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AN ORATION,

DELIVERED FEBRUARY 22d, 1815,

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Wassitugkon Jenevolent Socieky,

IN THE

CITY OF NEW-BRUNSWICK.

BY WILLIAM B. PATERSON.



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The Committee of Arrange orns in compliance with a organisme withe Wassingrou Bungsolung Sougers, of the City, edicat a copy of the dress delivered by you this day, for publication

C. L. BARDER! RGB

P. I. CLARK,

A. S. NEILSON.

" PATERSON, Erg.

ORATION,

&c.

NEXT to the day which gave us our political existence, the day which gave birth to our political Father, is most deserving of commemoration. To discharge a duty, with which so many grateful feelings, so many proud recollections are associated; to celebrate an event so inseparably connected with the most brilliant and interesting portion of American story, fellow-citizens, we are now assembled. Whilst contemplating the dawn of our independence, we naturally look back to the cradle of Washington; and the warmest wish we can form for our country, is, that the duration of the republic may be coeval with the same of its founder. How different then, would be our career and catastrophe, from what the experience and destinies of other nations lead us to anticipate. This western empire could surpass in permanency and splendour, all the mighty monarchies which have successively arisen and fallen in the old world; and that convulsion of the elements, which strikes the sun from youder beavens, would alone blot our constellation from the political firmament. But history, in recording the various fortunes, the awful vicissitudes which chequer the lot of the most prosperous communities, forbids to cherish so vain a wish, so chimerical a hope. Already, at this early period of our course, we have felt the operations of that law, which has stamped mutability and imperfection on all the works of men; and, under its severe though just retributions, our country has sustained much calamity, and our government anuch humiliation. But the name of Washington blazons over the ruins of the Capitol;

while the highest beam of our glory is derived from the hale of his immortality.

The pure and transcondent virtues of the American patriot are consecrated in the affections of the wise and good of every nation; and now, that death has sealed them for eternity, envy itself no longer attempts to sully their whiteness. All now acknowledge the purity of his views, the nobleness of his aims, the wisdom of his maxims, the benevolence of his patriotism, the magnitude of his services and his sacrifices, the lustre and authority of his example. Can we, then, too . Often recall the image, or too devoutly contemplate the features of merit so rare and so pre-eminent? Can we do a service more acceptable or beneficial to the community, than by frequently placing before its eyes that bright model of excellence, endeavour to correct the standard by which it judges of living character, and revive among its members a taste for true worth and greatness? In conformity with these views and feelings, I shall, in the sequel of this address, attempt a brief analysis of the different qualities which enter into the composition of a genuine patriot; and shall then exhibit them, luminously combined in the character of that illustrious man, whose principles it is the object of the Washington Society to perpetuate, and whose memory it is its highest delight to honour.

Dear to us, says Cicero, are our parents, our children, our kindred and our friends; but dearer still is our country, which includes all these charities. Patriotism, then, as it takes in so many tender and interesting relations, is an enlarged and generous affection, and a moral duty of primary obligation. It is one of those powerful instinctive feelings, which discovers itself almost with the first consciousness of existence, and whose movements are felt and recognized as law, anterior to those speculations which establish its supremacy in the scale of social virtue. It is an bonest, enlightened and active zeal to promote the safety, welfare and reputation of

the society in which we live, and of the government by which we are protected.

In illustrating these ideas, I shall lay it down as a fundamental position, that no prolligate and unprincipled man can be a real patriot; or, in other words, that none but a good man can be a good citizen. This would seem, at the first glance, to be one of those self-evident truths, which every one immediately assents to, and which requires no demonstration. A slight acquaintance, however, with the manner in which the affairs both of kingdoms and republics is conducted, will serve to shew, that political honesty is a very different thing from moral honesty. The former is merely another name for expediency or necessity, and is a sert of convenient state-logic, often employed by honourable legislators to explain away the obvious sense and spirit of obnoxious laws; of certain constitutional principles and provisions, which stand in the way of a favourite measure, or thwart a desirable project. It readily accommodates itself to times and circumstances; and is as plausible as the professions, and as pliable as the consciences of public men, whether they are presidents or governors, members of Congress or justices of the peace. A weak, though good man, invested with power, may undesignedly produce much mischief and calamity; and it will soon be discovered, that the benevolence and integrity of his plans and intentions will not compensate for his want of mental force, or his deficiency in political style.

But when great talents, unconnected with private worth, and unrestrained by religious principle, occupy elevated and confidential stations, the danger is eminent both to the morals and the liberties of a nation. Will the betrayer of his friend hesitate to sell or enslave his country? Will the spendthrift or debauchee have any scruples about employing the public money to supply his own extravagance, or to corrupt the putity of election? Did not Octavius Cæsar, in the same compact of iniquity, by which he delivered his early and faithful

connseller to the sword of his most implacable enemies, consent to accept a third part of Rome as a reward for his baseness? Did not Cataline and his libertine associates conspire equally against virtue and freedom, against decency and the laws! Was not Mirabeau, at one time, the great idol of modern democracy, about sacrificing his worshippers to the mammon of unrighteousness, when death arrested him in the midst of his preparations? And yet it is persons of this description who are generally the most ostentatious and clamorous patriets; who evince, in words, the most ardent attachment to the people, the most lively sensibility, the most zealous concern for their rights and interests. It happens too, unfortunately, that the people believe them, and suffer themselves to be deceived and imposed upon by their smiles and caresses, their professions and promises. Hence, taking advantage of this easy, complaisant, unsuspecting temper, these restless, unprincipled spirits are enabled to prosecute their schemes of aggrandizement unobserved, gradually to overleap the boundary between power and right, and finally to complete their usurpations, before the illusion of their virtue is dispelled, and the mask of their patriotism is thrown off.

The lustre of a popular name throws a specious glare over any measure, however violent and unjust, and hides from our sight its real character. That hardihood of purpose too, and energy of intellect, which generally accompany and ensure success to atrocious ambition; that doubtless and enterprising valour, which pursues danger through the ensanguined field, and snatches victory from the grasp of death; the noise and pomp of military movements and triumphal processions, frequently captivate the moral sense, and cause us to excuse or palliate the grossest acts of oppression. Napoleon Bonaparte, that fallen meteor, dazzled, while he consumed; and even good, honest, exclusive republicans, admired and courted, panegyrized and adored him.

Indeed, all the enormities of that revolution which attained

its acme and saw its completion in his person, may be ascribed to the portentous union of great talents with gigantic profligacy. In every step of its progress, it affords a striking illustration of the truth of my primary proposition—that there can be no public, without private worth. What a monstrous spectacle, what a phænomenon in wickedness and crime does it exhibit to our view !-- A whole community of bad men; of men without religion and without morals; a nation of atheists and savages, of prostitutes and assassins! Do you ask, whence this diabolical transformation? Who were the agents that conceived and accomplished it? They were philosophers, who dethroned Omnipotence, and annihilated the human soul, to illuminate a world, and perfect the species: they were Christian ministers, who abjured their Saviour and master, and worshipped a metaphysical phantom embodied in an immodest woman: they were legislators, who promulgated the code of equal rights, and demonstrated its benignity by plunder and confiscation: they were patriots and philanthropists, who deluged their native land in kindred blood: they were the noisy advocates, the wordy champions of republican principles, who invented and organized the conscriptive system, that engine of rapacious and unfeeling tyranny, which converts the citizen into the soldier, and compels him to rivet his fetters with his sword.

Such were the absurdities and atrocities, the miseries and abominations consequent on a severance of all those moral and religious ties, which bind men to the state and to each other. The reign of impiety and ferocity, of confusion and despotism has, at length, happily terminated; and the chief of those perturbed spirits, the master-dæmon, who called the unruly elements from the bottom of chaos, and drove his iron-car amidst their uproar and anarchy, retires before the angel of deliverance, the genius of returning order and benificent reform. We behold that dark and stormy ocean, which had nearly ingulphed whatever yet remained of free-

dom and morals, of refinement and magnanimity; and, on whose troubled bosom, the wreck of mighty nations, the fragments of the ancient splendour and independence of Europe were fast floating to the abyss of oblivion, now depositing its feculence and its blood, and reflecting the mild images of peace, of liberty and of happiness. The ark of humanity has survived the deluge of sanguinary revolution and conquest, and has sent forth her dove to a harassed and bleeding world. That bird of heaven now visits us with her olive, and most cordially do we welcome her return to these shores from which she was so cruelly driven. Here may she find a permanent resting place! Here, amidst the branches of our own vine and our own fig-tree, may she build her little dwelling of love, while we sit beneath her shadow, and have none to make us afraid!

Fellow-citizens, the last scene of that great drama, which has so long agitated the passions, and held in suspense the destinies of mankind, has just closed upon us; and among the various lessons which it teaches, some of the most prominent and instructive, I conceive to be the following:-That a vicious and immoral people can neither long possess, nor truly enjoy freedom; but must, sooner or later, fall a prey to their own infuriate passions: That their religious creed has a powerful influence on their political state and character; and, consequently, that it is of the utmost moment to them whether their rulers "believe in twenty gods, or one God;" whether they are the disciples of Voltaire, of Condorcet and of Paine, or the humble followers of that religion which came down from heaven, which speaks to the heart as well as to the understanding, which teaches men their duties as well as their rights, and which enforces the sanction of human laws by the authority of a Divine Legislator. Yes, my countrymen, believe it; the man, without private worth, without moral principle, without religious sentiment or feeling, however loud in

his professions of patriotism, however reiterated his huzzas for the people, however vociferous his denunciations against tories and traitors; that man is faithless and corrupt, a hypocrite and a tyrant at heart. He will betray your confidence, he will undermine your liberties, he will sacrifice you to his ambition,

He is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoil—— Let no such man be trusted.

My next general observation is, that no violent, or bigoted party-man can be a real patriot. The justness of this remark will be apparent by centrasting, or considering the opposite nature and tendency of those two passions, the love of country, and the spirit of party. The love of country is a branch of universal philanthropy, less extended, indeed, in its object, than the general affection from which it springs, but of equal benignity in principle and operation. The spirit of party is the offspring of selflove; and, like its parent, is mercenary and contracted in all its aims and pursuits. It is intolerant in its feelings and opinions—irregular and devious in its course—violent and capricious in its means, though steady and uniform in its end. How narrow, how circumscribed the circle in which the party-man moves! The little neighborhood of friends and relatives—the sect or junto of zealous and factious partizans—the small district of territory that cradled and feeds him-a Southern plantation, or an Eastern trading-town, confine and absorb the workings of his public spirit and benevolence. But the patriot, merging these personal and local attachments in one grand, master-passion, clasps, in his generous embrace, a whole land and nation. Every spot on that land he considers as a home; every individual in that nation he regards as a kinsman. O! my countrymen, if this sublime and beneficent virtue were as well understood among us, as it is boldly assumed; if it were 'as much felt as talked of, what a family of love, what a

band of brothers would the American world nourish in its bosom!

Again, patriotism is modest and unassuming; it does not consist nor delight in ostentatiously proclaiming its own merits and praises; or in traducing the motives, and undervaluing the services of others. It is not ambitious of that distinction which is acquired by noise, by flattery or by hypocrisy. It does not bluster in town-meetings; it does not intrigue in caucuses; it does not bully at election-polls; it does not authoritatively pronounce its dogmas, nor fulminate its anathemas from schools of philosophy or chairs of state. The spirit of party, on the other hand, is vain, proud and imperious; and exacts obedience from its votaries, with the same stern, unrelenting despotism, with which it delivers over its victims to the fury of a Parisian or a Baltimore mob.

The favored and self-sufficient partizan is a sort of political Pharisec; he looks down upon his unpatronized and unpretending brother with an air of contemptuous superiority, and says to him, Begone! I am better than thou art. His credulity is in proportion to his self-conceit; and, like an infidel, he believes every thing but the truth. Thus, he believes that our national honor and humanity compelled us to make war, in order to liberate about six thousand American seamen from British prison-ships; and yet, he believes that this same honor and humanity has suffered us to make peace without liberating them. He believes that the national treasury is empty, and that if it were full, it would soon be empty; and yet, he believes the world never saw such a set of financiers and æconomists, as are collected together in the patent chamber at Washington. In a word, faith, with him, is every thing; and good works constitute no article in his creed.

This excessive and illiberal zeal for party, while it thus blinds the eyes of the understanding, and chills the glow

perception. The first question which an honest man puts to himself on the view or proposal of any contemplated measure, is, Is it right in itself; is it consistent with the immutable laws of truth and justice; will it procure or promote a general and lasting good; is it a worthy mean to attain a useful and laudable end? Very different is the reasoning of the party-man in a similar predicament. He does not thus interrogate conscience; her voice is drowned in the noise of faction, in the clamor for office, in the struggle between ambition and avarice for place and rule. With him, party is country, and whatever tends to preserve and augment the power and influence of the one, must, in his opinion, necessarily conduce to the welfare of the other.

These violent and partial political fellowships, this idolatrous attachment to the tenets and persons of popular leaders and favorites, into what inconsistencies and contradictions both in sentiment and conduct, into what disgraceful and criminal enterprizes do they not harry and plunge the too "fond" multitude! How false do they make men to duty and to honor, to the state and to themselves! Do you demand instances of this melancholy and humiliating truth? What, but the most deadly party-seuds, created and fomented by the demagogues of the day, could have made the different members of the general confederacy, after having mingled their blood at Marathon and Platea, so far forget their common dangers and triumphs, principles and affinity, as to accept the bribes, and court the alliance of the Persian despot, in their dissentions and wars with each other? And to come nearer home, what but a perversity of intellect and feeling, engendered by the violence of political animosity, could have transformed the second magistrate in the American commonwealth, into a panegyrist of the "super-eminent Napoleon," the tyrant, the robber, and the assassin! What--but I forbear.

I would not mar the social harmony which so universally prevails, I would not wound that benevolence of feeling which beams on every countenance, by a recurrence to topics and events, which it would be for our honour, as well as our repose, to bury in eternal oblivion and silence. No; I would not mingle with those warm aspirations of pious gratitude, which ascend from every heart to the throne of heaven, the effusions of party-recrimination and invective. We would try to forget the causes and circumstances, which produced that disastrous contest, whose termination has diffused so much joy, and will, I trust, diffuse so many blessings. Or if we remember them, it will be for instruction, not for reproof; if, at any time we should hold them up to public notice, it will be, not as firebrands to rekindle dying dissensions, or to inflame existing animosities, but as beacons, to warn us of the approach and danger of similar animosities and dissensions. The sword of foreign hostility is sheathed, and shall not the torch of civil discord be extinguished? Shall not the din of faction be hushed with the roar of battle? Let them sleep together in the same place of rest; in the bosom of friendship and charity. Let not that peace which reigns throughout both hemispheres, on the land and on the ocean, be disturbed by our family quarrels. Let us live and love like brothers. Rulers and legislators! it is for you to begin the work of patriotism and philanthropy. It is for you to manifest a temper, to exhibit an example of moderation and forbearance, of good will and concileation. It is for you to become our fathers, and to make us your children. It is for you to make us one in affection, as we are one in name. Do this, and you shall rule our hearts, as well as our councils. Do this, and your friends shall be our friends; your enemies, our enemies.

Another requisite to the formation of the real patriot is a due degree of intelligence and information. Knowledge

to a certain extent, should pervade the whole mass of the community; for ignorance is as baneful in civil, as in religious life, and is as great a foe to liberty, as to genuine pie. ty. An enlightened and virtuous people are alone capable of appreciating the value, and relishing the sweets of freedom. A people ignorant and uninformed, are easily imposed upon and led astray. They are unable to detect error, to distinguish truth from falsehood, honest sincerity from plausible profession, the language and reality of patriotism, from its affectation and its cant. They have neither sagacity to discern the hostile, though colourable machinations and projects, nor energy to resist the open and daring attacks of domestic treachery or foreign ambition. The general diffusion of sound, moral, and political information, is essential to the temperate and wholesome exercise of that great prerogative of freemen, the elective franchise, which, in the hands of ignorance, loses both its dignity and value, and is easily wrested to the purposes of artful and aspiring demagogues.

If the genius of liberty cannot be rightly invoked even by the great body of her worshippers, unless their understandings and persons are suitably enlightened and regulated; what a portion of the ethereal spirit, what brightness of intellect, what purity of zeal, what rich gifts of nature, what large stores of knowledge, does she demand in those who aspire to minister in her temple. With what diffidence and awe, with what self-distrust and examination, should we contemplate an office so high and so sacred! Do we aim at a distinction so eminent, at a trust so responsible? With what sincerity and candour, should we question ourselves as to our qualifications, our motives, and our object? It was the remark made by Socrates of the Athenians, that although no man undertook a trade which he had not learned, even the meanest; yet that every one thought himself sufficiently qualified for the hardest of all trades,

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that of politics. This remark will, I believe, be found to hold good of a certain modern people. Every American, as he is a republican by birth, so he considers himself to be a politician by instinct; an instinct, pretty much like that which made old Jack Fallstaff a brave man. It would indeed, do your hearts good to hear some of our wise men talk. By the tongue of Demosthenes, how they do talk! It don't rain, but it pours, says the adage. So they don't speak, but they spout: and they spout too, not merely over the understandings of their hearers, but even beyond their own conceptions. For one of our greatest orators or spouters has declared, that he could not conceive where all the water he spouted came from.

But, to be serious, is it not a fact, that vice and folly too often occupy those places, which are the appropriate, and ought to be the exclusive rewards of wisdom and virtue? Do we not daily see persons, quitting their proper vocations, those humble, but useful spheres of life, to which nature and education has confined them, and thrusting themselves into the chair of justice, into the scat of legislation, with equal modesty and ability? And is it not time to change this state of things? Is it not time to make the question, long ago proposed as the rule of our judgment in public matters, the real and only criterion, by which the candidate for popular favour, is to be tried and advanced. "Is he honest, is he capable, is he a friend to the constitution?" Surely we have suffered enough from violating both the letter and spirit of a maxim, whose intrinsic equity, independent of the solemn manner in which it was originally propounded, ought to have secured to it a better fate.

Let us then make the experiment; let us promote none to office, but such as are honest, capable, and of tried attachment to the constitution, and it will not require the ken of prophecy to foresee the result—Public credit will be re-established, and the contributions to the treasury

will be paid with ease and cheerfulness; for the government will have at its command the affections, as well as the purse of the people. Our national prosperity, which, like our national Capitol, lies a prey to the hands of violence, will re-appear in its former health and splendour, before that once proud edifice can arise from its ashes; and the flag of our commerce will wave as triumphantly, as the flag of our navy.

The last quality which I shall mention, as essential to the character I am delineating, is consistency. This virtue seems to be included in, or rather, to flow out of those already enumerated, and it at once comprises and crowns them all. For the man, who to integrity of principle and motive, adds sagacity to conceive, and ability to execute schemes of extensive usefulness and benevolence, will employ none but worthy means for the attainment of his ends, and will be steady in the use of them. Thus his views and his feelings, his scutiments and his actions will discover a beautiful correspondency, and appear like so many wellproportioned parts of an harmonious whole. More attached to principles than to men, such a person does not hold his vote, any more than his conscience, unreservedly at the call or disposal of party; but considers it as the property of his country, which, as her honours, he would bestow on the deserving alone. An honest politician, as well as a skilful jurist, his opinions and interpretation of national and constitutional law, do not fluctuate with the tide of events, nor with the ebbs and flows of popular caprice and passion; but resting on the solid and eternal basis of moral and social justice, are the same in all cases and in all circumstances, at all times and in all places; in peace and in war, at Washington, and at Ghent. Collecting wisdom from the past, and looking forward to the future, his prominent official acts indicate an enlarged, matured, benfiecent system of policy; not a mere farrage of expedients, hasment; nor a series of disastrous experiments founded on absurd and impracticable dogmas. Guided by the same maxims, intent on the same object both in public and private life, while he possesses and enjoys power, he does not violate and forget right; he does not practise himself what he has condemned in the conduct of his political adversaries, and while he solicits their co-operation, accepts their services, and adopts their measures, he does not proscribe their principles and their person.

He is sincere in his professions, liberal and candid in his opinions; too proud to flatter, too honest to deceive; too wise and humble to be flattered or deceived. With a judgment unclouded by party-prejudice; with a temper unsoured by political rancor; with a heart unchilled by sordid or malevolent feelings, he presses forward to the goal, where virtue has stationed her prize, where honor has elevated her crown. With usefulness for his object, with duty for his guide he holds on a firm and even course, unseduced by the smile of popularity, unawed by the turbulence of faction. Reposing on the rectitude and serenity of his spirit, he never mis... takes the huzzas, or the hisses of the multitude, for the shout of fame, or the blast of infamy. And although the applauses of his fellow-citizens are grateful to his ears, they are so, because he hears them as a response to the plaudits of conscience, and not as the prelude to a momentary and noisy renown. The emoluments of office, never tempt his avarice; and its dignities are desired, more with a view to serve his country, than to gratify his ambition. The people he loves with so much sincerity, as to prefer their interest to their favor. To them he gives his cares and his labors, his eal and his talents; for them, he sacrifices his ease and his convenience, his pleasures and his comforts; every thingbut his conscience and his God.

Such is the real patriot—the genuine republican. And is it an ideal an unattainable character which I have essayed to portray? Does it "outstrip the modesty of nature?" Does it exceed the standard of human excellence? Or, rather, can you not discover in the portrait some faint outlines, an imperfect likeness of a great original? Methinks I hear you, with one voice, with one burst of honest enthusiasm exclaim, Such a man we once possessed; such a man formerly governed our councils and our hearts-A father, who belield us all with an equal eye, who clasped us all in his paternal -embrace. But that kind parent, benefactor and friend, is no more. Passing with a sigh, the untimely ruins of the Capitol, the patriot-pilgrim points his course to Vernon's shades. How soothing, how sublime the melancholy which they inspire! How still, how solemn the repose of the mighty dead! How fragrant that virtue, which rises above the corruptions of the grave, and will descend, a grateful savour, to latest generations! The man, on whose ashes the temple of American legislation would have stood inviolable, sleeps quietly beneath his native ever-greens; the emblems of those laurels, which entwined themselves around his cradle, and shall forever thicken around his tomb. Yes; the tomb of the patriot and the Christian is alike honoured and sanctified, however lowly and secluded; at once reflecting the screnest rays of earthly glory, and gilded with the sun-beam of immortality. Let us approach it, let us uncover it for a moment, and take a hasty look at those features so mild, and so majestic, so loved and so revered.

The first ambition of Washington was to be a good man; and integrity, that virtue so rarely possessed, so little estimated by great men, he made the basis of his fame. The whole tenour of his life served to illustrate the truth and importance of the precept, so much neglected and despised; that honesty is the best policy. Having early settled the maxims and principles of his public conduct, he adhered to them

with a perseverance and success, that demonstrated both their authority over himself and their general wisdom and benignity. Aiming at the good of the whole, and possessing an intuitive insight into character, he sought and advanced merit wherever it was to be found, and that alone recommended its possessor to his notice and favour.

He preferred what was solid to what was brilliant; truths. old, but useful, to those dazzling and tempting novelties, by which so many of his cotemporaries were facinated and deluded. Respecting the opinions, and considering the approbation of his fellow-citizens as his highest and best recompence, he would never stoop to flatter their prejudices; but pursued their permanent interest in opposition to their temporary passions. More than once, at the hazard of his peace and reputation, he arrested, on the very brink of revolution and war, that furious, headlong torrent, which has since borne down his successor, and nearly swept from our land every memorial of his labours and his councils. He was, truly, the patriot without fear and without reproach. Ambition was awed by the majesty of his virtue; glory was dimmed by its lustre; corruption shrunk beneath its frown. Having no selfish ends to serve, no unworthy passions to conceal or gratify, the arts of hypocrisy and deception were alike unknown and unnecessary to him. His administration was, therefore, without mystery, and almost without error. It seemed like one continued act, one great work of beneficence; and although, to use the words of an eloquent eulogist, it made many thousand malecontents, it never, by its rigour or injustice, made one man wretched.

What an encomium! How rarely deserved! And yet, how highly did Washington deserve it! His life, his example are before us;—of these neither calumny, nor persecution can deprive us. Oh! let us cherish them, as the dying bequest which virtue has left to freedom; as the most precious boon, which heaven has vouchsafed to earth. We aspire to be

called the disciples of Washington. Laudable ambition! Noble and proud distinction! Let us endeavour to merit it. While we honour the memory of our national benefactor, of our political father, with anniversary solemnities, let it be our study, as it is our duty, to embalm his maxims, to enshrine his virtues in our hearts, and to exhibit their image in our lives. Let us be faithful to his principles, zealous for his glory; so chall we be honest and true to our country.

Errata.

In a part of the impression the following errors occur:

Page 1, line 14th, for could read mould.

Page 5, line 1st, for givernments read government.

Page 6, line 26, for doubtless read dauntless.