try to veil the day:
   Thus shall you all toils enduring,
   See your troubles pass away.
   Though the clouds of night have hover'd,
   On your nation's hapless head:
   See the blushing morn discover'd,
   See the dawn of glory shed.

   Chorus.--Dry your tears, etc. etc.

3. See each science round you blooming,
   Like the flowers at dawn of day,
   With their sweets the air perfuming,
   With their beauties cheer the way.
   See with eagle wings expanded,
   See each hidden talent rise;
   See each slavish fear disbanded,
   See your genius mount the skies.

   Chorus.--Dry your tears, etc. etc.

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Anthem II

1. Ye sons of Afric, loud rejoice,
   In songs of triumph raise your voice;
   The night of slavery now is past,
   The dawn of freedom shines at last.

   Chorus.

   Rejoice that you were born to see,
   This glorious day, your jubilee.

2. O praise the Lord enthron'd on high
   The Lord that heard your piercing cry;
   That made his wond'rous light to spread,
   And shed his blessings on your heads.

   Chorus.--Rejoice, etc. etc.

   Finale.

3. Ye worthy friends our thanks receive,
   'Tis all that Afric's sons can give;
   And for the kindness you have shown,
   May GOD receive you as his own.

   Chorus.--Rejoice, etc. etc.

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