

AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT HARTFORD ON THE 6TH OF JULY,

A. D. 1802.

BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF THE

CINCINNATI,

FOR THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT,

Assembled to celebrate the Anniversary of

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

BY BENJAMIN SILLIMAN.

Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. — they speak great swelling words of vanity, — While they profess to love liberty, they themselves are the servant of corruption. —

2. Peter, ii. 10, 18, 19.



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1802.



*At a meeting of the Connecticut State Society of Cincinnati at the
city of Hartford, July 6th, A. D. 1802.*

VOTED, That Capt. **NATHAN BEERS**, be requested to
wait on **Mr. BENJAMIN SILLIMAN**, and present him
the thanks of this Society, for his Oration delivered before
them this day ; and that the Treasurer be directed to procure
three hundred copies of the same for the use of the members.

A true Copy of Record,

JOHN MIX, SECRETARY.



THE THEORIES OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY IN
RELIGION, GOVERNMENT AND MORALS,
CONTRASTED WITH THE PRACTICAL
SYSTEM OF NEW-ENGLAND.

AN ORATION.

THERE are few propensities of the human mind which solicit indulgence so successfully, as those which prompt us to commemorate the anniversaries of illustrious events, and to eulogise those by whom they were achieved.

WE return with mournful pleasure to seasons of darkness, and kneel with gratitude, over the tombs of those who have bled for their country. The recollection of the events which impelled them to action, transports us back to the periods, and conveys us to the places in which they fought. We linger with strong emotions, on the ground which has been wet with the blood of our friends; we mark the spot which was once a scene of carnage, and survey, again and again, the ramparts of war now covered with verdure. Our feelings of joy for the success of our country are almost swallowed up in the strong sympathy which we experience for the sufferings and death of some distinguished individual. Hence the place where WARREN fell will be pointed out to the latest posterity.

HOWEVER grateful it might be to our feelings to recapitulate the dangers through which we have passed, and to celebrate the assertors of our independence, we forbear to resume a theme which has been already exhausted, and to tear open the wounds which time has closed. While we drop a tear over those heroes who fell in the storm of war; remember with gratitude those whom the course of nature has since called to the grave, and survey with reverence the worthies who still remain, we yield to the crisis of the times, and pass from the recapitulation of dangers which are *gone* to the contemplation of those which are *present*.

THE interruption of domestic happiness, the exhaustion of public and private wealth, and the immense sacrifice of lives by which our revolution was accomplished, were esteemed a cheap price for the preservation of our ancient privileges, and for the assurance of future security. For a considerable period, our union in private life and energy in council seemed to laugh to scorn the predictions of our enemies; while a progress, almost unparalleled, in wealth, reputation and numbers, rendered less improbable the chimerical visions of poets and the dreams of enthusiastic patriots. A NEW ERA in human things was said to be commenced, and the ardent lovers of mankind anticipated, with sanguine confidence, the return of the golden age, and the commencement of a glorious millennium.

SUCH were the prospects which brightened upon the world just before the evening of the eighteenth century. Who could have thought that the sun, which had burst from the clouds with so much glory, was *so soon* to set in blood!

A NEW ERA in human things is now indeed commenced.

THAT bold and impious philosophy, which promises the total regeneration of mankind; which has

summoned to its banners the millions of Europe, and founded the charge to universal carnage, has commenced, in this country, the initiatory work of public corruption, and daily renews its labors, with a zeal not to be damped, and a success which mocks all opposition.

AT such a period the *crisis of the times*, naturally prescribes to the orator of the day, the subject of discussion.

IN seasons of common tranquillity, novelty alone might charm and ingenuity arrest the attention ; but there are periods when a sense of danger renders futile every effort to amuse, and the mind is satisfied, only with a serious and impressive representation, of the impending ruin, and of the means of escape.

WE are called upon by this philosophy, to abandon every principle which we have learned, every habit which has been sanctioned by experience, and every institution which we have derived from our fathers.

To accomplish this work of sacrilegious devastation, a degree of zeal is exerted worthy of a better cause, and while the success by which it is attended, on the one hand, inspires new confidence, on the other, it excites alarm and doubtful apprehension. Few even of those most actively engaged, are apprised of the real tendency of the principles which they advocate, and the fatal effect of the measures they pursue. In many instances, honest in their views, but deluded by superior art, they mistake *demagogues* for *patriots*, and *devastation* for *reform* ; while they continue to accumulate sorrow and guilt for themselves, and ruin for the land which gave them birth. Like the ox, whose labor helps to rear the altar on which himself is to bleed, they are made the victims of their own credulity, and the humble instruments of their own destruction. But the CHAMPIONS of the new philosophy, fully appri-

led of the nature of their doctrines, and the effect of their exertions, move forward in this impious enterprise, with aullen intrepidity, which fears no obstacle and starts at no consequence.

SOMETIMES arrogant, bold and commanding, they awe the timid into acquiescence, and with the imposing appearance of talents and dignity, command the homage of the undiscerning; at other times, persuasive, modest and alluring, they steal upon the heart by the smoothness of adulation, and delude the mind by glowing pictures of future happiness and glory. Addressing themselves to the fears, the ambition, the envy, the avarice, and, universally, to the weakness and corruption of mankind, they find the heart prepared to yield before the understanding is convinced, and the hand is stretched forth to destroy, even before the victim is known.

THE impulse thus received, is communicated, by sympathy, to increasing numbers, until the multitude, stimulated to madness against those whom they deem their oppressors, and blindly devoted to their self-styled friends, demand the victims of their fury, with an importunity not to be denied.

BEFORE we yield to a delusion thus complete, and an impulse thus uncontrollable; let us examine, with severe scrutiny, the doctrines which we are solicited to believe, and the practices which we are urged to adopt; and let us compare the enjoyments which are promised us, with our real blessings and substantial happiness.

FOR, the contemplated change, when once accomplished will be final:

“Facilis descensus averni

.....
Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras
Hoc opus, hic labor est.”

The descent to ruin is easy, but to retrace our steps and reach again the light of heaven, is indeed difficult and laborious.

THIS projected reform is not confined to a few important particulars, but embraces every human interest, from the chair of supreme magistracy to the cottage fire-side. Unconnected with any system of faith and politics, it wages war against every government and every religion. Society itself is to stand upon a new basis; government, religion and every social institution are to be abolished, and men are to become immortal by the mere omnipotence of mind over matter.

SUCH is the abstract jargon of this new philosophy. Contemptible as it may appear in the eyes of rational men, it has done more, within a given period, to destroy the happiness of mankind, than the arms of conquerors, or the ravages of the pestilence.

LET us therefore delineate its features, and then compare it with the *good, old, practical* SYSTEM OF NEW-ENGLAND. Thus, by viewing the two pictures together, we shall be able to decide which is beautiful, in the correct proportions of nature, and the modest simplicity of religion, and which is distorted in its form, and daubed, like Jezebel of old, with false deceptive coloring.

THE great code of "improved modern ethics, morality and legislation" where the doctrines of the *new school* are drawn out into system, and gravely assume the name of philosophy, is GODWIN'S "Political Justice." Were not this work of Mr. Godwin* the BIBLE of modern reformers; were not

* MR. GODWIN.

It may perhaps seem superfluous to add any thing to the remarks which have been made by different writers upon this author. In England, he has been hunted down by the united

his impious, absurd and abominable dogmas daily taught in our streets, and preached on the house tops, an apology might well be demanded for introducing him again to the public attention. But when our ALL is at stake we must have "line upon line, and precept upon precept." We are bound to use all the arms, which are furnished by argument and ridicule, to scout such men from society and drive them into obscurity and contempt. In this production will be found most of the principles here commented upon, while the rest will be drawn from ephemeral writings, and the colloquial rant of modern philosophy.

THE efforts of this philosophy are directed principally against RELIGION and GOVERNMENT, and as a principal mean in overthrowing these, it strikes at the EDUCATION, HABITS and MORALS of private life. In no point do its disciples agree more universally, than in their enmity to the CHRISTIAN RE-

powers of reasoning and ridicule. The writer of the "Pursuits of Literature," in particular, with great keenness of wit, and force of ridicule, has exposed the impious theories and miserable weakness of this REPUBLICAN PHILOSOPHER.— But it is necessary that similar efforts should be made in this country also. GODWIN is read and admired, by all that class of citizens who arrogate to themselves the title of REPUBLICAN. How far they merit this appellation, may best be learned from the *humility*, *MODERATION* and *disinterestedness* by which their leaders are so much distinguished. The principles of Godwin's "Political Justice," if carried into full effect in this country, would make the UNITED STATES, what FRANCE has been; a NATION OF RAVISHERS, ASSASSINS and PREDATORY WARRIORS. It is therefore a sacred duty to expose his miserable dogmas to that contempt which they deserve. It is not difficult to conceive why bad men should be his advocates. But it is really more than even *charity* can do to acquit both the *heads* and the *hearts* of Mr. Godwin's disciples. They are at liberty to take their choice of either part of the alternative.

As a *fine writer*, Mr. Godwin's pretensions ought never to be mentioned. He is obscure, diffuse and frigid; dull, formal and abstract.

LIGION, and to the dominion of him who bled on CALVARY. For, it is totally hostile to that pride of intellect, and impatience of control, by which they are uniformly characterized, and the doctrines which it inculcates are directly opposed to most of their favorite tenets. Hence, the destruction of Christianity is an object of primary importance, for it stands in the very vestibule of modern improvement, armed with the *two-edged sword of THE ALMIGHTY*.

THE bible is said to exhibit a false picture of the human character. In the language of philosophy: Man is not naturally depraved, but innocent. Inclined to virtue, and warm in the pursuit of knowledge, religion and social institutions have served only to corrupt his primeval innocence, and to cramp the energies of his intellect. Left to himself, he would instinctively soar to the brightest regions of virtue and the most glorious heights of understanding. Nay, perpetually progressing in the endless career of perfectibility, he would eventually supercede the necessity of sleep; subdue the dominion of passion, and, by the mere energy of mind, baffle the attack of every disease, and triumph over the KING OF TERRORS. Not only does the bible give a false account of the powers of the human mind, and the propensities of the human heart, but the virtues which it inculcates are said to be mean and selfish. It commands its disciples to do good to those who are within their reach; to relieve the distressed wanderer in the streets, and visit the prisoner in his dungeon; and not merely to say "be ye warmed and filled," but to perform the deed of charity, and leave the event to heaven.

BUT modern philanthropists feel no particular attachments, and exercise no particular benevolence. With "a certain cold-blooded indifference to all the mild, pious and honorable feelings of our common

nature," they spurn the misery which lies imploring at their feet, but glow with philanthropy to future generations. Extending their views to distant worlds and systems, they overlook "this little spot which men call earth." Their benevolence is exhausted upon beings who do not exist; they burn to relieve those who are conscious of no oppression; and long to bound over oceans, and to traverse continents, in search of sufferings unredressed, and injuries unavenged. They weep over a dying ass, but shout at the decapitation of a king. The implicit submission of the Turk, and the apathy of the Chinese, call forth a flood of tears, while the bleeding trunks around the guillotine, the smoking ruins of ravaged countries, and the carnage of slaughtered armies, awaken a horrid joy at the progress of liberty.

AFFECTION for our parents, brothers, sisters and friends, is proscribed by Mr. Godwin as the result of prejudice, and an offence to the principles of justice. The true cosmopolite feels no gratitude, for he has no attachments. He prefers "no human being to another because that being is his father, wife or son, but because for reasons which equally apply to all understandings that being is entitled to preference." Thus a theoretical candor, a cold calculation of merit, is to expel from the breast every tender and amiable feeling. Those to whom we owe our being, our education, and the seeds of every virtue, must be abandoned to want, disease and death, while a visionary philanthropy impels us to seek objects of fancied worth, whom we never have seen, and to whom we owe no obligation. The scriptural account of rewards and punishments is hooted at by Mr. Godwin and the whole band of demoralizing sophists. The former directly prefers the liberal gods of pagan theology; those pliant deities, whose morality could give no offence to the most easy voluptuary, and whose mysterious rites enjoined no mortifying penance upon human propensities.

WELL may we suppose that the corruptors of the universe, the assassins of human virtue and happiness, would wish to escape the scrutiny of him whose eyes are "as a flame of fire," and the retributions of those torments "whose smoke ascendeth forever and ever."

A FAR different remuneration is proposed by them to persevering virtue; in the good opinion of a world, whose shouts of applause are often bestowed upon successful villany; while the hiss of contempt and the pointed finger of scorn are the reward of inflexible rectitude.

BUT if the code of modern philosophy were harmless in other respects, Mr. Godwin, in his chapter upon promises, has dispatched all moral obligation at a single stroke. Hear his own words: "I have promised to bestow a sum of money upon some good and respectable purpose. In the interval between the promise and my fulfilling it, a greater and nobler purpose offers itself, and calls with an imperious voice for my co-operation. Which ought I to prefer? That which best deserves my preference. *A promise can make no alteration in the case.* I ought to be guided by the intrinsic merit of the objects, and not by any external and foreign consideration. No engagements of mine can change their intrinsic claims."

THIS is, unquestionably, a very convenient mode of paying a debt; nor need we wonder that cosmopolites are very partial to such morality when it frees them, at once, from the impertinence of sheriffs, and the tyranny of courts of justice. It is peculiarly convenient for those generalizing philosophers, whose time is so much devoted to the care of the universe, that they have none left to bestow on the sordid employments of industry, and the selfish avocations of family good. But in a serious view how execrable is such a teacher of morality—how

contemptible such a philosopher ! These are “ thy Gods, O Israel !”

SUICIDE is justified by this writer. He would think it rather unphilosophical to destroy one's own life merely to avoid some personal evil. But if the *general good* demands such a measure, it is the highest instance of disinterested heroism. If the *general good*, a phantom before which all *particular happiness* vanishes, requires that an innocent man, known to be such, should be tortured, the torture must be inflicted. Thus the good of the whole consists in the misery of the parts, and the felicity of the universe is consistent with the wretchedness of every individual which it contains.

BUT an evil, resulting from religion, which excites the most lively solicitude in the breasts of these gentlemen, is, that it maintains an order of men, who, in this country, possessed of the slenderest means of support—remote from the scenes of ambition, and wholly engrossed in doing good to mankind, are still described as plotting the most nefarious designs against the state, and burning with lust of power and hatred to liberty. Enemies to the gods of modern philosophy, they pay no worship at their shrines, and offer no incense on their altars. Hostile to that total dereliction of principle, which assumes the name of liberality of sentiment ; to that boastful philanthropy, which flows from the most exclusive selfishness ; and to that raging love of liberty, which springs only from a perfect impatience of control ; they assert with firmness the principles which they believe ; inculcate that love of mankind which is consistent with affection for our friends and our country, and advocate that rational liberty which is allied to firmness, energy and order. Hence their days are numbered by the genius of reform, and the hand-writing on the wall has already marked them out for destruction. As preparatory to a consummation so devoutly to be wished, their characters

must be covered with infamy ; the protection of society withdrawn ; all contracts and laws for their support annulled, and, if contempt and poverty cannot sink them to the grave, they must then be offered up to appease the incensed deity of revolutions.

Thus religion must be discarded, its altars and temples thrown down, its ministers driven from society, or consigned to the executioner, and all sense of moral obligation banished from the breast, before mankind can enjoy the blessings of that equality, which seeks only the level of desolation, the dismal independence of the grave ! “ Be astonished O ye heavens at this, and” thou, O earth, “ be horribly afraid !”

It was not to be expected that men who thus defy the omnipotence of heaven, should feel any scruples in laying violent hands upon GOVERNMENT. But considering mankind as not yet ripe for that consummation of philosophical reform, which is to sweep every institution, literary, civil and religious, from the face of the world, they are contented for the present, to impair the energy of government by little and little ; thus inducing a gradual decline which must finally end in dissolution.

THEIR first position is that all nations are capable of enjoying liberty. The brutism of the Hottentot, and the prejudices of the Hindu form no obstacle to this favorite theory. Virtue and information are not necessary to the existence of rational freedom ; licentiousness is liberty ; and rapine and murder are among the rights of man. Conscious that all good men will oppose their doctrines, no arts are too low—no sycophancy is too abject to secure the applause of the populace, that they may marshal them in hostility, against the wealth, the dignity and the virtue of society. Hence that senseless jargon which proclaims *the will of the people* as paramount to all laws,

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