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The
Triumph of American Genius.

By

J. Howard Bechwith.



Your Genius cannot be crushed.
The flame may be extinguished, but the spark
will remain. Let only the arousing energies of man
touch this spark, and it will be blown into a blaze.
The first breath that sweeps over this little grain
of mustard seed, may set in motion a train of causes
that will move mountains, and astonish the world.

When the Sun of Genius sunk in the west of the
Old World at the close of a glorious era, his last rays
lingering like half-closed eyelashes, seemed to kindle
in man the hope that another would dawn. Nor was
he doomed to disappointment; for lo! another Sun teeming
with Genius, peeps above the hills of a New World, and
veils half his disk behind the rocks, till the world
could bear that flood of light which was about to
burst upon it, and shroud it in a halo of glory.
He does not rise like the mad lion of the Eastern
World, leaping from his lair, stung with the pangs
of rage, and shaking his mane with awakened
fury, then relaxing his stalwart sinews sink into
drowsy slumbers; but like the Sun struggling in a
cloud with wrathful energy, till he breaks the gloom
with red furrows, and bursts the thunderous masses
into a sphere of golden light.

While this young Hercules lie in his war-rocked



cradle, with his infant brow baptized in patriot
blood, noble forms stood around, making a rampart
of knitt hearts; 'till he arose with his invigorating
strength, and threw the English Serpents of Despotism
gasping to the ground. It was then that he sprang
forth the full-fledged Minerva from Patriotism's
head, with his triumph bannered in star-spangled
glory, and his honors burnished in the rain bow's
tril colored beauty. And now his fame like the
distant thunder fills the heavens, and commands
the attention of a listening world. It is traced up on
the mountains by the black cars of his thunder-
breathing'rounds their brows, which startle pale midnight
on her ghastly throne. And America rears it as a
national bulwark which towers to Heaven like a moun-
tain full of the most brilliant fires of intellect, which
need but a Mosaic rod, to launch them in thunder
o'er the world. Although American Genius lies like
a hidden glory in its ocean-bound casket, and rises
like the New Moon more beautiful in nakedness, and
in imperfection the most sublime. Yet it is superior
to all other, but ever mindful of his country's goods,
he aims at still nobler ends, 'till he shall have
bathed his breast in the thunder's home.

This is the kind of Genius that sends forth

Emiles through the glory of our liberty, and delves
in Nature's mines to deck the land with Plenty's
wreath. He knows the patriotic virtues that glow
within the bosoms of his children, while listening
Senates hang upon his tongue, distilling the honey
of Patriotism in measured cadence 'Tis under his
guidance that our cities rear their gilded spires,
and stretch street upon street, crowded with his
aspiring sons, who daily stamp his image upon
some new invention of lasting importance. He fills
our harbors with groves of masts, whose slender tops
point towards Heaven like leafless forests. He crowds
our streams from bank to bank with smoky leviathans,
which bear American thunder along our coast, while
the remotest sea resounds his praise. He breathes through
that pathetic eloquence which moulds our Senate, the
inspiring vigor of Liberty, and shakes with indignant
lightnings Corruptions throne. And the magnet Kane
breathing high renown in America's proud soul, touches
her quail heart, and turned it tumbling to the Pole,
'till the light of American Genius streamed beyond
the frozen ridge that separated us from a New Watery
World, and there equipping his little barque, sailed
triumphantly on into the Great Ocean of Eternity.
But never satisfied with his present trophies, he ascends

his chariot of fire, and goes forth the messenger of
Eternal Truth to those nations who sit in the region
and shadow of Death, thus becoming the moral
lever that moves the world.

While viewing these triumphs, won by this soul-searching
Genius, we cannot but say it is the gift of Heaven,
and a kin to the Almighty. And as the dawn breaks
upon the world, so American Genius as if by the touch
of Omnipotence, fires all our faculties with throbbing joy,
and leads the spirit in celestial dreams. See him with
his brow studded with eight blazing orbs, whose rays
reflect the glory of his revolutionary struggles, as he
takes his way up Excelsior's path, gathering light like
the Sun nearing the meridian. The clouds gather round
him, and the mist pours forth its gloom; but they
cannot obscure the light, which shines like the glared
eye of the Eternal. As the Nile rises with tumultuous
emotions, so he with quivering, but with onward steps,
scans the dizzy road, leaving his course to be traced
by the streaming glories that sparkle from his train.
But the panic seizes upon him, and a briney torrent
tumbles down his glowing face, like rain down the
parched face of Nature. But like the hero of the
Indian Legend, he wrestles with the demon with

unceasing energy, till he brings him lifeless to the ground, and over his grave golden treasures burst. Then onward he speeds, dropping honey upon thousands of hearts, till he sits upon the triumphal cap-stone, gazing into Heaven, as if nothing was so much as worthy to lie beneath him. And pouring out his horn of Plenty upon his children, the streams rush like Mississippi torrents upon the land, wrapping it in sluicy sheets, as if the old Hoary Atlantic and the great Giant of the West, had made our country their battle field "Labitur, et labetur, in omne volubilis aerum."

American Genius has indeed done much; but we would like to see him with broader wings floating o'er the whole extent of our land, like the noble emblem of our country, surpassing all others in the grandeur of his flight, and pressing for admittance into the Celestial World. Let only the ecstatic flame of Patriotism shoot from heart to heart, firing them with throbbing energies, and American-Genius with his stary pavilion will be borne across the tides of Time, and when succeeding generations behold the orb rising upon their vision, the love of Country will come rushing upon their hearts—with words of Patriotism burning on their lips—with decisions of



of steel and souls of fire—they will greet the
beacon of an auspicious Providence, with the shout—

Hail! America Hail! unrivalled in fame,
Thy foes in confusion turn pale at thy name,
On thy rock-rooted Virtue firmly seated sublime,
Below breaks harmless the billows of Time—
May thy starry flag waving still glory pursue,
And Freedom find ever a guardian in you!

J. Howard Beckwith

Junior Prize Contest Oration of Jeremiah Howard Beckwith, Class of 1859
Transcribed by Michael Geduldig, June 2006
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

The Triumph of American Genius

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