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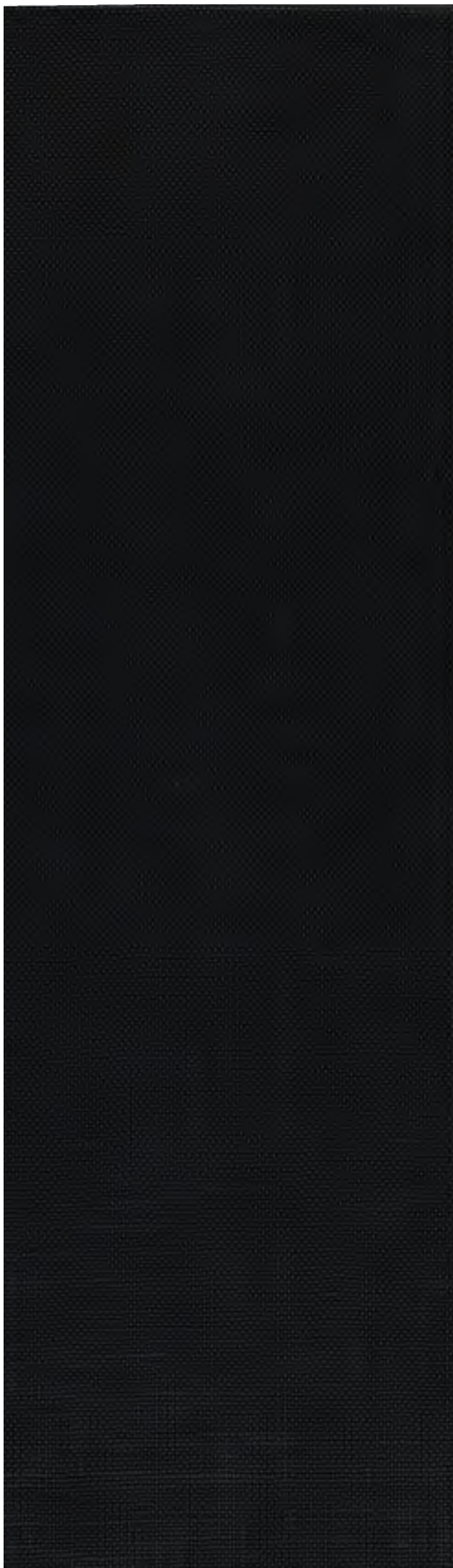
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AN ADDRESS

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DELIVERED AT THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

BATTLE OF GERMANTOWN.

OCTOBER 4, 1877.

BY

M. RUSSELL THAYER.

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A D D R E S S .

THE period of the Revolution is the heroic age of America. Its great battles stand along the stream of its history as the pyramids stand upon the Nile, towering above all other objects and reducing all other things within their horizon to a common inferiority. And there they will stand forever—the imperishable monuments of the courage, endurance, and patriotism of our fathers. They are to us what Salamis and Platæa were to the ancient Greek, what the battles of the Punic Wars were to the Roman—undying examples of that fortitude and self-devotion which are born of every great struggle for freedom and independence. We do well, therefore, to keep fresh in our remembrance the several stages in that memorable contest which emancipated us from foreign control, and laid the foundations of our present prosperity and power; to celebrate, on appropriate occasions, the great events which are the land-

marks of the struggle; to dwell with pride upon the particular instances which put to severest trial the courage and constancy of our ancestors, and to recall the victories and disasters which were alike illumined by their virtues. Nor is this employment less appropriate or becoming because the event which we celebrate to-day was not crowned with that complete success which the great man who planned it expected, nor because the victory which seemed within his grasp was snatched from his hands by those unforeseen accidents which often decide the fate of battles. As the defeat of Thermopylæ is not less honorable to Grecian arms than the great day of Platæa, or as the disaster of Cannæ does not less illustrate the valor of republican Rome than the victory at Zama, which forever relieved Italy from the invasions of Carthage, so the repulse of Germantown is not less honorable to Washington and his companions than the victories of Trenton, of Monmouth, or Yorktown.

Standing therefore to-day upon one of the battle-fields of the Revolution, let us pause for a moment from the pursuit of the less noble objects which occupy our daily lives. Let us turn back the current of our thoughts to contemplate briefly the circumstances which surrounded the struggle, when, a hundred years ago, this battle was fought,

and consider its influence upon the general cause then at stake. So shall we learn from the difficulties, the discouragements, and sacrifices of that day to value properly the effort which was here made, and to draw the lesson that perseverance, courage, and endurance in a great and just cause will in the end overcome all obstacles which oppose it, and bring it complete and lasting success. It is a familiar story, but we will do well on this occasion and on this spot to recall it.

The year 1777 opened darkly enough for the cause of Independence. "I confess," wrote Robert Morris, "things look gloomy." When, in February of that year, Franklin and Deane, the American Commissioners at Paris, proposed to the English ambassador to exchange a hundred British prisoners for an equal number of American prisoners in England, Lord Stormont proudly replied: "The King's ambassador receives no applications from rebels unless they come to implore H's Majesty's mercy."

Nor, in the existing state of affairs did his arrogance seem inexcusable. The disastrous retreat from Long Island, the battle of White Plains, and the flight through New Jersey, had reduced the army of Washington from 9000 to 3000 men, and these were half clad, poorly fed, and many of them without shoes. The fact is attested by many

eye-witnesses that the snowy roads were for many miles stained by their bloody footprints. They seemed, indeed, but a flying rabble before the well-appointed battalions of Howe and Cornwallis. A small reinforcement, the brilliant surprise of Trenton, and the bold attack on the rear of Howe's army at Princeton, lit up for a brief moment the surrounding gloom with some bright rays of hope, and then the darkness settled again as the Continental army went into winter quarters at Morristown. Washington had indeed saved Philadelphia for a time, protected Pennsylvania, wrested the greater part of New Jersey from the enemy, and driven him back upon his base at New York. But the future, nevertheless, was full of discouragement and apprehension. The forces under the command of Sir William Howe amounted to 35,000 men, well supplied and equipped with everything necessary to make successful war. It was apparent that if America was to be victorious in the struggle her people must rise to still greater heights of patriotism; must resolve to make still greater sacrifices, and to endure for some years at least the hardships and sufferings of war.

The great source of our weakness was that America was without a government, and consequently without credit and without power. The authority of Congress was confined to mere recom-

mendations of measures to the Executives and Legislatures of the several States. The State Governments, themselves newly established, inexperienced in the exigencies demanded by the evils which threatened the common welfare, with populations divided in sentiment on the great question which had been submitted to the arbitrament of arms, were afraid to resort to decisive measures in order to raise troops and levy taxes for the expenses of the war. Besides which, having until lately been accustomed to regard themselves as different communities, with distinct and often hostile interests, they carried into their new condition of life and into their new forms of polity the jealousies, suspicions, and selfishness of rival and independent States, a result much contributed to by the extent of the country, the sparseness of the population, the difficulty of communication, and the absence of traditional ties. In a word, the union which was born of the Declaration of Independence was in its infancy, and consequently in that state of comparative helplessness which characterizes that period of existence in the lives of States as well as of men. Our army would not have wanted men, nor our soldiers shoes, provisions, clothing, tents, blankets, and pay, had not Congress, the common agent appointed by the States to carry on the war, been destitute of that authority, that power to

command and to compel others to obey; without which every pretended government is but a shadow. "Certain I am," wrote Washington, "that unless Congress is vested with powers competent to the great purposes of the war, or assume them as a matter of right, and they and the States act with more energy than they have hitherto done, our cause is lost!"

The Declaration of Independence, while it animated the patriotic party with fresh courage and urged them to greater exertions, added strength also to the Tories by alienating and driving into opposition many who were before strenuous advocates of resistance for the redress of grievances, but who were opposed to separation, as unnatural, unnecessary, and injurious. General Howe's proclamation of amnesty and pardon to all who should return to their allegiance, and of reward to all who should perform meritorious service to the Royal cause, was not without considerable effect. Amid the general gloom many who were wavering went over to the side of the King. There was soon a formidable minority who not only refused to aid the cause of independence, but who openly gave their support to the Crown. Everywhere at home a new line of separation was drawn. Communities, and often families, were divided. The war was in some respects a civil war, as well as a

rebellion and revolution. In England the Declaration dried up the popular sympathy of Englishmen in our behalf. A few great leaders of the opposition, indeed, still denounced the war. But it was in vain that Burke wrote: "The war with America is fruitless, hopeless, and unnatural;" that Fox declared that it was impossible to conquer America; and that Chatham still thundered for the unconditional redress of our grievances.* The heart of England was hardened against us, and she set herself deliberately to the work of our subjugation. Fresh troops were sent from Great Britain. Hesse Cassel, Brunswick, Anspach, Waldeck, Hanau, and other petty German Principalities, were ransacked for recruits, the petty lords of these diminutive States receiving for the services of their subjects an average bounty of \$36 a head. Where now are Hesse-Cassel and Anspach and Waldeck and Hanau and all the rest of them? The armies in America were largely reinforced, and Howe in New York and Burgoyne in the North prepared to enter upon the campaign of '77 which was to crush out the Revolution and finish the war.

* "We shall be forced ultimately to retract; let us retract while we can, not when we must. I say we must necessarily undo these violent, oppressive Acts; they must be repealed—you will repeal them; I pledge myself for it that you will in the end repeal them; I stake my reputation on it. I will consent to be taken for an idiot if they are not finally repealed."—*Speeches of the Earl of Chatham.*

In the mean time Congress, without revenue and without credit, in vain sought a loan in Europe, and were driven at last to more issues of paper money, now daily becoming less valuable, for it was not in the power of Congress to regulate the amount of such money in circulation, the right to issue it being possessed by every local government as well as by Congress, and this right being liberally exercised. Regular soldiers were recruited with difficulty, because of the uncertainty of their pay and maintenance, while the militia of the States came and went almost at their pleasure; so that it has been well said that the uncertainty of the numbers of the army was only equalled by the uncertainty of their pay. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the Army of the North, under Schuyler, grew slowly to respectable proportions, while Washington, with greatly inferior forces, still maintained the unequal and stubborn contest in the Middle States.

But Franklin and his associates, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, were slowly and surely winning their way in France. Our privateers were already admitted with their prizes to French ports. Arms and munitions of war were borne to our shores from the arsenals of France. Lafayette and his companion, De Kalb, were afloat upon the ocean in the Victory. Both arrived at

Charleston in the spring of '77. The latter, pronounced by competent military authority the ablest European officer in our army, destined to be made Washington's inspector-general, and after three years of service to fall gloriously for his adopted country in the lost battle of Camden; the former to become the chosen friend of Washington, to live to enjoy the gratitude of the country which he had assisted to save, and after its liberties were established to commence a new and extraordinary career in his native land. From on board the *Victory* the hero had written to his young wife: "From love to me become a good American. The welfare of America is closely bound up with the welfare of all mankind. It is about to become the safe asylum of virtue, tolerance, equality, and peaceful liberty." Thaddeus Kosciusko had arrived in the previous autumn—an engineer of no mean renown, thereafter to fortify West Point, to plan for Greene the approaches to Fort Ninety-six, and to perform other distinguished services, now gratefully remembered. Following quickly came his countryman, Count Casimer Pulaski, a daring soldier, afterwards to be heard of at Brandywine, to be made a major-general, and to give his life for the cause two years later at the siege of Savannah. And the veteran Steuben, aid-de-camp and lieutenant-general

of Frederick the Great, severe in discipline, exact in drill, and wise in council. It is not too much to say that these five men were worth more to our cause than all the hirelings picked up by our enemy in Germany were to them, Knyphausen and Count Donop included, gallant and skilful soldiers though they both were.

In the summer of 1777 George Clinton held the forts in the Highlands of the Hudson. Schuyler was in command of the Northern Army, to be unjustly superseded by Gates in August. Burgoyne was advancing from the lakes to the head-waters of the Hudson. Howe, with his well-appointed army, was at New York, with strong detachments at Amboy and New Brunswick; and Washington, with his small army of 7500 men, watched him in security from his mountain camp at Middlebrook. On the 14th of June Congress resolved that the flag of the United States should be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, with thirteen stars in a blue field for the Union. The banner of a new nation was then thrown to the breeze, and the great military movements began which were to decide its fate

Such was the condition of affairs and such the posture of the opposing forces when Howe, on the 23d of July, sailed from New York with his fine army of 18,000 men, in his fleet of 300 sail,

for the head of Elk River, where he arrived on the 23d of August. On the next day, the 24th, Washington led his troops, decorated with sprays of green, through the crowded streets of Philadelphia, and the campaign, in which the battle of Germantown occupies so conspicuous a place, was begun. I need not on the present occasion pursue the details of subsequent movements, or speak of Brandywine, of Wayne's surprise and the midnight butchery at Paoli, or relate the events by which Washington compelled Howe to consume thirty days in a march of fifty-four miles to Philadelphia. It is not within my province to describe the battle which, after the occupation of that city, rolled its furious tide through this peaceful village at sunrise on the 4th of October, 1777. That is a portion of this day's ceremonies which has been assigned to another. How well he has performed it you have already heard.*

Suffice it for me now to say that here, by the side of this gently descending road, once but an Indian trail through the laurel bushes, and where, in 1683, the scholar, Francis Daniel Pastorius, agent of the Francfort Land Company, settled his frugal countrymen from the Palatinate; here on these breezy uplands, then, as now, beginning to

* Dr. A. C. Lambdin's clear and interesting narrative of the battle has lately been published in the "Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography" (No. 4).

reddened with the first tints of autumn, was struck a blow for freedom which will be remembered as long as the liberty which we enjoy shall survive. It matters not that complete success was not achieved. What hallows this day and this place is the memory that on this spot many brave men gave up their lives for their country. Thirty miles away, at Bethlehem, while the battle raged, lay one of their comrades, disabled by the wound which he had received at Brandywine. Washington had said to the surgeon who attended him: "Take care of him as if he were my own son." He was a major-general, an aid-de-camp to the Commander-in-Chief, and but twenty years of age. It was Gilbert De Lafayette. The Battle of Germantown lasted but two hours and forty minutes. It was a short but sharp and sanguinary conflict, skilfully planned, and, in the beginning, heroically fought. They who here fell are as worthy of praise as if they had fallen in the arms of victory. Their blood was mingled with the morning dew. Their bodies repose in our ancient burial-grounds and by the side of our green lanes. But the work which they here did and the example which they here set, endure unto this day, and *will* endure, in the imperishable history of their country, surviving all crumbling material monuments erected to commemorate great deeds, as the splendid elegy of Simonides still survives

after more than 2000 years to perpetuate the memory of those who fell in defence of Greece :

These to their land fame unextinguished gave,
Though death's dark cloud encompassed them around ;
Dying, they died not ; valor from the grave
Leads them on high, with glory's garland crown'd.*

It is of little importance now, except as a matter of historic interest, to inquire by what misfortune a victory already gained was turned into a repulse and retreat. Whether it was owing to the fog, which enveloped all things in its dense folds, to Chew's house, to Greene's tardiness on the left, or Armstrong's inactivity on the right, or to all combined. The fact remained that the patriot army, inferior in numbers, ill-provided, poorly armed, and consisting largely of raw and undisciplined troops, had, regardless of the defeat at Brandywine three weeks before, immediately assumed the offensive, attacked the flower of the British troops in their entrenchments, driving them before them for two miles (from Mount Airy to the Market House), and but for those strange accidents which so often lie in wait to

* It is to be regretted that the author of this and of many other beautiful metrical translations of the Greek Anthology which are contained in the collection of Mr. George Burges of Trinity College, Cambridge, over the initials M. A. S., is unknown. All that we know is that they were written by a lady who insisted on concealing her name from the public.

defeat great enterprises, would have compelled the whole force to surrender or driven it into the Schuylkill.

The battle produced a great effect upon the country. Everywhere confidence revived, and the cause was strengthened. For it was immediately perceived that the army had a commander who, if he had self-control to avoid the rash exposure of his men to forces superior in numbers and appointments to his own, knew also when and where to strike, and who would strike hard when occasion offered. The battle of Germantown satisfied the country that the Commander-in-Chief would fight when it was proper to fight; that if he possessed the prudence and caution of Fabius, he possessed also the enterprise and daring of Scipio. The thanks of Congress were given to General Washington, his officers and soldiers, for their brave exertions, "Congress being well satisfied that the best designs and boldest efforts may sometimes fail by unforeseen incidents, and trusting that on future occasions the valor and virtue of the army will, by the blessing of Heaven, be crowned with complete and deserved success."

As one consequence of the battle General Howe was closely shut up for the winter in the city, where, defended by his chain of fourteen redoubts extending from river to river, he passed his time with his Tory friends in a manner which led

Franklin to remark that, instead of capturing Philadelphia, Philadelphia had captured him, his chief exercise during the winter being to turn out his regiments occasionally in pursuit of Captain Allan McLane and his restless band of troopers. Quickly after the battle of Germantown came the news of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, on the 17th of October. The country was aflame with excitement, and expected impossible things. The Council and Assembly of Pennsylvania clamored for an immediate attack on Philadelphia. Congress, by an unanimous resolve, declared itself in favor of a winter campaign—a winter campaign by soldiers without shoes, without blankets, without tents, and dependent, as their bitter experience soon proved, upon forced contributions from the country people for their scanty food.

Abroad the political results of the battle of Germantown were of the most important character. On the 12th of December, 1777, Vergennes, the French Minister, in an interview with the American Commissioners, said: "Nothing has struck me so much as General Washington's attacking and giving battle to General Howe's army. To bring troops raised within the year to this, promises everything." On the 17th of December Franklin was informed by Gerard, the Minister's secretary, by the King's order, that the King in council had determined not only to acknowledge,

but to support American independence. On the 6th of February, 1778, was concluded the treaty of alliance between France and the United States; and on the 8th of July D'Estaing arrived at the Capes of the Delaware with his squadron of sixteen ships-of-war, bringing 4000 French soldiers to aid us in the struggle. It has been generally supposed that the surrender of Burgoyne turned the scale in our favor with the French; but the facts of history show how considerably the battle of Germantown entered into and influenced that fortunate result.

In England a widespread conviction began to be entertained that the conquest of America was impossible. On the 7th of April, '78, the Duke of Richmond proposed an address to the King, recommending the recognition of the independence of the United States. His motion was opposed by Lord Chatham, who through all his brilliant career had been a strenuous opponent of the war and the most eloquent defender of our rights. Then occurred that most pathetic and sublime scene, so powerfully painted by many historic writers, as well as by the pencil of Copley, when, coming into the House, leaning upon his son, William Pitt, and his son-in-law, Lord Mahon, all the peers rose, out of respect to him, as he advanced slowly and with great difficulty to his seat, and rising to answer the Duke of Richmond,

he raised one hand from his crutch, and casting his eyes towards heaven, exclaimed: "I thank God that, old and infirm, and with more than one foot in the grave, I have been able to come to-day to stand up in the cause of my country. My Lords, I rejoice that the grave has not closed upon me, that I am still alive to lift up my voice against the dismemberment of this ancient and most noble monarchy." A few moments afterwards he fell backwards in the agonies of death, and was borne by his friends from the House, never more to enter it. The Duke of Richmond's motion was lost. Most willingly would they have conceded all that America had originally asked, but the dismemberment of the Empire, the loss of a continent in the West, was still a result to which the pride and patriotism of the British nation could not consent, and the war went on.

It is not for me now to trace its subsequent history; to follow the army in its retreat from Germantown to the Skippack; to accompany it to Whitemarsh, or on that dreary December march to Valley Forge—a name which recalls the direst sufferings of the whole war; to follow it in its glorious pursuit of the British through New Jersey in the following summer, or in its renewed struggles, as the war rolled away to the southward, where Gates, in the words of his friend Charles Lee, was to exchange Northern laurels for South-

ern willows. Four long years of tireless effort, of political embarrassments, of fierce conflicts, and of various fortune lie between Germantown and Yorktown—years which were to contain Monmouth, Stony Point, Savannah, Charleston, Camden, King's Mountain, the Cowpens, Guilford Court House, Eutaw Springs, and many more battles of minor renown. They were years of great anxiety, of great successes and great reverses; of great achievements, of great events, and of great men. As often as we may go over the records of those years, and review their stirring history, and follow the lives of the great leaders who acted their part in them, the same grand and majestic form still towers above all surrounding objects; and we are impressed with the truth of those words of a recent English historian, who says of Washington: "No nobler figure ever stood in the forefront of a nation's life."

The place in which we stand is the central point of a region rendered forever memorable in the great contest for American Independence. On these undulating fields and the paths which traverse them, and in the gardens and orchards which surrounded the houses of the peaceful villagers who then dwelt here, was fought the battle which we commemorate to-day. Behind us are the heights of Roxborough, where Armstrong and his handful of Pennsylvania militia held in check

the British left resting upon the Schuylkill, while Washington with Sullivan and Wayne, supported by Stirling with Maxwell and Nash—the latter to fall upon the field—drove against their centre. Near by, in front of us, are the roads along which Greene and Stephen and McDougall and Smallwood and Forman led their divisions to the attack of the right and rear. Six miles away is the city which was on that day contended for, where the Declaration was promulgated, and the Continental Congress sat. Below are Fort Mifflin and Red Bank, so long and so gallantly defended. Westward, and not far away, are Barren Hill and Paoli and Valley Forge, while in the near north lie Chestnut Hill and Whitemarsh, whose wooded hills, in December, '77, blazed by night with the thousand camp-fires of the hostile armies. Look in whatever direction we may, we look upon scenes which are hallowed by the sufferings and sacrifices, the valor and endurance, of the men of the Revolution, to whom, under the blessing of Almighty God, we owe the independence and prosperity which we now enjoy.

Great changes have taken place in the century which has elapsed since that day. Our country has grown to vast proportions. Its people have increased from 3,000,000 to more than 40,000,000. It has passed successfully through other great wars. Civil strife has shaken, as with an earthquake, the

structure whose foundations were so deeply laid in public and private virtue, and they were found to sustain the shock without injury. Slavery has been abolished; and everywhere the people who inhabit this broad domain live under free constitutions and equal and just laws. If, when another century shall strike on the dial of Time, our descendants shall be able to assemble on this spot to celebrate, without a blush and without remorse, the events which we commemorate to-day, with the Government undecayed, with the Constitution entire, with the Union unbroken, and with free institutions unimpaired, it will be because they have emulated the public spirit, the self-denial, and devotion to their country of the men of that day; because they have adhered to the principles and ideas which animated them, and because, like them, they have lived and wrought in humble dependence upon that Divine Providence which regulated their work and crowned it at last with victory and peace.



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