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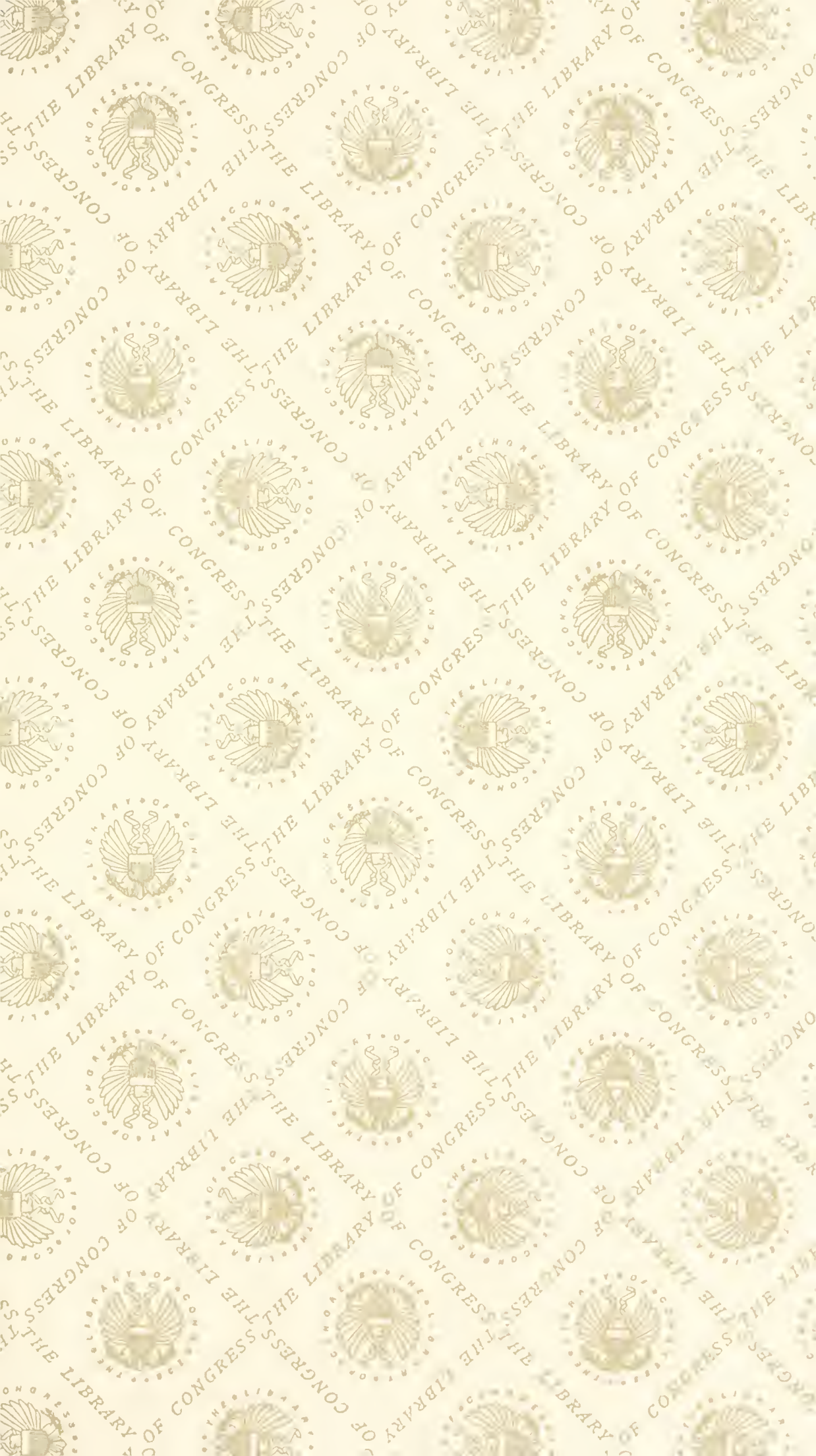
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AN
ORATION
DELIVERED BY REQUEST
BEFORE THE WHIGS
OF
PHILADELPHIA,
ON THE
FOURTH OF JULY, 1834.

BY
WILLIAM MORRIS MEREDITH.

PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY THE COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENT.

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PHILADELPHIA, JULY 25th, 1834.

W. M. MEREDITH, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

WE take great pleasure in handing you the enclosed resolution, passed on the evening of the seventh instant, and have the honour to be

Very respectfully,

SAM'L J. ROBBINS,
LEVI HOLLINGSWORTH,
SANDERSON ROBERT,
THOS. HARTLEY,
CHARLES SCHNEIDER,
HENRY F. ANNERS,
PETER CONRAD,
WM. J. WAINWRIGHT,
WM. F. BURKHART,
JOSEPH AKENS.

*Extract from the Minutes of the Committee of Arrangement,
for Celebrating the Fourth of July.*

RESOLVED, That the thanks of this Committee be tendered to W. M. MEREDITH, Esq. for the chaste, spirited and patriotic oration, delivered by him before the Citizens of the Second Congressional District, on the fourth instant, and that the sub-committee of arrangement be directed to request a copy for publication.

Attest,

HENRY F. ANNERS, Secretary.



AN

ORATION.

ASSEMBLED to commemorate the triumphs of our ancestors, let us rejoice that we are still worthy to honour them. Though we have distress around us, and before us a struggle of which the result is in the hands of Providence, yet we keep this festival with the cheerful hearts of FREEMEN. Determined in any event, not to disgrace our fathers, we can speak of their deeds without the blush of shame, or the down-cast eye of conscious degeneracy. We look back to them, not as slaves look to the memory of kind protectors or generous avengers,—but as freemen turn with honest pride to their predecessors. When we shall cease to revere them, we shall have been rendered incapable of the admiration of heroic actions:—when we shall despair of imitating them, we shall have lost our distinguishing characteristic as a people, and become a reproach to our common country.

In WASHINGTON, and the men of 1776, was embodied the spirit of our race, the SPIRIT OF LIBERTY. That

spirit had dwelt a thousand years with their forefathers, and is not extinct in their descendants. We do injustice to the vast scheme of Providence in our behalf, when we limit our view of its operation to the Revolution, or even to the colonization of this country. We may observe it from the time when those who were destined to found the Saxon race, were led from the sunny plains of the south, to acquire in a frozen and unkindly region, the hardy frame, the sturdy manhood, and the personal independence that form the groundwork of civil liberty. Turbulent and untutored, yet in the earliest history of the Anglo-Saxons and their ancestors, we find them maintaining the privilege of electing their own chiefs, and acknowledging no hereditary right, except where they found hereditary merit.

Throughout the various stages of English history, we can trace the germ of liberty, gradually expanding, amid all the storms and earthquakes that surrounded it. To what dangers was it not exposed? Through what struggles was it not preserved? By what severe lessons was that experience acquired, which was necessary to secure its full development? What blood was shed,—what suffering endured,—what toil undergone, for the full education of the principle of CIVIL LIBERTY? Enlightened civil liberty—the fruit, not of impulse merely, but of impulse and knowledge,—to be enjoyed amid the comforts and luxuries of the highest civilization,—that liberty which no improvement in the arts can endanger,—which no accumulation of wealth can corrupt,—which is the living

soul of THIS PEOPLE! The history of England is but the history of the preparation for our republic. From Alfred to the Barons at Runnimeade, and from them to the Hampdens, Cokes and Seldens, and down to the Sidneys and Russels of later days—all her noble hearts were working for us.

In the seventeenth century, when religious and civil liberty were understood; when the shackles had been struck from the intellect of man; when the most gigantic minds had been employed in collecting and arranging all the lights which the experience of so many ages afforded; then the magnificent design of THE CREATOR was unfolded, and then were led forth, from the bosom of a community advanced in arts, in letters and in civilization, the selected bands, to found THIS REPUBLIC, on a soil not stained with the blood of oppressors or their victims, and where we yet breathe an atmosphere untainted by successful tyranny. They were indeed few in number, and apparently feeble, but they were firm in purpose, powerful in intellect, ripe in experience, and confident in themselves,—and they had hearts in whose pulses throbbed the blood of the only free race on earth. This nation had no infancy of barbarism and disorder. The handful of men that landed on our shores, formed, from the first, a policed people. Though with a nominal dependence on the mother country, our governments were, from the beginning, REPUBLICAN in principle and in essence. Yet their founders tried no rash experiments. They brought with them such of the laws of their forefathers

as were suitable to their circumstances, and none other. Coming from a country in whose system of jurisprudence at that day, prerogative and privilege regal, ecclesiastical and baronial, were so intricately interwoven with the common rights of person and property, that the labours of lives would have appeared insufficient for their complete extrication, MARK with what a miraculous instinct the early colonists (heaven-directed) performed this almost impossible task. They retained nothing however remotely dangerous TO REPUBLICAN LIBERTY. They sacrificed or injured nothing material to the preservation of order and public and private rights. The fulness of time was come. The sacrifices of past ages were to be recompensed. The edifice was completed,—and although to the unskilful eye, the massive and towering scaffolding appeared essential to sustain the structure, yet at the touch of THE MASTER, it fell away at once, and left the temple standing in its fair proportions and impregnable strength. Let those who affect to lament, or study to supply, our want of that EXECUTIVE SUPREMACY, and of the other devices which are elsewhere considered necessary to the stability of a government, look at our history, and learn that they might as well censure the gallant frigate which cleaves the waves, rejoicing in her peopled deck and battery of thunder, because she lacks the shores and braces, timbers and wedges, that supported and restrained her before she reached her destined element.

With what unheard of rapidity did our ancestors advance in their new career to prosperity and power !

How soon were the most distant seas vexed by their commerce, while the farthest forests groaned beneath their axes! And wherever their foot pressed the soil, *there* was planted a population of hardy and unflinching MEN, filled with the same spirit of enterprise, and the same instinct of freedom.

When the appointed hour came for severing the last tie that had feebly pressed without repressing their energies, and the final separation from Great Britain was at hand, with what cheerful alacrity, did the glorious descendents of those men, rise to fulfil their destinies! They understood the first slight touch which was to summon them to their task, and they moved to its performance with joyful solemnity. The chord had been struck. They did not wait till the spur of tyranny had been buried rowel-deep in their flanks, nor rise at last against intolerable oppression. Although they took arms against fearful odds, yet it was not in the phrensy of desperation, nor with the pusillanimous ferocity of slaves. With deliberate coolness and invincible resolution, a free people swore to maintain their freedom against any odds,—and they did so. Throughout that struggle no blood was shed in popular tumult. No life of foreign or domestic foe was lost, save in the field of open battle, or by the regular judgment of a judicial tribunal. Although the murderous savage was let loose on our borders, and the prisoners taken by the enemy were treated as malefactors, yet no breach of the laws of war rendered our magnanimity questionable. No principle

of order was shaken. No right of person or property was violated. No law was disregarded. No frame of government was violently upturned. The world never witnessed so glorious a spectacle! How could it be otherwise? The men whose lot it was at that day to obey the impulses of their nature, and establish undying names, which will honour us, and which we shall honour "to the last syllable of recorded time," looked to their fathers for examples, as we look to them. Ages had contributed to their production: they were the fruit of a tree which had been cherished for centuries, and had come to maturity here. We have this day, in our Guests, the living proofs that it has not yet ceased to bear.

We cannot better celebrate the day, than by devoting it to the inquiry, with what fidelity we have preserved our inheritance? Safe from foreign aggression, we have had domestic dangers, and in sustaining the severest test to which a republic can be subjected, we have been near the rock on which all former republics have been wrecked.

Though the old party names were retained to a later period, yet it is now about fifteen years since the wholesome action of parties ceased among us, without which a free government is like a standing pool. The questions of foreign policy which had divided the country, were at an end. If there were differences of opinion on certain domestic questions, those differences were sectional. The candidates for the suffrages of the people, throughout any one quarter of our country, generally professed the same

principles. Our politics degenerated really into personal politics, and our parties into factions. No principle seemed to be at stake in our elections. The government moved on almost without an effort. A period ensued of great public quiet, and great private prosperity, but of remarkable political apathy among the mass of the people. The statesmen who had been formed in more active times were gradually disappearing, though some of them are fortunately still left. A class of men arose who were called *politicians*; who for their own advantage paid that attention to public affairs, which others neglected to pay for the public good. The public service became almost a trade. Men whose intellect and energy had failed to secure success in other avocations, and who possessed no principle but the determination to keep on the strongest side, crept into the inferior offices, and too often gained a footing even among our REPRESENTATIVES. Amid the appearances of great prosperity, the vitality of our institutions, was, in fact, daily diminishing. Our government is a government of balances. Due vigour is required in all its branches, otherwise irregular action will take place in some of them. When, above all, the integrity of the REPRESENTATIVE BODY is touched, the heart of our system is struck at. If its corruption or imbecility have not passed a certain point, it may be restored in season, to the due performance of its functions, by the operation of the ballot-box, when the people have been roused to a sense of their danger. Let us hope that this is the case now.

It was during the dangerous calm of which we have spoken, that a man was raised up among us, destined to enhance our love of liberty, by endangering its continuance, and to give us a lesson of future vigilance, by exhibiting a startling example of the perilous consequences of supineness and neglect:—a man, whose military services were undoubted, and whose civil capacity was taken upon trust,—whose temper was known to be impetuous, and was therefore supposed to be generous,—who was believed to be ignorant of the arts of intrigue, because he had never been versed in the science of civil business:—a man whose professions were of reform and retrenchment,—of the purity of the elective franchise, and the diminution of executive patronage. His popularity was unbounded. He had the generous confidence of a free people, and although many who knew him better, or trusted him less, foresaw and foretold the danger of his elevation, their voices were drowned in the acclamations of an enthusiastic and determined majority.

Soon were the worst anticipations to be realised. At first, indeed, he seemed to give his confidence to those of his friends who best deserved it; and although the numerous removals from merely ministerial offices, of men who had grown gray in the public service, and whose only fault had been their preference of another candidate, showed that in the discharge of his functions he was to be controlled by considerations rather of private resentment, than of public good, yet his constitutional advisers were men,

to whom the country could look with some feeling of security. It remained to be shown how easily and fatally the instinct of tyranny could be awakened in a man whom nature had made arrogant, and education had not made wise, and in whom age had increased the susceptibility to flattery, and the obstinacy of the will, while it had weakened the force of the judgment, and the generous impulses of the heart. In such a man, a small knot of traders in politics,—corrupt and unmeritable persons, with no public character to lose, nor principles to restrain them,—in such a man, in a word, the UNDER-CABINET found their proper prey. In a short time they secured the full possession of him. His own better friends, and the friends of their country who had supported him, began to stand aloof in sorrowful amazement. A cabal, holding no responsible situations, and to the members of which the people would have refused their votes as candidates for the lowest office, became in effect the executive of the republic. They obtained the control of its action. Against whatever man or institution stood in the way of the accomplishment of their purposes, they took care to excite a feeling of hostility in the mind of him whom they delight to call their CHIEF,—whom they hail as “born to command,”—at whose feet they prostrate themselves in the enthusiasm of sycophancy. And when that feeling was once roused, then commenced a relentless war, prosecuted with unmitigated rancour, and scarcely ceasing with the ruin of the victim. Cabinets

dissolved, in order to strike an effectual blow at high officers, whose only offence was that they refused to compel their families to be governed in their social relations, by the will or whim of CÆSAR. An ignominious dismissal followed in one case by threats of personal violence, before the obnoxious individual could leave the seat of government. In other cases, personal violence actually offered to members of Congress, who had been active in resisting the abuses of the administration. Let one instance suffice, as an example of the nature and spirit of their proceedings.

The Vice-President of the United States, an early and sincere supporter of the party, a man—I do not speak of the present incumbent—of lofty spirit, commanding talent, and unbending integrity, (whose subsequent errors, great as they were, are already almost redeemed)—JOHN C. CALHOUN,—that honest statesman—was a perpetual oppressor, a natural enemy, of the creeping cabal that covered the foot of the executive throne. On what flimsy pretences was a quarrel fastened on him, and a savage nature stimulated to the revenge of supposed injuries! With what unrelenting ferocity was the attack commenced! With what bitter malignity was it prosecuted! Neither the high office of its object, nor his unstained character, nor his long public services, nor his party claims, nor his personal fidelity, could protect him from an inundation of calumny.

For nearly five years past, public affairs, so far as the executive is concerned, have been conducted os-

tensibly on grounds of private resentment and malignity,—really, with the purpose of subserving the interests, and perpetuating the power of a band of unprincipled intriguers. The immense patronage of the government, has been unscrupulously abused,—the money of the people lavishly spent in attempting to corrupt them,—elections openly interfered with by minions,—a frightful discipline established, enforced by threats of the most deadly war on all who refused to submit,—private character wantonly assailed,—the constitutional functions of the Senate in regard to appointments, almost superseded,—the integrity of the legislative bodies deliberately trenched upon. Menaces for the insubordinate! Offices for the complying! We have seen more members of Congress appointed to executive offices in the last five years, than during the whole of our previous history. “CORRUPTION HAS BECOME THE ORDER OF THE DAY.” Rewards and punishments are proffered and threatened,—public service held as “THE SPOILS OF VICTORY.” The time has been in this REPUBLIC, when men were appointed to fill the offices, but we have lived down to the day when offices are given to fill the men.

OUR STATE GOVERNMENTS have been tampered with by the central power behind the throne. In a thousand shapes, intimations and wishes (which are commands) are issued from Washington to our local legislatures. Too fatally was this influence exerted within our borders, when PENNSYLVANIA, for the first time, at the will of one man, faltered in maintaining her formed, and repeatedly expressed opinions, on a

great question. When she voluntarily abandoned her own and the national interests, and disregarding her sense of justice, and swerving from the course of her policy, assisted to injure her own credit, and diminish her own resources, and was reduced to pride herself on obtaining from the BANKERS OF THE HOLY ALLIANCE, (whose money was always poured out like water in the cause of tyranny,) coin yet wet with the blood of the gallant POLES.

There remained one instrument of power, the possession of which was to be by all means compassed. I mean the control of the great monied interest of the country, concentrated in the Bank of the United States. That interest has no immediate or natural connection with political affairs, and had stood aloof, content with the due performance of its own duties. The attempt was made on the bank, and it failed. The men to whom the conduct of that institution had been confided, had themselves a stake in the country ; they had no common feelings or opinions with those who were conspiring against our liberties. They were neither to be cajoled nor brow-beaten. They defied the devil and all his works.

It is to be observed, that down to a recent period, notwithstanding all the misgovernment and abuses which prevailed, a great majority still supported the man of their choice. When blame could not be withheld, it was laid upon the advisers, and not upon their CHIEF. Although his friends were gradually giving him up, yet his personal popularity with the great mass of the people, was, as yet, scarcely affected.

A great lesson was to be given. It was decreed that his downfall should be a triumph of principle, and that no plausible reason should be left, for ascribing the decay of his popularity to the fickleness of popular favour.

One defeat, indeed, had already been experienced. Even the administration majority in the House of Representatives, had refused to throw the currency and business of the country into confusion, at the command of the chief, by destroying the Bank of the United States. The disappointment felt on this occasion, led directly to the desperate measures, which we are next to notice. Like Charles I. his Parliament had proved intractable, and he was now to try another way.

Thus far, the forms of law had been observed. HOWEVER, THE EXPERIMENT WAS NOW TO BE TRIED, and he looked about for an operator. He first sought one in Pennsylvania. But there he was mistaken. He had, and has still, many warm adherents in Pennsylvania, honest, virtuous and upright men, whose eyes have not yet been opened to all the deformities of their idol. But from the Lake to the Delaware, he could not find in Pennsylvania, the man who would deliberately become an active instrument in the destruction of our liberties. The individual whom he selected had a conscience, and a will of his own, and resolutely maintained his right to exercise in his own way, a discretion which the law had confided to *him*. He was, therefore, summarily discarded as a refractory subordinate. The president had discovered that

all executive officers, were merely instruments of the chief magistrate, and of course have no right to an opinion of their own. No,—he admits their right to hold an opinion, provided they do not express or act upon it. He has made, indeed, many discoveries. Among others, that as he is to execute the laws, he can only be expected to do it in the sense in which he chooses to understand them. So that of course those laws which he chooses to misunderstand, are to be executed according to his whim, while those which he cannot understand at all, are to remain unexecuted. He is to protect the Constitution; therefore, when either or both houses of Congress, do what he thinks the Constitution does not warrant, he must read them a lecture on their departure from its letter or spirit; point out the subjects which they may debate, and how they may debate them, the propositions which they may entertain, and to what decision they are to come on them. In fine, his will is to be the law:—that is the plain English of it:—we all understand it.

To return. His experiment was to be tried, and he wanted an instrument. Well, he found an instrument. The work was urgent. It must be completed before the meeting of Congress. He condescended to give his reason for this; he knew, forsooth, that a majority could, and would be bribed to oppose his measures! (O MY COUNTRY! how art thou degraded, when an EXECUTIVE officer DARES to speak thus of the REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE!) Whatever might have been the case with some members of his party, he had the best reason for knowing that others of them

could not be bought to oppose him, unless they were as knavish as the burglar who on the day before his execution sold his body to two different surgeons, and ended by bequeathing it to the hospital of the prison. But the work was to be done quickly, and an instrument was provided. The blow was struck. A charter, solemnly granted by law, was violated; the trial by jury was taken away; the rights held under a binding contract were disregarded; illegal contracts were made; the accruing public treasure was stopped in its way to the place of its legal deposit, and scattered in divers places, where it may be as hard to find as the surplus revenue of the post office department. The country was thrown into confusion; its currency disordered; its industry paralysed; its resources cut down. The breach of law and of justice was attended by as much private misery as public wrong. The deed was done. Congress had adjourned in the spring, leaving a country still governed by laws, and enjoying the highest prosperity. They met in the autumn amid the wreck of a broken Constitution, and the groans of a ruined people. Happy were the men whose destiny it was at this crisis to be posted in the front of the battle, and to strike the chord which was to vibrate in the hearts of millions. Need I name them? They live in our hearts! Their names are written where every day we turn the leaf to read them. The USURPATION was detected and exposed. There had been expected the tame hum of acquiescence, or at most the murmurs of timid discontent, but in lieu of these, there rose

from all parts of our territory the trumpet-tones of defiance and the earthquake voice of FREEMEN demanding their rights! No, we are not degenerate. At a word, the WHIGS started again into life for the GOOD OLD CAUSE! When forty thousand men assembled around the Hall of Independence and swore to live and die FREEMEN as their fathers had lived and died, their voice was echoed from the NORTH to the SOUTH. NEW YORK,—that had been trebly shackled,—awoke, arose, struggled, and is FREE! VIRGINIA, (God bless her, the gallant old racer!) VIRGINIA has leaped like a giant on the course! PENNSYLVANIA is up! From the VALLEY OF THE MISSISSIPPI come the echoing tones of FREEDOM! No, we are not degenerate! We have sworn to be FREE, and we will be so. We tread our native soil,—we have rallied round the standard of OUR COUNTRY! Every day we know ourselves and each other better, and acquire new confidence and new determination, and every day there come pouring into our camp from the ranks of the enemy, the WISE, the VIRTUOUS and the PATRIOTIC, who were long deceived, but are deceived no longer, and soon there will be left to make good the monstrous scheme of tyranny which has been projected, nothing but the rotten carcase of corruption, and an effeminate band of parasites.

When we shall have purified the House of Representatives by a free election, and set this government again upon its proper basis, let us never forget the men nor the body, that stood by our rights, manfully and against all odds.

I believe, that under God, the majority of the Senate, by their wisdom, their firmness, and their fearlessness, have saved us from a convulsion. They have prevented the total prostration of the barriers against arbitrary power; the fabric may again be peacefully resuscitated; the country will not bleed in civil war. Faithfully have those patriots, worthy of being eulogised on this day—faithfully have they stood to their posts. Their duty has been for the time fulfilled; the responsibility now rests upon us, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES. WE are to decide between LIBERTY and SLAVERY. We demand our CONSTITUTION and our LAWS, and to be governed by our OWN REPRESENTATIVES! We demand our CONSTITUTION as we understand it, and as our fathers understood it. We will suffer no quibbling glosses on that sacred text; no strained constructions to suit the purposes of arbitrary power. Show us the man who loves that CONSTITUTION,—who will maintain and support it against all opposers,—who will live—who will die for it,—and we show you A BROTHER! No matter by what name he has been called—no matter by what mutual injuries we may have been estranged,—no matter what wounds may have been festering in our bosoms,—we forget them all! We lay our feuds, our animosities and our revenge (A HOLY SACRIFICE!) on the altar of OUR COUNTRY,—and we pledge the hand of fellowship and the heart of truth, to every FREEMAN who shall stand with us at this hour by the ark of LIBERTY, and partake our triumph in her cause!

With such a spirit, and in such a cause, how can we fail? By that love of LIBERTY, which is set on the inmost shrine of our hearts—by that love of our COUNTRY which lives in all our thoughts—by our recollections of her past struggles—by our sense of her present danger—by our hope of her future glory—nay, by that SAXON BLOOD which fills our veins, and which always turned to fire at the touch of oppression—we will never pause in this career, nor turn from our direct and forthright course, till we shall have swept away the last vestige of tyranny, and re-asserted and re-established in all its vigour, our HEREDITARY FREEDOM!

We do not blush for our ancestors, nor shall our children blush for us. May they to the end of time, keep this glorious day as we keep it, and go on from age to age, rejoicing in the buoyant spirit and blessed enjoyment of that LIBERTY which has been already won, and is now to be maintained!



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