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POEM

DELIVERED ON THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

LITERARY FRATERNITY

OF

Waterville College,

JULY 26, 1831.

BY RICHARD HAMPTON VOSE.

AUGUSTA:

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WATERVILLE COLLEGE, July 27, 1831.

RICHARD H. VOSE, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—In behalf of the Members of the Literary Fraternity, we tender you their thanks for your excellent poem delivered on their late Anniversary, and earnestly solicit a copy for the press.

CORNELIUS A. THOMAS, }
WM. H. ROPES, } Committee.
ALBERT W. PAINE, }

AUGUSTA, August 1, 1831.

Messrs. CORNELIUS A. THOMAS, }
WM. H. ROPES, }
ALBERT W. PAINE. }

GENTLEMEN,—In compliance with the request contained in your letter, I will furnish you with a copy of my poem for publication.

I am, gentlemen, most respectfully,
Your obedient servant.

RICHARD HAMPTON VOSE,

POEM.

NOR to the fabled Nine, nor mystic cell,
Nor silent grove, where Fawns and Druids dwell ;
Not to the land, immortal yet in song,
Mother of Poesy, our vows belong.
Land of the scholar! thou hast been the grave
Of thine own genius, with no power to save ;
And he who wanders o'er that lovely isle,
Now looks with sadness on thy funeral pile.
No, though "'tis Greece, and living Greece" once more,
The rays reflected from this western shore,
Beamed from no shrine by human folly built,
Demand no offerings from human guilt.
Not Delphic priest, nor oracle combined,
Could rear an altar for the human mind.

The lofty Pyramids, they stand sublime,
Above the reach, beyond the touch of time ;
Time, the great leveller of human pride,
Left them unharmed, to loneliness allied,
That they in their eternity might say,
How mortal man must perish and decay.
For lo! within the consecrated bust,

All, all, has mouldered into common dust.
 The shrine so beautiful—in outward form,
 Built to defy the lightning and the storm,
 Contains no living principle within,
 To tell where kings and emperors have been.

And yet the monuments of earth have taught
 One truth at least, omnipotence of thought ;
 Not of the earth to build, for earth must die,
 But of itself, an immortality.

Then turn from hence, nor let our footsteps stray,
 We ask no muse to guide our humble lay.
 Visions of fancy flit around the brain,
 Her hopes and wishes are alike in vain.

Spirit! That led the pilgrim from his home,
 Amid a savage wilderness to roam,
 Spirit of knowledge! from thy throne of light,
 Come and dispel these shadows—mortal sight
 Is dim, obscure,—and human passions roll
 A sea of darkness, o'er the human soul.

Then let us rise above each selfish care,
 And talk and reason of the things that are ;
 Lift up the veil that clouds our partial view,
 And seek for favor, when our song is true. .
 Let other bards, their well earned trophies raise,

And sing the glory of departed days.
 We will not tread amid their classic lore,
 To dig for knowledge, which at best is ore,
 Or hope to draw from science misapplied,
 Some meagre nourishment, for meagre pride.
 No : 'tis in vain the knowledge of the schools—
 In vain are forms, and precedents, and rules,
 To give to human intellect its fire—
 To rouse the passions or restrain their ire.
 Oh! there are things beyond the poet's ken,
 And there are monuments of mortal men,
 That live, and breathe, and speak. Behold them here,
 In every blessing that ye count most dear.

Dread mind! thy march is onward, ages back,
 Are the first foot-prints of thy giant track—
 And he who pauses, where bright deeds were done,
 Would look for stars beneath the mid-day sun.
 Then linger not, who fondly hope to claim
 One spotless triumph from the hand of fame.
 In every age in this wide world ye trace
 Alternate scenes of glory and disgrace.

Seek ye for truth? there is no altar where
 No human frailty mingles with the prayer ;
 No earthly shrine, whence perfect offerings rise,
 Unmixt with guilt, a spotless sacrifice.

Bound down by creeds, still fettered to the dust,
 Man in his fellow man is prone to trust ;
 His hopes, his wishes and his views the same,
 He makes religion but a heartless name.
 Poor, erring man! how long will mortals dare,
 To limit God, to ocean, earth or air—
 Heaven is, where virtue is, and deepest Hell,
 Within the bosom, where dark passions dwell.
 Man is his own tormentor, fondly rears
 The mighty fabric of his hopes and fears,
 Drinks to the dregs, the cup our follies show,
 Then calls it suffering in a world of woe.

Yet strange to tell, within this house of clay,
 Proud reason sits and holds undoubted sway,
 And viewless thought, as active as the wind,
 Immortal product, of immortal mind—
 Let reason die, her voice completely mute,
 What art thou then, above thy fellow brute ?
 He thy superior in strength and power—
 Would tread upon thee, being of an hour.

Go to the patriot of the modern school,
 Whose love of country is the love of rule.
 Ask for the ties that bind him to the earth,
 And truth shall answer, they have yet no birth,
 Or else confined within a narrow sphere,
 Point to himself, and say they centre here.

Thus circumscribed, his selfish purpose done,
 He ends the patriot that he once begun.
 Or else perchance in hope of other pelf,
 Forgets his country in the love of self.

Where is the spirit of the brave and free,
 That died in glory at Thermopylæ?
 The pilgrim father of our later age—
 Who nobly dared the ocean, and the rage
 Of savage man,—that he might tread a shore
 Free as the wave, his little bark that bore;
 The mountain wave that thundered at the base
 Of the lone rock, his first sad dwelling place.

And there were men, who dwelt in later times—
 Unknown to fame, unsung in measured rhymes,
 Whose names unwrit on bright historic page,
 Shall live remembered through each future age.
 What though no marble monument may tell,
 The holy spot where they so nobly fell—
 Deep in the heart their proud memorials rise,
 And moulder not until fair freedom dies.

Yes, on this soil ye proudly call your own,
 'Twere vain to tell what mighty deeds were done—
 Since first the pilgrim, gazing on the sea,
 Felt that he was, what Heaven had made him, free.
 And on the barren rock so strangely wild,

Thought of his future home and proudly smiled—
 Exulting thought of freedom's magic sway,
 And saw the glory of her perfect day.

Thus when the prophet, led by Heaven's command,
 Smote the hard flint with his mysterious wand,
 Fresh down its side the grateful waters flow,
 And fill with verdure all the vale below.

The tree once planted on a barren soil,
 Watered with blood, and nurtured long with toil,
 Rears its proud trunk, extends its branches wide,
 Becomes the shadow for the earth beside.
 Is there no danger, ye who eat the fruit,
 Lest some small insect feed upon the root?
 It trembles not, beneath the wintry blast,
 And yet may fall, if ever, will at last,
 Prey to some insect of so mean a size,
 That men shall marvel, or perchance despise,
 Till, one by one, each withering leaf shall die,
 Lost the last vestige of our Liberty.

Is freedom safe, when men may wear the chain
 On her own soil, and cry for help in vain?
 When ye can hear the oft repeated tale
 Of Afric's wrongs, with cheeks no longer pale?
 As though it were some idle fond conceit,
 Contrived to frighten those it could not cheat!

Shame to the land, whose motto ought to be,
 All men are equal, by their nature free—
 And cannot wear the fetter, nor resign
 This best of gifts, this treasure all divine.
 What! chain thy brother, born of kindred clay,
 And justify the deed in open day?
 And say, he eats, and drinks, and sleeps, (perchance
 as well
 As other brutes!) Heard ye the funeral knell,
 When the poor negro crossed the stormy wave,
 Bought as thy property, to live thy slave?

Go teach him morals : he would love to hear
 The holy lesson—doubtless would revere
 Thee and thy precepts, let him not be told
 What tenure holds him—man a slave for gold—
 Else when compared, thy precept and thy deed,
 He think it strange, such comment on such creed.

But not by chains and fetters are confined,
 The mighty workings of the human mind—
 A few short years his pilgrimage shall cease,
 Then deathless spirit, thou shalt find release ;
 In other climes beyond the tyrant's rod,
 There shalt thou dwell, companion with thy God.

But who shall break the fetters of the soul?
 Or say to vice, no more thy surges roll?

Oh! there are chains, 'tis hard to rend apart,
 Forged by ourselves, which cling around the heart:
 And this is slavery, beneath whose sway,
 Poor nature withers, and foretels decay.
 When the fair image of our maker given,
 For noblest purpose, all despoiled and riven,
 Sends not a single ray reflected bright,
 Back to the centre of eternal light—
 Man would be brute, the creature of mere sense,
 And hence thy triumphs, foul intemperance.
 And there are those who float on folly's tide—
 Such are the sons of luxury and pride,
 And mad ambition, towering to be great,
 And power relentless, linked with deadly hate,
 And they who seek for wealth, who pile up ore,
 Reckless of means, to gain a little more.

Once the poor Indian, fearless and alone,
 Roamed the dark wood, and claimed it for his own;
 The silent stream, that passed unheeded by,
 The mountain top, that seemed to reach the sky,
 These were the monuments the red man knew,
 And these enough to prove his title true.
 He loved the chace, or else in light canoe,
 Adown the stream, in merry pastime flew;
 Or if perchance, his soul was roused by ire,
 He met with chiefs around the council fire;
 His simple wigwam, built with little care,

Enough to shield him from the midnight air.
 Few were his wants, and easily supplied,
 Who would not deign to pamper lust or pride.
 A foe implacable, a friend sincere,
 Untaught by hope, and undisturbed by fear,
 Stern, unrelenting, far above control,
 Go view the Indian—learn he had a soul.

The white man came—his home was far away,
 Weak and defenceless, whither shall he stray?
 Poor helpless one! Is no protection near?
 The red man met thee with his wonted cheer,
 Gave thee a home, and bade thy sorrows cease,
 Beneath the shadow of the tree of peace.
 Ill fated race! thy tribes have one by one,
 Sunk to their rest, beneath the setting sun,
 Just like the bubbles that the ocean bore,
 The wave swept o'er them—they are seen no more.

And yet, a remnant of that noble blood
 Survived the wreck, the tempest wave withstood,
 For peaceful arts, their savage life resign,
 And love to bend before the christian shrine.
 With him they dwelt, with him for years had trod
 The walks of peace, and learned to worship God.

In later times, new truths are brought to view,
 Man is now taught his interest to pursue,—

All else is sacrificed to selfish gain,
 And he who hinders, but deserves the chain.

Ye modern sages! did men dare to tell
 Such truths as these before the forest fell?
 The haughty chief, exulting in his might,
 Would love to hear resistless power was right,
 And ask no umpire to decide his cause,
 Nor vainly supplicate unmeaning laws.
 No, the proud savage taught the christian love,
 And this the kind of gratitude ye prove?
 In his right arm his title had been clear,
 Tremble ye tyrants: is there nought to fear?
 Is there no power beyond your little span,
 That rules the destiny of mortal man?
 Were they the chosen, the peculiar race
 Favoured of Heaven, whose prophet face to face,
 Held high communion with the King of Kings,
 Condemned to suffer from the serpent's stings?
 For earthly crime to draw polluted breath,
 To drink in famine, pestilence and death?
 And we who dwell beneath the noontide ray
 Of pure religion, in unclouded day—
 Shall we escape? though vengeance slumber long,
 Heaven will redress the suffering Indian's wrong.
 Then patriot rise, ere yet it be too late—
 A cloud hangs o'er thee, dark with future fate—
 The flag of freedom, floating proudly by,

Is stained with guilt,—restore its purity,
 Nor let each future age proclaim thy doom,
 Here freedom perished, at the red man's tomb.

From scenes like these, the patriot fondly turns,
 Up to the mount where purer incense burns.
 Temple of Knowledge! He would look to thee,
 And still remember that his home is free.

There is a power within the human breast,
 Calm as the ocean when it sinks to rest.
 Yet like that ocean when the tempests rise,
 It spurns control, and he who braves it dies.

Hark! to the voice of freedom on the wave,
 Departed spirits! ye have burst the grave,
 Brave Kosciusko—on thy native sphere,
 Thy spirit lives, as though thyself wert here.

Tyrants, forbear! nor longer dare profane,
 That sacred soil, or hope to bind the chain
 On human intellect: would ye control
 The ocean wave, or bid it cease to roll?
 Yet though ye hush the viewless winds to sleep,
 Extend your empire o'er the mighty deep,—
 The mind invisible, for ages born,
 Laughs at your nothingness, and still moves on.

Oft on the land where Ætna rears his head,
 The wintry storm, his icy robe has spread—
 Cold, bleak and barren is the vale below,
 While deep within, the slumbering embers glow;
 Sudden, the mountain burns with liquid fire,
 The snows dissolve, such elements retire.

Thus on thy soil fair Poland, man had set
 The seal of slavery, unbroken yet—
 When but the breath of freedom on the slain,
 Had reared thee up re-animate again—
 That breath has come, now rolls thy lava forth,
 It will consume thee—despot of the North.

Turn ye to France: How madly she pursued
 The shade of freedom,—but her robe was blood,
 Her light the livid lightning—and her breath
 Nought but infection, messenger of death.
 The book of freedom, it had met the eye,
 Unread, a dark unmeaning mystery—
 And say, did ye such liberty prefer?
 Or hope to read with no interpreter?

No, the pure elements of earth combined,
 In strange proportions, would o'erwhelm mankind,
 And the same fire that bids our comforts flow,
 Lays cities waste, and ruins all below.
 Fair land! a light is beaming on that page,

Bright with the counsels of thy patriot sage—
 He, who was nursed by freedom, taught with care,
 Thee and thy children, what her precepts were.
 Then bid thee rise, and now thy chariot roll,
 Onward in safety—it will reach the goal.
 Yes, unconsumed, in equal orbits run,
 And end in glory, as its course begun.

Isle of the ocean! thou art mighty yet,
 Not in the strength of kings, thy coronet
 Is all but useless, though it decks the brow,
 Of one termed monarch, unto whom ye bow.
 Home of our fathers! thou hast deigned to know,
 Truths that were taught some centuries ago.
 And think thy children will not love to claim,
 Thee for their parent when thou art the same?
 Isle of the ocean! thou wert born to be
 Brighter and holier in thy destiny.

The spark first kindled on the desert strand,
 Cherished in silence by the pilgrim band,
 Blown to a flame, its rays still upward went,
 And wider spread, till our fair continent,
 One living scene of glory, sent the flame
 Back to the land from whence the embers came,—
 That light reflected, meets its parent rays,
 And earth and ocean are one common blaze.



Immortal mind! that fire is all thine own,
Thy kingdom comes, the universe thy throne ;
Sceptres and crowns are playthings for a day,
The men that wear them are as vain as they ;
But thou, thy triumph is but yet begun,
Eternal spirit!—pure and deathless one.
Free from the tenement that holds thee here,
Thou art an ocean, where no shores appear,
And yet receding from the eager eye,
Till thou art lost in thine immensity.

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