

ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION

OF THE CITY OF ALBANY,

AT THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

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BY

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATION :

Fifty-nine years have this day elapsed, since, in the council chamber of the nation, the patriot fathers of our country first proclaimed to the world that these trans-atlantic colonies "were; and of right ought to be, free and independent states;" and, acquiescing in the necessity which denounced an eternal separation between them and the British people, resolved, thereafter, to hold them as they held the rest of mankind, "enemies in war, in peace friends."

Fifty-nine years have elapsed, since, at this very hour, on the balcony of the State Hall, at Philadelphia, the bold Declaration to which you have just listened, was first announced to the assembled citizens of that metropolis. The subjects of which-it treated, the body from which it emanated, the infinite issues suspended on its promulgation, rendered it the most important message ever communicated to mortals, since the annunciation of "peace on earth and good will to men." To that agitated and, wearied community, who had watched, from day to day, the long debates, the solemn deliberations and the foreboding fears, with which the assembled delegates of the nation had proceeded to their high resolve, it was almost like the manna in the wilderness, that revived the senses of the famishing children of Israel; it was like the fresh gush of the fountain, that flowed forth, in the desert, from the rock that Moses smote. On the free breath of a thousand lips, on the fresh pages of a thousand sheets, on the swift wings of the morning wind,

the solemn declaration flew along the extended lines and tented fields of our infant country, and carried with it joy and hope and reviving confidence and redeeming power.

At this distance of time, in this change of scene, it is difficult, nay it is almost impossible adequately to appreciate the feelings, which, at that eventful moment, swayed the breasts of those who held and sealed their nations destiny. Some appalling apprehensions no doubt shook their purpose, some fearful misgivings crept over their hearts, as they embarked their country upon the bloody sea of revolution, and, appealing to Heaven for the justice of her cause, solemnly pledged their lives their fortunes and their sacred honor to defend her.

Yet, in the midst of that anxious and deliberating assemblage, there was one, whose prophetic eye pierced the gloom of the surrounding scene, and foresaw that the results of all their suffering and sacrifice, would be ineffably and illimitably glorious.

Wrapt in the holy enthusiasm of the moment he wrote to a distant friend ;—“ The day is passed. The 4th of July, 1776 will be a memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe it will be celebrated by future generations as the great Anniversary Festival. *It ought* to be solemnized with pomp, shows, games, sports, bells, guns, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of the continent to the other, from this time henceforward forever.”

These sublime and prophetic sentiments were the offspring of no mental hallucination. They were the deep felt and resistless movings of that divinity, which speaks within great minds, on great occasions.

The hand that penned those prophetic words, has gone to moulder among the clods of the valley ; the spirit that glowed with those lofty sentiments, has passed beyond that silent bourne, whence “no traveller returns.” But, thanks be to God, there yet lives in his country, a generation not unmind-

ful of the day and the men who made it memorable. There are, scattered over this broad continent, thirteen millions of grateful freemen, who, since the rising of yonder sun, have commingled their rejoicings at the return of this "great Anniversary Festival," and have solemnized it with all those public expressions of gladness, that become a patriotic, enlightened and moral people. From the crowded city and the smiling village, from the flowry vale and the far woodland, from hill and plain and mountain and lake, from ocean to ocean afar, the glad acclaim of free hearts has gone up to the answering skies, in long and loud and repeated anthems. And Oh, if the blessed tenants of that eternal world, where revolutions spread not their ravages and triumphs cease not forever, take cognizance of the doings of the dwellers upon earth, with what ineffable delight, with what benignant satisfaction must that immortal patriot bend from his cerulean throne, in the skies, to witness, to-day, the prosperity and glory of his country, and the fulfilment of his long-remembered predictions.

It will scarcely be expected that, among the numerous topics which press upon the attention on this interesting occasion, a large space shall be allotted to the perilous and bloody conflict by which American liberty was achieved. The interesting story has been often told. Its thrilling incidents have been familiarized to the rising generation, by faithful history, by spirit-stirring eloquence and by honest, plain and truth telling tradition. The multitude of our country's wrongs, the magnitude of her dangers and the brilliancy of her exploits, have formed the first lesson that beguiled the ear of childhood, the last admonition that trembled on the lips of dying age. The principles and the truth they conveyed have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, and we would sooner blast the green sod that shelters the grave of paternal love, than slight the lessons of those sires, whose spirits "rule us from their urn."

I cannot, however, omit to observe, that in recurring to the painful sufferings of our gallant soldiery and the generous sacrifices of our impoverished people, as a part of the priceless boon with which American liberty was purchased, the mind is arrested by many an act of noble female daring, many an example of heroic maternal fortitude, which hallow the cause to which they were devoted, and challenge the admiration of a grateful posterity. When time shall have cast its lustre on our earlier history, and the ripened literature of our country shall imitate the examples of Grecian and Roman genius, some new Homer or Virgil will arise, to sing the deeds of our glorious revolution, and raise to honorable immortality, the names of our own Cornelias, Volumnias and Virginias.

The philosophic mind will also, pause to admire another circumstance, peculiar to those wonderful times, and characteristic of those patriotic men, in whose history the world will ever find abundance of admonition and example. I allude to the astonishing facility with which the nation was reduced, from a state of universal revolution, to a state of universal quiet and order. Other nations have been esteemed fortunate, if, on the conclusion of protracted wars, they have been able to disband their armies, by slow degrees, by the employment of largesses and donations of lands and governments, without the occurrence of domestic dissensions, rapine and bloodshed. Among the ancient nations the practice was common, of appropriating to their disbanded soldiery, rich and populous provinces in their own dominions,—of which they were permitted to take possession, by open violence, as a pretended reward of their valor, but in reality, as a bribe for the peace and safety of the country.

Nor was this practice confined to new and unsettled governments, where the throne was imperfectly established, or the sceptre of the laws was weak. Even in the Roman Empire, after the battle of Phillippi, the immortal

Mantuan Bard, whose sweet singing muse had won the favor of the emperor Augustus and gilded even the "golden age," was driven by a brutal soldier, at the hazard of his life, from that farm which he had decorated with a poet's taste, and consecrated as the theme of some of his most admired pastorals.

Such was not the spectacle presented to mankind, when the tocsin of war was hushed and the song of peace broke forth over these revolutionizing colonies. That gallant continental band, who, through a seven year's conflict, had braved every danger and endured every hardship, hailed with delight the joyful tidings of peace, and returned, in quietness, to the condition and pursuits of private life, happy,—that though every thing else had been sacrificed, their country, their beloved country was free. True, they had wasted the best years of their lives, without pay and without booty; they had lost the best portion of their health in disastrous service, at inclement seasons; they had left, here and there, a mangled limb on the bloody battle field, and had gained some enduring scars where their country's foes were vanquished: they had scattered the memorials of their personal poverty and want, in fortresses captured, in battles won, in cities saved from conflagration, and in a country redeemed from bondage;—but the love of law, of order and of good government still triumphed in their bosoms; they still respected the rights of persons and of property, and were as ready to crush the monster anarchy at home, as they had been to repel a foreign tyrant from their shores.—Though they had moistened the green fields of their country with their undressed wounds; though they had reddened with their blood the frozen hubs, that gashed their bare feet on the winter's march; though they had bivouacked, at night, on the snowy earth, without a blanket or a tent to shield them from the blast; though they had pined in hunger, when the rags that fluttered on their backs were more valuable, to

purchase a morning's meal, than the *Paper rags* with which their country had rewarded their services;—yet their souls stood erect in the dignity of freedom, spurning the meanness of lawless violence, conscious of the rectitude of the cause in which they suffered, and resolved to do nothing incompatible with the great principles of right and justice, on which their country's claim to freedom and independence was founded.

The patriot of future times, will love to pause and linger on the spot, where, for the first and only time, the chivalry of America *grounded their arms*,—not to a foreign foe, nor to a domestic conquerer, but the peace and glory of that country which their valor had redeemed, and which their magnanimity alone could preserve. He will behold them, voluntarily abandoning a profession their achievements had ennobled, returning to pursuits their habits had rendered irksome, and vainly striving to repair the fortunes their patriotism had dissipated, by toilsome industry and slow accumulation. Perhaps he will observe some natural tears coursing down their manly cheeks, as the war worn veterans turn from their comrades in toil and glory, and, with more than a poet's feeling, bid farewell, a “long farewell” to all the

“Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war.”

When the tempest-beaten mariner has outrode the long storm at sea; when the clouds disperse from the heavens and the sun breaks forth on his fiery track, giving promise of a glorious morrow, and a calm and prosperous voyage; then he trims anew his shattered sails, refits his gallant ship, and, calculating his distances, and setting his course, sings the merry song of home, and dreams of his little ones, safe by the far fireside, where no tempests beat, and no dashing waves drive the vessel awreck.

But, after the long storm of war and revolution had ended, and the gallant heroes of America beheld their ship of state

riding proudly on a tranquil sea, the sun of peace shining gloriously around her, and the winds of prosperity filling her sails, alas, there was no song of home heard upon her deck; her tempest beaten mariners could dream of no peaceful fire-sides, unswept by the gale; the same terrible storm that had driven their barque on the troubled sea of revolution, had too often visited their defenceless dwellings with desolation, and driven their families, unprotected upon the world, to seek a scanty subsistence, as chance or charity might offer. Such, are some of the perils, sufferings and sacrifices which our forefathers encountered in laying the foundations of that national liberty, which, though it left them poor indeed, was destined to cover their posterity, to the latest generation, with benefits and glories surpassing the comprehension of the finite mind. Enough will it be for their immortal renown, that an impartial world shall record of them, that in their adversity they knew no despair, in their prosperity no elevation; that, having redeemed a nation by their valor, they blessed mankind by their example, having shaken a world by their arms, they adorned it with their virtues, and filled it with tears by their death.

To these high and ennobling qualities in the character of our revolutionary heroes, may be attributed the singular success which crowned their struggle for independence, in distinction from those thousand bloody efforts, which, in other times and other nations, have begun in ambition and ended in tyranny. Mistaken, however, is the man, who supposes that the acknowledgement of the independence of the colonies, by the King of Great Britain, was the consummation of that system of rational civil liberty, which has been so long the wonder and the blessing of the trans-atlantic world;—that, on the bursting forth of the sun of peace in this western hemisphere, the native tree of liberty sprang up spontaneously in the soil, and matured and bore fruit, like those germinating plants of spring, that shoot, and blossom and cast their seed, in a single season.

The convulsive throes of the nation had cast off the fetters of a foreign power, had dissolved the connection between the old and the new world, and had given to the conquerors the undisputed possession of thirteen independent states. But it had done more. It had severed the connection between the past and the future; it had dissolved the relations between former opinions and those that were to come, between ancient institutions and modern, between old governments and new. It had given to the patriots of the revolution the possession, as it were, of a new province in the moral world; it had cast upon them the responsibility of cultivating and improving an unexplored territory in the political hemisphere. Into this wilderness domain, without a chart or a guide, worn down by a long war, pinched by poverty, oppressed by the jeers of surrounding nations, and threatened with the invasions of savage foes, they were about to enter, for the first time,—to clear away the rubbish of prejudice, to open the virgin soil to the seeds of virtue, to mark the first lines of social order, to clear away the channels of religious freedom, to erect new forms of government, and to build new bulwarks of national liberty.—Here they were to commence the establishment of that empire of freedom, which, throughout all the past, had found no prototype—throughout all the future was to widen and strengthen, till the whole earth was covered with its benefits.

We are told by the historian, that the great discoverer, who first conceived the idea of a new world beyond the western wave,—who toiled for near fifteen years in traveling from court to court, to dispel the prejudices, to enlighten the ignorance, and to excite the enterprise of stupid princes and their more stupid subjects,—who, at last, embarked with his little convoy, and, after a painful and protracted voyage, arrived in sight of the object of all his hopes, and refreshed his senses with the spicy gales and green groves of his own

“hesperian isles,”—we are told that even he, who had given a new empire to Castile and Leon, a new world to civilized man, found the difficulties attending the settlement of his discovered realm so great, that he scarcely planted on it a single flourishing colony, that he left not on it a single enduring memorial, and that he died, far away from its shores, poor and unfriended in his native land.

The pages of history also inform us, that the little but gallant band of pilgrim fathers, who, driven from their homes by the fires of persecution, embarked from the port of Leyden in the good ship *May-Flower*,—who, after months of buffeting in the northern seas, at last reached their long-sought asylum, on the rocky coast of Plymouth;—we are told that even they, the fathers and pioneers of New England’s greatness, found the difficulties of subduing the wilderness so numerous, the cold of the winter so severe, and the inroads of the savages so fatal, that nearly their whole number perished, with hunger, or disease or violence, before a comfortable settlement was effected, or any of the joys of that country, whose blessings they were unfolding, began to be realized.

Not unlike to the history of their misfortunes, was the lot of many of the political adventurers, who embarked their destiny in the struggle for American independence. Of their number, some perished on the battle field, some died of disease, some were carried away captive into foreign lands; and when at last, the long war was ended, and the remaining few were cheered with the sound and sight of that liberty which had been so long the idol of their dreams and the object of their toil, alas! they found they had reached only the shadow of their hopes, they had arrived only at the vestibule of the temple of freedom.

Their country was indeed disenthralled, but her treasury was exhausted, her credit was impaired, her soil was impoverished, her commerce blasted, her entire energies palsied

or destroyed by the blighting hand of war. The bands of the confederation were breaking loose, the clashing States were rushing madly apart, the arm of the General Government was becoming daily more feeble, the empire of the laws was giving way, the elements of society seemed tending back to their original discord and anarchy.

Ah! who can tell how many a noble heart fainted in view of all these appalling obstacles! Who can tell how many a war-worn veteran sunk hopeless into the grave, ere the soil he had labored to redeem, brought forth its plenteous harvest of peace and prosperity!

Yet, thanks to Heaven, there were brave spirits remaining, whose unconquered patriotism triumphed over every obstacle,—whose resistless genius penetrated and subdued the political wilderness, and made the desert bud and blossom as the rose. They planted in the virgin earth the living seeds of national greatness; they upreared on the free soil, the vast frame-work of the Government; they struck out the golden links of that mighty chain, that was to bind together the States of the Union; they planted those thousand institutions of social and religious liberty, which still continue to adorn and bless the nation, and among which, none is more grand, permanent and consistently beautiful than the present constitution of the United States.

It was not to be expected, however, that the establishment, even in this western hemisphere, of a new and resplendent system of popular government, would long be inoperative on the rest of the nations. The wheel of revolution, which began to turn on this side of the Atlantic, though for a while it moved on with regularity, and was arrested when the public good required it, could not long be controlled.—Crossing the broad ocean, it re-commenced its rotations among the monarchies of Europe, with a fearful and gigantic power. Impelled by the passions and prejudices of nations, just aroused to a sense of their wrongs and a con-

sciousness of their might, its revolving frame whirled forward with a momentum which no prudence could anticipate, and no power arrest, till in its disastrous track, it left not only thrones subverted and hierarchies crushed, but provinces laid waste and empires ruined.

Such, however, are the legitimate consequences of smothering the free energies of nations by a long course of oppression and misrule. Sooner or later, the accumulated elements of corruption and crime, gathering force, like those hidden fires, sometimes pent up in the bosom of the earth, must burst forth upon the world with the resistless fury of the desolating volcano.

Happily, in our own fair land, the influence of free principles upon the people, in their practical application to the purposes of government, proved only the source of unmingled happiness and increasing prosperity. Through more than half a century of varied vicissitudes among other nations, the experiment of a republican representative government, founded on the will of the people, and effectually securing the rights of man, has been here thoroughly tested and triumphantly sustained. In despite of the cold predictions of foreign diplomatists, in despite of the blighting influence of distant but jealous despotisms, in despite of the lying representations of vagrant journalists—sent here to prowl about our country, and cater, among the petty errors and paltry peculiarities of our people, for the morbid appetites of their king-serving and scandal-loving masters,—in despite of each and all of these, from first to last, in peace and in war, over her whole territory, revolutionized America has “gone on and prospered;” and at this moment exhibits more of vigorous enterprise, more of intellectual cultivation, more of physical strength, than any other equal portion of this inhabited globe, which the sun in his circuit visits. I use not the language of vain-glorying or of gasconade. Let him who doubts the truth of the statement, cast his eye over

this teeming realm, from the ocean on the east, to the distant but not unexplored Rocky mountains on the west. Let him mark its busy marts, its fertile fields, its commerce-covered lakes, and its fast-fading forests. Let him tell over the States of our glorious Union. Let him survey their gorgeous capitals, their stately halls of legislation, their academic groves, their solemn temples of religion, their numberless, secluded and quiet, but wonder-working schools.

Let him visit our fortresses on the frontier, or our bulwarks on the seaboard, where our gallant soldiery, few but firm, with bold hearts and sinewy arms, stand prepared to repel invasion from abroad, or to suppress insurrection at home. Let him follow the white canvass of our ships, which, over every sea, scatters the rich produce of our soil, or bears aloft the star-spangled banner to the breeze. Let him mark the ceaseless tide of emigration, which, from the oppressed lands of the old world, is emptying into this great "City of Refuge," the pilgrims of every creed and the exiles of every clime,—or which, flowing out from the bosom of our own New England, is rolling on to the west, in native streams, "as broad, as deep and as pure as the rivers whose banks they go to fertilize." Let him trace out our great channels of internal communication, bearing on their bosom the descending products of a mighty continent, or conveying into the far interior the costly merchandize of unnumbered nations.

Tell him that these, all these, are but a few of the many evidences of national greatness and glory which press upon the eye of the observer to-day, and which the current of time is multiplying in the future, with a rapidity that distances competition, and baffles all comparison, save in the past.

We have sometimes witnessed the astonishing achievements accomplished by a single mind, when impelled by powerful motives, and directed to a mighty object. In such an exhibition, every thought and feeling and wish seemed to

be absorbed in a single purpose, and to flow in a single channel. The mind and heart and frame were swayed by a common impulse. All the elements of human nature seemed to be cast, as it were, into a burning crucible, where the mingling agents combined to aid each other's powers, and to heighten the grand result. We have seen, and can comprehend the effects of such an exhibition, in a single case. But, when the minds of a whole community are thus engaged; when the energies of twenty-four extended States are thus directed; when the entire thoughts, feelings and strength of a mighty republic are thus swayed, by a common impulse, towards the accomplishment of some great, good and glorious object, who can calculate the benefits, who shall measure the results of their action?

Such is the spectacle presented by a glance at this active, energetic, diversified, all-potent, and wonder-working people!—who shall give bounds to the triumphs of their enterprise? who shall foretell the achievements of their arts?—who shall say, to the rolling tide of their prosperity, “thus far shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”

Grateful and cheering is the prospect, in connection with the spreading power and wealth of our country, of the rapid diffusion over the whole land, of that useful knowledge which must ever be the pride and glory of a free people, and the only permanent safeguard of national liberty. The general cultivation of the public mind, the elevation of the great mass to a just conception of their rights, and a correct appreciation of their power, is a novel and ennobling feature in the character of the present age. It is this distinguishing trait that elevates our country above every nation upon earth, but more particularly, above those Republics of former times, which after having ascended high on the hill of science, and plucked many deathless garlands from the temple of fame, suddenly disappeared from the world and left only a name behind

them. The general diffusion of knowledge among the people, seems not to have come within the means, nor to have entered into the conception of even the most refined nations of antiquity. Their brilliant exhibitions of art, their dazzling examples of genius, stand only as solitary lights, shining amidst the more than cimmerian darkness that surrounds them. They are left, like lonely, but lovely trees, spreading their foliage and casting their fragrance on the desert waste of ages. They stand, like lurid beacon-lights, on the dark coast of time, pointing the weary traveller, not to the haven of peace or the home of prosperity, but to the shoals where glory was wrecked, and greatness perished forever.

The intelligent observer of history needs no voice from the sepulchral vaults of the pyramids, to tell him that the builders of those time-defying monuments, were buried in more than their Egyptian darkness. The traveller among the ruins of Greece, needs not the shades of Themistocles or Aristides, to inform him, that the idle throngs, that deified them to-day, and ostracised them on the morrow, were illumined by none of the beams that played around the Parthenon and the Areopagus.

The thoughtless multitudes, who wept at the eloquence of Demosthenes, at eve, and smiled at the gold of Philip, in the morning, were as ignorant and as fickle, as the gay populace of that modern Athens, the crowds of which have shouted "*vive la Republic,*" in one breath, and "*vive le Roi,*" in the next—have cried "*vive Napolcon,*" to-day, and "*vive Louis Phillipe,*" on the morrow; and who will be as ready to cry "*vive le Beelzebub,*" on some other occasion, should passion or interest suggest it.

The light of knowledge, like the light of the sun, is most cheering and salutary when most equally diffused. The genial rays of the "king of day," radiate not alone through the ambient air; they gleam and dilate over the earth; they lighten along the sea; they linger on the shining hill-side,

and penetrate the deep valley; they visit the windows of the lowly cottage, and flash across the turrets of the towering palace. Thus, it is, they come to man "with healing in their beams," thus it is, they shine but to enlighten and warm but to vivify. But, when their radiant powers are contracted and condensed, when they cease to be diffused, and are concentrated into force, then, they beam but to dazzle, and kindle only to consume; then they dry up rivers into deserts, and blooming fields into scorching wastes, and arid sands.

Let him that would enoble and bless his species, by mental cultivation, unfold the great book of nature, and learn from it; let him look abroad into the visible universe, and get wisdom from the ways of God. As is the light of the sun, so is the light of the mind.

The earth drinks not the morning dew, the burning plain absorbs not the summer shower, the gray-grown turret receives not the shining moon with such welcome zest, with such refreshed sense, with such added grace, as the children of men yield to the renovating influences of intellectual cultivation:—

" For man loves knowledge, and the beams of Truth
 " More welcome touch his understanding's eye,
 " Than all the blandishments of taste his tongue,
 " Than all of sound his ear."

Proudly for myself, proudly for my country do I here advert to the rise and progress, to the achievements and prospects of that noble institution, whose members are many of them before me, the living illustrations of its benign influence, in diffusing all that elevates and refines the character of man. Blending its generous efforts with the enlightened spirit of the age, and with the unshackled genius of our government, it has already put in play a spring, in the moral world, which is scattering more intellectual light than was ever dreamed of by the philosophy of ancient days. The cumulative treasures of useful and practical information, thrown weekly, upon

your tables, from every part of this vast republic, and indeed of the earth, presents a clearer and fuller view of science, the arts and the world, and is exercising a mightier influence upon mankind, than all the garnered lore, that slept and perished in the vaults of the Alexandrine Library.

The pride and the selfishness of the ancient world, led them to hoarde and to bury their learning, as the miser does his gold, or as the modern Turk, does his feminine beauty and virtue. The learned and profound treatises of Aristotle were consigned only to the diamond casket of the conquering son of Philip; the keys of the famous Egyptian library, were entrusted only to the keeping of their princely founders, the Ptolemies; the literature and science of the middle ages, gleamed not beyond the vaults of the cloister; and even the book of eternal life, was reserved for the eye of temporal potentates, or bigoted hierarchs.

But the wisdom and the benevolence of modern times, have reversed the order of things. That mighty engine of thought, a free press, has surrounded the globe with a moral and intellectual atmosphere, which, like the air of Heaven, encircles and refreshes, vivifies and supports the elements of mental greatness, wherever, beneath the sun, they may chance to spring into being. To diffuse, and to purify this atmosphere, to increase its volume, to regulate its motions, and to direct its undulations, is the elevated object of your institution.

Did the time permit, the task would be a grateful one, to trace more minutely, its history, and to exhibit, in less figurative terms, its actual operations upon the welfare of society and the destinies of our common country. But 'tis time our lengthened task were done.

The light of knowledge and the light of liberty are kindred flames, kindled at the same celestial altar-fire. They are supported by the same ethereal aliment, and watched by the same vestal purity. The sacrilegious hand that would

extinguish the one, must quench the more than Promethean heat of the other. United they were born—together they must expire. Our fathers caught these blended lights from the skies, and relumed them on this trans-atlantic shore. Long did they watch their rising flames—kindling and widening and brightening, till the far nations began to startle at their lustre, and the darkness of the earth faded away before their beams. Ever be it the grateful task of their children, to guard and to feed the fountain from which their effulgence issues. Long be it their happy lot, to walk in the beams of their glory, till the night of time shall settle upon the world, and the lights of liberty and knowledge shall be lost in the blaze of eternity.