

AMERICA: A DRAMATIC POEM

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America: A Dramatic Poem by John Torrey

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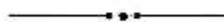
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JOHN TORREY

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ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH,
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1868.

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P R E F A C E.

THIS little poem was chiefly written in the beginning of the year 1862, and reflects events and feelings more peculiarly belonging to that epoch of the terrible and momentous struggle which still convulses our land. But though its particular form may retain the impress of that moment, yet it is hoped that it will not on that account be found destitute of power to recall the magnitude of the issue, the awful solemnity of the crisis.

Some allusion is made to the unfriendly attitude of Europe. While, however, we dwell sadly on the disappointment occasioned by encountering a spirit of hostility, where the most opposite sentiment had been anticipated, let us still remember that the heart of humanity every where beats with us whether consciously or not.

In this faith let us strengthen ourselves. And let us recall with gratitude the names of some even beyond the ocean, who have not hesitated to speak for us in this our time of trouble; above all, that of Count Gasparin, who, with such unwearied patience, such earnestness of affection, has studied into the spirit of our history and national life, and following us in every step of this painful struggle, has plead our cause so nobly and so faithfully before the tribunal of public opinion in Europe.

May the hope and expectation of such friends meet with no disappointment through our unworthiness of the part we are called to play in the destinies of mankind.

AMERICA.

—◆—
Mountains of Virginia—Night—Genius of America—Alone.
—◆—

AMERICA.

WEEP! weep! my clouds, drench the dull night
with tears,

Ye winds of heaven, from every quarter come
Shriek forth my pain, and with your outcry wild
Let thunders mix their voice: let all the hills
Ashamed of dumbness, send some echo back
Responsive to my grief.— But though ye poured
Your fountains dry, O heavens! though ye should
rage,

Ye thunders, till no sound were left to shake
The groaning sphere, yet would ye suit no more
Than summer dews, or birds that sing at dawn,

To speak the measures of mine agony.
Well dost thou sit, O darkness! on these hills,
Well dost thou clothe about with robe obscure
The soil once glorious, now with shame defiled,
Disowned of all her heroes, and by doom,
Just as the nod of heaven, condemned to drink
The poisoned cup that to the mother's lips
The daughter's hand upheld.—Lo! in mine ears
The battle sounds afar. I hear the shock
Of arms, the deadly clash of meeting foes.
The hoofs of war tear up the sacred sod
That bore the common sires. The bullet flies
By brother aimed at brother. They that fed
As one upon my breast, each to this heart
Dear as the inmost currents of its life,
Wrestle together in the mad embrace
Not loosed till death for one or both divide
The firm-strung sinewy strength, with palsying
hand
Smite down a crown of manhood in the dust.

O heavens! O earth! look on, and see what
grief

Provokes my bitter outcry!—unto mine
Compare not yours, O mothers that do sit
Gazing, with eyes that can not see for tears,
On faces of dead offspring, — not with yours
I count my sorrows, — but if one there be,
One miserable mother in the land
Against whose life the nursing of her love
Hath lifted murderous hand, — against the life
That was its source and fount, hath lifted up
The thrice accursed parricidal stroke,
Then let her come, for she hath known my woe,
Then let her sit and mix her tears with mine.
—Yet she, mayhap, would be some mother stern,
Some cruel stepdame, and no tender care
Had taught more reverence, — but a thorny bed
Her bosom proved, nor could they learn so late
A better lore, who from her lips had heard
No word of pity drop, no lesson mild