

Bid us and our posterity bow the knee, supplicate the friendship, and plow, and sow, and reap, to glut the avarice of the men who have let loose on us the dogs of war to riot in our blood and hunt us from the face of the earth? If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquillity of servitude than the animating contest of freedom—go from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains sit lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen!

To unite the supremacy of Great Britain and the liberty of America is utterly impossible. So vast a continent, and of such a distance from the seat of empire, will every day grow more unmanageable. The motion of so unwieldy a body cannot be directed with any despatch and uniformity without committing to the Parliament of Great Britain powers inconsistent with our freedom. The authority and force which would be absolutely necessary for the preservation of the peace and good order of this continent would put all our valuable rights within the reach of that nation.

As the administration of government requires firmer and more numerous supports in proportion to its extent, the burdens imposed on us would be excessive, and we should have the melancholy prospect of their increasing on our posterity. The scale of officers, from the rapacious and needy commissioner to the haughty governor, and from the governor, with his hungry train, to perhaps a licentious and prodigal viceroy, must be upheld by you and your children. The fleets and armies which will be employed to silence your murmurs and complaints must be supported by the fruits of your industry.

And yet with all this enlargement of the expense and powers of government, the administration of it at such a

distance, and over so extensive a territory, must necessarily fail of putting the laws into vigorous execution, removing private oppressions, and forming plans for the advancement of agriculture and commerce, and preserving the vast empire in any tolerable peace and security. If our posterity retain any spark of patriotism, they can never tamely submit to such burdens. This country will be made the field of bloody contention till it gain that independence for which nature formed it. It is, therefore, injustice and cruelty to our offspring, and would stamp us with the character of baseness and cowardice, to leave the salvation of this country to be worked out by them with accumulated difficulty and danger.

Prejudice, I confess, may warp our judgments. Let us hear the decision of Englishmen on this subject, who cannot be suspected of partiality. "The Americans," they say, "are but little short of half our number. To this number they have grown from a small body of original settlers by a very rapid increase. The probability is that they will go on to increase, and that in fifty or sixty years they will be double our number, and form a mighty empire, consisting of a variety of States, all equal or superior to ourselves in all the arts and accomplishments which give dignity and happiness to human life. In that period will they be still bound to acknowledge that supremacy over them which we now claim? Can there be any person who will assert this, or whose mind does not revolt at the idea of a vast continent holding all that is valuable to it at the discretion of a handful of people on the other side of the Atlantic? But if at that period this would be unreasonable, what makes it otherwise now? Draw the line if you can. But there is still a greater difficulty."

Britain is now, I will suppose, the seat of liberty and virtue, and its legislature consists of a body of able and independent men, who govern with wisdom and justice. The time may come when all will be reversed; when its excellent constitution of government will be subverted; when, pressed by debts and taxes, it will be greedy to draw to itself an increase of revenue from every distant province, in order to ease its own burdens; when the influence of the crown, strengthened by luxury and a universal profligacy of manners, will have tainted every heart, broken down every fence of liberty, and rendered us a nation of tame and contented vassals; when a general election will be nothing but a general auction of boroughs, and when the Parliament, the grand council of the nation, and once the faithful guardian of the State, and a terror to evil ministers, will be degenerated into a body of sycophants, dependent and venal, always ready to confirm any measures, and little more than a public court for registering royal edicts. Such, it is possible, may, some time or other, be the state of Great Britain. What will, at that period, be the duty of the colonies? Will they be still bound to unconditional submission? Must they always continue an appendage to our government and follow it implicitly through every change that can happen to it? Wretched condition, indeed, of millions of freemen as good as ourselves! Will you say that we now govern equitably, and that there is no danger of such revolution? Would to God that this were true! But you will not always say the same. Who shall judge whether we govern equitably or not? Can you give the colonies any security that such a period will never come? No. *The period, countrymen, is already come!* The calamities were at our door. The

rod of oppression was raised over us. We were roused from our slumbers, and may we never sink into repose until we can convey a clear and undisputed inheritance to our posterity! This day we are called upon to give a glorious example of what the wisest and best of men were rejoiced to view, only in speculation. This day presents the world with the most august spectacle that its annals ever unfolded—millions of freemen, deliberately and voluntarily forming themselves into a society for their common defence and common happiness. Immortal spirits of Hampden, Locke, and Sidney, will it not add to your benevolent joys to behold your posterity rising to the dignity of men, and evincing to the world the reality and expediency of your systems, and in the actual enjoyment of that equal liberty, which you were happy, when on earth, in delineating and recommending to mankind?

Other nations have received their laws from conquerors; some are indebted for a constitution to the suffering of their ancestors through revolving centuries. The people of this country, alone, have formally and deliberately chosen a government for themselves, and with open and uninfluenced consent bound themselves into a social compact. Here no man proclaims his birth or wealth as a title to honorable distinction, or to sanctify ignorance and vice with the name of hereditary authority. He who has most zeal and ability to promote public felicity, let him be the servant of the public. This is the only line of distinction drawn by nature. Leave the bird of night to the obscurity for which nature intended him, and expect only from the eagle to brush the clouds with his wings and look boldly in the face of the sun.

Some who would persuade us that they have tender

feelings for future generations, while they are insensible to the happiness of the present, are perpetually foreboding a train of dissensions under our popular system. Such men's reasoning amounts to this: Give up all that is valuable to Great Britain and then you will have no inducements to quarrel among yourselves; or, suffer yourselves to be chained down by your enemies that you may not be able to fight with your friends.

This is an insult on your virtue as well as your common-sense. Your unanimity this day and through the course of the war is a decisive refutation of such invidious predictions. Our enemies have already had evidence that our present Constitution contains in it the justice and ardor of freedom and the wisdom and vigor of the most absolute system.

When the law is the will of the people, it will be uniform and coherent; but fluctuation, contradiction, and inconsistency of councils must be expected under those governments where every revolution in the ministry of a court produces one in the State—such being the folly and pride of all ministers, that they ever pursue measures directly opposite to those of their predecessors.

We shall neither be exposed to the necessary convulsions of elective monarchies, nor to the want of wisdom, fortitude, and virtue, to which hereditary succession is liable. In your hands it will be to perpetuate a prudent, active, and just legislature, and which will never expire until you yourselves lose the virtues which give it existence.

And, brethren and fellow-countrymen, if it was ever granted to mortals to trace the designs of Providence, and interpret its manifestations in favor of their cause, we may,

with humility of soul, cry out, "Not unto us, not unto us, but to thy Name be the praise!" The confusion of the devices among our enemies, and the rage of the elements against them, have done almost as much toward our success as either our councils or our arms.

The time at which this attempt on our liberty was made, when we were ripened into maturity, had acquired a knowledge of war, and were free from the incursions of enemies in this country; the gradual advances of our oppressors enabling us to prepare for our defence; the unusual fertility of our lands and clemency of the seasons; the success which at first attended our feeble arms, producing unanimity among our friends and reducing our internal foes to acquiescence—these are all strong and palpable marks and assurances that Providence is yet gracious unto Zion, that it will turn away the captivity of Jacob.

Our glorious reformers when they broke through the fetters of superstition effected more than could be expected from an age so darkened. But they left much to be done by their posterity. They lopped off, indeed, some of the branches of Popery, but they left the root and stock when they left us under the domination of human systems and decisions, usurping the infallibility which can be attributed to Revelation alone. They dethroned one usurper only to raise up another; they refused allegiance to the Pope only to place the civil magistrate in the throne of Christ, vested with authority to enact laws and inflict penalties in his kingdom. And if we now cast our eyes over the nations of the earth, we shall find that, instead of possessing the pure religion of the Gospel, they may be divided either into infidels, who deny the truth; or politicians who make religion a stalking horse for their ambition; or professors,

who walk in the trammels of orthodoxy, and are more attentive to traditions and ordinances of men than to the oracles of truth.

The civil magistrate has everywhere contaminated religion by making it an engine of policy; and freedom of thought and the right of private judgment, in matters of conscience, driven from every other corner of the earth, direct their course to this happy country, as their last asylum. Let us cherish the noble guests, and shelter them under the wings of a universal toleration! Be this the seat of unbounded religious freedom. She will bring with her in her train, industry, wisdom, and commerce. She thrives most when left to shoot forth in her natural luxuriance, and asks for human policy only not to be checked in her growth by artificial encouragements.

Thus, by the beneficence of Providence, we shall behold our empire arising, founded on justice and the voluntary consent of the people, and giving full scope to the exercise of those faculties and rights which most ennoble our species. Besides the advantages of liberty and the most equal Constitution, Heaven has given us a country with every variety of climate and soil, pouring forth in abundance whatever is necessary for the support, comfort, and strength of a nation. Within our own borders we possess all the means of sustenance, defence, and commerce; at the same time, these advantages are so distributed among the different States of this continent, as if nature had in view to proclaim to us: Be united among yourselves and you will want nothing from the rest of the world.

The more northern States most amply supply us with every necessary, and many of the luxuries of life; with iron, timber, and masts for ships of commerce or of war;

with flax for the manufacture of linen, and seed either for oil or exportation.

So abundant are our harvests, that almost every part raises more than double the quantity of grain requisite for the support of the inhabitants. From Georgia and the Carolinas we have, as well for our own wants as for the purpose of supplying the wants of other powers, indigo, rice, hemp, naval stores, and lumber.

Virginia and Maryland teem with wheat, Indian corn, and tobacco. Every nation whose harvest is precarious, or whose lands yield not those commodities which we cultivate, will gladly exchange their superfluities and manufactures for ours.

We have already received many and large cargoes of clothing, military stores, etc., from our commerce with foreign powers, and, in spite of the efforts of the boasted navy of England, we shall continue to profit by this connection.

The want of our naval stores has already increased the price of these articles to a great height, especially in Britain. Without our lumber, it will be impossible for those haughty islanders to convey the products of the West Indies to their own ports; for a while they may with difficulty effect it, but, without our assistance, their resources soon must fail. Indeed, the West India islands appear as the necessary appendages to this our empire. They must owe their support to it, and ere long, I doubt not, some of them will, from necessity, wish to enjoy the benefit of our protection.

These natural advantages will enable us to remain independent of the world, or make it the interest of European powers to court our alliance, and aid in protecting us against

the invasion of others. What argument, therefore, do we want to show the equity of our conduct; or motive of interest to recommend it to our prudence? Nature points out the path, and our enemies have obliged us to pursue it.

If there is any man so base or so weak as to prefer a dependence on Great Britain to the dignity and happiness of living a member of a free and independent nation, let me tell him that necessity now demands what the generous principle of patriotism should have dictated.

We have no other alternative than independence, or the most ignominious and galling servitude. The legions of our enemies thicken on our plains; desolation and death mark their bloody career; while the mangled corpses of our countrymen seem to cry out to us as a voice from heaven:

“Will you permit our posterity to groan under the galling chains of our murderers? Has our blood been expended in vain? Is the only benefit which our constancy till death has obtained for our country, that it should be sunk into a deeper and more ignominious vassalage? Recollect who are the men that demand your submission, to whose decrees you are invited to pay obedience. Men who, unmindful of their relation to you as brethren; of your long implicit submission to their laws; of the sacrifice which you and your forefathers made of your natural advantages for commerce to their avarice; formed a deliberate plan to wrest from you the small pittance of property which they had permitted you to acquire. Remember that the men who wish to rule over you are they who, in pursuit of this plan of despotism, annulled the sacred contracts which they had made with your ancestors, conveyed into your cities a mercenary soldiery to compel you to submission by insult

and murder; who called your patience cowardice, your piety hypocrisy.”

Countrymen, the men who now invite you to surrender your rights into their hands are the men who have let loose the merciless savages to riot in the blood of their brethren, who have dared to establish Popery triumphant in our land; who have taught treachery to your slaves, and courted them to assassinate your wives and children.

These are the men to whom we are exhorted to sacrifice the blessings which Providence holds out to us, the happiness, the dignity, of uncontrolled freedom and independence.

Let not your generous indignation be directed against any among us who may advise so absurd and maddening a measure. Their number is but few, and daily decreases; and the spirit which can render them patient of slavery will render them contemptible enemies.

Our Union is now complete; our Constitution composed, established, and approved. You are now the guardians of your own liberties. We may justly address you, as the decemviri did the Romans, and say, “Nothing that we propose can pass into a law without your consent. Be yourselves, O Americans, the authors of those laws on which your happiness depends.”

You have now in the field armies sufficient to repel the whole force of your enemies and their base and mercenary auxiliaries. The hearts of your soldiers beat high with the spirit of freedom; they are animated with the justice of their cause, and while they grasp their swords can look up to Heaven for assistance. Your adversaries are composed of wretches who laugh at the rights of humanity, who turn religion into derision, and would, for higher

wages, direct their swords against their leaders or their country. Go on, then, in your generous enterprise with gratitude to Heaven for past success, and confidence of it in the future. For my own part, I ask no greater blessing than to share with you the common danger and common glory. If I have a wish dearer to my soul than that my ashes may be mingled with those of a Warren and Montgomery, it is that these American States may never cease to be free and independent.

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