

[title page]

ADDRESS
READ
AT THE OPENING
OF
THE PENNSYLVANIA HALL
ON
The 15th of Fifth Month, 1838

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[unnumbered bland page 2]

ADDRESS

Not with the splendors of the days of old –
The spoil of nations, and “barbaric gold” –
No weapons wrested from the fields of blood,
Where dark and stern th’ unyielding Roman stood,
And the proud Eagles of his cohorts saw 5
A world, war-wasted, crouching to his law –
Nor emblazoned car – nor banners floating gay,
Like those which swept along the Appian way,
When, to the welcome of imperial Rome,
The victor warrior came in triumph home, 10
And trumpet peal, and shoutings wild and high,
Stirred the blue quiet of th’ Italian sky; –
But calm, and grateful, prayerful, and sincere,
As Christian freemen only, gathering here,
We dedicate our fair and lofty Hall, 15
Pillar and arch, entablature and wall,
As Virtue’s shrine – as Liberty’s abode –
Sacred to Freedom, and to Freedom’s God!

O! loftier Halls, ‘neath brighter skies than these,
Stood darkly mirrored in the Ægean seas, 20
Pillar and shrine – and life-like statues seen,
Graceful and pure, the marble shafts between –

[page 4]

Where glorious Athens from her rocky hill
Saw Art and Beauty subject to her will –
And the chaste temple, and the classic grove – 25
The hall of sages – and the bowers of love,
Arch, fane, and column, graced the shores, and gave
Their shadows to the blue Saronic wave;
And statlier rose on Tiber's winding side,
The Pantheon's dome – the Coliseum's pride – 30
The Capitol, whose arches backward flung
The deep, clear cadence of the Roman tongue –
Whence stern decrees, like words of fate, went forth
To the awed nations of a conquered earth,
Where the proud Caesars in their glory came, 35
And Brutus lightened from his lips of flame!

Yet in the porches of Athena's halls,
And in the shadow of her stately walls,
Lurked the sad bondsman, and his tears of woe
Wet the cold marble with unheeded flow; 40
And fetters clanked beneath the silver dome
Of the proud Parthenon of imperious Rome.
O! not for him – the chained and stricken slave –
By Tiber's shore, or blue Ægina's wave,
In the thronged forum, or the sages seat, 45
The bold lip pleaded, and the warm heart beat –
No soul of sorrow melted at his pain –
No tear of pity rusted on his chain!

But this fair Hall to Truth and Freedom given,
Pledged to the Right before all earth and Heaven, 50

[page 5]

A free arena for the strife of mind,
To caste, or sect, or color unconfined,
Shall thrill with echoes such as ne'er of old
From Roman Hall, or Grecian Temple rolled;
Thoughts shall find utterance, such as never yet 55
The Propylea or the Forum met.

Beneath its roof no gladiator's strife
Shall win applauses with the waste of life –
No lordly lictor urge the barbarous game,
No wanton Lais glory in her shame. 60

But here the tear of sympathy shall flow,
As the ear listens to the tale of woe –
Here in stern judgment of the oppressor's wrong
Shall strong rebukings thrill on Freedom's tongue –
No partial justice hold th' unequal scale – 65

No pride of caste a brother's rights assail –
No tyrant's mandates echo from the wall,
Holy to Freedom, and the Rights of All!
But a fair field, where mind may close with mind,
Free as the sunshine and the chainless wind; 70
Where the high trust is fixed on Truth alone,
And bonds and fetters from the soul are thrown,
Where wealth, and rank, and worldly pomp, and might,
Yield to the presence of the True and Right.

And fitting is it that this Hall should stand 75
Where Pennsylvania's Founder led his band,
From thy blue waters, Delaware! – to press
The virgin verdure of the wilderness.

Here, where all Europe with amazement saw
The soul's high freedom trammelled by no law; 80

[page 6]

Here, where the fierce and warlike forest-men
Gathered, in peace, around the home of PENN,
Awed, by the weapons Love alone had given
Drawn from the holy armory of Heaven –
Where Nature’s voice against the bondman’s wrong 85
First found an earnest and indignant tongue –
Where Lay’s message to the proud was borne;
And Keith’s rebuke, and Franklin’s manly scorn! –
Fitting it is that here, where Freedom first
From her fair feet shook off the old world’s dust, 90
Spread her white pinions to our western blast,
And her free tresses to our sunshine cast,
One Hall should rise redeemed from Slavery’s ban –
One Temple sacred to the Rights of Man! –

O! if the spirits of the parted come, 95
Visiting angels, to their olden home –
If the dead fathers of the land look forth
From their far dwellings, to the things of earth –
Is it a dream that with their eyes of love,
They gaze now on us from the bowers above? 100
Lay’s ardent soul – and Benezet the mild,
Steadfast in faith, yet gentle as a child –
Meek-hearted Woolman, and that brother-band,
The sorrowing exiles from their “FATHER LAND,”
Leaving their homes in Kriesham’s bowers of vine, 105
And the blue beauty of their glorious Rhine,
To seek amidst our solemn depths of wood
Freedom from man, and holy peace with God;
Who first of all their testimonial gave
Against th’ oppressor, – for the outcast slave, – 110

[page 7]

Is it a dream that such as these look down,
And with their blessing our rejoicings crown?

Let us rejoice, that while the Pulpit's door
Is barred against the pleaders for the poor –
While the Church, wrangling upon points of faith, 115
Forgets her bondmen suffering unto death –
While crafty Traffick and the lust of Gain
United to forge Oppression's triple chain,
One door is open – and one Temple free –
A resting-place for hunted Liberty! 120
Where men may speak, unshackled and unawed,
High words of Truth, for Freedom and for God.

And when that Truth its perfect work hath done,
And rich with blessings o'er our land hath gone –
When not a slave beneath his yoke shall pine, 125
From broad Potomac to the far Sabine:
When unto angel-lips at last is given
The silver trump of Jubilee in Heaven;
And from Virginia's plains – Kentucky's shades,
And through the dim Floridian everglades, 130
Rises to meet that angel-trumpet's sound,
The voice of millions from their chains unbound –
Then, though this Hall be crumbling in decay,
Its strong walls blending with the common clay,
Yet, round the ruins of its strength shall stand 135
The best and noblest of a ransomed land –
Pilgrims, like those who throng around the shrine
Of Mecca – or of holy Palestine!

[page 8]

A prouder glory that ruin own
Than that which lingers round the Parthenon. 140
Here shall the child of after years be taught
The work of Freedom which his fathers wrought –
Told of the trials of the present hour,
Our weary strife with prejudice and power, –
How the high errand quickened woman's soul, 145
And touched her lip as with the living coal –
How Freedom's martyrs kept their lofty faith
True and unwavering, unto bonds and death, –
The pencil's art shall sketch the ruined Hall,
The Muses' garland crown its aged wall, 150
And History's pen for after times record
Its consecration unto FREEDOM'S GOD!