



J. J. PRINGLE'S

Oration.

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED IN

ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH,

BEFORE THE INHABITANTS OF

CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA,

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1800.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY APPOINTMENT OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION SOCIETY,

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THAT SOCIETY,

AND ALSO OF THE

South-Carolina State Society of Cincinnati.

Quæ enim res unquam (proh sancte Jupiter!) non modò (in hac terra sed in omnibus terris est gesta major? quæ gloriosior quæ commendatior hominum memoriæ sempiternæ?" CICERO. Phillip. 2.

By JOHN J. PRINGLE,

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AND ATTORNEY GENERAL OF SOUTH-CAROLINA.

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ORATION.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT was the remark of a celebrated Roman historian,* made perhaps too much in the spirit of detraction, that the exploits of the Athenians, sufficiently grand and noble in themselves, were much exaggerated by fame; and that inasmuch as Athens produced writers of extraordinary genius, the achievements of her citizens were renowned throughout the world, as the most glorious and exemplary; and the valor of those who performed them, were exalted proportionately to the talents and address of those who recounted them.

Although it is very presumable, that our country, the United States, will not be destitute of writers and orators, capable of ranking with those of Athens, at the most brilliant periods of its literary eminence, yet we need not be apprehensive

* Sallust. in Bell. Catil.

henfive, that any fuch remark as has been premifed, will ever derogate from the wife counfels and heroic actions, which contributed to the acquisition and eftablifhment of the independence and fovereignty of the United States, of which we now celebrate the twenty-fourth anniversary. In the early ages, when Athens, with the other Grecian ftates, infpirited by the fervid love of liberty, and actuated by the generous impulses of patriotifm, performed thofe actions, which have been borne along the tide of time, down to us, with fuch effulgent and unfading glory; the means of committing them to co-eval records were flow and uncommon; they could not be made to pafs as it were under the immediate review of co-temporary nations, with whom, if but a little remote, there was little or no communication.

Much muft, therefore, have been neceffarily left to uncertain tradition. Hence fiction had greater temptation and latitude to magnify and embellifh, with lefs poffibility of detection. At the advanced æra of the American revolution, the improvements in the arts of printing and navigation, had, in a manner, approximated and united the moft diftant parts of the globe; and intelligence of national tranfactions, was wafted from one to the other hemisphere on the wings of the wind. France, Spain, and Holland, three of the moft conspicuous powers of Europe, taking an active part in the war, which terminated in the independence of the United States, contributed to the extenfive and accurate publicity of the

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the counsels and actions, which led to and attended that important event. These have been committed to historic records, with unalterable fidelity. So known, so attested, and so recorded, they must ensure the admiration and applause of future ages, in as high a degree as of the present age. The two very respectable societies, who concurred in celebrating, by an annual appropriate oration, this glorious event, many of whose members contributed materially to it, in the tented field, and in the public counsels, did not aim, by such an oration, to blazon it by brilliant flourishes of rhetoric, or captivating strokes of eloquence; its intrinsic merits render this an unnecessary, a superfluous undertaking. They were induced to it by more laudable views. They must have conceived, that such a discourse, on such a theme, on such a day, and to such an audience, as the present, might tend to fan the flame of patriotism, which had glowed in the breasts, and prompted the meritorious actions of those distinguished champions of the revolution; who were yet living, and claim of them a consistent continuance of services, as often as occasions might require—that it might tend to excite a grateful zeal for the public welfare in those of our fellow citizens, whom immature age, or subsequent adoption, had precluded from co-operating to the happy event, of which they enjoy, and their posterity will enjoy the benefits—that it might tend to render the rising generation emulous of that fair fame, and truly ennobling distinction, which result from impor-

tant services rendered to one's country—that it might tend to prevent national degeneracy, by fostering a generous national pride.

* It was a custom of one of the most magnanimous nations in the world, to place in the vestibules of their houses, the statues of the most illustrious of their ancestors, that in beholding, as oft as they passed them, their minds might be set on fire to excel them; and that the excited reminiscence of their great services, might kindle in their own generous hearts, a flame that nothing could extinguish, but the equalling them in merit and glory. If mute marble, inanimate effigies, could produce such effects, what might not be expected from great events, expressively delineated by the pen of the historian, or conveyed to the heart, in the glowing language of the orator? The productions of their native poets, historians, and orators, rehearsed and pronounced to the Grecians, in their periodical and solemn assemblies, vivified and invigorated that ardent patriotism, which was the energetic spring of so many disinterested and heroic enterprises.

In taking but a cursory and rapid view of the prominent and distinguishing features of the American revolution, it may be allowed, in every fair and just regard, to challenge the pre-eminence over that of every other recorded in the annals of nations. No revolution ever originated in causes and motives more pure, just, and honorable—ever, in the same space of time, produced a greater number of excellent patriots;
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* Vid. Sall. in Bell. Jugurth.

more persons distinguished for military and political genius and talents—ever exhibited a greater display of wise counsels and heroic actions—more active valor, and passive fortitude—a more general co-operation of people of every class for the public good—ever effected more benefits with fewer evils—more extensive and improvable national and individual felicity.

It may not be improper to observe, that the theatre on which these bright scenes have been unfolded, the territories of the United States, are favored regions, where the fell monster, despotism, has never yet been known to inhabit—where the tutelary goddess of the country, the guardian genius of the place, seems ever to have been sacred liberty—here she seems to have fixed her peculiar, her beloved abode. Every region of the old, every other part of the new hemisphere, at some period or other, has groaned, or does groan, under the scorpion scourge of tyranny. At the earliest discovery of this continent, and it is reasonably to be presumed ever before, the various aboriginal tribes, or nations, who were spread over it, from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, lived in a state of society which abridged but few of their natural rights. In their councils, the most wise and experienced were chosen to preside; the warrior of the most signal valor and conduct was their leader in the field. The sentiments of freedom were so congenial with their souls, that no blandishments, or terrors, could ever bring them to a state of servitude.

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To these happy regions, where no vestiges were ever discernable of the tyranny, or of the slavery of man, the first colonists emigrated from a free, although a monarchical state of Europe, and emigrated about the time, when regal attempts at arbitrary power, and the resistance of the parliament and people to them, had educed the most rational and fervent sentiments of the rights of man, and inveterate abhorrence of despotism. The spirit of freedom, which they brought with them, could not fail to be transmitted to their progeny, in a land where it not only ever existed, but where every surrounding object, animate and inanimate, was calculated to nurture and increase it. No adventitious circumstances arose, to prevent it from prevailing, with the same influence, in the hearts of those resolute adventurers from other parts of Europe, who resorted hither from time to time, in the spirit of the Grecian emigrant chief,* where fortune kinder than their parent state, conducted them, and where they could enjoy that liberty and happiness which she denied to them. North America, thus peopled, and blessed with infinite natural advantages of soil, climate and situation, under the auspices of freedom and industry, and the protecting wings of the mother country, in the space of less than two centuries, attained to a pitch of affluence and population which astonished the rest of the world. Among such a people, equally exempt from the insolence of riches, and the abjectness of poverty, no such inequality

* Horat. Carm. 7. Lib. 1.

inequality of condition or station existed, as could promote a dependant, or servile spirit.— In no country, did ever more general happiness, and general liberty prevail; when the parent state disclosed a disposition to subvert these, and substitute a system of unmerited and intolerable oppression. The king and parliament of Great-Britain endeavoured to levy taxes in the colonies without their consent, and asserted the right of binding them in all cases whatsoever, contrary to the rights to which they were entitled by nature, the British constitution, by charter and usage. Fortunately at this period, the people of the colonies were too enlightened as to their rights, and too jealous and tenacious of them, passively to submit to the invasion of them. The enervating luxury and vices of old and opulent societies, had not yet infected this hardy and industrious people. They cherished the manly spirit of defending their rights and privileges, at every hazard of life and fortune. From New-Hampshire to Georgia, they rose in opposition, to the arbitrary attempts of Great-Britain. Nobly discarding all local jealousies and particular views of interest, they made it a common cause; and concurred in the generous resolution, to sacrifice their present ease for honorable perils, and to bury themselves beneath the ruins of their country, rather than to survive the destruction of their freedom. Happy was it, that liberty attacked, could thus readily rally under its banners the people of so many distinct provinces; happy that it was at a time, when

no causes of rivalry and difference had prevailed sufficiently among them, to enable British despotism to obtain footing, and to rule by dividing them. Did ever any people, simultaneously rising in resistance, against the oppressive measures of government, discover more moderation, union, order, and system, than the people of America? Their resentments did not burst forth like the long pent up, struggling fires of a volcano, which in their explosion cast on every side a blasting lava. Their just and glorious cause was never sullied by any rabble-like, barbarous, brutal excesses, which make revolutions too often deplorable, and to be deprecated;

“ And make us, rather bear the ills we have
 “ Than fly to others that we know not of.”

SHAKESPEARE.

It was reserved to the sober minded, reflecting people of America, to exhibit to the world, the novel, extraordinary, & interesting spectacle, of an orderly, regular, and governmental resistance of one part, to another part of a great nation. With a noble and implicit confidence, which was never retracted, and never abused, they committed the vindication of their inestimable rights to the delegates, whom they elected to meet in the general Congress. Was there ever a public body, in the best established, and the most experienced government, who surpassed them in foresight, wisdom, disinterestedness, and firmness? There was scarcely an individual
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among them, who as to all, or most of these qualities, did not justify the choice of his constituents.

“ Through what variety of untry'd matter,

“ Through what new scenes and changes must they pass.”

In this novel, trying, perplexing, and perilous situation, lawyers, physicians, merchants, and planters, prove themselves to be politicians of great reach and sound judgment, statesmen of grand conceptions and elevated views, as well as patriots of uncorruptible integrity. Their minds deeply affected by the important subjects of their deliberations; exalted to enthusiasm by the magnitude of the objects committed to them, develop abilities and talents, which in ordinary times, and without such excitements, might have continued dormant. When the native faculties and energies of the soul are powerfully stimulated, and impelled by great and extraordinary occasions, men are very apt to display astonishing valor, firmness, and eloquence.

Were the rights of any people ever traced to their source in nature and reason, and defended upon principles of positive constitution and law, with more acute and profound reasoning, expounded with more perspicuity, and enforced with more pathos and energy, than those of the people of America by Congress? Under the difficult, dangerous, and embarrassing circumstances, which occupied their attention, were there ever measures planned with more wisdom, and supported with more firmness, than

all their measures? * Let the public declaration, and impartial judgment, of one of the ablest statesmen and greatest orators the world ever produced attest their merits. “When, said he, your lordships have perused the papers transmitted to us from America—when you consider the dignity, firmness, and wisdom with which the Americans have acted, you cannot but respect their cause. History has been my favourite study, and in the celebrated writings of antiquity, I have often admired the patriotism of Greece and Rome; but I must declare, and avow, that in the master states of the world, I know not the people, or senate, who, under such a complication of difficult circumstances, can stand in preference to the general Congress at Philadelphia. I trust, that it is obvious, that all attempts to impose servitude upon such men, to establish despotism over such a mighty continental nation, must be vain, must be fatal.”

The succeeding Congress composed mostly of the same members, did not fall short of the character of the preceding; or in any manner falter in the noble career they traced. Provoked, yet placable, they reiterate the most reasonable petitions, and just remonstrances, to their inflexible oppressors, who, instead of granting a redress of grievances, prepare the way for military coercion, and military resistance, by a series of acts of parliament, as unjust in their principle, as cruel in their operation.

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* Lord Chatham in his speech in the House of Lords, 20th January, 1775.

It was not until after the battles of Lexington and Bunker's Hill, in both of which the British were the aggressors, & until America was inevitably reduced to the alternative of absolute and unconditional submission, that Congress resorted to arms and resistance by open force. Manifesting to the world the justice of their cause, and rectitude of their views, "we fight," they declared, "not for glory or conquest; we exhibit to mankind, the remarkable spectacle of a people attacked by unprovoked enemies. In our native land, in defence of freedom, for the protection of our property, acquired by the honest industry of our forefathers, and our own, against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms, and shall lay them down, when hostilities have ceased on the part of the aggressors, and the danger shall be removed, and not before." It is under circumstances like these, that noble, generous minds, and free spirits, expanding with a sublimating enthusiasm, rise superior to all considerations of interest, danger, or ease; with such minds there can be no hesitation, when the choice is between death and slavery, ruin or dishonor. Astonished Europe beheld a new people, emerging into national consequence, possessing a lively sense of the value of freedom, with vast energy to defend it at every hazard, against one of the most brave, opulent, and powerful monarchies of the world. All the virtuous and generous part of mankind approved their cause, admired their spirit, and wished success to their struggles. When they

entered upon the contest, how dubious was the issue? Yet they entered upon it with minds erect and undaunted.

The interest and pride of Great-Britain, deeply affected, and vehemently roused, prompt her to rack every resource, and employ her whole strength for their subjugation. Numerous troops, including German mercenaries, and large fleets, are sent out, commanded by the most able and experienced admirals and generals, supplied with all the instruments and munitions requisite for war, to carry into execution, plans fraught with blood and desolation, and every way calculated to inspire and spread dismay and terror. Who were to be opposed to these formidable bands, and to these redoubtable commanders, arrayed in all the pomp of war, emboldened by confidence in military discipline, and completely versed in tactics? They were to be opposed by men, drawn hastily from all the peaceful occupations of life, unaccustomed to the dangers of the field, and to the restraints of military duty; badly supplied with arms and warlike equipage, but commanded in chief, by thee, O WASHINGTON, paragon of heroes! and animated by thy enthusiastic spirit, O holy LIBERTY! by that same spirit, under whose invigorating impulses, in ancient times, small bands of Grecians discomfited the numerous hosts of the mighty Persian monarch at Salamis, Marathon, and Plateæ—in more modern times, the Swiss peasantry defeated the Austrians at Sampach and Lauten, and Charles the Bold of Burgundy

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at Morat ; and the Dutch burghers gained their independence in despite of the most powerful monarch of Europe. To the awful and impressive lessons which these victories held out, the independence of America has added another, to rulers, to beware how they trample on the sacred rights of the people, and to the people, to rise up against oppression, since "they can never want the means, if they do not want the spirit to be free," especially in these enlightened times, when the prevalence of sound philosophy, and the general diffusion of science, has so considerably dispelled that ignorance and superstition, which were the most efficacious aids of despotism.

It was nearly about the time, when General and Admiral Howe arrived in the state of New-York, with a powerful fleet and army, that Congress gave that most signal proof of their enlarged views, wonderful decision, and impregnable firmness, by solemnly ordaining and declaring, "that these colonies were, and of right ought to be INDEPENDENT STATES, and that they were absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that they had full power to do all things which independent states ought to do." To this measure, as transcendent in wisdom, foresight, and policy, as in boldness, decision, and dignity, the emphatic words of the Roman orator appear justly applicable ; what has there been ever performed, O Holy Supreme, upon the whole face of the earth, greater, what more glorious, and what more worthy to be consecrated

crated to the eternal remembrance of mankind? To what immortal honor art thou not entitled, O ADAMS, who brought forward, and ably supported in Congress that noble act? And thou, also, O JEFFERSON, in whose perspicuous and energetic language is expressed that sublime memorial of the rights, and of the spirit of free-born Americans?

To this declaration of independence, the Congress and people of America adhered, with unremitting firmness, in the most gloomy periods, and adverse vicissitudes of the contest. Immediately after the disastrous defeat at Long-island, when dismay and despondence might naturally be supposed to assail even resolute minds, Congress rejected with disdain the insidious proposals made by Lord and General Howe. In this instance their magnanimity may be matched with that which the senate of Rome shewed, when the conquering Annibal appeared at the gates of that city. To Lord Carlisle, and the other commissioners, who afterwards proffered every freedom and privilege, short of a total separation of interests from Great-Britain; and in case of their being unaccepted, menaced the extremes of war and desolation, Congress declared, that they would make no treaty, inconsistent with those which they had, as independent states, made with other nations; and would enter upon none, which was not accompanied with an explicit acknowledgement of their independence, and withdrawal of the fleets and armies of Great Britain. Herein they did not fall short of another

ther much vaunted example of the magnanimity of the Roman senate, when they refused to listen to any overtures of peace from the victorious Pyrrhus, till he withdrew his arms and forces out of Italy. At length Great-Britain, after an obstinate and ineffectual contest of eight years, during which she lavished an immense profusion of blood and treasure, explicitly recognized the independence of the United States, yielding all claims to any part of their territories. It will not be consistent with the limits, and other topics of this discourse, to indulge my inclinations to make a particular and adequate display of the great bravery, perseverance, and attachment to the liberties and welfare of their country, manifested by the officers and soldiers of the Continental army, upon many memorable occasions, under all the difficulties, dangers, and discouragements that men could encounter; and which never divested them of that clemency, which is always associated with real courage. It may be truly said of them, that they never shed the blood of their adversaries but in the field of battle, or when opposed to them with arms. History, in these respects, has not failed to do them justice. It may not, however, be amiss here to notice the unexampled moderation and regularity, with which at the end of the war, scantily requited for their services, they retired to the rank and occupations of citizens, uncorrupted by the vices and disorderly habits usually contracted in camps, in a long course of war; and have given exam-

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ples of industry, regard of social order, and submission to the laws: and many of the officers have since rendered their country eminent services in the civil stations, to which they have been appointed by the suffrages of their fellow-citizens.

The revolution of the United States has been frequently paralleled with the revolutions of two celebrated nations of Europe, the Swiss and Dutch. Both of them, by their exemplary valor and perseverance, had recovered their freedom, and expelled their oppressors; but it may be remarked, that they had for some time submitted to the yoke of oppression, and grievously felt its pressure before they determined to shake it off—they were severely galled by the chains of despotism, before they broke from them.

The people of the United States being free, and magnanimously resolute to continue so, and tremblingly alive to any design of arbitrary power, quickly descried, and broke in pieces, the fetters prepared for them. As it is more meritorious never to suffer the loss of liberty, than to regain it when lost; in this view will the American revolution excel the other two revolutions.

At no crisis, and under no vicissitude, however difficult and gloomy, did the people of the United States, manifest any symptoms of despair, or abjectly court, or by humiliating concessions obtain, the aid of foreign powers. In this further regard, it claims a marked and ho-

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norable superiority over that of the Dutch. After the capture of an important town of Zealand, by the Spanish invaders, it is a fact well ascertained, that such was the despair of Holland and Zealand, that they formed the design, which was approved in the states of Holland, to confer the sovereignty of those provinces on some protestant prince, who should be able to protect them against the tyranny of Philip, and the offer was made to, but declined by Queen Elizabeth of England; and the other United Provinces did, sometime after actually acknowledge the duke of Anjou, as their sovereign. The United States of America, when they were at the lowest ebb, and soliciting foreign assistance, never proposed any terms, or concessions, incompatible with the dignity of free, sovereign, and independent states. It was after the convention of Saratoga, when the tide of success had set strongly in their favor, that they made the treaty with France, which was fair, equal, and dignified. The treaty which was made between Queen Elizabeth and the Dutch, was such as might be expected of a people, who frequently despaired of being able to rescue themselves, by their own resources and exertions, from the vengeance of their provoked tyrant.

When the seven Dutch provinces met at Utrecht, and signed the articles of alliance, known by the name of the Union of Utrecht, and which were the basis of that commonwealth, known by the name of the United Provinces, the first

coin they struck after this union, is typical of their desponding situation. It represented a vessel laboring amidst the waves, unassisted by sails or oars, with the motto, * “Uncertain where the fates may carry.” The articles of confederation and perpetual union, between the thirteen United States of America, were agreed to by Congress within a few months after the declaration of independence, and at a still more dangerous crisis, after the American armies had been repeatedly defeated, and were retreating before the enemy. These expressly evince the noble confidence they had, of maintaining their independence in spite of all the horrors of war, and exertions of the enemy.

The American is meritoriously distinguishable from every other revolution, as being of nobler birth, and as originating upon principle, and not in consequence of grievances actually suffered. The people of America “augured misgovernment at a distance, and snuffed the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze.” The duty imposed on tea was trivial, and attended with present profit; but it might have involved an acquiescence in the parliamentary right of taxation, which although a question of apparently abstract discussion, was big with important and mischievous consequences. The outrageous and sanguinary excesses, and practices, such as arbitrary imprisonment, persecution for religious opinions, lawless executions, which have generally been the cause of revolutions
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* “*Incertum quo fata ferant.*”

in other countries, had not existed among the Americans. They surprised the monster in its infancy, and strangled it in the cradle; mindful of that important maxim, that although nations may acquire liberty, yet if this inestimable acquisition is lost, it is rarely or never recoverable. Men who suffer themselves to remain long in a state of servitude, if they should retain, or recover the sense of freedom, they lose the capacity of enjoying or retaining it. "Liberty," says the profound, as well as eloquent Rousseau, "is a wholesome aliment, but hard of digestion, and a sound stomach can only bear it. I laugh at those debased minds, who, suffering themselves to be linked together in a confederacy, dare talk of liberty without having an idea of it; and who, with hearts filled with all the vices of slavery, imagine that to be free, they need only be mutinous." At the revolution, Americans possessed not only the ideas, but habits of freemen. The transition effected by this revolution, was from a state of freedom, to a state of still greater freedom, which transition therefore, did not require those extensive and radical changes, and convulsive reforms, which are resorted to in states, where inveterate abuses, habitual errors, and deep rooted institutions, inimical to freedom, have long prevailed; and which reforms and remedies, exhaust the blood, rend the nerves, and strike at the vitals of the body politic. Little more was requisite to restore tranquillity, order, and stability, in the United States, than to expel the invading enemy.

As soon as the fleets and armies of Great Britain disappeared, the happy consequences of American independence began to expand. It dawned indeed beneath clouds, and was for sometime dimmed by mists; but it had scarce rose above the horizon, when it unveiled itself with splendid majesty. No sooner had grim-visaged war made way for lovely peace, than those fields which had been irrigated with the blood of their proprietors and cultivators, and had beheld death and desolation stalking through them, in so many hideous forms, were crowned with golden harvests; the meadows and pastures were covered with sheep and herds, towns and cities arose from the ruins of conflagration, with increased elegance; the ports were thronged with vessels, and resounded with the busy hum of men; industry, commerce, and plenty, in the train of liberty, progressed throughout the United States.

After the cessation of the toils and perils of war, and the return of the blessings of peace, the discreet and intelligent citizens of America, did not run headlong into tumults and anarchy, misled and beguiled by Utopian schemes, and untried theories; nor did they lapse into listless repose, or torpid indifference for the public welfare. Preserving that attention and vigilance, which all free nations ought continually to exercise towards the interests of the community, they soon became sensible of the imbecility and incompetency of the existing confederation, to preserve the union of the states, and its essential objects. They concurred in forming

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ing a convention, composed of men, many of whom had given conspicuous proofs of their patriotism, in the most arduous and trying times of the revolution. With minds divested of all national prejudices and national bigotry, profiting from the experience of past ages, availing themselves of the improvements in policy, which the results of science, and researches of philosophy had revealed to modern times; reviewing other institutions of government, theoretic and practical, culling their excellencies and excluding their defects, they framed *one* for the citizens of the United States, perhaps, upon the whole, the most calculated to ensure and perpetuate the happiness of a people, of any heretofore devised. No social compact, or plan of policy, ever so explicitly recognized the majesty of the people, as the true source of legitimate power, by whom it is expressly declared to be ordained and established. We may truly say, that it is the work of reason, the result of deliberation, a regular digested plan, which was cast at once, like a beautiful statue, coming from the hands of the artificer, finished and symmetrical. Most, if not all other governments, have been imposed by force, or gradually formed by casual emergencies, and have been improved or impaired by them, from time to time, incorporating in their progress and operation, many of the barbarisms, prejudices, and errors of the times through which they passed, and which it would be difficult to extirpate or remedy, without endangering the whole structure.

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This government may boast the peculiar excellency of containing within itself, the corrective principle or power of making such constitutional amendments, as experiment may evince to be salutary, and in a manner, which protects against the evils of rash and violent innovations.

It has not proved to be merely specious in theory, but has practically succeeded, beyond what its warmest favorers predicted, or expected. But governments, however excellent, require to be well administered.

It is very remarkable, that the good fortune of America, as well as its wisdom and valor, has prevailed in every critical and important juncture. One signal instance of this was its possessing so great a patriot and hero, as WASHINGTON, at the dawn of the revolution; and another instance of equal good fortune, was the still possessing him, after carrying his country, by his bravery and conduct, triumphantly through the war, to preside at the formation of the new federal constitution, of which he was afterwards called to be the president and guardian, by the eager and unanimous suffrages of his fellow citizens. *His primary* discharge of the functions and duties of that high station, was necessary to dissipate the clouds of prejudice, which might, for sometime, have obscured the genuine and intrinsic worth of the constitution; his weight of character, wisdom, and firmness, were requisite to launch it fairly and steadily into agency, and to develop its admirable principles by a suitable administration. Important
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and critical events before long occurred, to put to the test, the efficiency of the government, and his capacity to preside. An alarming resistance to some of the laws of the United States, took place in one of our sister states; it was quickly repressed by the energy of the government, and able conduct of the president, without bloodshed, or capital punishment.

A war, unusually ferocious, extensive, and destructive, arose between most of the powers of Europe, with several of whom we had treaties of amity and commerce, and were in habits of constant intercourse; towards one of whom antipathies and resentments had not entirely subsided; and towards another a grateful predilection existed. In this difficult and perplexing crisis, our illustrious President taking an unimpassioned and clear view of our real and permanent interests, and the rights of the belligerent powers, marked out and adopted that system, which was promulgated in his proclamation, and rules, and regulations; and which while it manifests his correct ideas of true policy, and his faithful adherence to treaties and the law of nations, hath exalted the national justice, and national character of the United States, and hath prevented hitherto their being implicated in the war. One of the belligerent powers finding its efforts either to seduce, or intimidate the United States to take a part favorable to its views, equally abortive, recurred to indications of hostile intentions, and to lawless depredations on our commerce.

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The animated and prudent measures of our present President, and of the government, to assert our national dignity, and to protect our commerce, and to prepare for our general defence—the reprisals made by our rising navy are likely to be attended with the desirable effects; and France, however aspiring and dreadfully resentful, it may have appeared to other nations, hath lately invited that amity, which she had before haughtily and unreasonably rejected; and we have now the pleasing prospect of securing the re-establishment of peace and commerce with her, consistently with the honor and interests of the United States.

The general spirit and accord, which those apprehended hostilities excited in the citizens of the United States—the facility with which adequate military arrangements have been made, and the requisite resources supplied the rapid progress of our growing navy—the skilful and gallant conduct of the officers and crews of different frigates, afford auspicious presages of future spirit and ability, to assert and defend our national dignity and interests, against all who may violate, or prepare to violate them.

The exigencies which occurred, have encreased our public debt, but in how trivial a degree comparatively with the greatness of the objects, and with our actual and increasing resources? We cannot but be reconciled to the requisitions of government, when we find from the general statement of expenditures, lately submitted to the public, with what judgment and œconomy they

they have been applied to the public wants and occasions, and how small a portion of them are subtracted for the moderate salaries of our public officers, some of whom, especially in the higher departments, by their services, rather injure, than benefit their private fortunes.— How much the reverse is the case in other governments? In too many of them, a great part of the immense sums of money, which are wrung from the hard hands of industry, by enormous taxes, and heavy imposts, is prodigally lavished in maintaining the gaudy pageantry, and supplying the corrupting luxuries of royalty, in rewarding the venal abettors of arbitrary power, and pensioning the sycophantic minions of a court.

Among the peculiar felicities, which attend the people of the United States, it may be observed, that no nation, which ever existed, had so fair a prospect of exemption from the evils of foreign war and invasion. They border on no nations from whom they can apprehend any great danger. The immense ocean, which nature has interposed between them and the states of Europe, serves as an effectual rampart to discourage and to baffle any attempts of the most powerful of those states to invade and subdue any part of the United States; it serves also to prevent the latter from intermeddling in any of their feuds; and seems to point out the impropriety of having any other concern with them, but in the way of friendly and advantageous commerce.

To the most potent nation of Europe, any

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attempt

attempt to effect any conquest in the United States, as long as they remain in close and firm union, would prove a rash and desperate enterprise, a *Syracusan* expedition. After the total failure of Great-Britain, who, with every possible advantage, invaded America; taken at every disadvantage, it is very improbable, that any other nation will have the temerity to make another invasion, while the general union subsists.

Few adequate and rational causes, and grounds, can the United States ever have to tempt them to offensive war, and aggressive measures—not the acquisition of territory, for they possess within their own acknowledged and indisputable limits, more than sufficient to satiate the most extravagant desires—not to encrease the number of their people by conquest, for under the favorable circumstances that attend them, their natural encrease, and emigrations from other countries, will stock them with surprising rapidity. Nothing exists to create and nourish those prejudices and antipathies against other nations, which occasion irritability and propensity to open enmity. All sufficient within themselves, they may become happy, great, and powerful by their own legitimate resources, and need not aim at prosperity or aggrandizement, from the misery or depression of any other people. They may indulge to the amiable spirit of philanthropy, and benevolent precepts of christianity; and instead of envying, or disturbing, they may rejoice at, and promote the welfare of the rest of mankind.

How

How different is the situation of most of the countries of Europe? When we take a retrospect of the bloody, devastating, and expensive contests which have prevailed among them for many centuries past; when we consider their frequency and short intermissions, we may be warranted in pronouncing, that the relative and habitual state of the nations of Europe, is a state of warfare. Their complication of interests, and their real or imaginary equilibrium of power, keep them in continual negotiation, agitation and disquiet. Treaties of peace between them are little more than truces, and are commonly impregnated with the germs of future wars; which generally recommence, as soon as the exhausted parties are, or think themselves sufficiently recruited, to resume hostilities with any prospect of advantage. A few of the most powerful states, leave not to the weaker, the choice of peace or war, but drag them sooner, or later, into their vortex.

The strength, opulence, and prosperity of them all, is comparative with, and dependant on the weakness, poverty, and infelicity of their neighbours and competitors. They transmit, and esteem it politic to transmit, their enmities from generation to generation, inhumanly and unchristianly styling each other "natural enemies," especially

* " Those contending powers
 " Of France and England, whose very shores look pale,
 " With envy of each others happiness."

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* Shakespear. Henry V. Act v. Scene 2.

Our national happiness is as little liable to be overthrown, or endangered by internal commotions or seditions, as by external attacks. We are exempt from all, or most of those causes, which usually foment, inflame, and carry political dissentions to desperate extremities. There are no privileged orders among us—no distinct ranks—patricians or plebeians—nobles or commons—all have equal rights and privileges, the same common interest—those who are elevated to office and power, are so by the free will and choice of the people, or their representatives, and but for a limited time, during which they are responsible, and in case of delinquency, removable. It is not to be expected, nor is it desirable, that we should be entirely free from warm divisions of opinion, and animated discussions, upon points of common interest and safety. These may be productive of less evil, than cold indifference to public concerns—than that dead and dangerous calm, which may be owing to the supineness, remissness, and relaxation of national spirit, which may follow from much ease and overflowing wealth. The river which, sometimes swelling, and rushing on with the rapidity of a torrent, breaks its mounds, and deluges the country round, does partial mischief; while the still exhalations of stagnant waters, diffusively spread dangerous diseases and deadly pestilence. But it is nevertheless the duty of every true lover of his country, to endeavour to restrain dissentions and divisions from ripening into factions, when they become extremely dan-

gerous—

gerous—the public good will then be sacrificed to the particular views and interests of each faction—men will not be chosen for their merits and capacity to serve the public, but from their party attachment and party violence—measures will be obstructed, merely that the party proposing them may not derive credit and popularity from their success—the good and the moderate will be neglected, or obliged to retire from such turbulent scenes ; and foreign influence, and foreign interests will begin to intermingle and predominate.

The different states formed into their present confederation, have combined the interior police and liberty of small states, with the power and vigor of a great empire, uniting all the advantages, and excluding the disadvantages of democracy and monarchy. Their experience has already evinced, how well calculated republican governments may be to produce the greatest happiness of mankind. The government of each state, as well as the government of the United States, may be truly styled “governments of all by all,” and not governments “of all by one,” or “the combinations of the few against the many ;” they are governments reared, as all governments ought to be, on the basis of natural right, and general happiness, wherein those who are elevated to eminent stations, from the mass of the people, and revertible to it, are only so elevated with a view to the public benefit, and become not the masters, but the agents of the people. Offices and power, thus only attainable

tainable by the free suffrages of the people, are accessible to, and conferrable on all, who have the talents, virtue, and patriotism to merit them. This equality of political and personal rights, is the true and only equality, practicable and consistent with the peace, order, and safety of civil society. The law, which is the expression of the *will of the people*, ought necessarily to meet with reverence. All that they require of any man, is to do, or forbear towards others, what he would wish others to do, or forbear towards him. No man is here so high, as to be beyond their reach, or so low as to be without their protection. Can it then be matter of surprise, that the United States should, in a few years since their sovereignty and independence, attain to such a pitch of opulence, power, and prosperity, as nations do not arrive at in the course of many ages, in the ordinary rise and progression of empires. It has been usually remarked, with respect to the products of nature, and the works of art, that nothing of speedy growth, or hasty construction, is of long duration. The tree which shoots up quickly, and spreads its branches widely, is not apt to strike its roots deeply, and is liable to be easily overturned by storms. But this rule cannot be applicable to the growth and duration of the United States. Their sudden greatness, and prosperity, have not arisen from extrinsic, accidental, and transient, but from intrinsic, regular, and permanent causes and means, which, from their nature, must long operate with augmenting vigor and effect. The commerce,

which

which is daily pouring riches into them, is not like the precarious commerce of Tyre and Carthage of old, and of the Hanse-towns, Venice, and Holland in latter times; which fluctuating circumstances, and the competition of rival states, may destroy; but is supported upon the solid basis of a varied, encreasing, inexhaustible agriculture, which can only be limited by the number and industry of their inhabitants.— Their extent of territory, and population, are not the fruits and effect of conquest over a diversity of people, of different and discordant tempers, manners, and customs, held together by the constant compression of overruling force.

The arts and sciences, and at length manufactures, in states like these, possessing most, or all the materials, must flourish amidst such favorable circumstances, such extensive liberty and civil toleration; every art, science, and manufacture, will be translated to them, in their most improved and matured state, from other countries. Happy, not only in the actual fruition of so many comforts and blessings, the United States have still greater in the bright perspective which opens to their view.

They have reason to expect, before the lapse of many years, to have every thing within themselves, that can contribute to the real comforts, and to the embellishments of life, and to their general prosperity and solid grandeur. The American Eagle, upborne on vigorous pinions, will take as lofty and extensive a flight, as ever
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did the Roman Eagle, and in that flight may survey as great and powerful an empire; but an empire not formed for war and bloodshed, aggrandized by conquest, and supported by rapine and oppression, held together by force, and dissolving with the remission of that force; but an empire become magnificent and powerful by the voluntary association of a cluster of free states, equal in their rights and immunities, obeying no laws, and submitting to no governments, but what emanate from their free will and choice, and flourishing and supported by their own innate resources, and by reciprocation of commercial benefits with other nations.

Their happiness and example may tend to the amelioration of the condition of other nations, may inspire the spirit of rational reformation in perverted governments, will at least hold out to their miserable and oppressed inhabitants, a happy asylum, and may tend to make peace more sought, and wars more shunned by other nations.

It will not be possible, while we contemplate on this glorious day, the happiness and grandeur, actual and progressive of these our rising states, to be unmindful of those virtuous and valorous patriots, by whose eminent prowess, and good conduct, they became so free, so great and flourishing; many of whom sealed their patriotism, and cemented the fabric of our freedom, with their blood. In particular let us take this occasion of pouring forth effusions of the most lively gratitude, to WASHINGTON,

TON, whose recent loss we have so much deplored—to that first and best of men and heroes, to whose *fame*, panegyrick cannot now add, or from it, obloquy detract—also let us call to our particular and grateful remembrance, the virtuous, enterprising, unassuming, and circumspect GREENE, of whom it would be sufficient to say, that WASHINGTON, who was so keen and accurate an observer and discriminator of the talents and qualities of men, designated him as worthy to succeed him in command, should destiny snatch him from the service of his country, before the work of its freedom and independence was accomplished—GREENE, to whose heroic and successful exertions, all America, and this state in particular, is so greatly indebted.

Let us cherish with the most lively gratitude, the remembrance of the great and meritorious services of all our deceased patriots; let their bright examples direct and animate us to those pursuits, which will be beneficial to our common country, and honorable to ourselves—let us suppose their immortal spirits to be continually hovering over us, and witnessing our conduct—applauding such of our actions as are advantageous, and reproving such as are injurious to the commonweal. Let not our lips merely shew forth their praise, but let our hearts be indelibly impressed with earnest desires, to imitate as far as we can, their good qualities and patriotic deeds.

Fellow-citizens, if benefits enjoyed ought to excite gratitude and love, Americans ought to be

susceptible of as ardent a love of their country, their common, impartial, and bountiful mother, as ever inflamed Grecian and Roman breasts, and in them produced so many disinterested and glorious actions. Above all things, maintain with the most unshaken attachment, the intimate and general union of the states, without which it will be impossible for their prosperity and greatness to continue—be assured, that this only can save the different states from intestine discords and civil wars, or defend them from foreign invasion and conquest. Cultivate good morals as highly essential to free governments; and religion, without which morals can have no solid support. Be ever mindful, that civil societies, especially those under republican government, cannot subsist without due obedience to the laws. Never confound licentiousness with liberty, and guard against anarchy, as much as against tyranny. Disseminate, as much as possible, education and knowledge, which will countervail that natural aristocracy, which will exist more or less in the freest states. Let not ambition, or the spirit of conquest, but only self defence, and the vindication of your rights, prompt to wars. Observe with sacred fidelity all national engagements, and never regard any thing as founded in good policy, which is inconsistent with justice.

It does indeed seem vain to expect that the best constituted governments, more than any other human institutions, can last for ever. Like

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the human body, their natural tendency is to dissolution.

“ Proud cities vanish, states and realms decay,

“ The world’s unstable glories fade away.*”

But there have been instances of states enduring and flourishing for many ages, by tracing, watching, guarding against, and correcting the causes of decadence and ruin; and by attending to and renovating those principles, which are calculated to promote and support their happiness and duration. The United States promise a duration as unexampled, as their greatness is sudden; may the great Arbiter of human destinies, grant that their duration and prosperity, may be co-equal with the duration of the world!

* Hoole’s Tasso.

F I N I S.