

AN  
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

DANBURY ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1801.

IN COMMEMORATION OF OUR NATIONAL

INDEPENDENCE.

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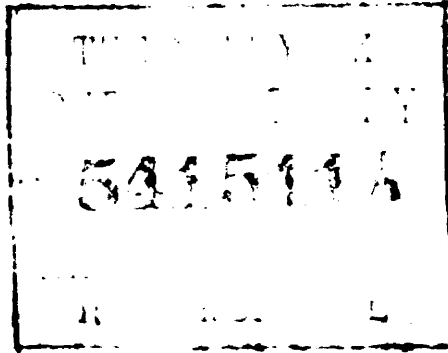
By EPAPHRAS W. BULL.

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DANBURY:

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1801.



*AT a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements for the  
Celebration of the FOURTH of July, 1801, in Danbury,  
held on the 6th July.*

**VOTED,**

*That WILLIAM COOKE, JOSEPH TROWBRIDGE,  
ZACHERIAH GRISWOLD, and JOHN P. WHITE wait on  
EPAPHRAS W. BULL, Esq. with the Compliments of this  
Committee, and request a Copy of his Oration for publication.*

**ZACHARIAH GRISWOLD, Clerk.**

AN ORATION, &c.

**T**HE present is an age of revolution. While in almost every part of the civilized world the blow of destruction is hurled at the institutions of man and of heaven, while the political universe is convulsed to its centre, and war with its tremendous horrors ravages the works of creation, this day by millions of freemen is celebrated throughout united America as a period of human happiness, a monument of the insuperable spirit of freedom, the acknowledgement of the rights of man and the gifts of God. Hail blest era which proclaimed to an approving world the triumph of freedom and virtue, over tyranny and oppression, when from an almost uninhabited wild a nation burst into being! It will be remembered with triumphant satisfaction while liberty is dear to man, it will be told to future generations when these hearts have ceased to palpitate, it will be an instructing example to the human race. On this auspicious day while the heart bounds with joy and gratitude to the Supreme Being, it becomes a nation highly privileged for its blessings to learn the causes of national prosperity and to avoid the origin of political misfortune. To collect from the example of other nations, from their rise and declension, from our own follies and tumults, from the supposed vices and virtues of the day, from the natural tendency of popular and unpopular principles, to reflect on the past the present and look forward to the future, from the past to calculate what is to come, from the great political drama of human life to explore the causes of private and public felicity, and from the whole to learn what is and what is not conducive of the greatest possible happiness to our fellow beings is a work of humanity and the duty of statesmen and philosophers, but far too extensive for an occasion like the present. That America as a nation has been happy beyond example, that like other nations she has received her portion of calamity, are facts which need not to be told, and past and present experience impress this forcible truth that all popular governments have been and in a degree must be subject to convulsion. To avoid those commotions incident to almost every institution,

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and establish our rights on the most permanent basis, it is necessary among other things, to cultivate a spirit of true morality and religion among all classes of men, to seclude ourselves from all foreign concerns and conduct with a becoming and dignified moderation in party politics.

A great body of people actuated by different motives, interests and feelings will not at all times act in conformity with right, without some tie or compulsion. Hence laws are made for the observance of civil obligation, but laws are but feeble barriers against long rooted habits of vice. It becomes necessary then for a nation which values its prosperity to instil into the minds of its subjects independent of all restraint some ruling principles of action. *Morality and Religion* are those principles which must establish permanent security and permanent happiness. As in private so in public life vice contaminates the essence of every good. As immorality by slow degrees destroys the individual, in the same manner does it undermine the public. As morality adds to the peace of one so it must to all, as it constitutes the contentment of domestic life so it is the true foundation of public happiness. The man who disregards the rights of individuals will neglect the public good, and will sacrifice it when interfering with his private interest. He who regards not his own character, will not regard the dignity of his country, and he who will plunge himself into infamy will not care to uphold a falling country but add his weight to accelerate its ruin. His elevation is marked by the demoralization of man, his example a poison to society. "What is religion but a belief in something higher, more powerful, more living than visible human nature and a perfect conformity to that superior Being?" What is morality but upright conduct as to ourselves and mankind? Will the man who regards not himself, his neighbor or his god, become a good member of society, will he add stability to a good government or his exertions exceed the narrow confines of a selfish spirit? Can it be said of him who contemns all religion as a farce, that he will not hold in disdain all social obligation?

Will the smiles of infancy, the tear of the orphan, or the grey hairs of old age move the pity of his heart who has said to virtue and morality, "I despise you," and to religion, "thou art an imposition"? Look to those countries where the names of morality and religion are not known or despised, where the gifts of the Creator are trampled under foot  
by unbounded

by unbounded despotism and where liberty, property, happiness and even existence are dependant on, what for the honor of human nature ought never to be mentioned, the will of an individual and that too independent of law and the more powerful claims of nature. See man the proud proprietor of this lower world debasing and debased, perverting right and wrong in eternal confusion, the bounds of every principle of virtue and humanity overleaping, and on the misfortunes and deprecations of millions establishing temples and thrones of tyranny! See the poor oppressed to pamper the rich, the indigent to satisfy the luxuries of the great and despised honestly the prey of voracious harpies! Behold the expiring victim drawing the dagger reeking from his breast and while asking mercy presenting it to the tyrant who murders him. No dawn of science here beams her pleasing ray, no pure morality to make man conscious of wrong, no religion to restrain those demons in human form who subvert the rights of nature and wield the shafts of omnipotence. Can we look to those benighted regions of another world and while observing the abject debasement of the human species, doubt whether morality and religion be productive of public security and tranquility? It must be acknowledged that that government which is composed of characters of no principle, is conducted by nothing but the baser passions of man, which, while contending interests shake its foundation must tumble in its original nothing and in its fall mar every blessing of society. As a nation we may for a time make a brilliant show of illusive prosperity, but it will be no more than splendid misery. That individual contentment which is void of moral rectitude of heart is on precarious tenure, and slender indeed is that public happiness which rests on the fabric of vice.

Among the many degrading errors into which America has fallen is a predilection for some foreign nation. A blind infatuation seems to have led us into a belief that not merely other governments, laws and religion are more perfect than our own but their very acknowledged errors are imputable to the virtues of the heart.

A striking emblem of the strength of prejudice and of human instability! That America of all nations of the earth should feel or manifest an attachment to any other power than our own is indeed singular. Of none do we ask any favor. To none are we indebted for any particular obligation. Our commerce is dependant on no nation so far as to make us servile

servile to their wishes. For our safety and protection we must rely solely on ourselves and for our honor and dignity to show a partiality in any possible situation is highly debasing. If then we gain nothing by our friendship, and are under no honorary obligations, if it involves the safety, honor and happiness of our country, why shall it be said we exercise an unnecessary prejudice, so injurious, productive of every evil and no one good effect? Men are sometimes driven to form attachments to another dominion from oppression in their own. Religious persecution, political tyranny, and proud distinctions of rank between man and man have created in many, an aversion for their own, and affection for a different country. Far different from this, is our situation. No dire oppression holds here her dreary reign, no despot at whose nod we tremble, none of those scourges of human kind who riot in the smiles of greatness and the degradation of man. Here no empty titles confer a superiority, and here religion open to all, and forced on none, finds a willing protection. Here too, the oppressed of the earth have experienced an asylum of contentment. And is this the nation which rejects her native feelings and bestows them on a distant and ungrateful world? Must it then be said of America, that while possessing a government that afforded a most ample protection, laws that secured to us our social and religious rights and every happiness which man is capable of enjoying, we have given up those blessings and groped after supposed felicity and in the regions of a distant country? Reason and patriotism condemn the imprudent thought. An interference in the affairs of individuals forcibly exhibits to us in miniature, the ruinous consequences of interference in the affairs of other nations. It involves us in unnecessary quarrels and disputes among ourselves, it totally unfits our judgment as to the merits of the contending parties, it creates national jealousies against us, it gives to those, who are traitors to their country, an opportunity of spreading foreign influence under a popular impulse and pretence of patriotism, it creates in us a love of other governments and religion and an aversion to our own, it leads us to adopt their principles, their habits and their vices and most fatally estranges our minds from our own interests and concerns. Why then should we turmoil and trouble ourselves about those things which ought not to concern us? Why hear of so many unhappy disputes? If such a nation has gained a victory, to  
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one it is matter of grief to another of excessive joy. If this general is defeated, pleasure diffuses itself in the looks of all, if unsuccessful the voice of mourning is heard in our streets.— Is it then in reality a matter of moment to us whether France or Great-Britain rule the seas, a Suwarrow or Buonaparte the world, if we are not injured by their victories? Who does not hold in proud contempt subjection to a foreign power? And yet in what situation can he be said to be who fondly hears of their success or defeat? Are any willing to own themselves partizans of another nation or enemies of our own country? Why then do we see a political preference given to another power, while our own safety and jurisprudence passes unnoticed?

Do any wish to neglect or change our government and adopt a new form of government, laws and religion? Why then are other laws, other forms of government commented upon with such high encomiums, unless to pass a silent censure upon our own?

Far happier would it be for us that we should never know of the existence of another race of beings than to sympathize with them in their various situations. A vast ocean separates us from our mother country, an almost incalculable distance from any foreign dominion. Our real concerns are few, independent of any other power or connection on earth. We have a government of our choice—families, friends, and children to attend to here, all dear to us, all happily calculated to inspire us with the love of our native soil, the soil which our forefathers gained by many a bitter pang. Shall we one family united by every tie that can endear man to man, destroy that family, and embark on the tempestuous ocean of foreign politics which must lead to a wreck of every enjoyment? Shall we by our passionate attachments rouse the spirit of contest, endanger our property, liberty and lives, and involve our country in a distressing war? Too late might we repent our folly, too late discover the ruinous policy of one nation's inspecting the concerns of another. The blood of thousands only could heal the wounds of our imprudence, and years to come might find them unhealed and festering with rancor. Were more reasons necessary to convince you of the danger of these feelings, I would tell you a Washington, that model of imitation and perfection, who is now no more, and whose grave the tears of an ever grateful country shall bedew with liveliest affection, yes, a Washington with his departing

ing words, in the sincerity of the most exalted patriotism, has warned us to avoid these kind of attachments, has told us of their pernicious tendency, and conjured us by every thing that is dear to man to shun, as the besom of destruction, those extremes of folly, of more than human madness. They are the words of truth, they come from a source of uncontaminated purity. The records of time may moulder in oblivion, and generations succeed each other to the tomb of their forefathers, but the dying words of that most beloved character can never be forgotten, they must be remembered with mournful pleasure, they will be felt by every true American.

Since the origin of civil society all governments have been more or less liable to unhappy divisions. Sometimes the intolerance of religion, sometimes the corruptions of civil government have been the means of a lasting quarrel, and as often have mankind quarrelled about nothing at all. From the example of other governments it seems as if they contained, within themselves, the seeds of their own destruction.

In America we are presented with the interesting and alarming picture of two grand parties, both of which appear sanguine in the justness of their cause. It is thus that a nation favored by heaven, whose happiness has been more than commensurate with any power below, and whose liberties and government have been famed throughout the world have found means to make themselves unhappy. I address myself to no party. On a day consecrated to the celebration of freedom and peace, the sound of party ought never to be heard. I address you as the lovers of the liberties, government, and religion of our common country. I come not here, my friends, to censure you for being divided, to expose your follies as objects of remorse, or blame you for exercising the rights of men, the right of thinking as we please. I wish to quell the spirit of party, not inflame it, to heal the wounds of discontent, not open them afresh; to remind you that twenty five years ago our ancestors, through every difficulty and distress attendant on human exertions, declared to the world their independence, and in support of it appealing "to the supreme Judge of the universe for the rectitude of their intentions, pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors"—To impress on you the duty and importance of preserving that independence unfulled to posterity; that, as divisions have taken place, they ought, as far as the nature of the case will admit, to be remedied,  
 that



that as the crest of party has arisen to an alarming height, it ought to be allayed, not by an outrageous opposition, but by mutual moderation and forbearance. By moderation, I mean a due respect for the feelings and opinions of others, though contrary to our own—by forbearance, a determination not to abuse and villify for a difference in sentiment. For years past we have seen little else than a general and unlimited series of misuse of character. In some parts of the United States certain political tenets have been held in high estimation, in other parts those same principles have served only as a general licence for abuse. Hence quarrels and disputes have too frequently taken place, and all parties seem to have been determined to substantiate the truth of their principles more by force than reason. No way so certain could have been taken to undermine our peace, our security, our happiness. Does the experience of mankind teach us that the opinions of men are formed or overcome by compulsion; are prejudices done away by fear, and the rules of right implanted while the lash hangs quivering over its victim? Mankind will always think for themselves; if they are wrong some other way than coercion must be found out to reclaim them. Conviction by argument or by reason will last forever. A forced conviction will last but for the moment—it will last no longer than a dread of evil presents itself, it will then burst forth more furious, more awful than before. All believe themselves the supporters of our liberties and constitution. All believe themselves in the right, and each perhaps as capable of judging who or what is right as the other. There is no standard of right and wrong to which we can resort to determine our differences, as most men are governed by interest and prejudice, and man himself at best but a standard of imperfection. Our interests are different, our minds will disagree, our prejudices are strong, they will be removed only by that which removes every prejudice, a belief that they are wrong. To think alike is impossible: as then in religion, so in politics, let error and misapprehension alone they will confute and destroy themselves. No doctrine hostile to social and political happiness can long remain popular among a free and enlightened people. Words and sounds may for a while delude, the tide of party in its whirling vortex may devour the reason and reflection of man, false theory may present to the mind an untried scene of future bliss and

imaginative:

imagination in its gaudy colours picture out a furrounding Elysium.

But when the passions subside and deliberation takes its turn to reign, when mankind perceive they have been led astray by a phantom, they will by degrees return to their wonted mode of belief and again cement in the grand mass of society. But commence a violent opposition against them both shame and pride will lead them to uphold their principles even if they believe they are wrong. There ought not to be affixed to any particular denomination any unjust sarcasms or scandalizing names to influence the formation of opinion and no unfair comparisons made to create unnecessary distinctions between our fellow beings. I my neighbor a bad man because he thinks different from me, and must he be decried as void of principle and merit? Must my friend be exploded for a supposed wrong in opinion? Why then do we daily hear the names of *Monarchist, Aristocrat, Angl-federal* and *Tory* on the one side, and the other that of *Disorganizer, Jacobin, Revolutionizer and Atheist*? Will names which have no meaning in them carry conviction to the rational mind? Will unfounded aspersions close up the fast widening chasm of exasperated party? Will torrents of abuse make converts to truth, or support a just cause? Away then with those unfeeling severities, those cruel scoffs so often made use of to stigmatize the best of characters, that distinguish a mob rather than men of candor, which tend but to mislead and by misleading divide. Forever banish all foolish distinctions founded in misapprehension, and which make men think each inimical to the other. Can we for a moment admit the uncharitable doubt that a large proportion of our fellow citizens are enemies to our country and attempting to destroy its liberties, the destruction of which must equally involve us all? We may, with truth, suppose individuals ambitious, in pursuit of that ambition stirring up the people and deceiving many honest men, we may suppose them using the vilest means to effect their purposes, and wishing to overturn the powers of this world, and scale the gates of heaven itself, but we cannot believe the great body of our nation is yet so corrupt so void of all sense of honor, of national dignity and happiness, as to be willing to sacrifice on the altar of party the constitution and government of their country. A late change is made in the administration of our government.

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A new choice of men is made by the people and a new order of things is about to take place. The government of Washington and Adams is no more. That government, under which as a people we have been happy, as a nation have acquired an honorable, a dignified name among the kingdoms of the earth, under which we have experienced to its full extent civil and religious liberty and have seen what is to be feared we shall never again see, wisdom and stability in our councils, is no more. The time may come when we shall long to return to our former situation when it will be out of our power; we shall then call to recollection the men we have displaced, the measures we have pursued, and while painfully observing a falling country look round in vain for a Washington, an Adams to protect us. But they are no more, and no protecting arm remains to steer us through the danger of the bursting storm. Some fortunate demagogue of power may rise on our ruins, on the ruins of our prostrate government, and erect a throne of the most despotic tyranny. May heaven shield us from so direful a calamity! I wish not to anticipate evil, to prejudice your minds against the present officers of our government. They may be good men. But of all parts of the world America has not to dread a more cruel destroyer than frequent change and revolution. The history and example of all nations is before us, they afford a solemn memento of avoidance against these dangerous shoals. We may soar on the pinions of visionary theory, we may be pleased with the idea of revolution, and wish for continual overturn, but sure we may be it rocks the base of liberty and foils the best attempts for good government.

But as an overturn in the administration of our government has taken place, it now becomes our duty, however much our feelings may have been opposed to the change, to submit to and support the choice. The greater part of us have believed the presiding officers of our government improper men. Time and experience only can determine.— Were we to judge only by what has happened since their accession to office we should be led to form an unfavorable opinion of that candor and impartiality which ought ever to mark the measures of public men and which we hoped would dignify our first magistrates. Men of unexceptionable character have been removed from office, and others, of whom it say no more the public thought highly improper have been put  
in their

their room. These things are mentioned with unfeigned sorrow; it is hoped they form no part of a general system, but are merely forced excrescences of the spirit of revolution. But of the true characters of men who have been and now are in office we cannot form a perfectly just idea. There was a time when what was printed was true, when facts came forth to the world supported by some authority. But the time now is when our nation abounds with printers who meanly praise and slander from habit, whose sole employment appears to be, to propagate the most simple, yet malicious falsehoods. Many things are said without foundation, and many perhaps too true. To believe or disbelieve all that is said would be weakness, to know what part to select as truth or falsehood is far beyond the capacity of man. To prejudge or be bent on determined opposition would not be a mark of candor or patriotism. It is not merely the name of Adams or Jefferson that can add happiness to America or create unity among her citizens, it is the conduct they pursue. Let us then form our opinion by that conduct. Let it not be said that the State of Connecticut, justly famed for its stability in the support of government, has refused its support for the same government on account of a disappointed election.—The love of our country does not consist in determined opposition to men of a certain description or strenuous adherence to those of another kind, but in a persevering rectitude of principle. The safety of America does not depend on *one* man.

That liberty which rests on an individual is but of short duration, that power usurped by him is equally frail. He might injure our national character, make infractions upon our constitution and pursue a line of conduct detrimental to our peace and happiness. But would you see your property taken by violence for oppressive taxation, your commerce destroyed, your government and constitution overturned, & laws made in subversion of morality, religion & the liberties of your country, and make no effort for redress? Not in the frantic fury of party, the inconsiderate rashness of an ungovernable mob, nor in a torrent of pusillanimous abuse, but in a manly, dignified, fixed resistance, founded on principle, void of a coward fear, breaking over the mounds of opposition and surmounting every obstacle imposed by an unjust and lawless infringement of power. Yes you would do it, and hurl that  
monster

monster from his throne however strongly entrenched by power and fortified by the vassals of greatness who should dare with uplifted hand to stab the honor of his country. If then our President follows the undeviating line of rectitude, he ought to be protected by every honest man, if he does not we sincerely hope the men who have helped to raise will help to level him with the commonality of mankind. But of men in office let us at all times judge with fairness and understanding. A thousand facts are related concerning them which at first strike us with indignation and astonishment, and the impulse of the moment would lead us to any measures however extreme for their destruction. But when an explanation is made, their conduct appears just and honorable. An unjust jealousy of our rulers is productive of the worst of consequences. A passive submission to usurpation of power is to the extent degrading. A fawning flattery of government and its measures, without reason, is contemptible, an unbounded abuse of the same without just foundation is unmanly and inhuman. To judge with candor is the duty of all. The truth is our rulers are like ourselves, subject to miscalculations, passion and prejudice, like us their judgment is fallible, like us at all times liable to err. No change or overturn can remedy these evils. Man will always be man. Nothing short of an almighty power can ameliorate his heart or perfect his understanding. I cannot conclude my remarks without a few observations on the comparative situation of the United States at the close of our revolution, with its present distracted situation. Look back to that period when Washington amid the shouts, congratulations and tears of thousands was called to preside over a vast republic composed of more than three millions of freemen, when with every mingled emotion of joy and adoration the air was filled with those ever memorable words "LONG LIVE GEORGE WASHINGTON," when the hearts of all overflowed with the most profound and unutterable gratitude, when the inhuman ravages of a destructive war had ceased to desolate a once land of happiness, when the war worn soldier and their veteran commanders freed from their mighty toil returned home to bless their happy families, when through an arduous struggle for every thing that is dear to man, through every varying change of fortune, from depression to elevation, from despair to success, from the most humbling defeats to the most glorious victory

victory we established an independence superior to the malignity of monarchy and founded on the immutable principles of right; then my friends was a season of delight of inexpressible felicity. No hated feuds existed to mar the charm of private life, no party spirit to disturb the mirthful glee of the domestic social circle, no horrid war of clashing opinions to wound the feelings of friendship, no curst ambition to molest mankind, no venomd envy to sap the merit of each honest deed, no fears for the destruction of our liberty, no abuse of private character and public virtue, no detraction of every created institution and no general disturbers of human felicity, but all were happy, all united, all loudly vocal in praise of liberty virtue and their country. These were the days of old and this the spirit of former times. They are gone they will return no more and a mourning county now feels and has yet to feel their loss in bitter remembrance. Now how astonishing the contrast! That gigantic monster PARTY FACTION with huge strides stalks this western world: at times retiring and slackening its pace, at times progressing with lawless fury and in all situations an awful picture of human weakness and human depravity. At its shrine private and public virtue is immolated—genius talents and patriotisms bow at its footstool and the human passions waked from their dormant mansions march forth with matchless ardor to the field of action.

Throughout united America nought is seen but marshalled battalions of electioneering furies leading on whole troops of depraved wretches to a contested election, nothing heard but the horrid din of overheated partizans and the spiteful venom of audacious faction. Distrust and jealousy have gone forth and inflamed the minds of men; man has become the enemy of man and the despoiler of his own species. Can we look on this scene for a moment, can we contrast our former happiness with our present situation and look to our country with indifference and unconcern? Shall we once more regain our former bliss, once more be blessed with the smiles of peace or are we doomed through progressive time to war with our own species? Oh let not the spirit of party drive you to madness, let it not devour the vitals of our country—it is the fiercest of furies, the worst of curses Omnipotence has left unbridled upon man—it will receive you into its bosom from which like the grave of mortality there is no return. Seek

truth

truth that ornament of every thing that pertains to man. Though clouds of party for a while bedim its lustre, though jealousy adds false colours to its purity and vice holds it forth to the world in derision, it must finally prevail, and like the sun in the heavens move on in its course unerring and rejoicing. But are you bent on party spirit, let me for a moment bring to your recollection the desolated fields of America: War once ravaged their fertility, the shepherd forsook his flock, the husbandman his plough, the thorn and the thistle sprang up where the beauties of nature were before dressed in their gayest attire and all wore the face of mourning and sorrow. Let me point you to Danbury the place of your nativity, where lie entombed the ashes of a Wooster, and others who fell in the cause of liberty, let me ask you if you have seen it razed to its foundation, an awful blaze consuming its buildings while clouds of smoke in sacred majesty ascended the skies, have you seen the temple of God in which some of you were wont to worship laid level with the earth, and the terrified inhabitants fleeing in every direction for safety, with no power to protect them from abuse or shield them from destruction? Yes these things you have seen and have learnt by sad experience the effects of foreign war. But how much more dreadful the effects of civil war—the perhaps remote yet certain consequence of party spirit—where all is one scene of disorder and tumult of dismay and terror, where all confidence is betrayed and society unhinged, where law is perverted and justice can down, where treachery and murder under friendship's mask destroy their victim and the blackness of night is but a cover for treason and death. Before then you are resolved on eternal enmity and discord, first look to the manes of your slaughtered countrymen, to the fields of battle where a Washington fought, a Montgomery bled and died, where gasping thousands yielded up their breath on the funeral pile of liberty, and behold those heroes of America smiling in the peaceful slumbers of eternity. It was for you they fought, for you they bled and died, to establish those rights which we this day commemorate. They call aloud for unity, they summon you from the regions of the happy, to protect the inheritance they left you unblemished. From a prospect beyond the veil of this world they view with anxious solicitude your conduct and with awful mandate will require at your hands those sacred deposits which their lives have sealed.

**Souled.** Will you answer the spirit of seventy six is no more, the genial fire of liberty is extinguished, that it is dwindled to a name, that government and despotism are inseparably connected and that party reigns on the ruins of freedom, government and religion? For the honor of man, of the present generation, of America at large and of every thing dear to humanity, let it not be said we are guilty of such base degeneracy. Behold humanity weeping over the errors of folly, patriotism consigning to oblivion the mistakes of good intentions, charity spreading her veil over a thousand wrongs and the situation of our country requiring unity and peace. Let us return to concord, let us return to happiness. The wilderness shall bud and blossom in the beauty of peace, and each sit under his own vine and figtree in the sweet smiles of content.—Let true morality and religion, true liberty and good government be the pride of your hearts. Cherish them as the foundation of all social all political happiness.—Protect them independent of forms, of names and idle professions—America may yet survive the lowering storm and yet become the pride and ornament of the human race.