

AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED JULY 4, 1804,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE SELECTMEN OF THE TOWN OF
BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE

Anniversary of American Independence.

BY DR. THOMAS DANFORTH.

Statui res gestas...quæque memoriæ digna videbantur perscribere, eo
magis, quod mihi a spe, et metu partibus reipublicæ animus liber erat.

SALLUST, *B. Cat.*

Vivons, ou périssions dignes de liberté,
Et songeons bien plutot, quelque amour qui nous flatte,
A defendre du joug et nous et nos Etats,
Qu' à contraindre des cœurs, qui ne se donnent pas.

RACINE, *Tragd. Mitbird.*



BOSTON,
PRINTED BY RUSSELL AND CUTLER.
1804.

VOTE OF THE TOWN.

AT a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of *Boston*, duly qualified, and legally warned in public Town-Meeting, assembled at *Faneuil-Hall*, the 4th day of July, A. D. 1804.

On motion, *Voted*, That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a Committee to wait on Dr. THOMAS DANFORTH, in the name of the Town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited ORATION, this day delivered by him, at the request of the town, upon the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America; and to request of him a copy for the press,

Attest, WILLIAM COOPER, *Town-Clerk*.

BOSTON, JULY 4, 1804.

GENTLEMEN,

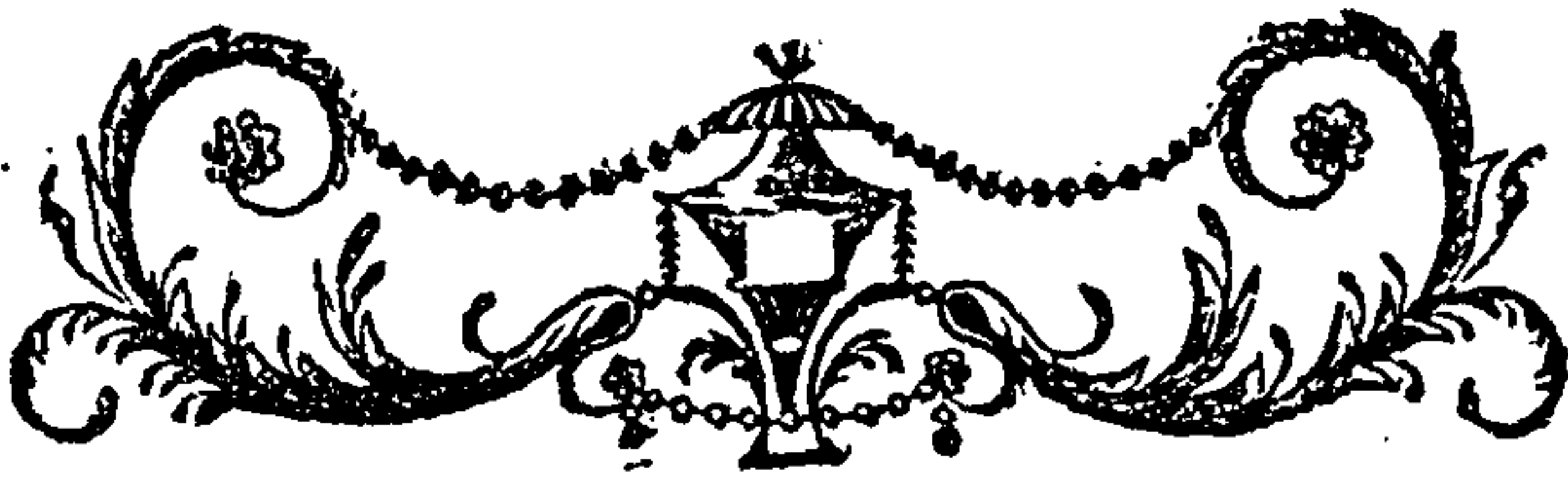
THE Oration delivered at your request, is most humbly submitted to your disposal.

With great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

THOMAS DANFORTH.

The Selectmen of Boston.



An Oration, &c.

NATIONAL honour, and national independence, constitute the primary and essential characteristics of a free, brave and generous people. If the former is assailed, the best blood will be sacrificed in its defence ; if the latter is threatened with destruction, it will rouse the spirit of the nation to the noblest enthusiasm. In proportion to the action of indignity, will be the re-action of honour, and the blow of arbitrary violence, will be returned with the preternatural strength of convulsive power.

ACTUATED by such sentiments, mankind, at various periods, have been incited to resist the oppressions of tyranny.

IN reviewing, however, the revolutions of society, the picture they exhibit is more often defaced by the deformities of vice than embellished by the beauties of virtue ; the point of rest vanishes at pos-

session ; new forms have continually arisen from the ashes of old ; imbecile ignorance perpetually renews the scene of error and calamity.

THROUGH the long lapse of ages, we search in vain for that people, among whom Liberty has long been cherished, with a constant regard to the dignity and welfare of our species. It has either degenerated into licentiousness, or become tributary at the throne of usurpation. Mankind have hated tyranny, without esteeming liberty ; they have repulsed restraint, without seeking to know the bounds of right, and vainly have contented themselves to repel the former, without labouring firmly to establish the latter. At the shrine of superstitious and political fanaticism, more sacrifices have been made, than grateful offerings of praise to heaven, for the supreme advantages of rational liberty.

IN those enlightened Republics of ancient time, where liberty seemed to have fixed her lasting residence, and where the desire of being free existed, when liberty seemed totally extinct, how vain were their efforts to preserve it ; like the last convulsions of expiring nature, they but served to accelerate decay.

THOUGH it cost the Macedonian more blood to conquer a few cities of Greece, than all Asia beside, yet Greece, torn by the distracting opinions of her citizens, vitiated, corrupted, divided, was no longer free. Carthage, degraded and overwhelmed, at

the close of her Punic wars, degenerate, exhibited but the dying spirit of a heroism, which cost to Rome, in her turn, dear bought victories ; victories which destroyed her liberties, as they extended her domains : the manners which had produced a Camillus and a Regulus no longer existed ; Cato's tears could not avail ; Augustus arose, and though the shadow of liberty was preserved, the substance was destroyed.

THE causes which have produced the destruction of despotism, and the emancipation of society, in modern time, have not been accompanied with more favourable results.

BUT for the enthusiasm of religious opinion, Great-Britain perhaps would not have accomplished the reformation of her government. By her prudence, her conduct, and her courage, an Elizabeth had inspired, in the minds of her subjects, the most dangerous security ; of which the Stuarts had profited, but for the more powerful stimulus of puritanic zeal.*

IN some Countries, however, liberty has kept pace with fanaticism ; has perished with it. Never would the United Provinces have attempted to break the chains, imposed by a Phillip, but for the terrors of an inquisition. The martyrs of their freedom, were impelled by all the horrors of an Auto de Fe. To erect those altars, at which alone she would worship, Holland was necessitated to

* See Note (a)

form the system of a Republic; doomed, at its birth, to fall a sacrifice to avarice, dissention, and the meretricious arts of a most powerful and fanatic neighbour.

THE events which have passed in review before us, are most impressive. We have lived to behold the changes of empire, more rapid and more awful, than when in torrid zone, the thickening clouds arise, to burst in streams of ceaseless lightning, the vengeance of the skies. In their struggles for right, we have seen an ancient kingdom reduced to a mere wreck of horror, wasting its vital energies, to fill up the measure of most condemning power. We have beheld the throne of the Capets tumbled to its base, and from the blood-stained ruins, we have seen a power arise, in form more hideous than Medusa's head. Even now, by daring usurpation, is her sceptre swayed, and gallant France exhausted, prostrate sleeps in the quietude of despotism. Could Tacitus arise in these latter times, how would the atrocious barbarities committed in the beloved Lutetia of a Julian, enkindle the fire of his style; in what horrors, would these crimes have been delineated, by his indignant and immortal hand; the banishment of an Aristides, the murder of a Phocion, furnish not more instructive lessons to posterity, than the inhuman butchery of an unfortunate monarch, or the more wanton sacrifice of the eminent Lavoisier.*

IT is a fearful age. We seem born to behold goodness prostrated, virtue defiled, talents corrupt-

* See Note (b)

ed, faith destroyed. Behold that country, where from the chaos of feudal barbarism, first arose the spirit of a freedom, which gave peace to virtue and dignity to manners; where liberty grew majestic, nourished on mountain soil, now sunken and depressed, fast bound in chains, proffered friendship and freedom proclaimed have wrought; Rome has come again; Switzerland, like famed Achaia's confederacy, must fall a prey to that protection, which destroyed the last hopes of ancient liberty.

such have been the melancholy results, when the passions of the multitude form the source of power, when democracy, under the mask of liberty, stalks among mankind, dealing out licence to her infuriated progeny, to gorge in human misery their mad desires.

AMID this waste, degenerate time, the philanthropist mournful looks around him, for some favoured clime, to rest in peace his wearied mind; turning his regards towards this western world, in the glow of sensibility he demands, must men be the everlasting dupes of systems begotten by distempered imagination? Does a blind fatality hold the destiny of empire? Is liberty a celestial chimera which philosophy implores in vain?

AMERICANS! descended from a long line of venerable ancestry, educated in the earliest habits of just authority, distinguished for character, manners and principles, it was reserved for you to accomplish the

noblest work of time, or blast, by similar follies, by similar calamities, the fairest hopes of creation.

WHILE other nations must trace their origin from plunder, conquest or blood, it is your peculiar privilege to behold in the first settlers of your country, a race of men, as resplendant for the lustre of their virtues, as memorable for the glory of their achievements.

AT that period; when the human mind began to awaken, from the lethargy of ignorance, excited by the investigations, of a Luther, a Calvin, and a Grotius, your ancestors voluntarily resigned the pleasures of domestic life, hazarding their lives and fortunes to enjoy, unmolested, sequestered, the rights of conscience. Can we in imagination carry back our view, to the period of their first landing on these then inhospitable shores, without emulating that ardor and that zeal in the human character, which in the lapse of scarce two centuries, has converted the frightful wild of the forest into fields and vallies, into towns and cities, into states and empire.

“ so the dread Seer, in Patmos waste who trod,
Led by the visions of the guiding God,
Saw heaven’s dim vault its circling folds unbend,
And gates and spires, and streets and domes descend,
Far down the skies ; with suns and rainbows crowned,
The new formed city, lights the world around.”

THEIR immediate descendants were not less renowned for their hardihood of courage, or their vigor of intellect ; and while other countries in their

struggles against oppression have been loaded with crimes, which have induced good men to prefer the worst of conditions to the hazard of change, yours was the most elevated effort of magnanimity and patriotism. Slow in its rise, it exhibited the calmness of deliberation ; resolute in its progress, it never departed from the regularity of system ; irresistible to its purpose, it unfolded the luxuriant sources of talents, genius, heroism.

BUT for the vain pride of ministry, and its perfidious dependants, brothers had not mingled their blood, in warfare with each other ; and the world might have beheld the rare and astonishing spectacle of an aged parent consecrating, at the altar of freedom, the rightful sovereignty of his descendants. *“ With filial piety, with more than Roman charity, you had opened the youthful bosom, of your exuberance, to an exhausted monarch ;”* but the pride of power silenced the voice of nature, the fatal blow was given, and we were severed forever.

LONG since have we sheathed the sword, to resume the implements of peaceful life ; anxious only to preserve the invaluable privileges, your ancestors had earned, by all the hardships of suffering humanity, the wise, the honest and the good, now sought the calm and settled state of an efficient government, by which alone the wants of mankind, and the peace of society, can be satisfied and preserved. At length to our enraptured view, the foundations of the temple of freedom are laid ; its majestic pillars are seen to

rise ; its dome unfolds, and liberty, which, as yet, had hovered over a country, where she had been invited to dwell, now borne on the wings of our eagle, descends triumphant, to this her best, her last abode.

Is then the pride of the nation, superior in your bosoms, to every other interest and ambition ? Is an enlarged, an enlightened affection towards the constitution, a fixed principle in the breasts of those, to whom we have leased our original power. Such are the feelings which this occasion should inspire. If we have liberty without a just authority, or government without liberty, we have contended in vain, we are worse than the slaves of foreign power, we are slaves to ourselves.

THE knowledge of the principle on which perfect civil liberty depends, is doubtless as great a desideratum in political science, as a knowledge of the cause of life is in natural philosophy. Empires succeed, and systems pass away, nations perish, and governments are extinguished, but the laws of truth are eternal ; and happy would it be for mankind, if in politics, as in physics, experiment was the standard, by which to test the good or evil tendency of laws, to the total exclusion of hypothesis and opinion.

IN all governments, there must be a preponderating influence, a sovereign power, doubtless deriving its origin from the people, but guaranteed by fundamental laws, in order that the liberty of all

may not be the sport of the licentiousness of any. There never has, nor there never will exist a true democracy. If, says the elegant author of the Social Compact, *there were a people of Gods, they might be governed democratically, a state so perfect will never belong to man.* In our own government, so happily blended and equipoised are the powers of State, that though sovereignty exists, it may be said never to remain fixed, but like the vibrations of the pendulum, gives to every part and portion, its uniform spring and action. The federal compact is not merely the sketch of liberty, it is the work complete, it is the only government under heaven, yet known, where every man may be said to exercise his right, in the aggregate system of power. Founded in reason and the analogy of nature, like the fair form of the human body, it exhibits the beauty, strength and proportions of a well ordered system. The executive is its brain, the judiciary its lungs, and the legislative its whole heart, circulating the very pabulum of its existence, and issuing the powers, which warm and invigorate its remotest extremities. As essential to the existence of our bodies, as are the brain, lungs, or heart, equally as essential, are the distinct and independent branches of our government, to its life and preservation. Drawn out of the experience of ages, it contains the principles of a Republic, sublimely rectified. It is the palladium of your future peace, a bond of union and obligation, which when violated, will convulse to its centre the delicate frame of your liberty.

such is the system under which you have so greatly flourished ; and will you—can you, from indifference, ignorance, or presumption, suffer the fundamental principles of so admirable a structure, to be sacrificed, to satiate the crude whimsies of turbulent innovation ? Would you wantonly risk the experiments of alchymico politicians, when already its excellence has been unfolded in your prosperity ? Are not ancient forms and institutions now more perfectly adjusted, and what further securities do you require ? From what sources have we cause for jealousy ? From whence must we look for the origin of our evil ? What dangers must we dread ? Is it from its monarchical tendency, you apprehend mischief to the State ; a throne—a diadem. Who shall wear it ? If monarchy is ever to be established within the limits of our Union, the dead bodies of your citizens will constitute its basis, while their blood will form the cement, which must amalgamate the discordant materials. Is it an aristocracy you fear ? Who, on the destruction of legislative right, would dare erect a privileged order ? Base, false idea ; thank God, we have, indeed, a nobility ; a nobility whose orders are founded on merit, on virtue, on solid worth, stars of the mind, not of the body, they will shine in history's latest page, and point the path to honor and to fame. A throne, or its titles, have no terrors for you ; these are but vain and empty shadows, mere bugbears of imagination, designedly held up by the envious and malicious, to distract and deceive the

ignorant and the misinformed. If we have any foe, if the councils of the nation must be dissolved, and the splendid dome, which has thus far sheltered us, must be rent in ruin, the daring enemy will assail you from within; he will be found at the heart of the city—that enemy is Faction, the canker-worm of empires, in free governments, engendered by a too luxuriant growth of the tender plant of freedom.

I would, my Countrymen, not a cloud had arisen, to obscure the prospect, which has animated our hopes; but alas, dangers have arisen, already exist, dangers inseparable from the nature of all free governments; dangers, which form the very essence of their freedom. The crafty, the subtle, the restless, and the disappointed, these are the boasted heralds of liberty, demagogues, who, like their brethren of antiquity, will not fail to appear popular, like old Diogenes, preaching up contempt of powers and dignities, they most eagerly desire, and provoking, by their charlatanry, that thirst and jealousy of the passions, which tear asunder the very cords of Society. Such are the men who have ever used the people as a mere ladder to mount the throne of power, who flatter to deceive, and feast your vanity, while they rob your understandings. In such hands, to such a power, with beings of such a cast, will you intrust your dearest interests? Shall foreign bodies nourish from your luxuriant bosom, while native citizens are alienized from your fostering care? Re-

confidence and property constitute the distinguishing character of the citizen; the real inhabitants, the real proprietors of the soil, they only are the true citizens, they only are the American People.

IT is a critical moment, when parties, which are formed from various views, will not permit the people to concur in the general good. Such moments, if repeated, must end in despotism.—Have we witnessed them; ask your own consciences, review the eventful periods of your history, recollect the annals of '86; scarce had the Goddess of Liberty lighted on our shores, when insurrection, that fiend of all social order, threatened her with instant extinction; your guardian genius had not yet sunk to eternal rest; again she awakened to truth; again she animated to victory. The monster, though confronted, was not destroyed; in assumed and novel shape she steals retreat, to break anew upon our peace; recollect the period, when with what anxiety you stood trembling, lest on the altar of opinion, should be sacrificed the prosperity of our country; happily virtue triumphed, wisdom prevailed, the constitution was adopted. In the congratulations of the public joy, the rage of party seemed to have sunk away, like tired nature she stole to rest, to collect anew her exhausted strength. Awakened by disappointment, behold Faction arms anew in all her power. The Savior of his country, could scarce escape the venom of its rage, shielded by Minerva, *modern degeneracy could not reach him, now*

safe beyond the skies, calumny darts in vain her arrows, at the sepulchre which entombs him.— Keep ! ah keep ! the hallowed relics, till some better day shall restore them, to the monuments of thy fathers. Not so, his noble friend, the venerable ADAMS ; he has survived to experience, how uncertain is popular fame, how profitable is revenge, how expensive is gratitude ; in the calm of retirement, behold the good man resting secure, on the staff of his bright honor.

INSATIATE, this malice of party knows no bound ; the same causes, lust of pride, avarice, mad ambition, hatred and love of perpetual change, have commenced their condemning labors among us. Philosophy indeed, has assumed a new face, but has she produced any thing new : Where is that harmony, that perfect tranquility, phantom of promised happiness ; vanished in air with the breath which announced it ; “ it is mere antiquated folly, varnished up anew ;” the fanaticism of a false wisdom, a mask of virtue, these are the delusive attractions of the times.

IN vain may we disguise ; the storm is gathering, the distant thunder has already reached us, honor and worth are deposed, past services forgotten ; the very poison rages at the vitals of the constitution ; if this spirit is never to be quenched ; if to gratify the views of the dominant party, continual changes are to be made, in the fundamental

ture has passed, gone forth, not to wrest from constituted authority its just power, but to maintain, if possible, that balance, which constitutes the very form and essence of your republic—equal representation of freemen only, founded on the immutable principle of just liberty, the right of suffrage.*

THE great contending powers, whose wars have agitated the world, still hold in hateful enmity. Ambition is not satisfied, pride has not reached her boundaries, vengeance is not done, the scaffold now steams with the blood of injured, innocent royalty. Can we survey these scenes, and as we drop the tear of sympathy for the continued miseries of man, and not feel the secret glow of gratitude burst from our bosoms, in praise to heaven, that these are the places of our fathers.

WE possess a country we delight in; here agriculture unfolds the richest abundance of the earth, commerce rolls her exhaustless treasures from either portion of the globe, arts and science are universally diffused, the sources of education are privileged to none, we have the religion of nature and of nature's God, open to the worship of all. Let us then, in the system of our political affairs, regard man as he is, not merely an imaginary creature, who wants no rules to bind him; but as a being selfish, though social, devoured by a cruel egotism, subject to vices, to weaknesses, and infirmities, which have ever defied the powers of human intel-

* See Note (d)

lest. Let us adapt the code of our laws, to the population, industry, extent and moral habits of the people.

IN the archives of your state, written on tablets of brass, let the solemn testament of your WASHINGTON be deposited; there, as at Delphos, let your statesmen come, and ponder well the truths his best, great mind conceived. In the career of such wisdom, guided by such counsel, we may indeed anticipate, that in our future history, will be unfolded the splendor of empire, philosophy shall realize her fondest expectation, prophecy shall be utterly accomplished; and the tree of liberty, planted by the zeal of your ancestors, nourished and supported by the continued care of their successors, shall flourish in perennial life, and millions yet unborn, as they refresh beneath its grateful shade, shall hail, in raptures of ceaseless exultation, this festival of your glory.



NOTES.

NOTE (a) Page 7.

“ If it be true, says a late political writer, that in revolutions, enthusiasts are necessary to advance beyond the mark, at which wise men aim, the English owe much to the Puritans, who, equally as opposed to Episcopacy as to Royalty, aimed at the destruction of both. The Restoration to the Monarchical system, under a more just balance of power, the definitive settlement of the privileges of Magna Charta, that noble moderation, Mr. Hume observes, as so essential to the establishment of freedom in government, which accompanied this change, has proved, beyond all controversy, the excellence and fitness of the Constitution, under which the subjects of Great-Britain have so long flourished.

NOTE (b) Page 8.

Science will long mourn the untimely fate of this disciple of a Bacon ; born to an ample fortune, endowed with a superior intellect, he expended the former, while he exerted the latter, in the developement of those principles, which operate the various beauties of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. Some most *important experiments* on the phenomena of the latter, he wished the liberty of a few days existence to present to the world ; but France had then no need of Philosophers ; the temple of truth was razed to its base, and his light was extinguished forever. He was of the long list of those, who fell under the axe of the Guillotine, during the reign of terror, (as the honest people of France rightly denominated it) in 1793.

NOTE (c) Page 18.

“ A people who would preserve their liberties must be perpetually guarding against the usurpations of their government,

more especially if they are extended over a vast territory. The *force* of government constantly presents an irresistible mass, while that of the citizens is every where divided. Re-united to a faction, it is easy for it to destroy liberty, it may effect it even by the aid of calumny alone. The most essential article therefore in the Constitution of a great people, is that which defends sovereignty against the attempts of the government." These observations, from the pen of a late writer, on the French Revolution, cannot be too seriously considered in this country.

NOTE (d) Page 19

William Ely, Esquire's, late Resolution, which has received the sanction of the various branches of our State government; a resolution, founded on the purest republican principles, and though intended to effect, if possible, an alteration in a given point, of the original compact, is nevertheless a change arising out of the urgency and necessity of the times, and favorable to liberty and the safety of the union; a change, which, if introduced, would serve to outweigh that unjust preponderancy already existing, and which will be so greatly increased by the Louisiana accession, a territory which must be principally populated by slaves. If *population* is to be the source of representation indiscriminately (to use a certain legislator's term) it is high time the cattle of New-England should be entitled to the right of suffrage; but I am inclined to think, with Aristotle, there is an essential distinction between *populus* and *popularis multitudo*. Residence on a given territory which belongs to a Body of *men*, is necessary to constitute a nation itself, and consequently residence, attachment and a certain right in the territory by freehold or convention is essential to constitute the citizen, and the people, in whom only sovereignty should reside.

