

## Peres [Perez] Fobes 1742-1812

### *An Election Sermon*

boston, 1795

In a day when Harvard listed its students according to their social rank, as perceived by the Harvard faculty, Perez Fobes was fifth from the bottom in a graduating class of forty-seven. He was born in Massachusetts, served as a chaplain in the Revolutionary Army, and held pastorates in the Congregational Church for some twenty years. At the age of forty-four he took up a professorship in Natural Philosophy at Rhode Island College (later called Brown University) and thereafter pursued a mixed career of preaching, teaching, and administration at preparatory school and college levels. In this sermon before the governor and General Court of Massachusetts, Fobes makes evident the problems and pitfalls encountered in extending a liberal theory of politics, developed to justify a revolution, to the practicalities of establishing republican government on a continental scale. What are the characteristics of a good public official? What is acceptable behavior toward such an official by citizens with freedom of speech and press and a habit of criticizing government? At what point does behavior that was once considered purely patriotic cease being patriotic and become subversive? Fobes here previews the problems surrounding the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.

### [AN ELECTION SERMON]

II. Peter, II. *Chap. part of the 10th and 12th Verses.*

They despise government—are not afraid to speak evil of dignities—and things they understand not.

An honest man is a character more frequently claimed than deserved. But of all claims, that of a calumniator is one of the most unfounded. The pen of inspiration has left a stigma in the evil of detraction. It is condemned by the voice of nature, and the verdict of reason. Whether it is vented by the tongue, the pen, or the press; whether it is conveyed under the disguise of dark insinuation, affected silence, or the contumelious brow; whether it arises from competitions of honour, or the jealousies of interest from prejudice, or rancorous passion; or is retained only for amusement, to supply the vacancy of reason, or the barrenness of conversation; from whatever source it springs, whatever form it assumes, or however confined in its walks, slander is a crime of the deepest dye, base in itself, and baneful to society. But if such is the criminality of “speaking evil one of another” in the circle of private life, what is their crime “*who dare to speak evil of dignities?*” *Presumptuous and self willed* are they called, and in company joined with characters of such infamy, that the most copious language on earth, under the control of genius and inspiration, was found too barren to describe them, without the aid of metaphors, the most degrading that could be borrowed from Heaven, Earth, and Sea.

*“Fallen angels, wandering stars, raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame, filthy dreamers, spots and blemishes in society, trees twice dead, cursed children, brute beasts made to be taken and destroyed,”* with such company are *they* ranked *who despise government*. And is

there not a cause amply sufficient to justify this marked distinction between evil speaking in common, and *speaking evil of dignities*? An attempt to investigate this distinction, while it diversifies a common topic, will perhaps suggest some useful observations on civil government. I feel on this occasion, the want of more than all the apologies that have ever been made in this place: but to ask the candour and patience of such an audience as this, might be “to speak evil of dignities;” and to speak evil, is in the original Greek, to *blaspheme*: to open the mouth against the civil magistrate, the vicegerent of God on earth, is “to set the mouth against heaven.” The word, *dignities*, is here taken in the abstract, and signifies political authority; in the concrete it is put for persons exercising power and jurisdiction. While it extends to all the grades and departments of public office, it strongly implies, that all men in public office *ought* to be men of dignity. But who are these dignities? What is that government which cannot be spoken against, without incurring the guilt of blasphemy, and the penalty of damnation? The answer is plain: That government, which the Apostle calls *an ordinance of God*, is a government chosen by the people; for he as expressly calls it *the ordinance of man*. Rulers are *ministers ordained of God*, only when they are the *ministers of good to the people*. Obedience therefore, to civil rulers imposed on the people, or to any *form* or *administration* of government contrary to the will of the people, was never inculcated by the inspired Apostle on pain of damnation: for the same authority which in this instance condemns, in others justifies open resistance and opposition to government. The unreasonable humour of Ahab King of Israel, the menacing edicts of Nebuchadnezzar, and the peremptory mandate of the Egyptian Monarch were disregarded with impunity, and even without blame. Was it a crime in Hushai to develop the machinations of Ahitophel? or did Mordecai speak evil of dignities when he exposed the plot of Haman against the whole nation of the Jews? If Sir Edmund Andross is a tyrant, if Arnold is a traitor, or even Lord Bacon is the bribed Judge, let their villany be unmasked, let their guilt be unkenelled. To do this every citizen is bound by prior and superior claims of society. Should the highest officer of any government on earth, flagrantly abuse the authority of his station, even by prosecuting private designs, or by adopting public measures hostile to the public good, it is not a crime, but the duty of a free people to be free enough to speak evil of him. The tongue in this case is the proper weapon to chastise and refrain, where the laws of men cannot reach. This will keep the public mind awake, by adding stimulus to ardour and information.

Hence we conclude, that speaking evil of dignities is a crime on the supposition only, that rulers are both the choice and ministers of good to the people. When this is a fact, those words of the Apostle which seem to carry horror in their sound, do not exaggerate its criminality. This will appear both from the nature and design of government, and from the duties and character of its officers.

In man, the noblest work of God on earth, three worlds co-exist: The material, animal and angelic; or *spirit, soul and body*. These are all governed by Deity, in a manner wisely adapted to their different natures and capacities. The material world is governed by irresistible force, the brute creation by instinct, man by law, he alone is endued with moral life, united with the animal and intellectual. This triple life, which combines all the known powers of nature, renders man a moral agent; amenable to God the moral governor of the world. With the angel and the brute in his composition, he possesses power and propensity to do wrong as well as right. This renders him a fit subject of civil government. The impulses of animal nature render it necessary, and the

social principle makes it agreeable, as the author of these powers, God himself is the author of government.

To that astonishing variety in his composition, which renders man a proper subject, we may add, the still greater variety, visible in the human genius and disposition, which demonstrates the necessity of subordination. Different stations in life require different talents and qualifications. If every man had the same degree of taste, of reason, or education, which are the portion of a few individuals, how wretched would be the lot of those who occupy the lowest offices, and perform the drudgeries of life. A sublime genius, a refined imagination, without an object, or the possibility of gratification, would serve only to tantalize and torment the possessor. Such is the difference of intellectual abilities among men, that the condition of an ox or an ass, endued with some human intellect, would not be more wretched, perhaps, than that of some philosophic genius destined only to drive them. This diversity of genius, which is independently the gift of providence, plainly indicates the necessity of those distinctions in life, which are implied in government; it shews moreover, the wisdom and benevolence of the deity, in providing for all, in such manner, as proves at once the indispensability of every man in society; and that the poorest in his humble condition may be as useful, contented and happy as the richest and most elevated officer of government.

Again—The signatures of subordination are legible in the human form. We behold in the countenance of some persons a kind of dignity, which at once beams reverence, and designates for dominion: in others, we observe such vacancy and prostration of dignity, as equally marks them for subjection. This diversity, altho it may arise in part from the original constitution of the mind, or from moral culture and improvement, is so conspicuous and captivating, as none will affirm, that the elevated stature of King Saul, the beauty of Absalom's person, the ruddy complexion of David, and the ennobling form of Washington, had no share in raising them up to the highest stations in life.

There is yet another proof of the divine authority of government, and that is the manner in which we come into existence. Had this been, like the original pair of our race, in a state of adult maturity and independence, it would have been, perhaps, more difficult to reduce fallen men to a state of government than the most savage beast, "*which are tamed, and have been tamed of mankind.*" But, happy for us, a different plan has been adopted. By a law of nature we all begin to exist in a state of helpless infancy, under the entire control and direction of parents. By this means children early become members of a family, which is itself an empire in miniature. Having formed in the moulding age of life, proper ideas and habits of government, they become at length prepared for civil society, in larger communities. While this benevolent law of nature announces government coeval with our existence, it speaks louder than the tongue of men or angels, the necessity of early education. Her voice to legislators is, "depend not on the number of your laws, or the severity of fines and punishments; but *lay the axe at the root* of vice, take possession of the heart, and charm, if possible, the young stranger to the love of virtue and country, in the tenderest period of life. Do this, by giving birth and energy to every possible institution for the education of youth." *It teaches* parents also, the ministers of religion and others, that while employed in the humble office of instructing youth, their services may be as patriotic, and perhaps more useful to their country, than the wisdom of their counsels in the

senate, or the valour of their arms in the field. In fine, while *it teaches* all this, it *shews*, that to despise government is to violate a law of nature.

But in still blacker colours does this crime appear, if we consider the design of government, and the manner in which it is supported. Its benevolent design embraces the greatest good of the whole community. But this can be effected in that way only which God himself has taken, both to instruct mankind, and to govern the world. His will is taught us in the sacred scriptures, not in detail, but by general rules. In like manner God governs the world by the laws of a general providence. These laws are calculated to secure the good of the whole. They must therefore, equally affect each individual comprehended under them, without any distinction of personal circumstance or character. Should the thunderbolt be diverted in its course, or stopped in its career, contrary to the fixed laws of electricity, to save one useful citizen, why not to save another? "*But shall the earth be forsaken, or the rock moved out of its place for thee?*" This would introduce such a train of miraculous events, as would subvert the whole constitution of nature, and destroy that established connexion between cause and effect, which is now the principal source of human knowledge and foresight.

Analogous to this divine model, all human governments must be constructed and maintained; i. e. by general laws; laws adapted to the state and happiness of men collectively. That endless variety in the condition and circumstances of individuals who compose by a community, renders it impossible to secure by general laws, the good of the whole, without injury or inconvenience to some individuals. An attempt to avoid by particular laws, the jarring claims, and infinite collisions of interest, which happen in society, would be perfectly nugatory. God himself has not done it. Inattention to this subject had been the unhappy cause, not only of strong prejudices against the book of God, but of bold censures against God and man. Under a mistake of this kind, the friends of Job censured an innocent man. Is it not owing to this, more than to any other cause, that men so often *speak evil of dignities*? Observing that some existing law is less favorable to their own private interest, than to that of some others, or than different regulations might be, they at once let loose the tongue of censure against them; not considering perhaps, not knowing, that the very law which would please them might injure, if not ruin thousands. Let us further observe, that the same object in view, when the legislator frames a law, ought to be in his eye, when the penalty is affixed; that is, the general good: In order to which, he will consider that moral evil is estimated by the intention of the agent; political evil by its consequences in society. Human laws cannot reach the heart; the cognizable actions therefore, of men in society, must be estimated in the abstract only; as such they are denominated political crimes, varying in magnitude, according to their tendency or general consequences to the community; that is, in proportion to the intensity and extent of misery that would follow, if all actions of that description were to be generally tolerated, or become common.

By this standard the penalty of every law should be adjusted; and not by the supposed moral evil of the action, which cannot be known, nor by its particular consequences to a few individuals, which cannot be regarded, but by its general effects on society. This is the pole star of every statesman; by the light of which only it is that we can account for the capital punishment of Uzzah for touching the ark, the zeal of Saint Paul in abstaining from meat, and the necessity of severe punishments for burglary, counterfeiting money, running contraband goods, exercitual desertion for cowardice, and many other actions, which in themselves appear small offences, if

not innocent or indifferent.—Inattention to this principle, it is presumed, has been the fruitful source of great misdemeanors and public disturbance. Can it be supposed, that the late insurgents in a southern state would have refused the payment of a small excise, had they considered, that the general consequence of that refusal was the certain loss of all public revenue, and the final subversion of all government?—From the same cause, have we not seen, what humanity ever blushes to relate, a reputed honest man, in open town-meeting, hold up his hand to defraud the public, or a public creditor, who would not, scarcely for his right hand, have been seen to injure one of his neighbours?

Inattention, permit me to say, is the best apology I can make for numbers of my fellow-citizens who neglect public worship, perform journeys, and unnecessary business on the Lord's Day. They do not consider, that if every other person, who had an equal right and the same excuse, should follow the example, public worship, that great pillar of civil government, would be entirely overthrown. But more than all, this principle now unfolds its chief design, and shews, as with a sun beam, the enormity of reviling dignities. A ruler is the father of his country; he stands at the head of government, at the helm of the ship, in which our lives and fortunes are all embarked. An attack upon him may sink the whole. Slander in this instance, is more than death; it is parricide, more fatal than all the malignant influences once ascribed to baleful comets, which spread plagues and desolations through a whole country.

But if we consider civil rulers in character of real dignities, it will strike a deeper stain of guilt and baseness into the crime.

If it could be said of *David*, on account of the dignity and importance of his public character, that *he was with 10,000 of the people*; was it not a greater crime *to speak evil of such a "dignity,"* than of another man? Dignity is opposed to meanness. It can be applied to no action but what is virtuous, and therefore to no being on earth but man. To him it is applied in point of character, sentiment and behaviour, all which in some degree, must unite in a man of dignity. But to form a ruler of that description, he ought to be—1st. a man of a good discernment and information. Great talents, and erudition may be indispensable in the learned professions, and in the pretorean department of a government, in which the people are governed by laws and not men. The police of some nations may indeed, be a science of operose attainment; but the administration of a government, simple in its structure and formed as our own is, by the common sense of a free, virtuous people, cannot be a subject of vast depth or difficulty. Where men have honesty enough, they rarely will want skill enough, to guide well the affairs of state. The human body is subsisted chiefly by common food. This is the most easily obtained and the most wholesome, otherwise it would not have been *common*. The grand object, let us remember, as well as name of our government, is the "*Common-wealth*." It must however, be granted, that the smallest accession of knowledge adds to every character a dignity which is felt; and were it not for envy, would be acknowledged by all. Children soon feel the superiour authority, it gives a parent even in the government of a family. Rulers may not all be men of science, but if they are not men "*who have understanding in the times, and know what Israel ought to do,*" it is at the risque of both of their country, and their own reputation, as dignities. 2d. *meekness of wisdom*, a cool dispassionate temper, is a distinguished trait in the character of official dignity. The greatest legislator was the meekest man on earth. It was an excess of diffidence in Moses, to decline, for want of abilities, the office of an ambassador to a royal court. But it raises in the mind an idea of greater dignity,

than the conduct of that aspiring young man, who spoke the real sentiments of others, besides his own, when he said, "*O that I were made ruler in the land, that every man who hath any suit or cause, might come to me and I would do him justice!*" Hypocrites may be found in politics, as well as in divinity. With patriotism on the tongue, there may be faction or tyranny in the heart. High pretensions of friendship to the rights of man, attended with bitter criminations of men in public office, ought never to be admitted as a test of sincerity, or of real qualifications for office; because great zeal and ostentation are seldom united with that cool dispassionate temper which is always necessary to form a just opinion upon any subject. In our coolest moments, "*we see through a glass darkly.*" But when we see through a ferment of passion, we see and judge falsely. The medium has a property strange and unknown in optics. It distorts and discolours, magnifies and diminishes every object at the same time. The rash policy of boisterous men at the helm of Government has been compared to a whirlwind at sea. When it happens to blow the right way, it may drive the ship from rocks or shoals, and save the cargo. But tornadoes are always dangerous to navigation.

To this cool dispassionate temper we must unite, 3d. resolution and intrepidity of mind; for this gives great dignity and elevation to a ruler. Unmoved by the fawnings of flattery or the four scowls of ambition, deaf to the croaking of anarchy and blind to the splendid baits of monarchy, he will nobly dare to speak his opinion, and act with firmness and decision. Like a rock in the midst of the ocean, he stands unshaken. The waves of violence, of intrigue and faction may rise, foam and roar against him, but dash and die at his feet. This firmness of mind is directly opposed to that indecisive temper, by which some are perpetually *halting between two opinions*, without forming any at all. It stands opposed also to another temper, which may be called decision in excess, a rapid rotation of opinion.—Men of this cast decide in such haste, and with so little discretion, that *they are given to change*; vibrating from one side to the other, that we know not where to find them. "*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways, unstable as water he shall not excel.*" There is another contrast of this mental fortitude, and that is ductility of mind; this renders the possessor too obsequious to flattery, to the lure of interest and popularity; too prone to be duped by the intrigues of disaffected aspiring men. Whatever may be the real cause or composition of these different tempers, certain it is, that the indecisive character, a bivious mind, and the ductile temper, all diminish dignity, and disqualify men for public office.

Firmness of mind must be accompanied with, 4th. consideration; for this, when united as commonly it is with industry and a public spirit, is one of the most prominent and pleasing features in the whole character of dignity. With what mild and gentle rays it shines through the characters of David, Solomon and a Washington, and gives them more real dignity, than all the dazzling splendours of a throne? This will soften the splendors of their stations, and give them an affable deportment, a complacency of behaviour, and such conciliating manners, as cannot fail to secure the most commanding influence over the people.—In this way the greatest monarch of the earth governed *men, who were in debt, in distress, and discontented*. There our exasperated spirits, bankrupts, and broken fortunes, who had no interest in the welfare of the country, he influenced into one common concern for its property.—Such a motley mass of discordant materials he kneaded up, into one useful harmonious compound! It is a unanimous vote in our world, never to respect, but always to despise a haughty disposition. This disposition once degraded from his throne, the royal brute of Babylon, and turned him out a grazing with the beasts of the field! it sunk another as low in the eyes of millions, when in the haughtiness of his

spirit, he said "I will bring all America to my feet." *Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit is the fall of dignity.* How unreasonable in a ruler as well as degrading is such a temper? What has he that he did not receive? Is he superior to others in the dignity of his person? God is the author of his frame. Has he more official dignity? It is derived from the sovereignty of the people. Does he shine in the most elevated stations? Like the moon he shines only in borrowed light. We do not particularly mention justice, humanity and patriotism, because they are all included in 5th. "Religion" which above all, gives to a ruler the highest dignity of character. The patriarchal benediction truly applies to religion alone: "*thou art the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.*" This refines, enables and animates all the features that compose dignity, both of character and office.—Emancipated from inglorious passions and pursuits, which rob me of all true honour, religion plants in the heart such undissembled virtue and piety, as will ensure respect and reverence, even to men of the lowest rank, but in men appointed to move in the higher spheres of life, religion casts a lustre on their elevated seats, and "by a strong reflection doubles the beams of dignity." How amiable, how sublime in such a character! Every feature, every action in it, creates esteem, and commands reverence. How sordid then is the wretch who dares *to speak evil of such dignities!* Is it now possible to sully this crime with an additional stain of infamy? Yes, it is done only by considering that the character of a ruler deprives him of the power of retaliation in his own defence. "*When Michael the arch-angel contended with the Devil about the body of Moses, he durst not bring against him a railing accusation;*" the dignity of Michael's character, rendered him an unequal match for Satan, at railing; therefore he said, *the Lord rebuke thee, and not I.* From the subject naturally arise the following

## OBSERVATIONS

1. Rulers are involved in the guilt of slander, when their conduct affords a just occasion for the people to speak evil of them. Can it be possible, that a legislator should enter the walls of the Senate, and under the solemnities of an oath, there give his voice and sanction to a law which he sacredly commits to the magistrate for execution; and then both of them be seen to violate *that law*, which the one has made, and the other is sworn to execute? Is it a crime to speak evil of such dignities? there is no dignity in such men. Vice is eternally mean. 2d. The character given of a ruler, leads us to decide a long controverted question, respecting the best form of civil policy, in favor of a free republic. I mean "a democratical aristocracy, resting on the free election of the people, and revocable at pleasure."—The strength and glory of such a republic depend on the virtue of the people, which is real dignity. That of monarchy is supported by the glare of earthly grandeur, by the pageantry of heroism, and the weapons of death, which is royal dignity. This intoxicates the senses, but the other touches the heart. Hence a republican form was the choice and fabric of God himself for his own people. Moses with a senate of seventy, shared the government of Israel. The nature of man, the character of christian rulers, above all the benevolent principles of liberty and equality, embosomed in the religion of Jesus, are congenial to no other form; at least they appear incompatible with monarchical principles and the dynasty of kings. 3d—The advocated principle of calculating laws to embrace the aggregate sum of happiness in a community shews the absurdity of that doctrine, which maintains that moral evil is political good; or that private vice is public virtue. Were this a fact, it would be the duty of legislators to *establish iniquity by law*, i.e. they ought to enact laws to encourage the practice of fraud, rapine, falsehood, robbery, assassination &c. than which nothing can be more absurd, or

abhorrent to the principles of reason and common sense. 4th. Since it is a crime of such malignity to *despise government*, it highly concerns every citizen, particularly to know in what manner this may be done. *Government*, I would observe, *may be despised* by fallacious comparisons—by inequality of elections—licentiousness of the press—neglect to diffuse virtue and knowledge—disunion of the magistracy and christian priesthood—exorbitant wealth in the hands of individuals—improper connexions with despotic governments—neglect to watch and provide for our own government, the means of military defence—in such ways as well as by *speaking evil of dignities*, we may *despise* and even *destroy* a free government. On some of these articles, I would subjoin a few observations.

1st. *The palladium of Liberty may pull down the pillars of freedom.* A licentious press, like the unruly tongue, is full of deadly poison. It sows the seeds of discord, and saps the foundation of all government. By corrupting the source of public information, it becomes the bane both of private and social felicity. When political poison is vomited from the press, few will escape the contagion. When partiality in a printer loses its infamy, or the most uncorrupted integrity ceases to be the summit of his ambition—when he and his readers are not struck with the horror of an earthquake, at the idea of venality and misrepresentation —when they print falsehood *for hire*, publish scandal *for money*, sell the liberties of their country for a *reward*, and *the wicked bare rule by their means*, and *the people love to have it so—what shall we do in the end thereof?*

2d. Whatever tends to destroy or diminish an equal voice in elections, will endanger the immunities of a people. Associations of every description, whether civil or ecclesiastical, whether self-created or sanctioned by government or by the god of nature, all tend to create in the mind certain byasses and attachments which produce an accretion of power and influence in future elections; nor can this be avoided without eradicating the principles of human nature. The existence of society depends on this principle; similar effects will arise from a natural superiority of genius, from greater acquisitions in knowledge, in wealth and in the arts of address. The Deity never intended a perfect equality among men, not even in their elective power. This would have been a scar, if not a solecism in the analogy of nature. This however, bears no proportion to that inequality which prevails among despotic nations, and which ought to be considered as the horror of all free governments. In nature we always observe variety, but we seldom find extremes. The beauty and utility of the human hand, that badge of human authority, would suffer great diminution, if its fingers were equal, but much more if they were enormous, either in length or size. It is only from an extreme or abuse of this inequality, that danger is apprehended; and over which we ought ever to watch with a jealous eye.

3d. *National wealth, especially when carefully accumulated in the hands of a few individuals, is dangerous in the extreme to human liberty.* The experience of ages, the repeated admonitions of our Saviour and his apostles prove beyond a doubt, *the power of riches corrupt the human heart.* Hardly can we find one period of prosperity, in the whole history of the Israelites, or of any other nation on the earth, which has not been followed with a decay of piety, and a corruption of morals. Shall we then rejoice and not tremble, when we see a profusion of earthly good; flowing streams of prosperity, in which multitudes are bathing themselves at ease, while the rapid current is carrying away the liberties of mankind? Opulence is the common parent of idleness, luxury and dissipation &c. The reflection of a moment will convince us, that wealth is both the object and principal cause of *avarice* and *ambition*. These are the common sources of anarchy and

despotism, and these again, are the charybdis and scylla of our country—most of the disputes and quarrels that happen in the world, originate from the idea of property. Savages live in tolerable peace almost without government, because they feel not, as we do, the power of wealth. While this attracts the gaze of vulgar admiration, it is apt to swell the heart with pride, “that unsocial and unfriendly passion,” *only by pride cometh contention*. Its influence on civil elections is still more pernicious. Money is frequently the most forcible logic, and he that carries the longest purse, will often carry the most votes. In this view of wealth, we see and admire the policy as well as justice of a late act of our legislature, which rescinded an old fragment of monarchy too long worn as the right of primogeniture. We feel also, and revere the wisdom of God in the appointment of a jubilee, as an essential article in the Jewish policy. This, it is probable, was the great palladium of liberty to that people. A similar institution perhaps may be the only method in which liberty can be perpetuated among selfish, degenerate beings in any government under heaven. But aside from this, and in full view of the dangers of exorbitant wealth, permit me to say that the prayer of one good man ever ought to be the united prayer of all America, “*give us not riches—nor poverty.*”

4th. The baneful effects of ignorance among the subjects of a free government, I need not describe. Inspiration has done it for me in one of her horrid descriptions of wild beasts and birds of prey, prowling under the dreary darkness of night, “*Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth, their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, owls shall dwell there, and satyrs, not fabulous, shall dance there.*” Happy for us, such darkness is past, and the present is a period of unusual ardour; for inquiry and diffusion of knowledge. Yea, the present is a most luminous period in that regular gradation of human knowledge, which from the beginning of creation down to the present time, has been constantly advancing. By a train of surprising events in providence, calculated to throw light upon each other, the public mind in every age, and among all nations, has been gradually opening, *from the father of lights*; as much light and knowledge have been sent down to earth, as the circumstances of its inhabitants would bear. At certain periods however, knowledge on earth, like the heavenly bodies, has proceeded with unequal velocity; and like them, it has sometimes appeared stationary and even retrograde; but this was in appearance only. Upon the whole it has been progressive, and will probably continue its progress, until its final completion in the full effulgence of millennial glory, when “*the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God.*” Partial interruptions have only paved the way for accelerating its progress. Great conquests and revolutions in the world, have given the people an opportunity for reforming their systems of government, and for great improvements, in useful arts and knowledge.—The American revolution is an instance of this kind, beyond a parallel. A large portion of the globe inhabited by millions of people, rapid in population, had long been held in subjection to one distant island. But the vision which *the young Hebrew* saw in his dream, *was but for an appointed time*. No longer could *the sun, the moon and stars*, be made to gravitate round a pebble: no longer could they *make obeisance* to Briton’s king.—Nature itself revolted. They arose to independence, ascended their native sphere, and formed a new solar system; a system compleat of *federal democracy*; in which equal power, emanating from each individual, uniting, formed one central luminary. This is retained in its station by a balance of gravitating power, accumulated in separate branches of the same body, as well as in a number of separate bodies or states. These are each independent in jurisdiction, different in structure, magnitude and distance from the centre; around them a number of secondaries perform their judicial circuits in periodical times; these are attended with satellites of executive power. A large

judiciary body, created and impelled by solar influence, ranges like a comet through the whole system; spreads terror among evil doers; and gives lustre and stability to the whole frame. In a word, the influence of the solar orb pervades every other body, retains each in its own orbit, and gives to all energy and motion, by confederating all into one fast harmonious system. No sooner was this luminary kindled up in America, than it darted its beams of science and liberty across the Atlantic. It dawned in Europe—it glows in France. New discoveries and vast accessions of knowledge, and the arts of life astonished the world. We lived an age in a few years; we saw a *nation born in a day*. Having felt the pangs and pleasures of the parturition of a new empire, we now behold the aurora of science fast rising to meridian lustre. Hardly can we contemplate the present, and anticipate the future state of our country, without moments of triumph. When we reflect on the present improved state of commerce, agriculture and of tactics, the mechanical and fine arts, geography and natural history, surgery and the medical art, chymistry, electricity, areology with the infant, but real science of physiognomy &c. all in progression; then lift up our eyes and behold a new galaxy of American geniuses, lately risen and still rising in our hemisphere, what in the name of science, what may we not expect? At least, we may hope, that modern polish of literature will not, *like Pharaoh's lean kine*, eat up the more substantial parts; and that the time will soon arrive, when four years at a college will not roll away, without consecrating a portion of it, to the classical, scientific study of natural history, and those practical principles of chymistry, on which the rationale and improvements of agriculture and the mechanical arts, so much depend; and which at the present day are so highly necessary to the growth and prosperity of this young American empire. May we not also indulge the pleasing hope, that the orthography of our own language, that vehicle and repository of arts and sciences, will soon be purged of its barbaric dross, and become as pure simple, and systematic as our politics. May the genius, the unconquerable spirit of Americans, forbid that a language formed by accident in days of Gothic ignorance, and refined and enriched with so many infusions of elegance and learning, that a language which probably will become the vernacular tongue of more millions than ever spoke one language on earth, should long remain perplexed and incumbered with so many literal defects and redundancies easily corrected. On this account I beg leave to say that the orthography of the English language, in its present state, is a tax on life, the opprobrium of science, a load of expensive lumber on the tender minds of millions of our race. In such a nation as this, it is intolerable. I will not think of it, but proceed to a thought more pleasing, 5th. virtue and religion above all are the strongest pillars of government. The mask of hypocrisy is a public acknowledgment of the worth of religion. The suggestion even of Atheists, when they dub religion a state engine to awe men into obedience, is a tacit confession of its utility in government. A safe engine it is, and of such force too, that the want, or weakness of but a single spring in it, I mean the belief of a future state, has always proved fatal to the establishment of government over any one whole nation on earth. Inspectors of the public manners, appointed by the law-givers of antiquity, prove that virtue was esteemed essential to the prosperity & even existence of government. Should we appeal to the records of history—to that of the Jewish nation—to the Egyptians, Persians, Grecians, Romans, and to most of the flourishing states in the world, her verdict would be in favor of virtue. The interchange of virtue and vice, graduated the scale, by which the wealth, power and respectability of all nations may be accurately measured. Polybius, who ascribes to irreligion the ruin of his own country, which preceded that of Rome, observes that a tenfold security given by a Grecian trustee for a small sum of public money, was sure to be violated, while the religion of an oath among the Romans was ample security for every engagement. While virtue prevailed in the Roman Empire, her feet

in the language of Daniel, were *iron*. But when the people began to degenerate, the iron began to be mixed with clay. Her feet were broken, and the empire fell.—In a word, it can no more be doubted that happiness and misery of public communities, as well as individuals, are connected with virtue and vice, than that gravitation is a property of matter. But if ethical virtue was the existence and prosperity of ancient governments, what may not be expected from the purest system of moral virtue ever taught on earth? Compared with this, the finest morals of Socrates or Confucius, or Plato, or Epictetus, are no more than the light or heat of a glow worm, to that of the meridian sun. The religion of nature teaches men to be just and righteous; but a righteous man is not the character which christianity calls a good man. A good man will do *more* than strict justice can demand of him; *he will do more than others*. His services done for the public are performed not with servility, but affection.—Not merely to escape censure, or for the sake of reward, “*but as a servant of Christ with good will*” to mankind, “*doing service as unto the Lord, and not to men.*” Religion requires those *who rule over men to be more than just*; they must *rule in the fear of God*: Because gods on earth are the subjects of Heaven, and must give an account of their stewardship to God, as well as to men. It was from this principle only, that the vice-roy of Egypt could assure his brethren, that he would be just to them; that he was a man that could be trusted; for says he, *I fear God*. This will operate with peculiar force on the people as well as on rulers. This will seize the hearts. And the subject yields to the magistrate, *not for wrath, but for conscience sake*. He will not *despise government*; he is *afraid to speak evil of dignities*, because he believes that one is *the ordinance*, and the other, the *minister of God*. And those who resist, however they may escape punishment from men, *will yet receive to themselves damnation*. To him *the word of God is sharper than the magistrate’s sword*; a guard stronger to human laws, than all their penal sanctions.

A judgment to come awes him more than all the terrors of an earthly tribunal. By those sublime and interesting discoveries which revelation unfolds, a new tribunal of justice is erected in the human breast; where conscience sits as judge, a judge that will be heard, when all others are silent. Such is the energy of religion! O religion the scorn of infidels, “a pitiful and paltry thing,” but the everlasting pillar of government; for the sake of which, may heaven save us from the vortex of deism—that old harlot, lately re-baptized by the name of reason—the *age of reason*. Immortalized indeed, for the discovery of a new proof, *that infidelity is only another name for ignorance*; and that a great politician in Europe as well as insurgents in America, may be guilty of speaking evil of “DIGNITIES,” *and things they “understand not”*—with proper deference to lord Bolingbrooke, Bill Beadle,\* and Tom Paine. I will close this article with an aphorism of the wisest and one of the greatest politicians that ever lived, and presume to recommend it, as *more than equal to the Spanish proverbs, or even those of the American Franklin*—it is this—“righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

In the presence of an assembly, that contains so many living characters of *dignity*; His *Excellency* claims our first attention. Two annual suns have not yet revolved over the silent corpse of the patriotic, the generous, the amiable *Hancock*, since we saw him here. The man of dignity, the patron of Liberty, the friend of religion, of its ministers, and institutions, must die! But happy for us, his co-patriot lives, and this day fills his vacant seat. Venerable with age, more venerable for his piety and unconquerable love of liberty, we behold him again placed in the first seat of Government, by the United voice of his grateful country. She loved *his brother* in proscription, and still remembers the name of *Adams* enrolled with him, on the immortal list of

exemptions from pardon, for no other crime but that of being a friend to his country. If his inflexible attachment to the same principles has since procured him the wounds of censure, *are they not wounds without a cause?* and will he not with his dying breath, forgive his enemies, and pray for the liberties of mankind. His eminent services in the cause of freedom are too deeply engraved on the hearts of all true republicans ever to be forgotten. May the fostering hand of heaven guard him, at this critical period of life, from every adverse event which might shake the few remaining sands, that now measure his important life. With all the sensibilities of an imperfect offending mortal, united with the honest intrepidity of virtue, may he not appeal to heaven and earth, in the language of an inspired patriot of his own name, and say—"I am old and grey headed, I have walked before you from my childhood to this day; behold here I am, witness against me, before the Lord, and before his people, whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or of whose hand have I taken a bribe. And the people will say—thou hast not defrauded, thou hast not oppressed us, the Lord is witness, the Lord think upon you for good according to all that you have done for this people."

The re-election of a distinguished character to the second office in this Commonwealth bears an honorable attestation to his abilities and public virtue.—His early attachment to the principles of republicanism, his patriotic exertions in the accomplishment of our happy revolution, with later services, in promoting the true interests of his country, have fully justified the wisdom, the gratitude and patriotism of his electors. May heaven reward his faithful services with honours unfading and eternal.

With grateful hearts we hail the return of an anniversary, which has once more convened those honored gentlemen who compose the two branches of our happy Legislature. From their known abilities, and the characters of their electors, we presume they have brought with them, to this consecrated spot, real dignity of character.

We rejoice in the senatorial *branch* of our government—chosen by the people at large. Their influence will operate as a useful check on the more local interest of the other *branch*, which otherwise might interfere and diminish the sum of public happiness.—This influence of the patrician order may indeed operate as a check on the dispatch of business, but repeated discussions of the same subject, in a different branch of the same body, will be more than a compensation for delay. As the object is ever the same, both branches will harmoniously cooperate for the general good. Every member holds an office, that is rendered highly momentous, both by the magnitude of its object, and the solemnity of an oath by which their fidelity is pledged. Guardians of the public rights, great confidence is reposed in them.—The eyes of the people, yea, the eyes of God himself are upon them. Unto Heaven may they look for assistance, and to the most perfect models on earth, for imitation.

Jesus was "the prince of the kings of the earth;" but he washed his disciples feet. *He went about doing good.* Learn of him, learn industry, condescension, philanthropy: "*whosoever would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all.*" Moses, when he stood on the mount with the laws of the Hebrew nation in his hand, with what astonishing dignity and splendour did this great magistrate appear in the eyes of the people? But *Moses wist not that his face shone:* "Be instructed ye rulers of the earth." This man had been with his God in the mount; *and Judah ruleth with God, and therefore is faithful.*—"The power of godliness" is the supreme dignity of all

rulers in Heaven or earth. Acquainted with human nature, our civil fathers will not be disappointed to find honest men, who from ignorance of the duties, the expenditures and responsibility of public office, *will* be apt to consider rulers in a state like drones in the hive, which live on the honey of the poor labouring bees.—Others will mutter against government, and clamour for different measures, when they neither know nor can tell what they want. While they condemn rulers for oppressing the people, they are themselves acting the very part of that tyrant, who having once had a dream, threatened to kill his officers, if they did not interpret it, when he himself could not tell his own dream. When evils or inconveniences are felt in society, too many are apt to imagine the fault is in rulers, when it is in the people: hence they will seek a remedy in a change of the former; not considering, that an army infected with the plague, or composed of cowards, cannot be cured by a new choice of officers. Others will be found turbulent and disappointed—men of desperate minds and fortunes, who constantly carry about them the tinder of faction, waiting only for a spark to produce an explosion. They wish for convulsions in the state, that *they* may rise into view, “ride in the tempest, and direct the storm.” From such men, no honest ruler can escape the calumny of the tongue. Envy is the tax of eminence, and must be paid by every man in public office. While the Son of God remained in private life, *he increased in favour both with God and “Men.”* But when he assumed his public office he suffered more than the scourge of tongues. If our amiable *President* has made his escape, beyond any human character, it must be remembered, that he, like the amiable and intrepid Daniel, said to the people “*Let thy gifts be to thyself and thy reward to another;*” otherwise he might have heard the growls of avarice and the curses of clowns.—In proportion to the degree in which a public spirit, or the social principle, prevails over the selfish, rulers will feel their own dignity, and make others feel it too. Conscious integrity will raise them far above the petulance of the tongue, or the virulence of party rage; “none of these things move them.” Nothing will abate the ardor of their exertions for the public good. They know that silence is the school of wisdom, and “*with well doing they will put to “silence” the ignorance of foolish men.*” We shall see them moving on, in silent majesty, like the full-orbed moon, above the reach of the arrows of slander, and beyond all danger of an eclipse or even a spot, from the little shadows of ten thousand beagles barking at them.—Example unblemished in public life will forever be held sacred: they know that man is an imitative being; that between mind and body there exists such a reciprocity of influence, that even imitating the gestures and manners of others tends to produce a similarity of disposition. The passions of the people are moulded by the inclinations of the great. The actions of rulers, like the rods of Jacob, which he peeled and set before the flocks, will give colour and complexion to all that behold them; yea, more than this, the influence of public example will operate on the people, like the magnetic influence upon iron, which not only attracts or repels, but even communicates its own nature. This theory is authenticated by the most striking facts of inspiration. “As in water face answereth to face,” so did the character of God’s ancient people, both of Israel and Judah, correspond to that of her rulers. Whether they neglected or attended to religion and the worship of God, the people generally followed their example. What a lesson is before us! a volume of the most serious instruction in a single fact. May “*the honourable of the earth*” never forget, that character gives currency as well as dignity to their laws and public administrations; and while enforced by example, their own exertions to promote piety and morality, industry and temperance, with all the useful arts of life, will be productive of the most salutary effects.

Among numerous objects that may claim the attention of our honored rulers, and to which their own wisdom is fully competent, I would only suggest that the property of numbers among us while they and their families are attending public worship on the Lord's Day, is liable to invasion, from licentious neighbours who attend no worship at all.—When the people of Israel left their own habitations and went up to Jerusalem to worship, God himself interposed; and by a miracle guarded in their absence, the property of his own people against the rapacity of their enemies. But without a miracle, or the least invasion of the rights of conscience, may not our legislators in this instance, place the property of every citizen upon the same ground of security. This would be done, if those who do not, should be obliged either to attend public worship themselves, or to furnish at their own expense a guard to the property of others, *while* they do attend.—“*With that confidence wherewith I am bold to say, that our civil rulers will not forget their own names as “dignities,” it may be presumed, they will not forget that public institution of learning, to which they are so much indebted both for their literary and official dignity. May “stand as a seal upon their arm, and a signet on their right hand.”*—Above all, our venerable fathers will bear it in mind, that while employed in the service of their country, they are all acting a part for eternity. Fired with a noble emulation of transmitting their names to posterity in laurels of honour, they will be infinitely more concerned, to secure an enrolment of their names *on the Lamb's book of life*; where “the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.”

*My fellow citizens of this numerous and respectable assembly,*

We know the value of freedom. We can truly appreciate the blessings of a free and happy constitution. When our birth-right was sold, *with a great sum* the purchase was made. Most ardently we wish they may never be abused, despised or lost. May Heaven, auspicious, forever guard them:—but this cannot be done unless men will guard their own tongues. A savage undisciplined tongue is more to be dreaded than undisciplined troops, or the most inhuman savage. Sharper than a two edged sword, it cuts the bands of love which unite man to man, and thrusts its deadly stab into the bosom of society; it is a *pestilence that walks in darkness and wasteth at noon day*. When the cause of liberty bleeds, let the patriotic tongue blow the trumpet, and plead its injured rights. Freedom of speech and of the press, in such a cause, is the terror of tyrants and the scourge of anarchy. But when licentious and ungoverned, they create jealousies, infuse suspicions, weaken public confidence, kindle, and augment the flames of such contention, as may desolate a country, and crimson it with blood! While every man claims, as he justly may, a right to watch his own government, let him watch his own tongue. In this way the poorest man may plant one of the strongest guards around the liberties of his country, by that which will cost him nothing, but silence. If he cannot keep his heart from deceit, he may keep his lips from speaking evil of dignities. Should we ever behold what Solomon saw and lamented in his day, viz. “*Folly set in great dignity;*” the fault must be chiefly in the people who set them up. While therefore, we censure our rulers, we condemn ourselves. Never let us dare to sport with the character of a ruler. Public character especially ought to be treated as one of the most dear and delicate of all possessions. How easily is it tarnished? and how often is it done in ways unknown and unsuspected? Is there a man on earth willing, that his faults should be enumerated without naming his virtues? Partiality in this case is a species of the blackest slander.—Names and epithets of the most honourable import are, from the poverty of language, always liable to this kind of partiality; and when perverted, they become vehicles of the most abusive scandal: Just as the rankest poison may be conveyed in the richest perfumes. The names appropriated to express

power, as it resides in the two branches of our own legislature, have not escaped this kind of perversion. Monarchy is exploded; but the idea still remains. Should an appropriate name to express that idea be wanted, etymology will present us with the word, "*Autocratical*," i.e. the power of self, or self-important. This, it is presumed, truly expresses the feelings of the heart, and is perhaps the best definition of both the others, when they are bandied on the tongues of zealous partizans by way of reproach.

Where encomiums on the one side—ridicule and obloquy on the other, are both extravagant, it becomes difficult if not impossible to find the truth.

Among a free people there will be a variety of opinions, from whence different plans and systems of civil policy will be adopted, even where the object is the same. In this case, if different paths should not lead us with equal safety to the desired object, candour and moderation are the best remedies.

When political heresy creeps in, the standard must be lifted up against it. "To the law and to the testimony"—to the constitution and to the sovereign people we must appeal—the majority must decide, and all the people shall say Amen. While we are watching our own, and speak with freedom on the great republic of France, let us be *afraid to speak evil of "dignities" and things we understand not*. Let no envenomed tongue or sacrilegious hand dare touch the *ark* of liberty, or presume to make one link in that infernal chain of confederation against human happiness! May heaven secure us from systems of monarchical policy, and the devouring gulph of European politics! In fine, may all the friends of peace and harmony in our own and in the federal government, that admired fabric of human policy; may the friends of union without division, and of union without consolidation, yea, let every individual among us, unite and display his friendship by a strict government over the tongue, that "*unruly, member*" of society; the greatest tyrant, the vilest insurgent on earth! "*fight neither with small nor great, but with the King*" of tyrants, this demagogue of faction. To do this we are bound, both by the highest claims of society and the more sacred ties of christianity. For, "if any man speak with the tongues of men and angels, and bridleth not his own tongue," *this man's religion is vain*. Convinced of this, and knowing that the heart is the guilty source from whence proceed evil thoughts, and speaking *evil of dignities*, let us look up to him, under whose dominion is the heart of man, and pray him to *create within us a pure heart*, and form us anew in Christ Jesus, that we may govern our passions, and bridle our tongues. May the most ardent gratitude from every heart, and every tongue arise to the eternal throne of the Supreme Ruler of nations, for the present peace and prosperity of our nation. Luminated with the hope of its continuance, let every one follow the unerring path of national and individual happiness, delineated by the dictates of infinite wisdom in such language as this—"*He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile, let him depart from evil and do good.*" Travelling in this peaceful path of wisdom and rectitude. A few days more the journey of life will be ended, the strife of tongues will cease, all our connexions with civil society be dissolved; while the *renovated* soul, washed in the Redeemer's blood, panting for liberty, will burst the chains of its prison, and bound over the long range of eternity, exploring and triumphing in all the "Liberties of the sons of God."

AMEN.

[\*] He pistoled himself at Weathersfield in Connecticut, December 11, 1782, after he had murdered an amiable wife and four children. This appears to have been done in cool blood, and from the genuine principles of his boasted, benevolent deism.