

Dr. Samuel Cooper (1725-1783), *A Sermon Preached before His Excellency John Hancock, [...] of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780. Being the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution, and Inauguration of the New Government* (Commonwealth of Massachusetts [Boston]: J. Fleet and J. Gill, [1780])

DR. COOPER'S
SERMON
ON THE COMMENCEMENT
OF THE
Constitution, & c.

A SERMON
PREACHED BEFORE HIS EXCELLENCY
JOHN HANCOCK, ESQ;
GOVERNOUR,
THE HONOURABLE THE
SENATE,
AND
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH
OF
MASSACHUSETTS,
OCTOBER 25, 1780.
BEING THE DAY OF THE
COMMENCEMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION,
AND
INAUGURATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

BY SAMUEL COOPER, D.D.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS;
PRINTED [...] [BY] J. FLEET, AND J. GILL.
[1780]

In the House of Representatives, June 24, 1780.

ORDERED, That Colonel *Dawes* and Major *Osgood*, with such as the Honourable Board shall join, be a Committee to inform the Rev. Dr. COOPER that the two Houses have made choice of him to preach a Sermon on the last Wednesday of October next, being the first Day of General Election under the new Constitution.

Sent up for Concurrence,
JOHN HANCOCK, Speaker.

In Council, June 4, 1780.

Read and concurred, and *Thomas Cushing*, Esq; is joined.

JOHN AVERY, Dep. Secr'y.

Consented to by the Major Part of the Council.

A true Copy,

Attest. JOHN AVERY, Dep. Secr'y.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In the House of Representatives, October 26, 1780.

ORDERED, That Mr. *Lowell* and Col. *Dawes* be appointed a Committee, with such as the Honourable Senate shall join, to wait on the Rev. Doct. COOPER and return him the Thanks of both Houses for his Sermon Yesterday delivered before the General Assembly, and to request a Copy thereof for the Press.

Sent up for Concurrence,
CALEB DAVIS, Speaker.

In Senate, October 30, 1780.

Read and concurred, and *Abraham Fuller*, Esq; is joined on the part of the Senate.

THOMAS CUSHING, President.

True Copy,

Attest. JOHN AVERY, Secr'y.

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A SERMON, & c.

XXXth JEREMIAH, 20, 21 Ver.

“Their Congregation shall be established before me: and their Nobles shall be of themselves, and their Governor shall proceed from the midst of them.”

Nothing can be more applicable to the solemnity in which we are engaged, than this passage of sacred writ. The prophecy seems to have been made for ourselves, it is so exactly descriptive of that important, that comprehensive, that essential civil blessing, which kindles the luster, and diffuses the joy of the present day. Nor is this the only passage of holy Scripture that holds up to our view a striking resemblance between our own circumstances and those of the ancient Israelites; a nation chosen by God a theater for the display of some of the most astonishing dispensations of his Providence. Like that nation we rose from oppression, and emerged “from the House of Bondage”: Like that nation we were led into a wilderness, as a refuge from tyranny, and a preparation for the enjoyment of our civil and religious rights: Like that nation we have been pursued through the sea, by the armed hand of power, which, but for the signal interpositions of Heaven, must before now have totally defeated the noble purpose of our emigration: And, to omit many other instances of similarity, like that nation we have been ungrateful to the Supreme Ruler of the world, and too “lightly esteemed the Rock of our Salvation”; accordingly, we have been corrected by his justice, and at the same time remarkably supported and defended by his mercy: So that we may discern our own picture in the figure of the ancient church divinely exhibited to Moses in vision, “a bush burning and not consumed.” This day, this memorable day, is a witness, that the Lord, He whose “hand maketh great, and giveth strength unto all, hath not forsaken us, nor our God forgotten us.” This day, which forms a new era in our annals, exhibits a testimony to all the world, that contrary to our deserts, and amidst all our troubles, the blessing promised in our text to the afflicted seed of Abraham is come upon us; “Their Nobles shall be of themselves, and their Governor shall

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proceed from the midst of them.”

This Prophecy has an immediate respect to the deliverance of the Jews from the cruel oppressions of the king of Babylon. Their sufferings, when they fell under the power of this haughty tyrant, as they are represented to us in sacred history, must harrow a bosom softened with the least degree of humanity. They give us a frightful picture of the effects of despotic power, guided and inflamed by those lusts of the human heart with which it is seldom unaccompanied. Can we forbear weeping for human nature, or blushing for its degradation, when we view either the sufferer or the actor in such a scene; the relentless oppressor, or those who are “sore broken in the place of dragons?” What can be more pathetic than the description of it given by the same Prophet who gave the consolation in our text. “How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people? How is she become as a widow: she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces? She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; she hath none to comfort her; her friends have dealt treacherously with her. Judah is gone into captivity; because of affliction, and because of great servitude, she findeth no rest. Her mighty men are trodden under foot; her young men are crushed; the young and the old lie on the ground in the streets — Mine eyes do fail with tears; my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured on the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

Such are the fruits of lawless and despotic power in a mortal man intoxicated with it: Such desolations does it make in the earth — Such havoc in the family of God, merely for the sake of enlarging its bounds and impressing its terror on the human bosom. It often, indeed, claims a divine original, and impudently supports itself not barely on the permission, but the express designation of him “whose tender mercies are over all his works;” though it exactly resembles the grand adversary of God and man, and is only a “roaring lion that seeketh whom he may devour.” To plead a divine right for such a power is truly to teach “the doctrine of devils.” It covets every thing without bounds: It grasps every thing without pity: It riots on the spoils of innocence and industry: It is proud to annihilate the rights of mankind; to destroy the fairest constitutions of wisdom, policy and justice, the broadest sources of human happiness: While it enslaves the bodies, it debases the minds of the offspring of God: In its progress it changes the very face of nature, it withers even the fruits of the earth, and frustrates the bounties of our common parent. “Before it is the garden of God, behind it is a desolate wilderness.”

Looking upon the Jews when groaning under such a power; their armies

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vanguished; the flower of their country cut off by the sword; their fortresses reduced; their cities in ashes; their land ravaged; their temple and worship destroyed, and the remnant of the nation led in chains to a foreign land; who would have thought that in a few years, these cities and this temple should rise again from their ruins, and a people so totally enslaved and widely dispersed be restored to their rights and possessions, their laws and institutions; peace, liberty and plenty daily augmenting their numbers, and lighting up the face of joy through their whole land; while the haughty empire of Babylon, from which they had suffered so much, should set to rise no more! Such, however, were the decrees of Heaven; such the predictions of the inspired Prophets; and such the event.

“Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of thee; but thou shalt serve the Lord thy God: and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and they shall come and sing in the height of Zion: And fields shall be bought in this land whereof ye say it is desolate, it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans — men shall buy fields for money. And they that devour thee shall be devoured; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil. And out of Judah shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation, their religious and civil assemblies, shall be established before me: and I will punish all that oppress them: and their Nobles shall be of themselves, and their Governor shall proceed from the midst of them, and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me.”

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land of Judea, and brought upon it such devastations and miseries, it was governed by a King, who shared in the captivity of his subjects, and was led with them by the conqueror in chains to Babylon. But in the happy restoration promised in our text, it is observable, that the royal part of their government was not to be renewed. No mention is made in this refreshing prediction of a King, but only of Nobles, men of principal character and influence, who were to *be of themselves*, and such as they would choose to conduct their affairs; and a Governor, who should also *proceed from the midst of them*, and preside over all, clothed with a tempered authority and dignity, not with arbitrary power, and the means of gratifying an unbounded avarice and ambition.

The form of government originally established in the Hebrew nation by a charter from Heaven, was that of a free republic, over which God himself, in

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peculiar favour to that people, was pleased to preside. It consisted of three parts; a chief magistrate who was called judge or leader, such as Joshua and others, a council of seventy chosen men, and the general assemblies of the people. Of these the two last were the most essential and permanent, and the first more occasional, according to the particular circumstances of the nation. Their Council or Sanhedrin, remained with but little suspension, through all the vicissitudes they experienced, till after the commencement of the Christian era. And as to the assemblies of the people, that they were frequently held by divine appointment, and considered as the fountain of civil power, which they exerted by their own decrees, or distributed into various channels as they judged most conducive to their own security, order, and happiness, is evident beyond contradiction from the sacred history. Even the law of Moses, though framed by God himself, was not imposed upon that people against their will; it was laid open before the whole congregation of Israel; they freely adopted it, and it became their law, not only by divine appointment, but by their own voluntary and express consent. Upon this account it is called in the sacred writings a *Covenant*, compact, or mutual stipulation.

A solemn renewal of this covenant was the very last public act of Joshua their renowned leader. “He gathered all the tribes of Israel to Sechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for the heads and for the judges, and for their officers, and they presented themselves before God.” The occasion was great and important; being nothing less than to renew their acceptance of the constitution they had received from Heaven, and solemnly to confirm the national compact. How august was this assembly of a great nation, its representatives and magistrates of every order, with their brave and faithful leader at their head; he, who had been foremost to face the dangers of their cause, who had fought so many battles for their happy settlement, and rendered such various and important services to his country. In a short but nervous and pathetic address to the assembly, he reminded them of their small original; of the peculiar favors granted by Heaven to their progenitors; of their remarkable deliverance from the slavery of Egypt; of the wonders wrought for them by a divine hand in their progress through the wilderness; in their conquests on the borders of Canaan, and their firm possession of that promised land. Deeply impressed with this interesting recollection, he warmly declares his own resolution to abide by that noble cause for which they had been led by Heaven from an ignominious and servile dependence, and formed into a distinct and respectable nation. But as the memorable act of the day depended entirely on the consent of the

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people, he accordingly refers the matter to their own free determination. “Chuse you this day whom you will serve.” It was impossible for the people not to be moved by such an address; not to discern the excellency of the mosaic constitutions; how well they were adapted to the particular circumstances of the nation, and the noble purposes they were designed to promote. The people replied, *the Lord our God we will serve*; we consent, and are determined to be governed by the laws and the statutes he has been so graciously pleased to afford us. “Then Joshua said unto the people, ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him; and they said, we are witnesses.” If ever we renounce the constitution and happy settlement granted to us by Heaven; if ever we break the sacred compact; this day, and all the public and voluntary transactions of it, must be a witness against us. “Thus Joshua made a covenant with the people at Sechem”, which, we are afterwards told, he recorded in a book, and at the same time erected a monumental stone upon the spot, as a memorial of these sacred stipulations, and as a perpetual testimony, that the Supreme Ruler himself had not established their polity without their own free concurrence, and that the Hebrew nation, lately redeemed from tyranny, had now a civil and religious constitution of their own choice, and were governed by laws to which they had given their solemn consent.

To mention all the passages in sacred writ which prove that the Hebrew government, though a theocracy, was yet as to the outward part of it, a free republic, and that the sovereignty resided in the people, would be to recite a large part of its history. I will therefore only add a single instance. When the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manassah had erected a separate altar, though it afterwards appeared with no bad intention, all the other tribes were extremely alarmed, and being met in General Assembly, determined to make war on their offending brethren. But previous to the intended assault they agreed to send an embassy to expostulate with them on the occasion. Phinehaz and ten princes, or principal men, were appointed for this purpose. Here was an act of sovereignty, and an act of the highest importance to the interest of any nation, involving in it nothing less than the power of making peace or war. It was not done by Joshua, though he was then alive; it was an act of the congregation of Israel: The embassy upon this momentous matter was chosen, commissioned, and instructed by them. “As it was democratically sent, says a great author,(1) who wrote conclusively, who fought bravely, and died gloriously in the cause of liberty, it was democratically received: It was not directed to one man, but to all the children of Reuben, Gad and Manassah,

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and the answer was sent by them all.” The report was made to the congregation, who finally determined the grand question, and decided for peace.

Such was the civil constitution of the Hebrew nation, till growing weary of the gift of heaven, they demanded a King. After being admonished by the Prophet Samuel of the ingratitude and folly of their request, they were punished in the grant of it. Impiety, corruption and disorder of every kind afterwards increasing among them, they grew ripe for the judgments of Heaven in their desolation and captivity. Taught by these judgments the value of those blessings they had before despised, and groaning under the hand of tyranny more heavy than that of death, they felt the worth of their former civil and religious privileges, and were prepared to receive with gratitude and joy a restoration not barely to the land flowing with milk and honey, but to the most precious advantage they ever enjoyed in that land, their original constitution of government: They were prepared to welcome with the voice of mirth and thanksgiving the re-establishment of their congregations; nobles chosen from among themselves, and a governor proceeding from the midst of them.

Such a constitution, twice established by the hand of Heaven in that nation, so far as it respects civil and religious liberty in general, ought to be regarded as a solemn recognition from the Supreme Ruler himself of the rights of human nature. Abstracted from those appendages and formalities which were peculiar to the Jews, and designed to answer some particular purposes of divine Providence, it points out in general what kind of government infinite wisdom and goodness would establish among mankind.

We want not, indeed, a special revelation from Heaven to teach us that men are born equal and free; that no man has a natural claim of dominion over his neighbours, nor one nation any such claim upon another; and that as government is only the administration of the affairs of a number of men combined for their own security and happiness, such a society have a right freely to determine by whom and in what manner their own affairs shall be administered. These are the plain dictates of that reason and common sense with which the common parent of men has informed the human bosom. It is, however, a satisfaction to observe such everlasting maxims of equity confirmed, and impressed upon the consciences of men, by the instructions, precepts, and examples given us in the sacred oracles; one internal mark of their divine original, and that they come from him “who hath made of one blood all nations to dwell upon the face of the earth,” whose authority sanctifies only those governments that instead of oppressing any part of his family,

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vindicate the oppressed, and restrain and punish the oppressor.

Unhappy the people who are destitute of the blessing promised in our text; who have not the ulterior powers of government within themselves; who depend upon the will of another State, with which they are not incorporated as a vital part, the interest of which must in many respects be opposite to their own; and who at the same time have no fixed constitutional barrier to restrain this reigning power: There is no meanness or misery to which such a people is not liable: There is not a single blessing, though perhaps indulged to them for a while, that they can call their own; there is nothing they have not to dread. Whether the governing power be itself free or despotic, it matters not to the poor dependent. Nations who are jealous of their own liberties often sport with those of others; nay, it has been remarked, that the dependent provinces of free states have enjoyed less freedom than those belonging to despotic powers. Such was our late dismal situation, from which Heaven hath redeemed us by a signal and glorious revolution. We thought, indeed, we had a charter to support our rights; but we found a written charter, a thin barrier against all-prevailing power, that could construe it, to its own purpose, or rescind it by the sword at its own pleasure.

Upon our present independence, sweet and valuable as the blessing is, we may read the inscription, *I am found of them that sought me not*. Be it to our praise or blame, we cannot deny, that when we were not searching for it, it happily found us. It certainly must have been not only innocent but laudable and manly, to have desired it even before we felt the absolute necessity of it. It was our birth right; we ought to have valued it highly, and never to have received a *mess of pottage*, a small temporary supply, as an equivalent for it. Going upon the trite metaphor of a mother country, which has so often been weakly urged against us, like a child grown to maturity, we had a right to a distinct settlement in the world, and to the fruits of our own industry; and it would have been but justice, and no great generosity, in her who so much boasted her maternal tenderness to us, had she not only readily acquiesced, but even aided us in this settlement. It is certain, however, that we did not seek an independence; and it is equally certain that Britain, though she meant to oppose it with all her power, has by a strange infatuation, taken the most direct, and perhaps the only methods that could have established it. Her oppressions, her unrelenting cruelty, have driven us out from the family of which we were once a part: This has opened our eyes to discern the inestimable blessing of a separation from her; while, like children that have been inhumanly treated and cast out by their

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parents, and at the same time are capable of taking care of themselves, we have found friendship and respect from the world, and have formed new, advantageous, and honorable connections.

Independence gives us a rank among the nations of the earth, which no precept of our religion forbids us to understand and feel, and which we should be ambitious to support in the most reputable manner. It opens to us a free communication with all the world, not only for the improvement of commerce, and the acquisition of wealth, but also for the cultivation of the most useful knowledge. It naturally unfetters and expands the human mind, and prepares it for the impression of the most exalted virtues, as well as the reception of the most important science. If we look into the history and character of nations, we shall find those that have been for a long time, and to any considerable degree dependent upon others, limited and cramped in their improvements; corrupted by the court, and stained with the vices of the ruling state; and debased by an air of servility and depression marking their productions and manners. Servility is not only dishonorable to human nature, but commonly accompanied with the meanest vices, such as adulation, deceit, falsehood, treachery, cruelty, and the basest methods of supporting and procuring the favour of the power upon which it depends.

Neither does the time allow, nor circumstances require, that I should enter into a detail of all the principles and arguments upon which the right of our present establishment is grounded. They are known to all the world; they are to be found in the immortal writings of *Sidney* and *Locke*, and other glorious defenders of the liberties of human nature; they are also to be found, not dishonored, in the acts and publications of America on this great occasion, which have the approbation and applause of the wise and impartial among mankind, and even in Britain itself: They are the principles upon which her own government and her own revolution under William the third were founded; principles which brutal force may oppose, but which reason and Scripture will forever sanctify. The citizens of these States have had sense enough to comprehend the full force of these principles, and virtue enough, in the face of uncommon dangers, to act upon so just, so broad, and stable a foundation.

It has been said, that every nation is free that deserves to be so. This may not be always true: But had a people so illuminated as the inhabitants of these States, so nurtured by their ancestors in the love of freedom; a people to whom divine Providence was pleased to present so fair an opportunity of asserting their natural

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right as an independent nation, and who were even compelled by the arms of their enemies to take sanctuary in the temple of Liberty; had such a people been disobedient to the heavenly call, and refused to enter, who could have asserted their title to the glorious wreaths and peculiar blessings that are no where bestowed but in that hallowed place?

It is to the dishonor of human nature, that Liberty, wherever it has been planted and flourished, has commonly required to be watered with blood. Britain, in her conduct towards these States, hath given a fresh proof of the truth of this observation. She has attempted to destroy by her arms in America, what she professes to defend by these very arms on her own soil. Such is the nature of man, such the tendency of power in a nation as well as a single person. It makes a perpetual effort to enlarge itself, and presses against the bounds that confine it. It loses by degrees all idea of right but its own; and therefore that people must be unhappy indeed, who have nothing but humble petitions and remonstrances, and the feeble voice of a charter to oppose to the arms of another nation, that claims A RIGHT TO BIND THEM IN ALL CASES WHATSOEVER.

Poor Genoa! says an author(2) who exposes with great energy and spirit the idea of receiving as the gift of a despot, by a written charter, a title to the rights of human nature, and to which all men are born; “Poor Genoa! wherefore shouldst thou be vain of exhibiting a charter of privileges given thee by one Berenger: Concessions of privileges are but titles of servitude: The true Charter of Liberty is *Independency supported by Force*. — It is with the point of the sword the diplomas that ratify this natural right must be signed. Happy Switzerland! To what placart owest thou thy Liberty? To thy courage, thy firmness, thy mountains. But hold — I am your Emperor. “We do not choose you should be any longer so.” But your fathers were my father’s slaves. “It is for that reason their children will not be yours.” But I have a right by dignity. — “And we have a right by nature. When did the Seven United Provinces become possessed of this incontestable right? From the moment they united; and from that moment Philip II. became the Rebel.”

Heaven and *earth* can bear witness that these States are innocent of the blood that hath been shed, and the miseries diffused by this unrighteous war. We have stood upon the ground of justice, honor, and liberty, and acted merely a defensive part. Not unreasonable in our demands, not violent in our councils, not precipitate in our conduct, our “moderation has been known to all men;” and without refusing a single claim that Britain could in equity make upon us, our persons, our property,

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our rights have been invaded in every step that led to this revolution. I do not wish that this should be taken for granted barely upon our own declaration. Without appealing to foreign nations, whose conduct towards us demonstrates what opinion they form of our principles and measures; we have an acknowledgment of the truth of this assertion from Britain itself; from men of approved wisdom, integrity, and candor; from some of the first characters, and brightest ornaments in her own government; from innumerable speeches in her Parliaments, and from solemn protests in her House of Lords.

Allow me particularly to mention on this occasion the letters of Mr. HARTLEY, member of the British House of Commons for Hull, to his constituents; in which he gives a detail of the measures of that government respecting America, and upon which he says; — “Thinking, as I have always thought, that the FOUNDATION and PROSECUTION of the war against America has been unjust, I have taken some pains to lay open those insidious arts which ministers have practised, that I may contribute my feeble efforts to vindicate my country at large from so grievous a charge as that of supporting an unjust cause, knowing it to be unjust.” In another place, he says, “When all these transactions shall come hereafter to be revised in some cooler hour, I am confident there is not a man with a British heart who will not say, that in the same circumstances he would have acted as the Americans have done.” He goes on, “What had the Americans to look to after the refusal of their last petition, but to seek for shelter in their own strength and Independence? They were cut off from all possible communication with their sovereign and their mother country; and the first act of the second session of parliament was to cast them out of all national and parliamentary protection; to send 20,000 German mercenaries against them [...] They had petitioned and addressed; they had disclaimed every idea of independence; in return for which administration sends against them an army of 50,000 men. Now let ministers answer to God and their country for the blood which they have shed. The blood of thousands of their fellow creatures, willfully and premeditatedly shed in an unjust cause, will be required at their hands; who have taken their full stretch of vengeance, in their attempts to destroy and to lay waste to the utmost of their malignant power the lives, liberty, property, and all the rights of mankind.”

Nothing can be more full to the point than this acknowledgment from a gentleman of such distinguished character: He imputes indeed the whole to the ministers, but as it was all adopted and authorised by the whole British government,

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it became an act of the nation in general; though many worthy individuals, with himself, abhorred the injustice and cruelty.

In the protest of the Lords, against the prohibitory bill, the dissentient Peers say, “We are preparing the minds of the Americans for that Independence we charge them with affecting, whilst we drive them to the *necessity* of it by repeated injuries.” “I rejoice that the Americans have resisted,” said Lord Chatham in parliament; a short but full testimony from that great man to the justice of our cause.

Thus are we acquitted from the guilt of all this blood that “crieth from the ground,” by the public declarations of many of the wisest and best men in Britain; men who perfectly knew all the measures of her government, and all that could be offered to justify them, being themselves a part of this government: Men deeply versed in natural and political law, capable of forming the truest judgment upon so important a point, and who cannot be suspected of partiality in our favour. With all this justice on our side, we still put our cause to great hazard by delaying to declare ourselves a separate nation, even after Britain had with her own hands violently broken every bond of union.

By this conduct of our enemies, Heaven hath granted us an inestimable opportunity, and such as has been rarely if ever indulged to so great a people: An opportunity to avail ourselves of the wisdom and experience of all past ages united with that of the present; of comparing what we have seen and felt ourselves, with what we have known and read of others; and of choosing for ourselves, unencumbered with the pretensions of royal heirs, or lordly peers, of feudal rights, or ecclesiastical authority, that form of civil government which we judge most conducive to our own security and order, liberty and happiness: An opportunity, though surrounded with the flames of war, of deliberating and deciding upon this most interesting of all human affairs with calmness and freedom. This, in all its circumstances, is a singular event; it is hard to tell where another such scene was ever beheld. The origin of most nations is covered with obscurity, and veiled by fiction; the rise of our own is open as it is honorable; and the new-born state, may I not be allowed to say, is a “spectacle to men and angels”. For as piety, virtue, and morals are not a little interested in government, such a transaction has an aspect upon both worlds; and concerns us not only as members of civil society upon earth, but as candidates for “the city of the living God, the Jerusalem on high”.

Happy people! who not awed by the voice of a master; not chained by slavish customs, superstitions, and prejudices, have deliberately framed the constitution

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under which you choose to live; and are to be subject to no laws, by which you do not consent to bind yourselves. In such an attitude human nature appears with its proper dignity: On such a basis, life, and all that sweetens and adorns it, may rest with as much security as human imperfection can possibly admit: In such a constitution we find a country deserving to be loved, and worthy to be defended. For what is our country? Is it a soil of which, though we may be the present possessors, we can call no part our own? or the air in which we first drew our breath, from which we may be confined in a dungeon, or of which we may be deprived by the ax or the halter at the pleasure of a tyrant? Is not a country a constitution—an established frame of laws; of which a man may say, “we are here united in society for our common security and happiness. These fields and these fruits are my own: The regulations under which I live are my own; I am not only a proprietor in the soil, but I am part of the sovereignty of my country”. Such ought to be the community of men, and such, adored be the goodness of the supreme Ruler of the world, such, at present is our own country; of which this day affords a bright evidence, a glorious recognition.

To the disappointment of our enemies, and the joy of our friends, we have now attained a settled government with a degree of peace and unanimity, all circumstances considered, truly surprizing. The sagacity, the political knowledge, the patient deliberation, the constant attention to the grand principles of liberty, and the mutual condescension and candor under a diversity of apprehension respecting the modes of administration, exhibited by those who were appointed to form this constitution, and by the people who ratified it, must do immortal honor to our country. It is, we believe, “an happy foundation for many generations”; and the framers of it are indeed the *Fathers* of their country; since nothing is so essential to the increase, and universal prosperity of a community, as a constitution of government founded in justice, and friendly to liberty. Such men have a monument of glory more durable than brass or marble.

I need not enlarge before such an audience upon the particular excellencies of this constitution: How effectually it makes the people the keepers of their own liberties, with whom they are certainly safest: How nicely it poises the powers of government, in order to render them as far as human foresight can, what God ever designed they should be, powers only to do good: How happily it guards on the one hand against anarchy and confusion, and on the other against tyranny and oppression: How carefully it separates the legislative from the executive power, a

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point essential to liberty: How wisely it has provided for the impartial execution of the laws in the independent situation of the judges; a matter of capital moment, and without which the freedom of a constitution in other respects, might be often delusory, and not realized in the just security of the person and property of the subject.

In addition to all this, what a broad foundation for the exercise of the rights of conscience is laid in this constitution! which declares, that “no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained in his person, liberty or estate, for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience, or for his religious profession or sentiments; and that every denomination of Christians, demeaning themselves peaceably, and as good subjects of the commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the law, and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall be established by law.” It considers indeed morality and the public worship of God as important to the happiness of society: And surely it would be an affront to the people of this state, as the convention speak in their previous address, “to labor to convince them that the honor and happiness of a people depend upon morality; and that the public worship of God has a tendency to inculcate the principles thereof, as well as to preserve a people from forsaking civilization, and falling into a state of savage barbarity”.

Of these, and other excellent properties of our present constitution, the citizens of this state are thoroughly sensible, or well informed, and jealous as they are of their rights, they never would have adopted and ratified it with so great a degree of unanimity. They know it is framed upon an extent of civil and religious liberty, unexampled perhaps in any country in the world, except America. This must highly endear it to them; and while it is written upon their own hearts, they have the satisfaction to find that it has already received the elogiums of others, whose capacity and distinction render their testimony truly honorable. But lest through the imperfection of human nature, and after all the deliberation and caution with which it has been formed and approved, some inconveniences should be found lurking in it, of which experience can best inform us, a right is expressly reserved to the people of removing them in a revision of the whole, after a fair experiment of fifteen years.

When a people have the rare felicity of choosing their own government, every part of it should first be weighed in the balance of reason, and nicely adjusted to the claims of liberty, equity and order; but when this is done, a warm and passionate patriotism should be added to the result of cool deliberation, to put in motion and

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animate the whole machine. The citizens of a free republic should reverence their constitution: They should not only calmly approve, and readily submit to it, but regard it also with veneration and affection rising even to an enthusiasm, like that which prevailed at Sparta and at Rome. Nothing can render a commonwealth more illustrious, nothing more powerful, than such a manly, such a sacred fire. Every thing will then be subordinated to the public welfare; every labour necessary to this will be cheerfully endured, every expence readily submitted to, every danger boldly confronted.

May this heavenly flame animate all orders of men in the state! May it catch from bosom to bosom, and the glow be universal! May a double portion of it inhabit the breasts of our civil rulers, and impart a luster to them like that which sat upon the face of Moses, when he came down from the holy mountain with the tables of the Hebrew constitution in his hand! Thus will they sustain with true dignity the first honours, the first marks of esteem and confidence, the first public employments bestowed by this new commonwealth, and in which they this day appear. Such men must naturally care for our state; men whose abilities and virtues have obtained a sanction from the free suffrages of their enlightened and virtuous fellow citizens. Are not these suffrages, a public and solemn testimony that in the opinion of their constituents, they are men who have steadily acted upon the noble principles on which the frame of our government now rests? — Men who have generously neglected their private interest in an ardent pursuit of that of the public — Men who have intrepidly opposed one of the greatest powers on earth, and put their fortunes and their lives to no small hazard in fixing the basis of our freedom and honour. Who can forbear congratulating our rising State, and casting up a thankful eye to Heaven, upon this great and singular occasion, the establishment of our Congregation; our Nobles freely chosen by ourselves; and our Governour coming forth, at the call of his country, from the midst of us?

Behold the man, whose name as President of Congress, authenticates that immortal act, which, in form, constitutes the Independence of these United States, and by which *a nation* was literally *born in a day*! See him, who had taken too early and decided a part, and done too much for the liberties of America, to be forgiven by its enemies! See him, whose name, with that of another distinguished patriot,(3) was expressly excepted from a British act of grace, and upon whose head a price was virtually bid by those who meant to enslave us: Behold this very man, declared by the voice of his country, “the head of the corner” in our political building; the

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first Magistrate of this free Commonwealth. It was not in the power of his fellow citizens to give an higher testimony how well they remember the generous and important services he has already rendered to his country, and how much they confide in his disposition and abilities still to serve it.

May God Almighty take his Excellency and the other honourable branches of the government, the Lieutenant Governour, the Council, the Senate, and House of Representatives into his holy protection, and unite them in measures glorious to themselves, and happy to their country! Vested as they are with particular honours, they have a painful preeminence: Their distinctions call them to the most weighty and important cares, at a time when the administration of public affairs is attended with peculiar difficulties. They need therefore the gracious direction and assistance of the “blessed and only Potentate,” which, in this solemn assembly of rulers and people, we jointly and devoutly implore.

The people of a free State have a right to expect from those whom they have honoured with the direction of their public concerns, a faithful and unremitting attention to these concerns. He who accepts a public trust, pledges himself, his sacred honour, and by his official oath appeals to his God, that with all good fidelity, and to the utmost of his capacity he will discharge this trust. And that Commonwealth which doth not keep an eye of care upon those who govern, and observe how they behave in their several departments, in order to regulate its suffrages upon this standard, will soon find itself in perplexity, and cannot expect long to preserve either its dignity or happiness.

Dignity of conduct is ever connected with the happiness of a State; particularly at its rise, and the first appearance it makes in the world. Then all eyes are turned upon it; they view it with attention; and the first impressions it makes are commonly lasting. This circumstance must render the conduct of our present rulers peculiarly important, and fall with particular weight upon their minds. We hope from their wisdom and abilities, their untainted integrity and unshaken firmness, this new formed Commonwealth will rise with honour and applause, and attract that respect, which the number and quality of its inhabitants, the extent of its territory and commerce, and the natural advantages with which it is blessed, cannot fail, under a good government, to command.

From our present happy establishment we may reasonably hope for a new energy in government; an energy that shall be felt in all parts of the State: We hope that the sinews of civil authority through its whole frame will be well braced, and the

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public interest in all its extended branches be well attended to; that no officer will be permitted to neglect the duties, or transgress the bounds of his department; that peculations, frauds, and even the smaller oppressions in any office, will be watchfully prevented, or exemplarily punished; and that no corruption will be allowed to rest in any part of the political body, no not in the extremest, which may spread by degrees, and finally reach the very vitals of the community.

Righteousness, says one of the greatest politicians and wisest princes that ever lived, "Righteousness exalteth a nation." This maxim doth not barely rest upon his own but also on a divine authority; and the truth of it hath been verified by the experience of all ages.

Our civil rulers will remember, that as piety and virtue support the honour and happiness of every community, they are peculiarly requisite in a free government. Virtue is the spirit of a Republic; for where all power is derived from the people, all depends on their good disposition. If they are impious, factious and selfish; if they are abandoned to idleness, dissipation, luxury, and extravagance; if they are lost to the fear of God, and the love of their country, all is lost. Having got beyond the restraints of a divine authority, they will not brook the control of laws enacted by rulers of their own creating. We may therefore rely that the present Government will do all it fairly can, by authority and example, to answer the end of its institution, that the members of this Commonwealth may *lead a quiet and peaceable life in all* GODLINESS as well as *honesty*, and our liberty never be justly reproached as licentiousness.

I know there is a diversity of sentiment respecting the extent of civil power in religious matters. Instead of entering into the dispute, may I be allowed from the warmth of my heart, to recommend, where conscience is pleaded on both sides, mutual candour and love, and an happy union of all denominations in support of a government, which though human, and therefore not absolutely perfect, is yet certainly founded on the broadest basis of liberty, and affords equal protection to all. Warm parties upon civil or religious matters, or from personal considerations, are greatly injurious to a free State, and particularly so to one newly formed. We have indeed less of this than might be expected: We shall be happy to have none at all; happy indeed, when every man shall love and serve his country, and have that share of public influence and respect, without distinction of parties, which his virtues and services may justly demand. This is the true spirit of a Commonwealth, centering all hearts, and all hands in the common interest.

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Neither piety, virtue, or liberty can long flourish in a community, where the education of youth is neglected. How much do we owe to the care of our venerable ancestors upon this important object? Had they not laid such foundations for training up their children in knowledge and religion, in science, and arts, should we have been so respectable a community as we this day appear? Should we have understood our rights so clearly? or valued them so highly? or defended them with such advantage? Or should we have been prepared to lay that basis of liberty, that happy constitution, on which we raise such large hopes, and from which we derive such uncommon joy? We may therefore be confident that the schools, and particularly the university, founded and cherished by our wise and pious fathers, will be patronized and nursed by a government which is so much indebted to them for its honour and efficacy, and the very principles of its existence. The present circumstances of those institutions call for the kindest attention of our rulers; and their close connection with every public interest, civil and religious, strongly enforces the call.

The sciences and arts, for the encouragement of which a new foundation⁽⁴⁾ hath lately been laid in this Commonwealth, deserve the countenance and particular favour of every government. They are not only ornamental but useful: They not only polish, but support, enrich, and defend a community. As they delight in liberty, they are particularly friendly to free States. Barbarians are fierce and ungovernable, and having the grossest ideas of order, and the benefits resulting from it, they require the hand of a stern master; but a people enlightened and civilized by the sciences and liberal arts, have sentiments that support liberty and good laws: They may be guided by a silken thread; and the mild punishments proper to a free State are sufficient to guard the public peace.

An established honour and fidelity in all public engagements and promises, form a branch of righteousness that is wealth, is power, and security to a State: It prevents innumerable perplexities: It creates confidence in the government from subjects and from strangers: It facilitates the most advantageous connections: It extends credit; and easily obtains supplies in the most pressing public emergencies, and when nothing else can obtain them: While the want of it, whatever benefits some short-sighted politicians may have promised from delusive expedients, and deceitful arts, renders a State weak and contemptible; strips it of its defence; grieves and provoke its friends, and delivers it up to the will of its enemies. Upon what does the power of the British nation chiefly rest at this moment? That power that has

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been so unrighteously employed against America? Upon the long and nice preservation of her faith in all monied matters. With all her injustice in other instances, mere policy hath obliged her to maintain a fair character with her creditors. The support this hath given her in frequent and expensive wars, by the supplies it has enabled her to raise upon loan, is astonishing. By this her government hath availed itself of the whole immense capital of the national debt, which has been expended in the public service, while the creditors content themselves with the bare payment of the interest. It may be demonstrated that the growing resources of these states, under the conduct of prudence and justice, are sufficient to form a fund of credit for prosecuting the present war, so ruinous to Britain, much longer than that nation, loaded as she now is, can possibly support it.

But need I urge, in a Christian audience, and before Christian rulers, the importance of preserving inviolate the public faith? If this is allowed to be important at all times, and to all states, it must be peculiarly so to those whose foundations are newly laid, and who are but just numbered among the nations of the earth. They have a national character to establish, upon which their very existence may depend. Shall we not then rely that the present government will employ every measure in their power, to maintain in this commonwealth a clear justice, an untainted honour in all public engagements; in all laws respecting property; in all regulations of taxes; in all our conduct towards our sister states, and towards our allies abroad.

The treaty of alliance and friendship between HIS MOST CHRISTIAN MAJESTY and these states, is engraved on every bosom friendly to the rights and independence of America. If fidelity dwells in such bosoms, it will be conspicuous on every occasion of performing our own part of these sacred stipulations. The interest is indeed mutual, as was openly confessed: The treaty is therefore natural, and likely to be lasting. But mutual interest doth not always banish generosity; a proof of which our illustrious ally hath given in this compact; a proof not unapplauded in Europe, though particularly felt and acknowledged in America. I will not affront either the understanding or the feelings of this respectable audience, by attempting formally to demonstrate that we have received great advantages and support from this friendship. It is impossible we should forget the first pledge of it, in the squadron sent to our aid under the orders of that vigilant, active and intrepid commander the COUNT D'ESTAING; who greatly disconcerted the designs of the enemy, and did every thing for us that wisdom and valour, in his situation, could perform. Nor need I call your attention to that important armament lately arrived to

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our assistance, under leaders of distinguished abilities, and the most established military reputation. France, though a monarchy, has been the nurse and protectress of free republics. Switzerland among others can attest to this: Her free States can attest, that during an alliance with France of more than three hundred years, their liberties have been constantly befriended by that nation, and every part of the treaty for their support punctually performed. This they have acknowledged in a late solemn renewal of the alliance. An happy omen to these States, whose circumstances are in many respects similar to those of the united cantons of Switzerland.

The personal and royal accomplishments of LOUIS THE SIXTEENTH are known and admired far beyond his own extended dominions, and afford the brightest prospect to his subjects and allies. The reign of this monarch diffuses new spirit through his kingdom, and gives freshness to the glory of France. A British author, in his account of the regulations which took place after this prince had ascended the throne, calls him “a paternal and patriotic sovereign, who wherever he appears is loaded with the blessings of his subjects.” The celebrated Mr. Burke, in his speech before the British House of Commons on February last, adds his own testimony to this, when speaking of some reforms in the finances and the court of France, he says, “The minister who does these things is a great man, but the prince who desires they should be done, is a far greater: We must do justice to our enemies; these are the acts of a PATRIOT KING”. The friendship of such a monarch must be valuable indeed!

The other great and powerful branch of the house of Bourbon, the king of Spain, though not at present formally allied to us, is yet evidently engaged in our cause, by the union of his arms with those of France. We cannot be wanting in the sentiments due to the amity and aid of so respectable a potentate. May God Almighty bless these Princes, and their dominions; and crown their arms, and those of America, with such success as may soon restore to a bleeding world the blessings of peace!

Peace, peace, we ardently wish; but not upon terms dishonourable to ourselves, or dangerous to our liberties; and our enemies seem not yet prepared to allow it upon any other. At present the voice of providence, the call of our still invaded country, and the cry of every thing dear to us, all unite to rouse us to prosecute the war with redoubled vigour; upon the success of which all our free constitutions, all our hopes depend. I need not enumerate the former or more recent

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events of the war, and the favours or chastisements of heaven sent to us in these events: They are known to you; they cannot be forgotten: God grant they may be properly improved! Through his aid, amidst all our mistakes and errors, we have already done great things; but “our warfare is not yet accomplished”: And our rulers, we hope, like the Roman General, will think nothing done, while any thing remains undone.

We have depended too much upon partial measures, temporary expedients, short and interrupted efforts made only upon the spur of the occasion. An army established in proper numbers, for the whole duration of the war and seasonably furnished with all necessary supplies, is now universally acknowledged of the utmost consequence to the liberties of America. Particular attention will certainly be paid to the recommendations of this great object from the Commander in chief—that illustrious man, formed by heaven for the important trust he sustains, and to draw to a point the confidence of these free states, and a patriotic army. Part of the gladness of this day rises from the general expectation, that our new government will give new vigour to the measures necessary to this momentous purpose; that these measures will be instantly pursued, and without that delay we have too much experienced in times past; and which, at this season, must prove greatly distressing, if not fatal to our country.

Can we hesitate a moment at the burden and expence? It is impossible. Why have the citizens of America been framing such wise and excellent constitutions, if they meant not to maintain, but leave them to become the sport of their enemies? If after all the memorable things we have done to repel lawless power, and establish our rights; if after all we have endured in a war savagely conducted by our enemies; if after the rank we have taken, and the reputation we have acquired as an independent nation, we should now relax in our efforts, and suffer tyranny finally to prevail, who can bear to think of the consequences, or to look upon the picture imagination presents? In such a reverse, we may write upon this fair region the inscription given to an ancient dungeon. — “You who enter here, leave behind you every hope”. What would not this people do; what exertions would they not make, rather than submit to such debasement and misery? It is with you, our civil fathers, to direct such a spirit, and such exertions, in a manner the most effectual to the salvation of our country.

What heroes have bled, what invaluable lives have been offered up to redeem us from slavery, and place us on a free constitution? Their names will never die:

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Their honours will never wither. Among these we see a WARREN, and a MONTGOMERY: Liberty wept over their tombs; and there would have remained inconsolate, had she not beheld a succession of patriots and warriors rising in the same spirit. Rights retrieved with such blood as hath flowed from the veins of America in our great cause, must certainly be held by us at an inestimable price, and improved to the greatest advantage; nor can any thing show their value in a clearer light, than a good administration of our free governments.

Our present rulers, as principal founders of the constitution, cannot but regard it with parental tenderness. They cannot but love their own offspring, especially when it has features and charms to attract the love and admiration of the world: And hoping that their names and their glory may long live in such an offspring, they have an irresistible motive to guard against every thing that may weaken or deform it; every thing that may render its existence short, precarious, or dishonourable.

The same kind of motive must excite the body of the people to the same care. It is with you also my fellow citizens, by whose appointment this constitution was framed, and who have solemnly acknowledged it to be your own; it is with you to give life and vigour to all its limbs, freshness and beauty to its whole complexion; to guard it from dangers; to preserve it “from the corruption that is in the world;” and to produce it upon the great theater of nations with advantage and glory. We have now a government free indeed; but after all, it remains with the people, under God, to make it an honourable and happy one: This must ultimately depend upon the prudence of their elections, and the virtue of their conduct. A government framed by ourselves for our own benefit, and according to the fairest models of our own minds, and administered by men of our own choice, ought to be more deeply respected, and more religiously supported by us than any kind of imposed authority. Having defined and adjusted its powers by our own decisions, and made those who are vested with such as are improper to be long continued in the same hands, amenable, at short intervals, to the judgment of the people, we never can allow it too much weight and energy; we only support ourselves in supporting such authority: While to oppose or weaken it, or bring it under an undue influence, is with the hand of a parricide to destroy order, liberty, and happiness. Upon this general principle, and to establish a dignity and independence, where they must forever operate to the benefit of the community, the citizens of this State have by their present Constitution, most freely and wisely secured to their chief Magistrate, and the Justices of the supreme judicial Court, permanent and honourable salaries; an article which, we cannot

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doubt, will be sacredly observed in the true spirit of the Constitution.

In a word, if the Rulers and the People act throughout in this spirit; if they mutually watch over and sustain each other; and those virtues are cultivated among us which support and are supported by a free Republic, our new Government will then open with the most happy omens, and the commencement of it will be the era of our rising felicity and glory.

While we receive in the settlement of our Commonwealth a reward of our achievements and sufferings, we have the further consolation to reflect, that they have tended to the general welfare, and the support of the rights of mankind. The struggle of America hath afforded to oppressed Ireland a favourable opportunity of insisting upon her own privileges: Nor do any of the powers in Europe oppose our cause, or seem to wish it may be unsuccessful. Britain has maintained her naval superiority with such marks of haughtiness and oppression as have justly given umbrage to the nations around her: They cannot therefore but wish to see her power confined within reasonable bounds, and such as may be consistent with the safety of their own commercial rights. This, they know would at least be exceeding difficult, should the rapidly increasing force of these States be reunited with Britain, and wielded by her, as it hath been in time past, against every nation upon whom she is pleased to make war. So favourable, through the divine superintendence, is the present situation of the powers in Europe, to the liberties and independence for which we are contending. But as individuals must part with some natural liberties for the sake of the security and advantages of society; the same kind of commutation must take place in the great republic of nations. The rights of Kingdoms and States have their bounds; and as in our own establishment we are not likely to find reason, I trust we shall never have an inclination to exceed these bounds, and justly to excite the jealousy and opposition of other nations. It is thus wisdom, moderation and sound policy would connect Kingdoms and States for their mutual advantage, and preserve the order and harmony of the world. In all this these free States will find their own security, and rise by natural and unenvied degrees to that eminence, for which, I would fain persuade myself, we are designed.

It is laudable to lay the foundations of our Republics with extended views. Rome rose to empire because she early thought herself destined for it. The great object was continually before the eyes of her sons: It enlarged and invigorated their minds; it excited their vigilance; it elated their courage, and prepared them to embrace toils and dangers, and submit to every regulation friendly to the freedom

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and prosperity of Rome. They did great things because they believed themselves capable, and born to do them. They revered themselves and their country; and animated with unbounded respect for it, they every day added to its strength and glory. Conquest is not indeed the aim of these rising States; sound policy must ever forbid it: We have before us an object more truly great and honourable. We seem called by heaven to make a large portion of this globe a seat of knowledge and liberty, of agriculture, commerce, and arts, and what is more important than all, of Christian piety and virtue. A celebrated British historian observes, if I well remember, that the natural features of America are peculiarly striking. Our mountains, our rivers and lakes have a singular air of dignity and grandeur. May our conduct correspond to the face of our country! At present an immense part of it lies as nature hath left it, and human labour and art have done but little, and brightened only some small specks of a continent that can afford ample means of subsistence to many, many millions of the human race. It remains with us and our posterity, to “make the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the desert blossom as the rose;” to establish the honour and happiness of this new world, as far as it may be justly our own, and to invite the injured and oppressed, the worthy and the good to these shores, by the most liberal governments, by wise political institutions, by cultivating the confidence and friendship of other nations, and by a sacred attention to that Gospel that breathes “peace on earth, and good will towards men.” Thus will our country resemble the new city which St. John saw “coming down from God out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband.” Is there a benevolent spirit on earth, or on high, whom such a prospect would not delight?

But what are those illustrious forms that seem to hover over us on the present great occasion, and to look down with pleasure on the memorable transactions of this day? Are they not the founders and lawgivers, the skillful pilots and brave defenders of free States, whose fame “flows down through all ages, enlarging as it flows”? They, who thought no toils or vigilance too great to establish and protect the rights of human nature; no riches too large to be exchanged for them; no blood too precious to be shed for their redemption? — But who are they who seem to approach nearer to us, and in whose countenances we discern a peculiar mixture of gravity and joy upon this solemnity? Are they not the venerable Fathers of the Massachusetts; who though not perfect while they dwelt in flesh, were yet greatly distinguished by an ardent piety, by all the manly virtues, and by an unquenchable love of liberty — They, who to form a retreat for it, crossed the ocean, through

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innumerable difficulties, to a savage land: They, who brought with them a broad Charter of Liberty, over which they wept when it was wrested from them by the hand of power, and an insidious one placed in its room. With what pleasure do they seem to behold their children, like the ancient seed of Abraham, this day restored to their original foundations of freedom! their Governor “as at the first, and their Councillors as at the beginning”? Do they not call upon us to defend these foundations at every hazard, and to perpetuate *their* honour in the liberty and virtue of the State they planted?

O thou Supreme Governor of the world, whose arm hath done great things for us, establish the foundations of this Commonwealth, and evermore defend it with the saving strength of thy right hand! Grant that here the divine constitutions of Jesus thy Son may ever be honoured and maintained! Grant that it may be the residence of all private and patriotic virtues, of all that enlightens and supports, all that sweetens and adorns human society, till the states and kingdoms of this world shall be swallowed up in thine own kingdom: In that, which alone is immortal, may we obtain a perfect citizenship, and enjoy in its completion, “the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God!” — And let all the people say, AMEN!

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1. See *Algernon Sidney* upon Government.
2. Voltaire.
3. The Honorable SAMUEL ADAMS, Esq;
4. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.