

HIS EXCELLENCE
GOVERNOR GERRY's SPEECH,
TO THE
LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS,
DELIVERED

THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 1810.

*Gentlemen of the Senate, and
Gentlemen of the House of Representatives,*

THE independent, and respectable electors of this Commonwealth, by a majority of their suffrages, having honoured me with the office of their supreme executive magistrate, an honour at this period increased by the existing state of our public affairs, I have accepted the important trust, with that gratitude, which is due to such distinguished confidence; with that diffidence, which is fearful to do wrong; and with that solicitude, which is inseparable from a sincere desire to do right.

In this enlightened age of the world, the criteria for judging of rulers, are their measures, not their professions: those only then, whose conduct is candid, upright, and honourable, can enjoy, either the happiness of conscious rectitude, or the pleasing expectation,

[Boston, 1810].

of the approbation, esteem, and support of their fellow citizens. And should their rule be meritorious, how often do circumstances of a public nature occur, which leave to government a choice only of evils ; deeply affecting the feelings and interests of the people, and producing jealousies, discontents and opposition ?

Such of late has been the state of our national concerns, and the consequent divisions have exhibited prospects of serious alarm—is it not the duty of the Trustees and Guardians of the inestimable rights and liberties of the people, to destroy if possible this germ of political confusion, and at the shrine of public safety, honor, and welfare, to sacrifice all private and local views, prejudices, and discordant passions ?

If I have formed a just estimate of the characters whom I address, there cannot exist a solitary doubt, that in a pursuit so deeply interesting to the public, regardless of political distinctions, they will co-operate with me, in attaining these important objects ; and to secure success, let the mantle of friendship be drawn over past obnoxious measures, and our exertions be directed to prevent their repetition.

Whatever may be the points of difference between parties, in this they will undoubtedly agree, *that union is the vital principle of liberty* : for as well may the physical body have a being without air, as the body politic of our republic, without that principle.

From time immemorial, the successful maxim of ambition has been “to divide and conquer :” and even free governments have so far sanctioned it, for preventing the union, and preserving the subordination of their colonies, as to disseminate jealousies amongst them.

Such was the policy of Great Britain for retaining the colonies which first formed the United States ; a

policy which in the early period of their separation from her, exposed them to imminent danger, and was their most formidable foe.

But the good sense of the colonists prevailed ; and with a population not exceeding two millions of inhabitants ; with executives and judiciaries, almost wholly opposed to them ; with regal troops in their fortresses, cities, and principal towns, to awe and control them ; with few arms, and military stores ; and without public funds, or an organized government to conduct their operations ; they adopted this motto, “ United we stand, divided we fall ;” and their union, successfully commenced, and triumphantly terminated the revolutionary war. Had a party spirit then prevailed, it would have been fatal ; it would have plunged the patriots into the abyss of irretrievable servitude ; it would have exchanged their exalted station of *man*, for that of senseless Automata—and even cemented as the United States now are, by excellent federal and state constitutions, if the invisible hand of foreign influence, or if deep-rooted domestic prejudices and animosities should obtain the ascendancy, they will too late discover, *that the loss of union, is the loss of liberty* : for however remote we are from foreign nations, or lulled by prospects of their friendship, should our union be destroyed, intestine wars must ensue, and soon convert this beautiful, populous, and cultivated country, into a barren, depopulated waste.

But will not foreign powers, viewing as they do these flourishing commercial states with the invidious eye of competitors, seize the first favourable opportunity, for destroying their competition ? And with what ease will they effect it, should one seceding section of the confederacy, requiring an equal number to oppose it, leave but a remnant of the nation to resist foreign invasion ?

If we take a view of the two gigantic combatants of Europe, France and Great Britain ; nations to whom all others are most indebted for their progress in arts and sciences, and for those useful discoveries and improvements which adorn society and promote human happiness ; nations unrivalled by land and by sea ; who in their conflicts have nearly destroyed the independence of continental Europe, and threaten that of the other quarters of the globe ; if we reflect on the measures of their mighty governments, we cannot too deeply regret that they have lost sight of their own dignity and honor : or why do they not apply the powers entrusted them by divine providence, to complete, not the misery, but the happiness of man ? Why do they not immortalize their fame by recording it, not on the sorrowful tombs of slaughtered millions, not on the desolate ruins of mournful principalities, kingdoms and empires—but on the brilliant pages of illustrious philanthropists—on the durable annals of the great, the good, the God-like benefactors of man ? To the civilized world, the answer is a subject of the deepest regret and grief. Inordinate ambition and power, allies on the land, allies on the ocean, are as insatiable and unmerciful as the relentless grave. Unparalleled wealth, agriculture, manufactures and commerce, but furnish endless magazines of fuel to feed the unquenchable flame of ambition : and power, lawless and boundless power, is on both sides implicitly obedient to her sovereign will. Obligations of every kind, political, moral and religious, arising from the rights of neutrals, from the most solemn treaties, from publick law in general, and from humanity itself, are neglected, cancelled and treated with ineffable contempt, every beam of hope that national justice would resume her elevated station, has been ephemeral—glittering in the morn, it has been dim at noon, and extinct in the eve.

France has charged Great Britain with the establishment of a despotic commercial monopoly ; and has

viewed her own conduct, as a meritorious effort of a magnanimous volunteer, in a common cause to defeat the measure. The King of Great Britain, in return, has charged France with the fabrication of this as a pretext to cover her deep designs of universal domination. Neighboring nations, by their vibrating conduct towards these mighty belligerents, have declared that both are in the right, and both in the wrong—and the United States, ever careful to offend neither, have, with uniform solicitude, cultivated the friendship of each.— May their laudable endeavours be crowned with merited success !

France, previously to her revolutionary war, for a series of years, trembled at the rod of mighty Britain. That unparalleled event has reversed the scene, and France threatens the overthrow of her great enemy. The Emperor Napoleon has in substance, if not in form, declared it. Napoleon, that great arbiter of the East, is a most formidable foe : His equal is not to be found in the annals of man. Other monarchs have been styled great ; but as a statesman and warrior, he is super-eminent. He is a prodigy of human nature. He is viewed by his enemies as a comet of the first magnitude ; at a distance, they admire the awful grandeur of both, but the approach of either they dread, as the precursor of certain destruction.

Thus unhappily circumstanced is Great Britain, and she views her safety in war. She conceives that by a peace her great and only national safeguard, her Navy, must be dismantled ; that her numerous foreign seamen will return with joy to their native shores ; that her national seamen, in part, will be compelled to seek employment abroad ; and that, when imperious necessity shall again require her navy, in its present vigorous state, an event which would rapidly follow, *the measure would be impracticable, and the result her conquest.* Her eagle eyed statesmen act on this principle, and

have declared it. They have even declared that a peace must establish their national safety ; and this they view as a political impossibility.

On the part, then, of the United States, will not good policy look forward to the continuance of a war, in the participation of which they have been, and will continue to be in danger.

Each of these tremendous powers, presents itself at different times to United America, with the affected attachment of a disinterested admirer. But are they not disingenuous and inexorable competitors ? And however impartially she may conduct towards them, when either merely suspects that she favours the other, is not a jealous phrenzy thereby excited, urging the decree of American destruction ? In such imminent danger, is there not an indispensable necessity of union.

Shall we not then cordially invite the other great department of our government, the judiciary, containing our luminaries of law, the able and learned counsellors and practitioners at the bar—our respectable and pious instructors, the clergy, whose love of country and promotion of union during the revolution, is a pledge of their support—the citizens of the other learned profession, who, at that eventful period, in patriotism and prowess were inferior to none—our respectable and wealthy farmers, merchants, manufacturers and mechanics, whose ruin would be completed by intestine commotions, shall we not invite them all to aid in the preservation of our union ?

Will not this desirable measure, if commenced by government, be supported by the constitutional sovereigns of the land, the people ? Will not every friend to his country recollect the sacred truth, “ that an house divided against itself cannot stand ? ” Will he not determine for himself to relinquish a party system,

and the practice of misrepresenting, and unjustly reprobating his political opponents? Will he not magnanimously impute to his fellow-citizens in opposition a mistaken zeal and patriotism, and cordially embrace them? Will he not discountenance every attempt to wound the dignity of the press, that great palladium of liberty, when urged to prostitution and abuse? And will not internal peace and happiness, will not order at home and respectability abroad, be thus again restored to this great and respectable State?

Washington, the immortal Washington, by his farewell address on the subject, an address, worthy of record on a table of adamant, calls on you in strains of irresistible eloquence to preserve your National Union.

The great and good Adams, with his capacious mind and extensive influence, follows the bright example of the father and friend of his country to preserve that inestimable blessing. And may we not hope that Divine Providence, so often our Almighty friend in distress, will afford us aid and support, and grant an happy issue?

The next object of importance, to which, gentlemen, permit me to call your attention, is the militia. Unprepared to enter into details, my observations must be general. The militia is the great depositary of our Liberty and Independence—it is the first and last hope of our country. Let the militia be inefficient, and sudden will be our transition to slavery.

Previously to the revolution, the greatest care was taken to keep the militia in an unorganized and torpid state. Indeed, in this and other provinces, patriotic exertions were made with little effect to counteract this slavish policy. But the provincial executives, always opposed to the interest of the people, appointed militia officers, subservient to regal purposes; and when war with the Mother Country was inevitable, one of the

first important measures adopted, was the reorganization of the whole militia. Since that period, this state by its own authority, and afterwards in subordination to the Federal Government, have paid a marked attention to the subject. The result has done honour to both governments; their measures have excited that martial spirit, which merits every attention and encouragement.

The materials composing the Militia, are independent aspiring citizens; whose ambitious minds never were, and with the utmost confidence it is hoped never will be, subdued by foreign domination. Infinitely will they prefer to finish their existence with immortal honour in the field, to a surrender of their beloved country to haughty and tyrannical invaders—A country, the birthright of themselves and of those most dear to them.

Such materials for officers and privates, are not exceeded, if equalled, on the globe. Organized, armed, accoutred and clad, they are in this state as well disciplined as the nature of the case at present will admit. But is it not possible to complete their discipline? And is it not an object worthy of every attention, and requisite expense?

The revolutionary army, for several years after it was formed, was but an established militia; and yet never was an army composed of more meritorious, officers and privates. It is deeply to be regretted, that their services were not better rewarded. Their exertions to attain discipline did them great honour; but until the arrival of a disciplinarian from the family of Frederick the Great, the measure was impracticable. By his skill, military order sprang out of confusion, American corps were soon equal, if not superior to veteran enemies, and these were convinced that our federal grounds were too sacred to be trodden by foreign invaders.

Should measures be pursued with success in all the States to attain this very important object, and our Union, unimpaired and confirmed, be supported by a completely disciplined Militia, then may the United States, in their defence, bid defiance to the world, and rest in safety.

I feel, gentlemen, the obligation of duty, to turn your attention, for a moment, to the Federal Government.

Previously to the Revolution, when clouds collected and portended a political tempest, it was predicted by ministerial adversaries, that our federal league "would be a rope of sand." This in a great degree was verified by the form of the confederation. The change from that to the Federal Constitution, applied powerfully to the feelings and interests of the community at large, and produced the necessity of an accommodation. This, having been wisely adopted, and the requisite amendments having been sanctioned, a system of Federal Government exists, which embraces the general, and nearly the universal approbation of the people.

The first candidate for President, united the public suffrages; but in regard to his successors, divisions ensued, being the result of the different territorial, commercial and political views and interests of the states; which in the beginning had little or no activity. The peace, order and dignity which, nevertheless, prevailed in the federal elections, are the highest panegyrics on the people, and on the form of their government.

We have in the federal chair a President, whose enlightened mind, and whose moral, social and political virtues qualify him in a supereminent degree for that important station. If any nation can boast of a Chief Magistrate with superior qualities for promoting public happiness, it is not within the recollection or knowledge of the person addressing you. Of what consequence is it, whether a President was born on this, or on that side

of the Potowmac? Are not the United States one great political family; exquisitely alive to the least common injury, and to the conduct of Government for removing it.

When we consider also the respectable characters which fill the other great executive offices, and those of the legislative and judicial departments, are they not, so far as character has a claim, justly entitled to our highest respect, confidence and support? From men let us turn our attention to measures; let us view the conduct of the Federal Government, from the first burst of the Gallic Volcano, to this day; let us look at them on the honourable ground of neutrality, charged, in turn, by each belligerent, with mean, degrading partiality, and repelling, with dignity, the unprovoked attack. See our federal rulers, robed in justice and honour, whilst *Europe*, convulsed to the centre, has been in one great blaze of war, preserving, for a series of years, their unoffending States in peace! Behold them, in the choice of unavoidable evils, struggling with the impatience and afflictions of the people, under the painful, but indispensable operation, for preserving the vital fluid of the nation, their active property! And then let us declare the correct judgment of candour and truth on the conduct of our government.

Whilst we admit, that there is no perfection in human nature, and that the greatest men do often err; let us not construe the errors of honest functionaries into crimes; let us place in the opposite scale, their meritorious acts, and at least give them full credit for the balance. When this is done, may we not with truth declare, that the Federal Government have done well, and are good and faithful servants of the public?

The provisions, made by the constitution and laws for the establishment and promotion of literature, religion, morality, and the social virtues, supported, as they have been, and assuredly will be by Government,

cannot fail to attain their desirable objects. They are the true and only sources of present and future happiness. Without these qualities, what is man? A living sepulchre, with a fair and deceitful exterior, and an impure and polluted mind;—and possessed of them, is he not “the noblest work of God?” How important then to society, is the patronage of Government for the institution and support of schools, academies, and colleges? These are the inexhaustible fountains of true piety, morality and literature; and the solid foundation of liberty, national honour, and public happiness.

In the channels of husbandry and commerce, flows in a great measure the active property of this State. These are natural allies, the aid of one, is indispensable to the other, and it is fortunate for both, that there is a coincidence of friendship and interest between them. They are the great pillars of this Commonwealth, and not a right of either ought to be invaded, or impaired, whilst she, in subordination to the general government, has an arm to protect them.

Industry and economy, those great sources of wealth, cannot be too much encouraged and supported. Happily for this country, they in numerous instances, are enlisted in the service of manufacturers and mechanics. These valuable and important classes of our fellow citizens, have a just demand on government, for every reasonable encouragement and support. *Their* pursuits are practicable patriotism, and whilst our national and state parchments, establish our independence *of right*, their measures, more solid, are establishing for us, an independence *indeed*.

When we reflect that the United States are in possession of numerous blessings, political, civil and religious, many of which are not enjoyed by any other nation: *that* we are remote from those scenes of war and carnage by which Europe is vested in sable: *that* we enjoy the uncontrouled right, on principles of true

liberty, to form, alter, and carry into effect our federal and state constitutions : *that* founded on them and on law, there exists a spirit of toleration, securing to every one the undisturbed rights of conscience; and the free exercise of religion : *that* the people, at fixed periods, have the choice of their rulers, and can remove those who do wrong : *that* the means of education in all its branches, are liberal, general and successful : *that* their national strength, resources and powers, by proper arrangements, may render these states invincible : *that* by our husbandry, commerce, manufactures, and mechanical arts, the wealth of this country almost surpasses credibility ; let us not be prompted by imprudent zealots of any description, to hazard the irretrievable loss of all, or of any of these inestimable blessings ; but let us secure them forever, with the aid of divine providence, by rallying around the standard of our national government, and by encouraging and establishing a martial spirit, on the solid foundation of internal peace, order and concord.

Accept, Gentlemen, I pray you, my unfeigned thanks, for your patience on this occasion ; which I consider as a pledge of your future liberality towards me ; unnecessary as my observations may be, in regard to information to yourselves, they have afforded me an opportunity of discharging my obligations to the public, by unfolding matters which may have impressed your minds, with much, if not with equal importance. As theseason requires, that for the benefit of the country, your session should be short, nothing shall be wanting on my part to promote your objects. However interesting to the public, your measures may be, they will not exceed my anticipations : and be always assured, that consistently with obligations of an official nature, they will ever receive my cordial co-operation and support.

Any other communications, Gentlemen, which may be requisite, shall be submitted to your consideration by message.
E. GERRY.