

W. Priscotto,  
From his friend  
W. H. Atkinson

- A N

# ORATION;

DELIVERED AT DOVER, NEW-HAMPSHIRE,

On the *FOURTH* of *JULY*, 1791. -

BRING THE FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF  
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

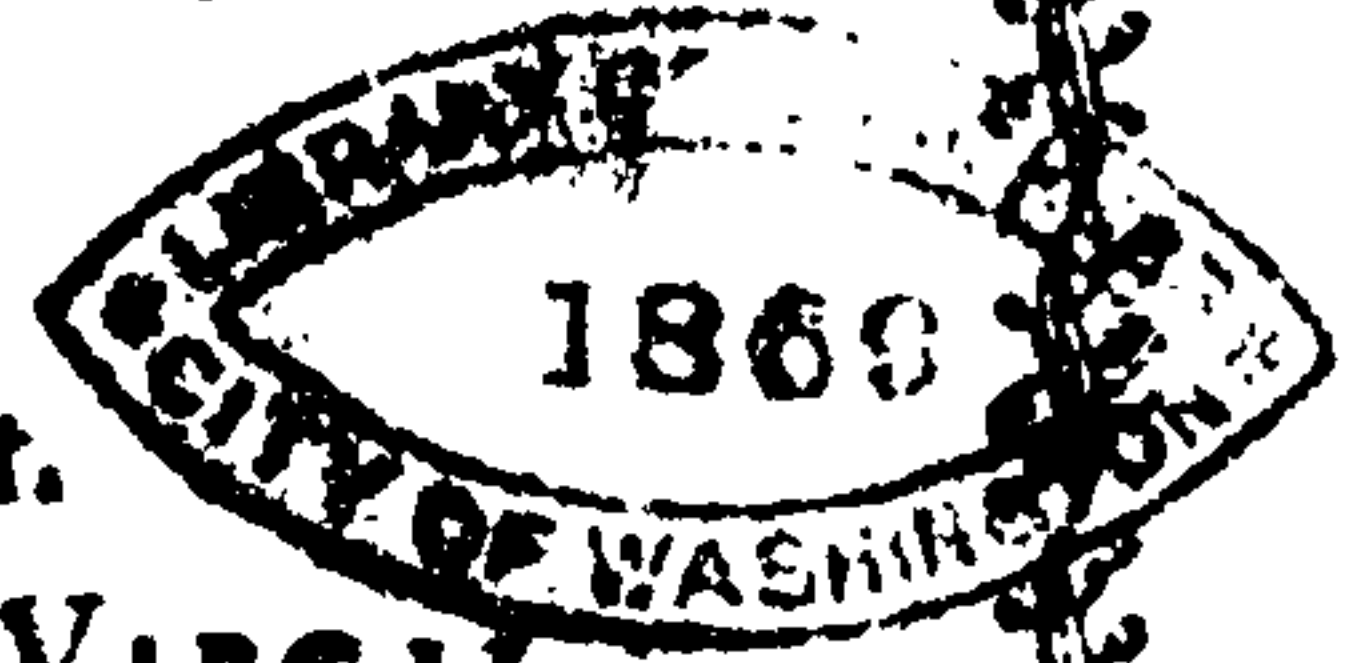


• • • 'Tis ours to set  
A bright example to succeeding times.  
From us the world, suspended, even NOW,  
Expects its fate. —

VOLTAIRE'S BRUTUS.

— Non hæc sine numine divûm.

— Et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.



VIRGIL.

By WILLIAM KING ATKINSON.



DOVER, NEW-HAMPSHIRE :

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M DCC, XCI.

*Over...*  
*cut.*

M. M. M., Jan. 13, '62.



To the inhabitants of Dover :

**A**S the following oration was written for YOUR amusement, it is entitled to YOUR candour. To you it is humbly inscribed. That it is the production of haste, and was composed amidst some avocations, is a true, but an indifferent apology, for the state of imperfection in which it is now banded to the press ; I feel most sensibly, how inadequate it is, to the celebration of the great event by which it was occasioned : an event, that forms a distinguished period in the annals of mankind, and which will be remembered with reverential awe, and gratitude, by every true American, while genuine sensibility, patriotism, and liberality of sentiment, shall find a place in the human heart.

I am,

your respectful fellow citizen,

the AUTHOR.



Erratum.—Page 17, line 8—instead of *is* read *are*.

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# *An* ORATION, &c.

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FRIENDS, COUNTRYMEN, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

**T**O commemorate the great events of their own times ;—to celebrate the illustrious exploits, and achievements, of their statesmen and heroes ;—and to trace, the rise, progress, and establishment, of mighty states and empires ; have been deemed in all ages, and by all civilized nations, a just tribute of a grateful people, and no ignoble employment for the intellect of man.—In this glory, their poets, orators, and historians have emulated each other ; and from their public performances, modern times, have derived the choicest information, of their morals, science and police.

How interesting then, to the feelings of every American, must be this anniversary !—With what transport will he hail the day, which taught him to realize **THE RIGHTS OF MAN** !—a day, which burst asunder the shackles of tyranny, proclaimed his country free, and independent ; and gave to a new empire, her rank and importance among the nations of the earth !

I would willingly believe, that in every city, town,

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and

and hamlet on this extended continent, this day is set apart, as a day of rejoicing, and of public thanksgiving to the supreme DIRECTOR of all events : and my approbation of so laudable a conduct,—a wish to contribute my mite, to the rational amusement of this town;—together with the obliging request, of my too partial friends ;——have induced me to address you, from this place, on this great occasion.

As this subject has been often treated by far abler pens, you will not expect, that I advance upon it, at this late period, any thing novel, or ingenious. Truth, not novelty, will be the object of my pursuit. I shall tell you only those things, which “you yourselves do know”; and, relying on your candour, will concisely notice.—A few leading incidents in the american revolution ;—the actual and probable consequences of that event ;—our present prospects,—and the line of conduct we ought to pursue, to perpetuate the advantages we have obtained.

While the rise, and origin, of other nations, are enveloped in the labyrinths of romance, and the dark uncertainty of fable it is the happiness of America, that her history is attended with the clearness of day.

Our fathers, early in the seventeenth century, prompted by a spirit of discovery, and determined never to wear the yoke of oppression ; finding their country at that time sunk in superstition and tyranny, cast themselves

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on the bosom of the ocean to seek in a foreign land, an asylum of liberty. Auspicious heaven approved the glorious attempt, and her favourite bark, was safely wafted to her destined shore. Here they found a country swarming with its tawny sons, the lord proprietors of their native soil; but savages and barbarians, with all their cruelty, appeared less terrible, than the power of a tyrant, though drest in the purple garb of luxury, and refinement.

True it is, that as this part of America, was discovered by english subjects, the crown of Britain, affected to claim a property in the soil. Our ancestors obtained from the king a grant of a part of these lands, merely I presume to silence the cavils of their enemies; for I will not believe, they imagined, his grant could operate, in the least degree, to convey a title.—As well might the king of that island, have made them a grant of the SOLAR SYSTEM.

Having by treaty, or by purchase, placed themselves on terms of amity with the natives, they began diligently to apply themselves to the business, to which the country appeared to be peculiarly adapted, I mean, agriculture and fishing. They put the steel to the woods, and levelled the large and stately forests. The virgin earth unbosomed all her treasures, and THE WILDERNESS BEGAN TO BLOSSOM LIKE THE ROSE.—They soon acquired a mean of comfortable subsistence.

But alas! this happiness was but of momentary duration.

tion. They had yet to learn, that an exemption from tyranny, was not to be purchased, at so cheap a rate. The Indians, with a grudging eye, beheld them reaping the fruits, of their honest industry ; they were continually exposed, to their outrages, hostilities, and rapine : and from that period (with a few, short, transient intervals) for a century onward, there is scarcely a page of history, which is not crimsoned with YOUR fathers' blood.

During these struggles, Britain looked on with great indifference, for we were as yet too poor to excite her jealousy, or to stimulate her rapaciousness.

To paint in detail the whole system of oppression, in the attempts of the english to subjugate, and enslave this country, is the province of history ; she, inexorably severe towards those who have been superlatively guilty, will delineate their characters with the point of a diamond ; and, BLAZON'D IN THE FACE OF DAY, the abhorrence, and detestation of mankind will DAMN them to everlasting fame.

At the close of a war, carried on under the auspices of the ablest War-minister, that nation, or perhaps any other, ever beheld ; and in which (by the bye) she had derived no small aid from her colonies ; seeing her fleets triumphant on the ocean, and intoxicated, and grown wanton with her victories, she abandoned herself to the  
directions

directions of a ministry, with whom ancient english worth and honesty, disdained to dwell. They undertook, without any consent on our part, to impose on us taxes, for the first time since we set our feet on american ground.—They went further.—The omnipotence of parliament, for so it was profanely called in the lute-string phraseology of that day, assumed a right to tax and bind us in all cases whatever. A standing army in the time of peace, that disgraceful badge, that last, and almost irresistible resort of detested tyrants, was stationed in a neighbouring town.—Its port was blocked up.—And under the pretence of punishing a breach of the peace, committed by a few individuals, an act was past, involving thousands in promiscuous, unmerited, unexampled misery, which it was equally out of their power, to stay, or to prevent.—These penalties were to be inflicted on them, not only UNHEARD, but UNCI-TED to answer.

Still the english colonists, replete with duty to their sovereign—the descendants of Britain, glowing with affection for their mother country, though agonizing under the scourge of oppression, preserved their moderation, and their temper. Petitions couched in terms of duty, and breathing the spirit of humility, and submission, were presented at the footstool of majesty.—But the GENIUS of Britain had departed—her glory had faded like the western sunbeam.

“ Far

“Far removed from the eye of royalty the humanity of a sovereign, was insensible to the miseries it did not behold—remote from the cries of public justice, and the efforts of popular despair, lords and commons remained unaffected with american convulsions”\*—Their prince turned a deaf ear to their complaints, and insult was superadded to oppression.—

Our fishing on our own coasts was denied us:—the troops were ordered to be reinforced:—the plains of Lexington and the heights of Charlestown, (the latter pillaged and set in flames) were witnesses to the horrors of war;—the savage of the wilderness was imprompted to take up his hatchet against us, and to debase our houses with the innocent blood of our women and children. †—These are refinements in cruelty, at which even Britain must blush,—refinements, which cannot be practised without infamy, or recited without horror!

THE VESSEL OF OUR CALAMITIES WAS NOW FILLED TO THE BRIM, and these last drops caused THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS TO OVERFLOW. §—The consequences  
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NOTES.

\* See the celebrated Josiah Quincy's observations on the Boston port-bill 1774.

† See the address of Congress to the people of Ireland.  
§ Bolingbroke.



are too recent, and too interesting to be unknown to any. Innumerable hosts of brave officers, and soldiers have fought, and bled in their country's cause,—hecatombs of heroes, have been gloriously sacrificed at the **ALTAR OF LIBERTY**.—How many of our brave countrymen have been cut off in the blossom of their years, “unhousel'd, unanointed, unanear'd!”

But where justice is the standard, heaven is the warrior's shield:—in their noble exertions, they were inspired with that divine ardour, which, paramount every thing human, caused them to consider the **“LORD OF HOSTS,** as their leader and his angels as fellow soldiers:—Trumpets were to them joyful sounds, and the ensigns of war the banners of **GOD**:—their wounds were bound up in the oil of a good cause, and their blood flowed into the veins of a **SAVIOUR**:—sudden death was present martyrdom, and funeral obsequies, resurrections to eternal honour and glory:—their widows and their babes, being received into the arms of a compassionate **GOD**; and their names enrolled among **DAVID'S WORTHIES**:—greatest losses were to them greatest gains; for they left the troubles of their warfare, to lie down on beds of eternal rest and felicity.”\* 'Tis a melancholy but a pleasing

N. O T E.

\* *Quincy's observations on the port-bill in 1774.*

pleasing sympathy, to shed a tear to the memory of those, who have been the friends of their country, and of mankind—highly distinguished among the group of heroes, methinks I see a MONTGOMERY, and a WARREN; yet justice to other characters forbids our eulogy on the greatest names.

Thousands,—the tribute of our praise

Demand;—but who can count the stars of heaven?†  
 But I turn with pleasure from the ravages of war, to contemplate a very different scene. Behold eight long years have roll'd away, and peace, fair peace, with healing in her wing returns.—See plenty, with her copious horn, commerce laden with the wealth and treasures of the globe, see all the gentle arts of life, attendant in her train.—Our swords are beat into ploughshares, our spears into pruning hooks, and the trumpet's clangor and the din of arms, is heard no more within our borders.

To complete, and give permanency to the happiness of America as a nation, a task great, and arduous, yet remain'd.—The constitutions of the several states adopted amidst the commotions of war, and (as my Lord BACON expresses it) “on the spur of occasion,” were found to be  
 totally

N O T E .

† *Thompson's seasons.*

totally inadequate to the business of cementing the various, and opposed interests, of this great people.

Every one saw the evil, but how to apply a remedy was the problem.

Fanciful, and ingenious theorists, have represented mankind, in the first dawns of civil society, convened on an extended plain, choosing out their chieftan, and adopting rules of government for civil life. But nothing short of the fact itself, could have given birth to the great idea, of five millions of people, convened by their representatives, from every part of a new world, coolly, and dispassionately deliberating on a form of government, which was to last for ages.—The admiring world saw in august assembly, the ORATORS, SAGES, and PHILOSOPHERS of America, engaged in this all-glorious attempt.

To avoid the evils of a monarchy, where ONE makes the WHOLE, and the WHOLE is nothing.

Of an aristocracy, where a man's happening to be born of certain parents, is a grant to him of all offices of power and profit in the state, without any regard to merit : as though GOD had formed him of more HONOURABLE DUST than the rest of mankind !

And the evils of a democracy, that monster in politics which, like mount ÆTNA and VESUVIUS, carries its own destruction in its bowels.—

To avoid these, I say, and to form a constitution of

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energy,

energy, and permanency ;—furnished with proper checks, and balances ;—with all the powers of government, nicely, and accurately distinguished, and kept as independent of each other as the nature of them will admit ;—was indeed a work of no small magnitude.—

What has been the result ? A constitution of federal government has been ratified by ALL the states, which will give perpetuity to the union. As the people are the fountain of all POWER, the legislature are chosen by them, and, at appointed periods, they are to return the sacred deposit whence they received it.

A PRESIDENT has been chosen by the unbought suffrages of millions of freemen !—his NAME is greater than the names of the sovereigns and potentates of the earth,——for his empire is established IN THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE. “They have arrayed him with honours, they have armed him with power, and set him on high :” yet still it is his chief glory, that he is only “the right hand of THEIR POWER and the MIRROR OF THEIR MAJESTY.”\*

While

NOTE.

\* *The address of the convention to the inhabitants of this State on forming the constitution 1781.*

While I am considering the President, 'tis with difficulty I repress my wishes to view the hero, and the man: but, as just praise offered to a living personage may favour of adulation, I shall forbear: yet no apology can excuse me from noticing the constellation of sages and patriots, who have illumin'd and adorn'd this northern hemisphere, and whose **SPLENDID ORBS** have lately sunk in the western ocean.

America has had her **BRUTES**, and her **CASSI**, her **HARRINGTONS** her **HAMPDENS**, and her **SYDNEYS**:—she has them still, and I trust will have them, till time shall be no more;—An **OTIS**, a **BOWDOIN**, and a **FRANKLIN**, the friends of science, of freedom and of mankind, are gone to the chambers of death, but—**their FAME** shall endure forever.

**HE DISARM'D THE CLOUDS OF THEIR THUNDER;**  
—**HE WRESTED THE SCEPTRE FROM TYRANTS.\***

The names of **NEWTON** and of **FRANKLIN** will in future ages be coupled together, and their principles be handed down from generation to generation, as expressive of the true **SYSTEM OF NATURE**. Like two **ATLASSES** of  
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**NOTE.**

\* *Fulmen eripuit cælo, sceptrum que Tyrannis.*  
there

the two worlds, supporting respectively the philosophy of each, they are travelling down, hand in hand, the road of immortality,—and their works will follow them.

But to return.—The effects of the revolution have not been confined to America alone; like that of the electric fluid, the mighty shock has pervaded the whole earth, and made the thrones of tyrants totter to their centres. Thanks be to GOD, the trumpet of jubilee is sounding throughout the world—the people are informed of the RIGHTS OF MAN! A great and glorious revolution has taken place in another hemisphere; the prison doors are thrown open, and the poor, wretched captive, counts no more the tedious hours of his confinement. We have seen, (says the venerable Dr. Price) “we have seen thirty millions of people, indignant  
nant

#### NOTE.

*There 's scarcely any european language, into which the works of Franklin have not been translated; and, as if this was not sufficient to give him celebrity, they have within a few years, been translated into latin.*

*“Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas!”*

nant and resolute, spurning at slavery and demanding FREEDOM with an irresistible voice."\*

The Lords of Britain seem now more than ever, to fear the SPIRIT OF LIBERTY, which has of late so remarkably displayed itself in France. They tremble lest the spark should strike the opposite shore, and teach the english nation, that the safety and happiness of the PEOPLE is the SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND. †

I hasten to the last object proposed, to wit, our present prospects, and the means of improving them.

I felicitate my Countrymen on the establishment of our excellent constitution of national government, where  
taxation

#### NOTES.

\* See his sermon delivered at the OLD JEWRY Nov. 4. 1789.

† The late celebrated pamphlet, which contains a revival of the antiquated doctrine of non-resistance and passive obedience, seems to have been published as an antidote, and a preventative of these effects. Oh Burke! thou greatest and meanest of mankind! why hast thou in this thy last, deliberate, desperate act,  
E destroyed

taxation and representation are inseparable—where not a spire of grass in all America can be subject to taxes, but what is represented in the legislature; and where, if our rulers abuse our confidence, provision is made for us at certain periods, to resume the trust and to place it in other hands.

Our prospects are peculiarly pleasing at this time. Our credit and character as a nation is in a great degree established; commerce revives;—manufactures of various kinds are advancing with rapidity toward European perfection,—our taxes are comparatively small, and the national expenditures are defrayed without any aid from direct taxes;—we have nearly a sufficiency of the precious metals, for the purposes of commerce and exchange, a want of which has heretofore been matter of grievous complaint

*destroyed a whole life of glory. The splendour of a British peerage has dazzled thine aged eyes, and thou art become, the flatterer of tyrants. The venerable Apostle of Liberty has escaped the outrage and virulence of thy invective and, gone to rest in the arms of the saviour, whilst thou art left, to remorse of conscience and perhaps a coronet, as the boon of thy noble exertions in favour of ——— Slavery.*



complaint:—we possess a country of a salubrious climate, and abounding in the necessaries and conveniences of life. Happy, thrice happy Americans, would ye but realize your own felicity!

And now to perpetuate these advantages, let us remember, “ That a reverence for the constitution, (so the elegant LORD BOLINGBROKE expresses it) and a conscientious regard to the preservation of it, are in the political, like charity in the religious system, a mantle to cover a multitude of sins; and as the performance of all other religious duties, will not avail in the sight of GOD, without charity, so neither will a discharge of all other secular duties avail in the sight of men, without a faithful discharge of this principal duty.” A particular attention to the virtues of economy, temperance, and industry, are peculiarly necessary in a country like ours. The farmer who will make three ears of corn grow where nature gave only one, is more deserving of a statue than the conqueror of a world.——— I am sorry to say it, but true it is, that foreigners have been surprized at the extravagance of Americans both in their dress and at their tables. Luxury maintains her thousands, & vanity her ten thousands. While commerce supplies us with many of the conveniences of life, we ought to be ashamed to be indebted to foreign nations, for almost every article of our apparel. A proper pride and dignity

one would naturally suppose, instead of despising the work of our own hands, would induce us to approve and to commend them. They in general wear better ; they are certainly as honourable ; and, if a young lady happens, (for it is very rare ; it she happens I say, to appear in public in apparel of her own making, it is doubly to her honor, as it implies habits of industry, and a want of vanity.

If we look into antient history, we find that nations were flourishing while they were industrious, temperate, and frugal ; but as soon as luxury was admitted, indolence and a train of evils soon followed her, sapp'd the foundation, and the whole fabric tumbled into ruin.

Too much cannot be said on the subject of the education of the youth of both sexes ; the observation is as true as it is trite, that "just as the twig is bent the tree's inclin'd." This is the period which generally determines their characters, both with respect to their morals, and the part they will probably act in the great drama of life. The late revolution is much indebted to the rapid advances of science, in enlightening the minds of Americans, and to the liberality of sentiment and spirit of free inquiry, which has of late years so greatly prevailed.

Their morals are of the first importance ; let us remember

member that virtue makes a nation great. Without a solid foundation of honesty and virtue, 'tis impossible a youth, whatever accomplishments he may have, can ever discharge the duty he owes to himself, his country, or his GOD.

Here let my oration pause. — We have taken a cursory view of the rise and establishment of a great empire, and of a revolution without example or parallel in the world. And shall we content ourselves, my countrymen, with considering only the **SECONDARY** causes of these great and glorious events ! I am sure your grateful hearts will answer—No. Filled with rapture and astonishment let us exclaim, “ These are **THY** glorious works, parent of good, Almighty.” — “ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be all the praise. — Thou settest up kings and removest kings ; thou givest wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them who know understanding. Thine O Lord is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty ! for all that is in the heavens, and in the earth is thine. Thine it is to make great, and to give strength ; thine is the kingdom, O Lord ! and thou art exalted as head over all.”

We should also view **GOD**, not only as the supreme director, and sovereign disposer of states and kingdoms, but should endeavour to view him in his whole providence, even in what we call the common events, and accidents

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of

of life. He is equally the father and friend of the whole creation and his paternal cares extend to all. Let him not then "be DIMLY seen in these his lower works; for THESE declare his goodness beyond thought, and power divine."

Could we bring our will and our wishes to coincide with his, WHOSE WILL IS ALWAYS DONE IN EARTH, AS WELL AS IN HEAVEN, who disposes of all things even to their minutest circumstances, and always for the best of purposes, we should attain as far as it respects this life, the summit of felicity. But this is not to be expected in the present state of things; we can only make it the subject of our occasional study and meditations.

*" If the soft band of winning pleasure leads,  
" By living waters, and through flowery meads;  
" When all is smiling, tranquil and serene,  
" And vernal beauty paints the fluttering scene,  
" Obteach us to elude each latent snare,  
" And whisper to our sliding hearts beware:  
" With caution let us hear the Syren's voice,  
" And, doubtful, with a trembling heart rejoice.*

*" If friendless, in a vale of tears we stray,  
" Where briars wound, and thorns perplex our way,  
" Still let our steady souls thy goodness see,  
" And with strong confidence lay hold on thee,*

*" With*

11 With equal joy our various lot receive,  
12 Resign'd to die, or resolute to live ;  
13 Prepar'd to kiss the sceptre or the rod  
14 **WHILE GOD IS SEEN IN ALL AND ALL IN GOD.**

15 With thee in shady solitudes we walk,  
16 With thee in busy crowded cities talk ;  
17 In every creature own thy forming power,  
18 In each event thy providence adore.  
19 Thy hopes shall animate our drooping soul,  
20 Thy precepts guide us and thy fear controul,  
21 Thus shall we rest unmov'd by all alarms,  
22 Secure within the Temple of thy arms ;  
23 From anxious cares, from gloomy terrors free,  
24 And feel ourselves omnipotent in thee.

25 Then when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,  
26 And earth recedes before the swimming eye ;  
27 Teach us to quit this transitory scene,  
28 With decent triumph, and a look serene.  
29 Teach us to fix our ardent hopes on high,  
30 And having liv'd to thee in thee to die."

**T H E E N D .**

