An Appeal to American Patriots: A Poem

Benjamin F. Tefft

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AN APPEAL TO AMERICAN PATRIOTS.

A POEM,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE CALLIOPEAN SOCIETY,

OF THE MAINE WESLEYAN SEMINARY,

AT ITS LATE ANNIVERSARY,

OCTOBER 13TH, 1835.

BY BENJAMIN F. TEFFT, A. B.

TEACHER IN THE MAINE WESLEYAN SEMINARY.

HALLOWELL:

GLAZIER, MASTERS & SMITH.

1836.
Dear Sir.—The Calliopean Society of the Maine Wesleyan Seminary, being highly interested in the Poem which you pronounced at their late Anniversary, and anxiously wishing to obtain and preserve the same for future use and perusal, have chosen us a committee to request of you a copy of it for publication.

We are most respectfully yours,

PARKER TUCK,
HENRY M. WOODS, { Committee.
GEORGE PARSONS,

Benjamin F. Tefft, A. B.

Maine Wesleyan Seminary, Nov. 10, 1835.

Gentlemen.—I herewith transmit to you a copy of the Poem to which you allude in your note of the 6th inst. You are aware under what pressure of other duties the Poem was thrown together; at intervals, too, when the mind is least poetical. It was designed, moreover, merely for delivery. In presenting you with this copy, I feel urged to accompany it with these remarks, hoping that you will consider it as an offering to you, rather than to the public.

With sentiments of respect, I am most obediently yours,

Parker Tuck,
H. M. Woods, { Committee
George Parsons,

By F. Tefft.
POEM.

I.
HARP of the North! to thee do I address
My prayer;—I, the lowliest of that throng
Who've anon sought thy favor, and caressed
A smile to cheer the dulness of their song,—
Listen.—Long have I loved thee; as long
Forbore to touch a strain of thine, or sound
One note of thee, so often raised in song
To dress some grovelling tale or sensual round:
Come, strike one note for freedom on freedom's chosen ground.

II.
When darkness round the earth had spread her shroud
A thousand years, and intellectual night
Had kept her chilling reign, and men had bowed
And worshiped long—they knew not what—and sight
Or glimpse of reason none, save the little light
That flickered o'er the schoolman's mazy lore,
And Truth, that angel pure, ethereal, so bright
In olden times, had spread her plumes for flight,
Fair morn began once more to dawn on earth's drear shore.

III.
And Rome was first to wake;—fair Rome! the first
To see the dawning day. Rome!—hallowed name!
The home of heroes, liberty;—the worst
Foe to despots;—Tyrant to tyrants! where Fame
Once spread her greenest laurels, and the game
Which Fortune plays with man and man's estate
Was played most variedly.—Dread Rome! whence came
Science, dear to all, 'twas thy blest fate
To see her shine again where darkness long had sat.
IV.

The sound of war had long been hushed; — longwhile
Her sons had slept oblivion’s sleep; — old Time
Had flapped his wings free o’er the funeral pile
Of Rome’s departed greatness; drearily chime
Her burial notes with the alexandrian rhyme
Of measured durance; — Freedom’s fires burn
Alas! no more, on shores of happiest clime;
Her grandeur fallen and her glory stern,
A torch alone she wants to fit her for the urn.

V.

But see! the resurrection morn has risen!
Rome’s sons arouse them from their slumber; —
Science wakes; — religion rushes from her prison
Of metaphysic lore; — and the whole number
Of priests, popes, saints, cardinals, monks and friars,
Hermits, abbots, bishops, jesuits and nuns,
Are now, alas! revealed! truth lights her fires,
And night, meanwhile, before so many suns,
Revolving back her clouds sublimely slow retires.

VI.

Amid this rising splendor, where, oh! where
Is Greece! lovely land! nourisher of men!
At once the cradle and grave of science, — for there
Was taught what men shall never know again, —
Oh! Greece! how sweet and lovely is the strain
That sings of thee and thine! From thy blest soil
First sprang the shoot of liberty, and when
It grew a noble tree, and covered all
Thy coast, its own fruit-bent branches doomed its fall.
VII.

But deep its roots had sunk; — and many a storm
Passed o’er them buried low in earth’s deep mold.
The frozen world but served to keep them warm
And free from harm external, while the cold
Bleak winter of a thousand years was told —
The dragon’s reign — on the checkered score
Of earth’s drear history. And now behold!
The spring returns with vigorous warmth once more,
Its scions shoot o’er all the world on every shore.

VIII.

If e’er a roaming spirit seize my soul,
I’ll visit thee, fair Greece, with quickest speed;
My barque along thy dinted coast shall stroll,
Where heroes lived and died, and won their meed
Of time-enduring fame. And if, indeed,
The fates forbid me not, I’ll visit thee,
Athena.— Socrates, did he not bleed
In thee? And Sophocles there sing? But see
My Plato there! Locke, Hume, Bossuet, what were ye

IX.

To this deep reservoir of Mind ! I deem,
A reservoir but seldom fathomed, yet
That seemeth shallow, since the limpid stream
Which issues forth refracts the rays of light
That penetrate the fount, and lifts to sight
The latent surface, far, far concealed
From unassisted vision. — Black that night
Must be that covers all thy streams! Ah! yield
Me e’er thy meed; — I’ll drink till all my veins are filled.
X.

But, Greece, thy day is past; thy glory's o'er!
Thy suns and stars have sunk to rise no more!
All Europe now breaks forth in brilliant light,
And rolls her clouds on thee; — a horrid night! —
How dark thy lot! — and darker yet thy fate
Must ever be, if e'er to renovate
Thy former fortune, thou shouldst vainly strive
To break thy servile chains. — Thy lords now drive
Thy sons. A slave thou art; a slave thou e'er must live.

XI.

Spain next revives, the land of chivalrous deeds;
And where a thousand years the chilling breath
Of desolating winter around had spread
Its with'ring course, and intellectual death
Preyed wide, the spring brings back o'er vale and heath,
Its smiling groves and whimpering streams. Thy sons,
Old Spain, once more are seen to tread the path
Which leads to wealth and greatness. Now returns
Thy long lost fame; — and brighter yet thy glory burns!

XII.

The fates divide their providence twixt thee
And Italy. 'Twas thine, Italia, thine
To mother th' adventurer; — but he
Alas! could find no friend in thee, divine
In all things else. — And though thy glory shine
Brighter than the stars which sparkle round
Thy deep-blue firmament, yet is it shorn
Of half its beams — thy pride must bite the ground
When such cold apathy in hearts so large is found.
But Spain shows forth her ancient chivalry; —
The bold adventurer forsakes the land
That gave him birth, and finds a heart in thee,
Blest Spain! congenial with his own. Ferdinand
Immortalized thy name, when from the strand
Of Palos he dismissed the favorite
Of Isabelle. — And thou didst understand
Thy traffic well, fair queen, when thou couldst set
Thy trinkets off to buy a world! — and yet thy fate!

XIV.
The fearless seaman spreads his swelling sails;
The cordage creaks; the streamers flirt the air;
The three tight ships embosom all the gales;
The sailors ring their cheer; the faithful prayer
The weeping mother lifts to heaven’s high care;
The safe return of all he has, a son,
The sighing father asks; — and here and there
The well-tried friend, the feeling citizen,
And dearer ones, commend to the winds and heaven these men.

XV.
The city with its spires, the woody port,
Are lessening fast, while the busy crew
Crowd up the decks, forget their wonted sport,
In silence now to take one lingering view
Of all that Spain, fast-flying Spain, can shew.
The pleasant fields recede, and the evening bell
Now rings the well-known sound; — the waters grow
Before each booming prow; — and now — some tell —
They shout their native land a loud and long farewell.
XVI.

Full seventy glad'ning suns had risen and set;
As many nights had brooded o'er the main;
And many a sigh was heard; the tear had wet
The iron-hearted seaman's cheeks;—in vain
The sturdy threat of flying back to Spain
T' avenge them there on th' adventurous hand
Which led them from their homes, had set a stain
That fades not, when, at dead of night, they stand
On deck,—"a light! a light!"—the morning showed the land.

XVII.

The years roll on—persecution rages wide;
In thick'ning crowds men rush from every clime!
Men swarm the valleys; climb the mountain's side;
The forests fall—proud cities rise—and time
Spreads out the furrowed fields;—the evening chime
Of bells, and voices sweet—where nought before
But savage yells were heard—and measured rhyme
Poetic, soft and free, arise.—The roar
Of wolves is now the din of men from shore to shore.

XVIII.

The lapse of centuries is gone;—when lo!
The British lion lays his vengeful claw
On freedom's bird!—afar the notes of woe
Peal loud and strong. The sons of freedom saw
The insult, nor idly do they stand, but draw
Their fearful blades to meet th' abetting foe
Which thickens round the scene.—The lion's maw
Opes wide its horrid portals.—Freemen, oho!
Go save your bird! arise! to death or victory go!
Bright ranks of men accede on either side:
On that, — Cornwallis, Tarleton, Clinton, Howe,
Burgoyne, Rawdon, Stewart, — Britain’s pride —
On this are Lincoln, Morgan, Putnam, Lee,
The valiant Gates, firm Reed, Montgomery,
Th’ intrepid Marion, and Sullivan,
Thomas, Scuyler, Thompson, Sterling, Moultrie,
Magaw and Greene, — Great names! but what to thine,
Revered Fayette! — or thine, unequalled Washington!

The struggle long endures, — the clouds of war
Hang low’ring thick and dark o’er all our sky;
Day falls — midnight rises on morn — afar
The shaking thunders roll! — the war dog’s cry
Is heard; — the rocks, and hills, and woods reply; —
Ahah! strike! warriors, strike! Ah! can ye see
Your bared prey to British tyranny! —
The blow is given, — the soaring eagle’s free,
She mounts her native skies and all is liberty.

Long years of peace smile o’er a happy land;
The harvest now repays the cheerless toil
Which planted deep the seeds, and thankless hand
That propped the shoot, of Liberty. Thy soil,
America, abundant teems with all
The fruits alternate showers and sun-lit skies
Can germinate; — the arts of war in thrall
Thy sons no more, — religion burns, — truth spies
Her goal, — plenty crowns the land, — and merit takes the prize.
XXII.

Once more the clouds of war arise;—thy day,
America, thy prosperous day recedes;—
A haughty nation o'er the seas display
Their hostile banners;—Britain 'gain invades
Thy blood-bought rights!—a price too dear of deeds
And heroes' souls to sacrifice or forego
Thine elder sons have paid;—professions, creeds,
Names, titles, as niceties, are all let go;—
Men rush to clear the field and scatter back the foe!

XXIII.

The foe is gone. — Now shines our sun with beams
Without a cloud between;—so bright his rays
Break forth o'er all thy lands thy morning seems
To mock the noon of other climes!—Long days
Of splendor rise;—so fierce the glories blaze
Of each succeeding, that the latter's shade
Serves it as night! How fresh the laurel bays
Which wreath thy temples, science!—Earth is made
A golden paradise without a serpent's head!

XXIV.

Now industry goes forth to sure reward;
The woodman's axe resounds the forest through
With well paid strokes;—the ploughman turns the sward
Which longs to countervail his toil;—the few
Who turn their thoughts on science, soon review
Their alphabet of honors. — Temples rise
As 'neath enchantment's wand, and shup the view
Or tread of none!—Their columns prop the skies!
Their architraves in clouds forsake our longing eyes!
XXV.
Free commerce spreads afar her lateen shrouds
And whitens all the seas with swelling sails;
Columbia’s hardy sons in lusty crowds,
Bestud the strands of every clime; — the gales.
Of heaven waft them o’er every sea; — their avails
Of trade th’ exchequer fills: — and if a foe
But dare invade our coast, he quickly quails,
Or finds a watery home. (British seamen know
What freemen are at sea! — Come? — ask them, — they’ll tell
you, No. — [No direc.)

XXVI.
On high our floating banner waves; — afar
Its stripes are seen to flap the rustling breeze;
A constellation studs its folds; — each star
Has cost the blood of many! — My veins freeze
And boil alternate, as reflection sees
Afresh the fields of blood which swam with gore
Of those who purchased thus our liberties! —
Full many a bone lies bleaching on some shore
While mothers weep at home, and sisters’ hearts deplore,

XXVII.
Their sons and brothers slain! — Each deafening peal
That rends the air and echoes far around
O’er hills and vales, in lasting anguish seals
Up many a parent’s heart! — See! here are found
In Mars’ red field, unburied o’er the ground,
The blasted hopes of widows, orphans, sires!
In heaps of slain they lie, ’neath the mound
Their friends throw o’er them. — While at home the fires
Burn bright, the wife waits, infants call, — the sire expires!
XXVIII.

Such! freemen, such the price of Liberty!—
’Twas bought with fathers’ blood and mothers’ tears!—
And heaven has blessed the purchase: — Ye are free!
A sunny peace o’er all the land! — No fears
From invading foes disturb your joys; — and years
Roll onward; heaven yet smiles around. — But can
Ye see a reckless band whom fury rears
To fight her battles, untaught by law, insane
With vengeance, freely violate the rights of man?—

XXIX.

The rights of freemen! — rights which heaven bestows
And sanctions! — this — is this philanthropy?
May my blood freeze whene’er its current flows
In such a channel! — Spirit of Liberty!
Are rights so dearly purchased, can they be
Thus bounded by a narrow stream which rolls
Its peaceful waves ’twixt sister States? — In thee,
America! on thy blest soil, now tolls
The knell of Liberty! “Stop there, or lose your souls!”

XXX.

Sons of Washington! Go, sheathe your blades,
And brandish them no more. — The cause is one,
But each must have its sphere. — The eye invades
The ear because it does not see! — Be done
With war. — Speech is, and must be, free. —
The sun
Of Liberty sends forth its sacred beams
O’er all who breathe the air which Jefferson
And Franklin breathed; — from North to South it seems
To teach as well as shine, “Let there be light!” — It gleams
XXXI.

Triumphant radiance through the world! It strikes
A terror to the heart of despots;—melts
The chains of tyranny;—burns out the spikes
And bolts of dungeons;—softens the rough insults
Of aristocracy which rasp the poor;—
Unnerves th' oppressor's grasp, who e'er exults
In wringing out misfortunes at the door
Of imbecility;—and tyrants skulk
Before its blaze, as George once did in days of yore.

XXXII.

Glorious Constitution! Thou central sun
Of twice twelve orbs which circulate around
Thy brilliant throne!—how wide thy glories burn!
O'er earth and sea!—o'er arch and tower and mound;—
O'er chiselled grandeur;—cloud-girt spires, where sound
Th' eternal tread and din of men!—o'er hills
And cragged mountains!—where the liquid ground
Bubbled up when earth crusted—thy light fills
All these! this New World is full of thee! Earth distils

XXXIII.

Her sweetest nectar here for man. Her lap
Teems with luxuries;—boundless her store;—
Her periods roll in successive springs. The map
Which spreads from the northern cataract's roar
To the southern gulf;—from the bluff shore
Of Atlas' booming waters, to the broad
Pacific, where th' Almighty's presence, more
Serene than infant's sleep, seems spread abroad
Over the deep, is full of life, of thee, of God!
American Constitution! — blood-bought chart
Of freedom! — talisman of human bliss! —
Thou signet to universal freedom! — heart
Of liberty’s full tide, whose choked pulse is
Beating, throbbing in the world’s arteries! —
Abyss of thought, deep, unfathomed! — great
Colossal monument of prudence! — This
Thou art and more to man, incarnate spirit
Of liberty! Offspring of Heaven’s great Architect!

Charter of Liberty! How wast thou coolly signed
By a whole nation, with pens dipped in gore
Of brothers, fathers, infants, mothers, destined
To bleed for man! — Thousands pledged before
A gazing universe, and stern-eyed Justice hoar,
To seal the union which thou fain wouldst make
With their hearts’ blood; — and thus ’twas sealed of yore.
Shall we not seal it? — Can hell’s thunders shake
Our minds to blend Liberty with Law! Freemen, awake! —

Of creeds I speak not; — let each man settle these
'Twixt him and Heaven. — I speak of Law, of Rights,
Of Freedom dear to all. — May Heaven, who sees
And counsels, aid us; — quell the jarring thoughts
Which shake thy columns, Freedom! — And ye lights
Which shine in bliss above, who gave us peace;
Oh! pity and forgive; — and from those heights
Which Mercy gives you, turn your eyes on Greece,
And then on us! — Speak, from heaven, speak your land release.
NOTE.

The author wishes to say to the members of the Calliopean Society and his other friends who have expressed a desire that the Poem might be extended, according to the original design, so as to embrace some of the leading topics of discussion now in agitation in the United States, that he has delayed its publication for some months with the design of complying with their desire, but has been prevented by the precarious state of his health. He relinquishes the design, however, with much less regret than he otherwise could, from the consideration that the subject of Human Rights, upon which the author wishes to introduce a few stanzas, has since received able advocacy from another source; from one whose poetry is the everlasting reason of the human mind. The author could do his friends no better service, were it not for the merited celebrity of the work, than to recommend to them the perusal and reperusal of Dr. Channing’s work on Slavery. Indeed, he is free to say farther, until this is done, we have not discharged our duty as christians, patriots and philanthropists, to God, our country, and the human family.