

6/11/1788
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Meigs
ORATION

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE
CITIZENS OF NEW-HAVEN,

JULY 4th, 1788;

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

DECLARATION

OF

INDEPENDENCE

AND ESTABLISHMENT

OF THE

CONSTITUTION

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

By SIMEON BALDWIN, Esquire.

NEW-HAVEN,

PRINTED BY J. MEIGS,

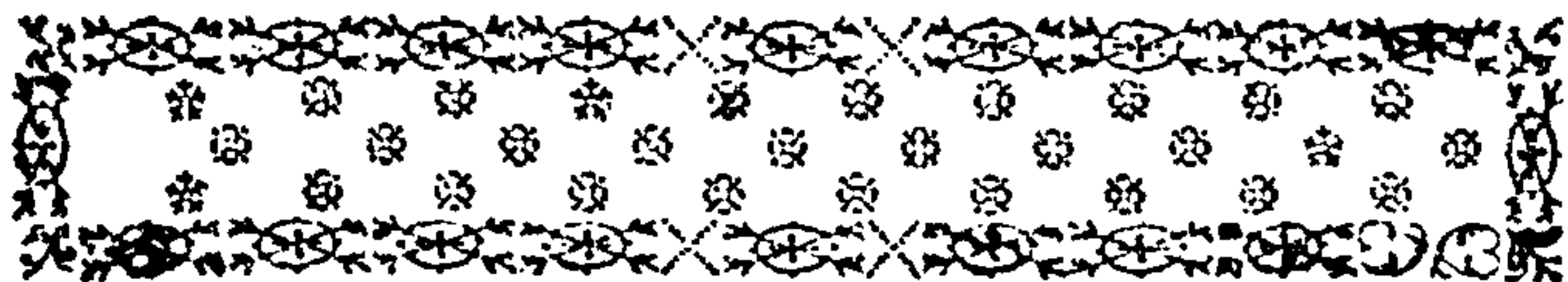
M,DCC,LXXXVIII.

*At a Meeting of a respectable Number of the
Citizens of NEW-HAVEN, in the State-House
July 4th, 1788.*

VOTED ; That the Thanks of this Meeting be addressed to SIMEON BALDWIN Esquire, for the Oration pronounced by him in the Brick Meeting House this Day, and that he be requested to furnish a Copy thereof for the Press.

WILLIAM POWELL,
ELIAS SHIPMAN, Esq.
HEZEKIAH BEARDSLEY,
JOSIAH MEIGS,
TIMOTHY PHELPS,
SAMUEL RUSSEL,
DAVID DAGGETT, Esq.

} Committee
of
Arrangement



AN O R A T I O N, &c.

TH E love of liberty, and a thirst for power, have ever been distinguished passions in the history of mankind. More blood and treasure have been expended in the struggles of freedom against the grasp of oppression, than in all the wars which have originated from other sources. But the instances are rare, of those who have enjoyed the blessings for which they contended. The soldier has frequently triumphed over the vanquished armies of the tyrant; but the citizen has, hitherto, been ignorant of those principles of government, which guard the rights of the people, and preserve an equilibrium between the extremes of despotism and anarchy.

Liberty was the darling object of the first settlers of this country. Animated with the hope of enjoying those civil and religious rights, which Heaven designed for the virtuous, they bade adieu to the joys of a more social life, and, surrounded with the horrors of death in a thousand different shapes, they took possession of the fair territory we now inhabit. In the anticipation of liberty, plenty and peace, they braved all dangers and all hardships.

By the great distance of this country from Europe, Heaven seems to have designed it for the seat of an independent

dependent people ; and the exertions of the first inhabitants who were but little assisted by the parent state intitled them to the privilege. This privilege however they never claimed, nor would their posterity have ever assumed it, had not their rising greatness been oppressed, by those whom they had ever viewed as the guardians of their national infancy, and into whose stores their filial affection induced them to pour the riches of this western world.

It was a circumstance peculiarly fortunate for us, that during many years after the settlement of this country, policy suspended the lash of tyranny, 'till the posterity of the first settlers had become habituated to the enjoyment of liberty, and by a population too rapid for the calculations of Britain, had scattered themselves over the fertile soil of this extensive country.

Without vanity we may glory in those virtues which we inherited from our ancestors. Though simple in manners, they were men of independent sentiment and strict virtue. They loved their freedom and they loved their posterity, and with their own knowledge and sentiments, took pleasure in improving our minds and meliorating our hearts.

In this stage of our society, we viewed the happiness of Britain, as intimately connected with ours. We considered her as the parent state, and cheerfully afforded her all the profits of our commerce, and every assistance to increase her national glory. With fervor we united in our prayers to heaven for her prosperity, until the late cloud of ministerial oppression began to obscure our liberties. The British nation had long been oppressed by an overgrown nobility, and loaded with the weight of an enormous debt. Their court had become habituated to the luxuries of a declining nation, and was perplexed with the numerous applications of hungry placemen. They envied our ease, grew jealous of our increasing strength, and determined that these colonies should bear the burthen

burthen of their extravagance. The plan of oppression was artfully devised, and carried on, at first, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. Under the most plausible pretexts, our charters were wrested from us, and our free republics changed into royal governments. Creatures of the crown supplied the places of those whom freemen once elected—the administration of justice was obstructed—salutary laws were rejected, and others imposed upon us better adapted to a system of despotism. A standing army was quartered in these colonies to awe us into compliance; and then they assumed the high prerogative of imposing duties and taxes on us at pleasure. Policy, 'tis true, fixed the sums upon a very moderate scale; but it is alarming to freemen to hear of taxes and of laws from a court in which we have no representation. These measures were the dictates of a tyrannic spirit, and the sons of freedom with manly firmness, withstood these unwarrantable claims of power. They knew it would be a more difficult task to enslave a free people than to straiten the chains that have once been riveted. Though firm and unshaken they did not disdain the mild language of humble intreaty. Whole districts and provinces repeatedly bent the knee to the inexorable monarch of Britain. His answer was the *thunder of war*--and the reply of patriots was LIBERTY OR DEATH—LIBERTY OR DEATH was in a moment echoed from every rank of citizens in the united colonies. History cannot boast a similar instance of a people inhabiting an extensive territory---divided by so many clashing interests and deep-rooted prejudices, uniting in a moment in a measure the noblest that men in society ever undertake.

The horrors of that slavery which the freeborn sons of America could not brook, and the animation which the hope of freedom inspired, left no time to reflect on our destitute situation. Destitute of the implements of war and of military stores without money the strength of war—without men who ever experienced a
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regular campaign---totally unacquainted with the manufactures necessary for the existence of an army, and without a single ally, we contended with a nation whose stores were replete with the instruments of slaughter---whose credit commanded the banks of nations---whose soldiers had been trained to the art of war, and whose armies had made the powers of Europe tremble. Reflection would have thrown us into despair; and indeed, “if the Lord himself had not been on our side when men rose up against us, they had swallowed us up quick.”

In this critical moment the Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, boldly cut the gordian knot. In the name of the people, they “assumed that separate and equal station among the powers of the earth, to which the laws of nature and nature’s God, entitled them.” While we celebrate that distinguished day, the clear manifestation of providential beneficence in this event, calls for gratitude and joy. The world confess’d it nobly done, and Heaven has ratified the deed.

The European nations beheld the contest with anxiety, and viewed the political balance of power, which preserves the peace of empires, as depending on the event. The noblest principles influenced their measures. They considered the war not the effect of a licentious rebellion against the proper exercise of government, but the effort of virtue struggling in her own defence. The charms of liberty shone with new beauty even in the courts of despotic governments. They revered the cause in which the unalienable rights of mankind, and the dignity of man was defended. They generously supplied our wants---They divided the power of Britain, and the blood of foreign heroes was mingled with the blood of our patriots in defence of freedom.

The numerous incidents of the war, from the *battle of Lexington* to the *capture of Cornwallis*, are too well known

known and have been too sensibly realized to admit of any comment. Most of us have been anxious spectators—many in this assembly peculiar sufferers and some distinguished actors in those interesting scenes. It was ever a peculiar circumstance following the most gloomy fortune of the war, that success and glory crowned the redoubled efforts of our arms. Three times have the victorious armies of our enemy, with rapid career spread the desolation of war, almost to the centre of our country, and twice has it been emphatically proved by the capture of two powerful British armies, that captivity may be led captive.

In a review of those memorable events, we mourn the untimely deaths of departed heroes, and lament that our charters of freedom were sealed with their blood. Their wounds, their sufferings and their deaths have enhanced the price of freedom.

Peculiar has been the loss of this city in the deaths of many useful and respectable inhabitants. Among the tombs of her slain who have been devoted victims to the rage of tyrannic slaughter, we shall find those of the venerable father, the amiable consort, and the worthy citizen. There we shall find the manes of WOOSTER, that bold and generous patriot. To the shining virtues of the citizen, in him were united the distinguished talents of the foldier. In early life he made the profession of arms his choice. The flower of his days and the prime of his life were employed in the service of Britain. Her glory was then the glory of his country. But the moment she formed the plan of despotism, his generous soul swell'd with indignation, and a rational conviction that the rights of the colonies were invaded, influenced him to take an early and decided part in favour of liberty. Despising the emoluments of a pension when in competition with the freedom of his fellow-citizens, with the ardor of a patriot he re-assumed the armour of his youth, and boldly facing the enemies of his country's freedom the renowned warrior died.

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While we pay the tribute of a tear to the memory of the dead, it would be a pleasing task, and civilized nations have ever considered it a useful employment, to celebrate the virtues of distinguished benefactors, who have survived the slaughter of war and triumphed in the freedom of their country. But it would be impossible to do justice to the merits of those patriots who performed conspicuous parts on the theatre of those actions we this day commemorate. My friends, words cannot do it. It is among the dark shades of our national character, that their fellow-citizens have been so reluctant to bestow the honours and rewards of their meritorious services. The *real friends* of their country still experience the feelings of gratitude and the influence of justice. And there is a reward of which malice cannot deprive the soldier. The reflection that they have done their duty, is a source of happiness more refined than that which arises “from the blaze of glory—the arm of power—or the golden lure of wealth”—Some faithful Ramsay, some American Livy or Tacitus, will transmit their names, their virtues, and their noble deeds to posterity; by whom they will be revered as the most distinguished benefactors of mankind, and eminent examples for future patriots.

A part of the debt which the citizen owes to the soldier and to his country, is, to complete the revolution and to secure its blessings, by a liberal, free, and efficacious government. In vain have we struggled against the grasp of despotism, if we degenerate into licentiousness and anarchy.

The declaration of independence, dissolved the political bands—it cut the nerves of former compacts. The ardor of patriotism in pursuit of the darling object of our wishes, was the only link which held us together. But liberty cannot long exist without government. To bring order out of confusion, and to secure the blessings of society, by the establishment of legal authority, was the laborious attempt of our wise politicians
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in the midst of invasion and the carnage of war. Most of the States adopted energetic forms of government, and yet favourable in the highest degree to the rights of mankind. A federal system was a more difficult task. The necessity of a national government we had never experienced---against its abuse we were then contending. Prejudices and fears therefore must be combated in the accumulation of federal authority. Accustomed to comply with the recommendations and to grant the requisitions of Congress, the people thought they should never need their commands. They could not see the necessity of coercive power, nor of a revenue under the controul of our national council. Thus circumstanced, the wisdom of Congress was necessarily confined to a system, adapted to those sentiments of the people.

It is necessary in a good government, that the *legislature* should be so formed as not to enact laws without due deliberation---that the *judicial* be competent to the administration of justice, and that the *executive* have energy to carry their decisions into execution. The nerves of the whole body politic should concenter in the supreme executive; and the great council of the nation, under due restrictions, ought to command the purse and the sword; or in vain will they wield the sceptre of government. To what purpose should a legislative enact laws if nobody is obliged to obey them? To what purpose make contracts which they can never fulfil? To what purpose remonstrate against the encroachments, the insults---the abuses of other nations, when they have not the appearance of power to oppose them? O my country! thy glory hath been tarnished by the consequences of a confederation totally deficient in these particulars. The resolves of that illustrious body of men, who form the nerveless council of our union, are disregarded at home and despised abroad. Our commerce languishes. Public credit is no more; and the glory of the United-States---where is it? It expired

pired with that patriot warmth which once united our councils, opened our purses, and strengthened our arms without the force of law.

Happy for us there is an ultimate point of national depression, beyond which human nature cannot sink. The degrees of depression will ever be in proportion to the knowledge and refinement of the people. The great bulk of mankind, when they have the means of knowledge, and time to deliberate, in general adopt right political sentiments—Our union, in opposition to the claims of Britain, is a proof of this observation, and a more recent instance is afforded us, from the appointment of that illustrious council of sages who convened, to frame anew the constitution of the United States. The people were sensible that our former confederacy was inadequate to the great objects of a federal union---they were convinced that a more efficacious government was necessary---and they have nobly attempted the change.

To the honour of these states, among the great national events which history preserves for posterity, it will be recorded, that they effected this change in government, in the most calm, deliberate and constitutional method. They despised those mad, tumultuous actions which disgraced many of the great revolutions of antiquity. They acted as became a free and independent people.

Men who were truly the representatives of the people, and the fathers of our empire---whose salutary counsels we had experienced in our most perilous circumstances---whose virtue supported them with fortitude, in “those times which tried men’s souls”---who had given proof of their patriotism in the declaratory act of independence---who had approved themselves equal to the greatest negotiations in the courts of Europe---who had conducted our armies, rescued millions from the hand of oppression, and triumphant!y returned to the joys of private life, Men
whose

interest was the interest of their country, were deputed by the suffrages of freemen, to give an expiring nation life—to rescue our liberties from the grave of anarchy, and to frame a constitution which might spread and secure the benign influence of freedom and peace to the millions of our posterity. Never—never before did men deliberate upon so interesting an object!

Revolutions in government have in general been the tumultuous exchange of one tyrant for another, or the elevation of a few aspiring nobles upon the ruins of a better system. Never before has the collected wisdom of any nation been permitted quietly to deliberate, and determine upon the form of government best adapted to the genius, views and circumstances of the citizens. Never before have the people of any nation been permitted, candidly to examine, and then deliberately adopt or reject the constitution proposed.

For a moment turn your attention to that venerable body—examine the characters of those illustrious sages, eminent for political wisdom and unfullied virtue—see them unfolding the volumes of antiquity, and carefully examining the various systems of government, which different nations have experienced, and judiciously extracting the excellence of each—listen to the irresistible reasons which they urge—mark the peculiar anity which distinguishes their debates—hear the mutual concessions of private interest to the general good, while they keep steadily in view the great object of their counsels, the firm CONSOLIDATION of our union—and then glory, Americans, in the singular unanimity of that illustrious assembly of patriots, in the most finished form of government that ever blessed a nation.

By the Constitution of the United States, all the essential rights of freemen, and the dignity of individual States are secured. The people have the mediate or immediate election of their rulers—to the people they are amenable for their conduct, and can constitutionally

constitutionally be removed by the frequency of election. While the voice of the people is heard in the House of Representatives, the independent sovereignty of the several States will be guarded by the wisdom of the Senate, and the disinterested penetration of the President will balance the influence and prevent the encroachments of each. In this beautiful gradation we find all those checks which are necessary for the stability of republican government, and the due deliberation of the most perfect legislature. Instead of the mad collections of the populace, we shall have a representation accurately calculated upon the numbers and property of the constituents. There will be as little connection between the executive and legislative as the good of government requires, and a total separation of the judicial from both. In each of these particulars, our constitution far exceeds those of the celebrated republics of Greece or Rome. These principles were admired by the wise politicians of antiquity, but had never been reduced to practice: of consequence their republics were of short duration, and while they lasted were perpetually torn by tumultuous seditions, with their train of numerous and tragical incidents.

The checks and balances of different orders, have the same effect in the regularity of government, as the political balance of power in the peace and happiness of nations. Europe has experienced the advantages of this, ever since the union of nations opposed the aspiring Charles V. If the principle had been earlier understood, the world would never have experienced the mad career of an Alexander, nor would the proud Romans so often have triumphed over the armies of the vanquished--nor would the weaker nations, victims to the lust of dominion in the powerful, so often have experienced the rage of war and the tyranny of conquest.

In these States the balance of property is wholly in favour of the people--Merit is the criterion of eminence, and the aristocratic influence is founded in superior wisdom and virtue. I

I should weary the patience of my audience, were I to attempt those encomiums which are due to this monument of wisdom. Perhaps it is not the best possible. But we boldly assert that in theory it appears to be the best form of government that has ever been offered to the world. It has been admired by millions, ratified and adopted by the enlightened freemen of *ten* States, and rejected by none who have constitutionally deliberated upon it--Language cannot praise it more.

I am peculiarly happy, my friends, that in addition to the general joy, which usually dilates the heart of every friend of his country on the celebration of this day, I may congratulate this federal assembly, on this most interesting event, the establishment of this constitution--an event, if possible, more interesting than independence itself. That gave us birth as a nation---This will give duration and happiness to our existence. The rubicon is now passed. Better prospects are before us. Experience has taught us these necessary lessons---to lop off the libertinism of juvenile independence, to strengthen the basis of our system of government--to correct the disordered parts, and to give greater stability and energy to all its operations.

From the adoption of this constitution, we have every thing to hope---nothing to fear. The powers of Congress are solely directed to national objects.--They are accurately defined and can extend to nothing which is not expressly delegated to them. In other nations, and in the several States in particular, the legislatures have power in every thing not expressly excepted: These exceptions in a good form of government comprehend the essentials of liberty.

The laws of every nation will wear the complexion of the constitution, and in a good government, will uniformly promote the great objects of political society; the protection of the estates, families, persons, fame, and lives of the subjects.

From such a system of government and laws, we may

nation ever yet united in itself all those superior advantages for social dignity. All the influential causes of greatness conspire and indicate the future glory of America. The soil of these States is extremely fertile---the territory is sufficiently extensive, and we are blest'd with an internal navigation which is unparalleled, and open to the world. An uncommon spirit of enterprise is populating our country with astonishing rapidity and enlarging the dominion of these States without the horrors of conquest. Our commerce is free to all nations. Manufactures are daily increasing, and that spirit of industry, which is the strength of government and the friend of virtue, is every where visible. A general intercourse has, in a great measure, removed local attachments and prejudices, and has given a refinement to the manners of the people, not accompanied, we hope, with those vices, which usually attend the same degree of refinement in other nations. The United States are peculiarly happy in a general diffusion of knowledge and in the prospect of greater improvement. Science cannot flourish in a land that is blasted with a tyrant's breath.—She is the companion of freedom, the child of independence. Dependency of government insensibly carries with it, a fatal dependency of mind—Men are too apt to think, that superior power is necessarily connected with superior wisdom, and for modes of acting and modes of thinking, with reverence look up to those on whom they are dependent. Even in these States, we have found it a more difficult task to root out those unnatural prepossessions, which tend to idolize the persons and productions of foreigners, to the prejudice of humble merit among ourselves, than to break the chain of political oppression—A single blow of the decisive sword destroys the one—the slow progress of reason and mental improvement the other. Divested of these prejudices we should be surprized were we to enumerate all the efforts of genius which have signalized Americans, since independence animated them to noble exertions. Witness
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the numerous mechanical inventions—witness those laborious productions, which will convey to posterity the close reasoning of the theologian, the experiments and inductions of the philosopher, the accuracy of the grammarian, the unsullied veracity of the historian, the bold imagery of the painter, the sublime flights of the poet, and those researches of the profound politician, which have taught the senators of Europe political wisdom, and the citizens of the world the road to freedom and peace.

If such effusions of genius distinguish the infancy of this nation, what may we expect when she shall ripen into manhood!

Our language is a channel of more information than any other language on earth. The press is uncontrolled, and a free toleration of sentiments distinguishes the happy government of these States.

In this country is completed that happy alliance of national blessings, which a lively imagination must have painted for the foundation of a glorious empire. It would not require the warmth of enthusiasm to embellish the piece. I leave it to the lively fancy of my audience to enjoy the animating prospect which we have pursued through the rough paths of war and the revolutions of government.

The best system of government cannot insure freedom, riches, and national respect, without the vigilance, the industry and the virtuous exertions of the people. The labours of the patriot and the friend of humanity are not yet completed. It is their task to remove those blemishes which have hitherto sullied the glory of these States. We may feed our vanity with the pompous recital of noble achievements—we may pride ourselves in the excellency of our government—we may boast of the anticipated glories of the western continent:—But virtue will mourn that injustice and ingratitude have, in too many instances, had the countenance of law—Humanity will mourn that an odious slavery, cruel in itself, degrading to the dignity of man, and shocking to human nature, is tolerated, and
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in many instances practised with barbarian cruelty.— Yes, even in this land of boasted freedom, this asylum for the oppressed, that inhuman practice has lost its horrors by the sanction of custom.

To remedy this evil will be a work of time.—God be thanked it is already begun. Most of the southern & middle states have made salutary provision by law for the future emancipation of this unfortunate race of men, and it does honour to the candour and philanthropy of the southern states, that they consented to that liberal clause in our new constitution evidently calculated to abolish a slavery upon which they calculated their riches. It is the duty of every friend to his country to lead his fellow citizens to rational reflections upon these interesting subjects, to abolish as much as possible the vices peculiar to us as a nation and as individuals, and to disseminate still farther those principles of wisdom and virtue which form the pillars of republican government.

Let not the enjoyment of peace and the pride of independence lead us to security and dissipation. But in view of those blessings which have heretofore animated us, let us be ambitious to perform well the duty of good citizens of a free government. Let us attentively guard our political constitutions as the most sacred bulwark of national independence and freedom. Let us ever be watchful of our liberties by attending to the choice of our rulers. Let us make merit the passport to honour, and the confidence of the people the reward of meritorious services. Let us be industrious in our employments, benevolent in our intentions, and diligent in our exertions. Let us endeavour to perform our duty nobly, and to discharge our duty to our God, our country and ourselves, like true patriots and benevolent christians. We shall then in the smiles of heaven, reap the fruit of all our toil. We shall enjoy respectability abroad, peace, liberty and prosperity at home, and shall give occasion for posterity to celebrate the day that gave birth to this nation, and
INDEPENDENCE to the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.