

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED IN THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL MEETING-HOUSE,

IN
PROVIDENCE,

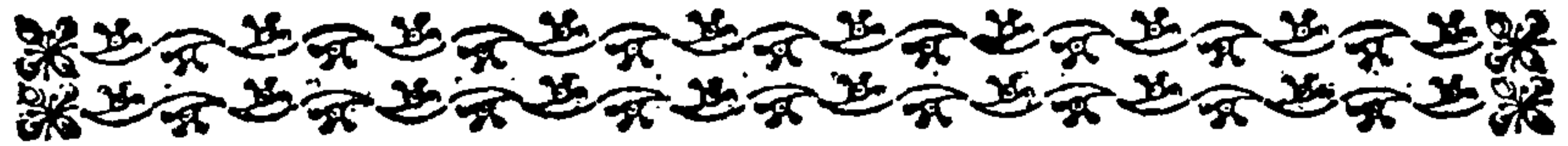
ON THE

Fourth of July, 1799.

BY JONATHAN MAXCY, A. M.
PRESIDENT OF RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE.

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A N

O R A T I O N .

CALLED by your suffrages, Fellow-Citizens, I once more address you on the Anniversary of our National Independence. This event, though glorious in itself, and wonderful in its effects, is, by the peculiar situation of our public affairs, exalted to a point of unprecedented importance. Never has our country been exposed to greater danger; never has our government been assaulted with greater violence, by foreign foes and domestic traitors; never have been more insidious, persevering and malevolent attempts to corrupt public opinion; to undermine the foundations of religion, to cut asunder the sinews of moral obligation, and to cover this happy land with carnage, desolation and ruin. Let us then with enthusiasm hail the Birth-Day of our Sovereignty. Let us summon all our energies against the artifices of secret intrigue, and the aggressions of open hostility. To animate your patriotism, and inspire you with all the ardour of violated liberty; to render you feelingly alive to the necessity of united vigorous measures of defence, to rouse up your generous indignation at the unprovoked abuses practised by a foreign nation of gigantic power, permit me to call back your attention to that period, not far past, when all that was dear to you as members of society and subjects of government, was suspended over the gulf of ruin; when you rose up with an invincible courage, and, in the voice of united thunders, announced to the world that you were **FREE, SOVEREIGN and INDEPENDENT.** On that great and trying occasion, what were your feelings? Did you tamely submit

to the usurping arm of foreign domination? Did you surrender your liberties, without a struggle or a sigh? No, Americans, you did not; you acted the part of men worthy of liberty; you displayed the standard of freedom; you drew the sword of vengeance; you discharged the thunderbolt of destruction, and, under the protection of heaven, obtained a triumph, which glitters in capitals on the pillars of eternity. Succeeding years crowned the efforts of our wisdom, and the labours of our industry, with a success and prosperity which have astonished the world. The establishment of an energetic government, the cultivation of the soil, the rapid increase of population, the great extension of commerce, the improvement of arts and sciences—all combined to perpetuate our freedom, to augment our power, and to render us a respectable and invincible nation. Guarded by an immense ocean, we hoped to escape that whirlwind which has long been spending its rage on the devoted nations of Europe. We assumed a neutral station: our right hand held out the branch of peace, while our left welcomed the persecuted stranger. Britain first smote us with her gigantic arm: she listened to our remonstrances, and redressed our wrongs. France, irritated at our success in preserving peace, determined on revenge. She renewed with additional vigour those secret, insidious arts, which she had long practised to controul our public councils, and to destroy the confidence of the people in the government of their choice. Detected and disappointed by the vigilance of our rulers, she threw aside the mask, and disclosed her vengeful countenance on the Atlantic. Our commerce fell a prey to her all-devouring jaws. The overtures made by our government have been neglected with the most haughty disdain, and our messengers of peace treated like the representatives of a nation destitute of wisdom and power. We have now no resource left to vindicate our honour and our rights, but our courage and our force. These we trust are sufficient to defend us against all enemies, whether foreign or domestic.

We must rank among our disgraces as well as among our misfortunes, the existence of a set of men in our country, who have derived their political principles from foreign influence and foreign intrigue; who exert their utmost efforts to ruin our government, and to prostrate

all permanent establishments. These men discard, as the effects of superstition, all ancient institutions; and, instead of adhering to an uniform order of things, delight in perpetual revolutions. Their system of rights, like their system of government, is metaphysic and fantastical. They do not consider that government is a science derived from the experience of ages, and that it ought to embrace the rights and welfare, not of the present age only, but of all posterity. They consider the chief magistrate in no other view than a private citizen; government in no other view than an affair of temporary expediency or advantage. Thus they level that distinction which is the foundation of submission to laws; and reduce a contract the most solemn and important to an equality with a partnership in commerce, which at any hour may be broken off and dissolved. Let their ideas of government be realized in actual operation, and there is an end of all order, peace and prosperity. For how can agriculture and commerce, arts and sciences, be carried on to perfection under an administration perpetually changing? What security has property? What excitement can there be to industry, where it is liable to lose, in one moment, the acquisition of years? A good government will derive assistance from the experience of past ages. It will embrace and perpetuate the complicated mass of individual and public rights and interests. It ought to be considered as an inheritance to be transmitted from one generation to another; and not as the capricious offspring of a moment, perpetually exposed to destruction, from the varying whim of popular phrenzy; or the daring strides of licentious ambition. The great objects of national importance cannot be obtained, except under a political system, rendered permanent by a well regulated balance of power; guarding on the one hand against tyrannical usurpation, and on the other against democratic violence. Such we conceive is the government of these United States. Nevertheless, there are many who view it in a far different light; or, because they are conscious of its energy, are continually advancing opinions and doctrines which tend to its subversion. They well know that the people of this country are very averse to a government like that of England. They take advantage from this circumstance, and are continually ringing it in our ears, that our government apes the manners of the British, and

is rapidly changing into that complicated system of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. This representation is given, either from ignorance of the British constitution, or from a desire to annihilate our confidence in our own. Compare for a moment the principal branches of the English government with the principal branches of the American. How great the contrast! How wide the difference! The king of Great-Britain is independent; the President of the United States is not. The former holds his throne by hereditary right; a right not derived from the consent of the people, nor at the disposal of the people: the latter holds his office by election, and with the consent of the people. The President of the United States, after a short space of time, descends and assumes his place as a private citizen; the king of Great-Britain holds his crown and his throne through life. The former is accountable for his conduct, and liable to impeachment whenever he violates the laws; the latter is accountable to no human power, nor can he be impeached at any human tribunal. In the king we behold an enormous power, independent and unimpeachable; in the President we behold a power limited by the constitution, and incapable of committing abuses with impunity. Can we descry any resemblance between these two important branches of the American and British governments? Why then all this outcry against the enormous power of our supreme magistrate? Why so many industrious attempts to persuade the people that he is an aspiring monarch? I will tell you: It is because we are blessed with a group of government levellers, who cultivate those all-preserving, democratic virtues, jealousy and ingratitude.

In the government of Great-Britain is an inheritable peerage. The lords temporal and spiritual are independent: they hold their seats without the consent of the people, and can hold them against their consent. How different the American Senators! Chosen by the people in a constitutional mode, they are wholly dependent for their power on the people; and must, after a prescribed term, revert to their places as private citizens. Great-Britain has an house of commons. In this branch lies the only share which the people have in the government, and here their influence is very small. For the commons consist of all such men of property in the kingdom as have

not a seat in the house of lords. The knights which represent the counties are chosen by the proprietors of lands ; and the citizens and burgeses, who represent the cities and boroughs, are chosen by the mercantile part of the nation. Hence the inequality of representation is so great in the house of commons, that the people rank this among their greatest grievances. We can discover no resemblance between the British house of commons and our house of representatives. In short, the most important branches of the British government are independent and hereditary : all branches of the American government are dependent and elected. Who but a madman, or an enemy to our country, could have had the effrontery to assert, that our government is formed after the British model ? Our government is our own, and so long as we adhere to it, we shall be a people free, independent, and invincible.

ANOTHER sentiment strenuously maintained by the enemies of our government, is, that the union of the States is an affair of occasional convenience or advantage ; and that any State, whenever she sees fit, has a right to denounce the proceedings of Congress, and to secede from the great political body. These positions are advanced with a view to impede the energy of the Federal Government, and even to undermine its foundation. If admitted and reduced to practice, they will render the execution of laws utterly uncertain ; and in case of foreign invasion, will expose the government to destruction and the country to devastation. The advocates of these strange political opinions seem not disposed to profit by past examples. They are like those fanatics who look for all wisdom in themselves ; “ and such never fail to find it.” I would cite them to the states of ancient Greece, at the time of the Persian invasion, under Xerxes. Had these states been united under a common government ; had they been responsible to some supreme controlling power ; they would not, through fear and jealousy, have deserted the public cause, and have left the Athenians and Spartans to oppose the immense army of Asia. One would suppose, that in a time of such pressing danger, a sense of the necessity of indissoluble union, would have had the force of a law, to compel all the states to engage in the common cause. But the reverse took place. The haughty monarch of Persia, taking ad-

vantage of the disunion of his enemies, pressed forward, marked his steps with *fire* and *blood*, took the city of Athens, which his general Mardonius soon after entirely destroyed. This example is a loud warning to us, that a country divided into a number of independent states can have no safety but in union, and no union but in responsibility to a supreme controlling power. I will hazard the assertion, that the states of Greece suffered more from their internal dissensions and divisions, which arose from the want of a Federal Government, possessed of a power over them all, than they did from all their foreign wars. Is it not the part of prudence, to profit by the errors, as well as by the wisdom of past ages? Is it not the part of folly, in the present advanced state of the science of government, to admit an idea which the example of all the ancient independent republics reprobates, as the fruitful source of division, violence and destruction?

THOSE metaphysic knights in the science of civil policy, who have attempted the subversion of our government, have done no small mischief by the perpetual use of certain words and phrases, which, though they conveyed no definite meaning, yet were calculated like the incantations of magic, to blind, seduce and mislead the unwary. "LIBERTY, EQUALITY, RIGHTS OF MAN;" these are the ensigns armorial of the whole tribe of political speculatists; these they hold up to the people, with a view to change real liberty into licentiousness; real equality into murderous violence; and the real rights of man into indiscriminate plunder. The indefinite phrase, "*Rights of Man*," seems to imply, that man is born into the world with certain connatural political rights. This cannot be true, for government is the creature of man's invention and wisdom, and is founded on the compact of men in society. If man has any political rights which he can claim, it is because he is a member of the political system, or a partner in the great community of rights attached to the government under which he lives, whether this government is formed by his cotemporaries, or inherited from his ancestors. But man, considered as such, has but one right, that of self-preservation. The phrase "*Rights of Man*," has been lavishly thrown out in this as well as in other countries, with a view to persuade the people that their government was an arbitrary engrossment of power; that it was an unreasonable restraint on their

passions and energies; that, as it denied them certain rights which they might claim because they were men, it ought to be demolished and buried in ruin. The direct tendency of the doctrine styled "*Rights of Man*," is to disquiet the people, to set them at variance with their rulers, to fill all the grades of society with an unreasonable jealousy of each other, and to change the order of civil institutions into the anarchy of barbarous association.

LET us for a moment contemplate the magical, wonder-working word, "EQUALITY." This, in the French cavalcade of death, is harnessed up behind Liberty. That fair goddess is with reluctance dragged into the train, and thrust forward, that her charms may introduce the infernal procession which troops behind her. The revolutionary demagogues of our country talk much of equality. They assure us, in their indefinite, unqualified language, that all men are equal. To ascertain whether this assertion is true, we must recur to fact and experience. Nature, so far from having made all men equal, has made them very unequal. All men have not the same strength and activity of body—all have not the same endowments and energies of mind. These are facts which speak in a language too plain not to be understood. Nature no where yokes up a dwarf with a giant, or a Newton with an ape. Amidst her mighty profusions of endowments, we discover an instinctive wisdom, fitting the numerous parts of this stupendous whole to their several places; arranging them by orders, differences and contrasts, so as to constitute one perfect system, whose parts are never all young, nor old, nor equal, but supported in a beautiful diversity through a perpetually dying and reviving universe.

SOCIETY no less than nature makes great differences and inequalities among men. When the road to acquisition is equally open to all—when the laws equally protect every man's person and property—all men will not make exertions equally great—all will not possess the same spirit of enterprize—all will not obtain accessions of wealth, of learning, virtue and honour, equally extensive and important. The industrious, prudent citizen, will gain vast quantities of property, while the negligent and idle will remain in the depths of poverty. To the last, the doctrine of equality is like the music of angels. Energized by the sound, he rouses from his lethargy, and re-

vels on the divided spoils of his wealthy neighbour. That men in the social state are equal as to certain rights—that they ought to be protected in their persons and property, while they conduct as good citizens, will undoubtedly be admitted. This, however, is a very different kind of equality from that which the promulgators of this pernicious doctrine intended to introduce. Their schemes of wicked ambition were, to overturn all the established governments in the world, and to obtain an unlimited controul over the minds and bodies of men. Nothing could be more immediately conducive to this purpose, than to render all the subordinate ranks of society dissatisfied with their condition. This was to be accomplished by persuading them, that the governments under which they lived were unjust and oppressive; that all religion was a vain and idle superstition; that there was no difference in men, except what arose from arbitrary violence; that the few who had acquired great wealth had no better right to it than the many who had acquired none; and that nothing could restore genuine liberty but the prostration of every dignity and of every advantage, whether derived from the industry of man, or the bounty of God. The advocates of this pernicious system of equality, in the career of their opposition to the laws of nature and society, have expressed their fervent displeasure at that respect which long has been, and I trust long will be, attached to eminent and dignified men, exalted to the higher stations in government. This is an important part in the system of universal disorganization. For if you destroy all respect for magistrates, you destroy all confidence in them; and leave no security for the existence of liberty or laws. The cry of our levelling democrats is, “respect the majesty of the people.”—Where are we to look for the majesty of the people, except in the persons exalted to office by the suffrages of the people? These are the characters whose public administrations are to shew whether the people have any majesty. The phrase, “majesty of the people,” in its modern acceptation, brings into view such an indefinite object, made of every gradation of character, from wisdom to folly, from virtue to vice, from aspiring ambition to brutal stupidity; that it serves only to perplex the mind, by rendering its views vast and irregular. We hope the American angle of vision is not sufficiently large, to

take in that indescribable farrago of majesty, with which our modern levellers are so much enamoured. We hope we have still judgment enough to distinguish merit, and gratitude enough to reward it. We are willing that the laws of nature, and the principles of civil association, should still be followed. We have not yet lost all regard for ancient institutions and ancient wisdom. We respect our magistrates; we esteem and protect the ministers of our holy religion; we embrace as our brethren all our worthy fellow-citizens; we form our political system after the great primeval model which descends from the source of infinite wisdom; which combines into one harmonious whole, principalities and powers, and exhibits in one vast and brilliant assemblage, millions of different dignities, without envy and without revolution. Peace, and order, and rational liberty; these are the objects to which we are invincibly attached. If once illumined by the transforming doctrine of equality, we shall see the whole establishment of nature reversed. Walking on enchanted ground, we shall see vales usurping the place of mountains; rivers whirling back to their sources, and skies falling to embrace the earth. We shall see huge whales sporting on the Andes, and clumsy bears flouncing in the Pacific. The planets in their courses will utter censure at their Maker, and the moon will repine at the splendour of the sun. When we are transformed into complete levellers, we can overleap, at one bound, all the mighty differences established by infinite wisdom; and, without a seeming disgust at the junction of eternally jarring principles, shall congratulate ourselves that we have escaped the drudgery of human prudence, and emerged into a region of perfect day.

ANOTHER cause which has had an extensive influence in producing and propagating erroneous notions respecting the nature of civil government, and which has rendered great numbers of people jealous and unhappy, is either an ignorant or designed misrepresentation of liberty. All restraints on the feelings, passions and actions of men, have been considered as the arbitrary mandates of a tyrant. It has generally been asserted, that when man quits the savage for the social state, he resigns a part of liberty to secure the rest. From this erroneous sentiment have originated the most violent invectives against those measures of government, which limit at a certain boundary the

exercise of civil rights, and render men responsible for the abuse of those rights. What liberty has man in the unsocial, uncivilized state? I conceive he has none, which properly comes under the idea of liberty. True, he is exempt from the restraints of law: he is also destitute of the protection of law. He consults no will, and no power but his own. Every man, therefore, in an uncivilized state, is either a tyrant or a slave. No one can be sure of the produce of his labour, or of the safety of his person. Visionary theorists may amuse themselves with their pompous descriptions of the liberty of uncovenanted man; but fact and experience will tell us, that he has no liberty but in a society governed by laws which controul every man's will, and protect the weak against the strong. What is called liberty in any other state, is properly the liberty of doing mischief. It is licentiousness or despotism. Government is by no means founded on what are called natural rights, but on conventional agreement. Every man in the uncivil state claims a right to every thing. Of consequence, every man sets himself up for a tyrant. War and bloodshed ensue, till the strongest arm determines whose right is best founded. Every man in the uncivil state claims a right to be the judge of his own cause, and the avenger of his own wrongs. He relinquishes both these rights when he enters into society. He now has a claim to assistance and protection from the aggregate wisdom and force of the community. Every right which he now possesses, rests on the social compact. He cannot now conduct himself in any way that is repugnant to established laws and constitutions. These prescribe the rights of every individual, and these alone secure genuine civil liberty. In the social state, every man is at liberty without any responsibility to extend and to use his rights, so far as they do not interfere with the rights of others, or with the general good of the community. The moment a man abuses his rights, with respect to the character, persons or property of others, he becomes responsible, and deserves punishment. For if no man is responsible for the abuse of his rights, society and liberty, with all their advantages, are destroyed.

A GOOD government is a system of restraints on the actions and passions of its subjects. All good citizens will rank these restraints

among their rights, and not among their grievances. A spirit of rational liberty exults in submission to the controul of just and salutary laws. It considers these as its only asylum against violence and outrage. A spirit of licentiousness is impatient of all restraint, delights in perpetual revolutions, and always measures its right by its power. Some of the citizens of these States consider our government as too complex in its structure, and too expensive in its operations. They confidently assure us, that a simple house of representatives, with a speaker, would fully answer every object of national importance. The simplest forms of government will generally secure some individual object better than the more complex; but they commonly leave the most important concerns unguarded. Every one who is versed in the political history of nations, knows that the ends to be obtained by government are numerous, often difficult of access, and, when obtained, difficult to be secured. No simple direction of power can possibly be accommodated to the complexity of human affairs. Hence it is that the due distribution of powers, so as to secure the greatest number of advantages, with the fewest inconveniences, has been considered, by the most profound politicians, as the most difficult part in the mechanism of civil institutions. In governments where there is but one branch of power, there is no security for liberty. Simple democracies, whether managed by the whole people assembled, or by their representatives, have always proved as tyrannical as the most despotic monarchies, and vastly more mischievous. It is in vain to substitute theoretical speculations in the place of facts. The modern zealots of revolutionary reform may tell us that the science of government is of all others the most simple; that a nation, in order to be free, needs only an exertion of will; but the experience of ancient and modern times will tell us that the science of government is of all others the most intricate: because it is to be deduced from principles which nothing but experiment can develope: and that a nation, in order to be free, needs some wisdom as well as will. But our reeking demagogues, in order to accomplish their designs of demolishing all permanent establishments, address themselves to the stubborn principle of will, and guide it, not by convincing the un-

derstanding—not by presenting a certain prospect of improved liberty and happiness—but by irritating the feelings, rousing up the passions, and loading the soul with a sense of unreal grievances.

THE enemies of our own and of all other established governments, in order to give complete success to their schemes of destruction, have attempted to exterminate all religious and moral principles. They well knew, that if men would not fear and obey the Supreme Being, they would not any subordinate being. Hence it is, that such efforts have been made to discredit the doctrines of natural and revealed religion. Hence it is, that cargoes of infidelity have been imported into our country, and industriously circulated to corrupt the minds and morals of the rising generation. Efface the idea of a supreme controlling power from the minds of men, and you leave none of those exalted motives, none of those ennobling virtues, none of those aspiring principles of perfection, which have excited, adorned and animated the greatest geniuses of ancient and modern times. No government, except absolute despotism, can support itself over a people destitute of religion; because such a people possesses no principles on which governmental motives can operate to secure obedience. The most salutary laws can have no effect against general corruption of sentiments and morals. The American people, therefore, have no way to secure their liberty, but by securing their religion; for there is no medium between an entire destitution of religion and the most deplorable servitude. No nation, however ignorant and barbarous, except one, has ever attempted to support a government without some respect to a Supreme Being. Let us then guard with the utmost vigilance against those domineering, abandoned and arrogant philosophists, who consider themselves as the asylums of wisdom, and the oracles of truth; who assert that there is no standard of moral rectitude; and are striving to persuade man, that to be perfect, he needs only forget every thing exterior to himself, and suffer all his actions to be guided by the impulses of his own nature. These sentiments, if reduced to practice, will undoubtedly destroy all moral, civil and social obligations. For how can men form societies, institute governments, and cultivate arts and sciences, who will be guided by no laws, and controlled by no power out of themselves? Each one considers himself a déi-

ty, and yet conducts like a brute! Each is an instinctive animal, and yet a perfect intelligence! Such are the effects of renouncing religion—of substituting speculation in the room of experience!

WE are called upon as citizens and as men, by the highest motives of duty, interest and happiness, to resist the innovations attempted on our government; to cultivate in ourselves and others the genuine sentiments of liberty, patriotism and virtue. After a long series of peace, prosperity and happiness, you are threatened with all the horrors and cruelties of war. The tempest thickens around you, and the thunder already begins to roar. A nation hardened in the science of human butchery; accustomed to victory and plunder; exonerated from all those restraints by which civilized nations are governed, lifts over your heads the iron sceptre of despotic power. To terrify you into an unmanly submission, she holds up to your view Venice, shorn of her glory; Holland, robbed, degraded and debased; Switzerland, with her desolated fields, smoking villages and lofty cliffs, reeking in blood amidst the clouds. In the full prospect of this mighty group, this thickening battalion of horrors, call up all your courage; fly back to the consecrated altar of your liberty, and while your souls kindle at the hallowed fire, invigorate your attachment to the birth-day of your independence; to the government of your choice; feel with additional weight the necessity of united wisdom, councils and exertions, and vow to the God of your fathers, that your lives and fortunes; that every thing you esteem sacred and dear; that all your energies and resources, both of body and mind, are indissolubly bound to your sovereignty and freedom. On all sides you now behold the most energetic measures of defence. All is full of life, and ardour, and zeal. The brave youth, the flower and strength of our country, rush into the field, and the eye of immortal WASHINGTON lightens along their embattled ranks. Approach these hallowed shores, ye butchers, who have slaughtered half Europe—you will find every defile a THERMOPYLE, and every plain a MARATHON!—We already behold our fleet whitening the clouds with its canvass, and sweeping the ocean with its thunder. The Gallic flag drops to American valour, and our intrepid sailors sing victory in the midst of the tempest.—Brave men! you will fight

for your country while an inch of sinew stretches on your bones, or a drop of blood throbs in your veins!—Fellow-Citizens, it is not by tribute, it is not by submission—it is by resolution, it is by courage, that we are to save our country. Let our efforts and our wisdom concentrate in the common cause, and shew to the world, that we are worthy that freedom which was won by the valour and blood of our fathers. Let our government, our religion and our liberty, fostered by our care, and protected by our exertions, descend through the long range of succeeding ages, till all the pride and presumption of human arrangements shall bow to the empire of universal love, and the glory of all sublunary grandeur be forever extinguished.

