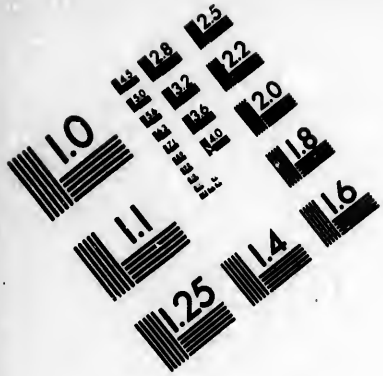

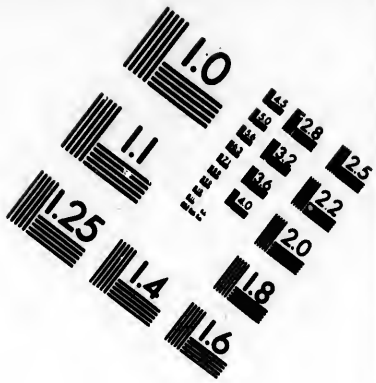

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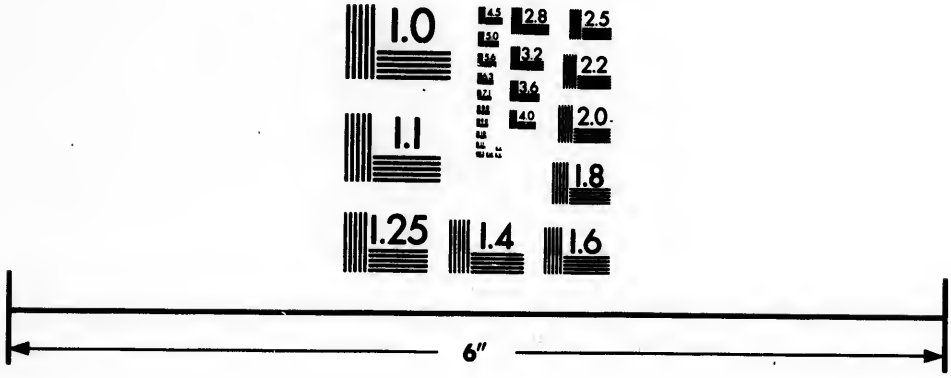

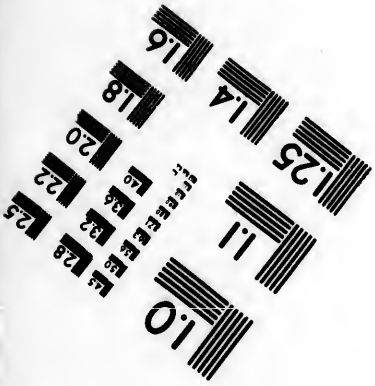

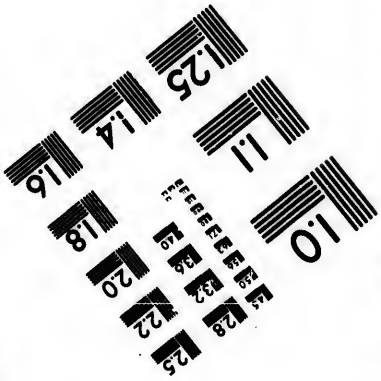

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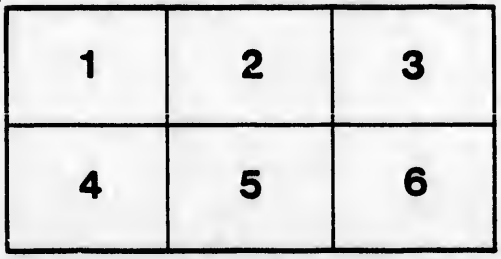

Pierce's Property

A

SOLEMN PROTEST

AGAINST THE LATE DECLARATION OF WAR

IN A

DISCOURSE,

[illegible]

[illegible]

A

SOLEMN PROTEST.

II CHRON. xiii. 12.

O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.

As the dreadful calamity of war has just befallen our country and oppresses all our minds with grief and concern, a discourse upon this subject is, of all others, the most seasonable, as meeting your most anxious thoughts and sure to engage your most earnest attention. The feelings of every man, capable of the least reflection, must be shocked beyond measure by so sudden and unexpected a fall from peace and plenty, ease and comfort, security and enjoyment, into all the privations, the hardships, the burdens, the perils, the distresses, the complicated horrors of war. At this moment, your minds are harassed and your bosoms tortured with the idea of your sons, your husbands, your brothers reluctantly torn from all the scenes and occupations of peace, from all their domestic connexions, enjoyments and pursuits, to be exposed in the tented field, subjected to the rigors of a military life, liable to the numerous and fatal diseases of a camp, and occasionally, to stand as so many marks for the sharp shooters in the hostile army. You anticipate the tingling of your ears at the tidings of one, and

another, and another of these your beloved friends and relatives fallen in battle, mangled with wounds, groaning and expiring on the crimsoned field, or lodged in military hospitals, there to linger in torment for a little space, till nature be exhausted, and they give up the ghost. Your bowels sound with pain and yearning at the expected accounts of garments rolled in blood, and the extensive carnage spread by contending armies. Nor can you forbear thinking of what must immediately take place, the incalculable loss of men and of treasure upon the mighty waters. The immense property of our merchants at this moment floating from all quarters of the globe is, by this one word, *war*, given up an unprotected and almost certain prey, together with the thousands and thousands of our seafaring brethren, having this property in charge, to be all made captives, crowded into jails and on board prison-ships, or constrained to man the fleets of the enemy and replenish with hands his thousand cruisers. You are in daily expectation of the ravages which these cruisers may make, their plunderings and burnings in the ports and harbours of our coast from one extremity to the other; while on our western frontier through its whole extent, the forces of the two Canadas, in junction with the numerous tribes of hostile savages, are laying waste our new settlements, bringing pillage and death on the defenceless inhabitants. You cannot suppress your sympathy in the perils to which this portion of our population is, even now while I am speaking, exposed. Some of you, my brethren, still remember what your own feelings were on that day when almost every breeze of air brought

fluences on this abode of mortals—prostrating my soul before their great author and regulator, my heart prompted me to pray, "O thou God of order and of peace, send down, I beseech thee, from thy eternal throne, a portion of the celestial harmony to guide the counsels and pursuits of thy rational offspring here on earth. In giving them existence, thou hast deigned from thine infinite understanding to impart to them some rays of intelligence. Crown, O crown thy gift of reason to them by penetrating their hearts with a portion of thy love. Give them to know and to feel how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Thus daily lamenting, and praying against, the miseries of war, I passed through that most gloomy portion of my past life from 1775 till the transporting sound of peace in 1783.

Abhorrent as my nature and all my feelings then were from war, I entertained the sentiment in which my fellow-citizens universally, almost to a man, were agreed, that, on our part, it was necessary, and from this conviction I composed and preached frequent discourses to animate and encourage its prosecution. Our oppressors had explicitly avowed their purpose to wrest from us our dearest privileges, to bind us in all cases whatever, subjecting us to their will and to whatever burdens they might see fit to impose. They vacated our charters, changed the forms of our governments, and answered our humble petitions and remonstrances at the mouths of their cannon. Their fleets and armies invaded our country, seized our property, wantonly shed the blood of our people, and themselves commenced the war with every mark of

ferocity and outrage. Thus circumstanced, like the children of Judah in the context, *we cried unto the Lord*, to Him committed our cause, and in a humble reliance upon him girded on the harness in our own defence.

In the motives for the present war, who can discern the least shade of resemblance to those for the former? And what christian, under the influence of christian principles, can dare pray for success? In order to the least hope from God, we must have a clear and perfect conviction that the war is just and necessary; I say, *necessary*, for if it be not such as is forced upon us by absolute and dire necessity, it cannot be just. Its very nature is violence against the lives and properties of our fellow-beings, our brethren, the children of our common progenitor on earth and common Father in heaven. On this account it is denounced, even when most just and necessary, by *M. de Vattel in his law of nations*, as " but a wretched expedient against those who spurn at justice and refuse the remonstrances of reason. It is (he goes on) in extremities only that a just and wise nation or a good prince has recourse to it.—Those who run to arms without necessity are the scourges of the human race, barbarians, enemies to society, and rebels to the law of nature, or rather to the common Father of mankind.—Humanity is shocked at a sovereign who lavishes the lives of his subjects, who exposes his people to the havoc and miseries of war, when they might enjoy an honorable and salutary peace.—Besides the misfortunes drawn on his subjects, for which he is accountable, he is guilty also of those he carries amidst an in-

nocent people. The slaughter of men, the pillage of cities, the devastation of provinces, are *his* crimes. He is responsible to God, and accountable to man, for every person that is killed. The violences, the crimes, the various disorders attendant on the licentious tumult of arms, pollute his conscience and blacken his account, as he is the original author of them all."

Such being, in the judgment of this wise and good Frenchman, the horrible guilt of those who engage in an unnecessary war, is it not the incumbent, the indispensable duty of every subject of these States, capable of the exercise of reason, in the fear of God, solemnly to inquire, whether the present war be necessary; whether the pretences for it be founded, and in that case, whether they be of such magnitude, so immediately urgent and important, as to justify the adoption of so awful an expedient? This question is forced upon our immediate consideration. Our consciences, if we have any, compel us to the discussion. Its late decision by our rulers does not exempt us from the obligation of giving it our most serious and impartial examination. Our rulers are men, and as such, are liable to err through misconception. To them applies the interrogatory, *who can understand his errors?* They partake of the common depravity of our apostate nature, and, of course, are liable to corrupt prejudices and passions, and from such depraved principles may form wicked decrees and establish iniquity by law. It is the glory of a free government, its chief and main excellence for which it ought to be desired and sought, comprising all that is meant or that is valuable in liberty itself, that it constitutes the people a check upon

their public servants, and, in the last resort, gives them the power of correcting the mistakes and of remedying the evil and mischief, which the weakness or the wickedness of their rulers may have produced. They may displace such rulers and commit the management of their affairs to better characters. If through their own weakness and wickedness they fail of doing this, they forfeit all their privileges, offend against God, the giver of them, and expose themselves to his heaviest judgments, not only to the calamities of the present life as a community, but individually, to the danger of everlasting punishment hereafter. If at the command of weak or wicked rulers, they undertake an unjust war, each man who volunteers his services in such a cause, or loans his money for its support, or by his conversation, his writings, or any other mode of influence, encourages its prosecution, that man is an accomplice in the wickedness, loads his conscience with the blackest crimes, brings the guilt of blood upon his soul, and, in the sight of God and his law, is a murderer. War is *hatred* in its fullest and highest expression, and St. John explicitly affirms, that *whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer*, and that *no murderer hath eternal life*. At the last day we shall be judged, not by the laws of Congress, but by the law of God now mentioned, and Him we must obey, to the neglect of all opposing human laws, and even at the risk of our lives. Whether to obey God or man, is the question upon which we are to make up our minds. In this awful dilemma, my brethren, you and I, all the men and all the women in these United States, are now placed. Each individual, after consulting his conscience and availing

himself of all the information within his reach, must determine for himself, and according to his own ideas of responsibility to God, at whose tribunal he must give an account. Nor has he much time for deliberation. In obedience to the law of God, that law, the fulfilment of which consists in love, benevolence, and universal goodness—we are now immediately to act and to suffer either in supporting, or, by all constitutional means, resisting that law of our rulers, which proclaims liberty to the sword, which calls us to rob and slaughter our fellow-men, our brethren, with whom we have ties of blood, of interest, of manners, of speech, of opinion, and of religion, incomparably more near than with the men of any other nation on earth: Against this nation we are commanded to wage war, doing them all possible harm and mischief, while they do all possible harm and mischief to us. Into this most horrible state of things our rulers have brought us: In these dreadful circumstances they have placed us by their declaration of war.

Their pretences for this, as stated in their manifesto, after being stript of much false colouring, many unproved assertions, and an abundance of verbal exaggeration, may be chiefly comprised under three heads. They pretend that, in a war of almost twenty years' duration, and of a nature and character different from any other that has ever happened in modern times, some of our seamen have been pressed on board British ships—that British cruisers have sometimes insulted our coast; but that the main provocation is, that the British Orders in Council were not repealed, after our President had proclaimed the repeal of the

Berlin and Milan Decrees of France.—With respect to the two first of these provocations—the impressment occasionally of some of our sailors, and an instance or two of outrage in our harbours—it has never been pretended that either of these was authorised by the British government. In every instance, they were the irregular, unwarranted acts of individuals, subordinate officers, whose rashness and folly no government can at all times and every where restrain. The redress of these grievances however, and compensation for such injuries, after proof of them has been fairly and fully exhibited, have never been refused. Our great and almost only controversy with England, respects her Orders in Council restricting our trade with France, because France had first prohibited our trade with England by her Berlin and Milan Decrees. As the British Orders were professedly occasioned by the French Decrees, it was expected that they would be revoked on the repeal of those Decrees. Our government, having proclaimed that repeal, demanded the revocation of the British Orders. England replied that we were mastaken in our assertion of the repeal of the French Decrees, and, in proof of our mistake, produced official documents of the French government explicitly contradicting our proclamation, and affirming that those decrees, so far from being repealed, were the fundamental laws of the French empire, and therefore were not and never could be repealed. She urged further, that ourselves knew that they were not repealed, by the almost daily loss of our ships and cargoes in consequence of their continued execution; as since the period of their pre-

tended repeal, scores, if not hundreds of our vessels had been seized in French ports, or burnt at sea by French cruisers, while many of their unoffending crews were manacled like slaves, confined in French prisons, or forced on board French ships, to fight against England. In opposition however to all these proofs, our government, with an hardihood and effrontery at which demons might have blushed, persisted in asserting the repeal, and, in revenge against England for not believing them, passed their non-intercourse law, laid their embargo, and now have declared war.

My brethren, if we have any regard for truth and righteousness, what must we think of such pretences for war? The apathy and indifference, with which some persons among us seem to receive the annunciation of it is, to me, matter of amazement. Considering that we are the subjects of the Prince of peace, the professors of that religion which breathes peace on earth and good will towards men, the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus, who have taken his yoke upon us, and entered into the most solemn engagements to imitate and obey him, having in us the same mind that was in him, I am amazed that a general shriek of horror at this deed of our rulers has not been heard from one extremity of our country to the other. For myself, from the moment my ears received the tidings, my mind has been in a constant agony, not so much at the inevitable loss of our temporal prosperity and happiness, and the complicated miseries of war, as at its guilt, its outrage against Heaven, against all truth, honesty, justice, goodness—against all the principles of social happiness. As a teacher of righteousness, as a

minister of Christ, I feel myself under obligations infinitely superior to all human laws, most solemnly to testify, both in public and in private, every where, in the hearing of all persons, rulers and subjects, against this atrocious wickedness, and to lay down my life, rather than cease this testimony. To you, my brethren, and to all my fellow citizens I say, in the language of the text, "FIGHT YE NOT AGAINST THE LORD GOD OF YOUR FATHERS; FOR YE SHALL NOT PROSPER."

No recent injury has been done us, no new provocation has been offered; nothing has happened of a nature to inflame the passions, and to bring on the present phrenzy. It is therefore the more wonderful, and can be accounted for on no other principle, but the imperceptible influence which the author of all evil, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, has been permitted to exert in the hearts of dark-minded, cool, deliberately wicked rulers. They have acknowledged themselves caught and entangled in the toils of Bonaparte, that rival of satan himself in guile and mischief, and his most conspicuous agent here on earth. He twisted and prepared the slip-noose which our rulers, in fulfilment of prior engagements to him, have put about the neck of their country. Thus strangling us, snug in their lucrative places, with the calmness of French philosophers, they enjoy our agonies. "The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed."

Were not the authors of this war in character nearly akin to the deists and atheists of France; were they not men of hardened hearts, seared consciences,

reprobate minds, and desperate in wickedness; it seems utterly inconceivable that they should have made the declaration. Their pretensions, in my judgment, are either glaring, unblushing falsehoods, or for things so trifling and unimportant that it may be queried whether they would not be wickedly obtained at the hazard of a single life. The trade of France is confessedly the main object. That trade in its very best state, before the restrictions on either side, it has been abundantly proved, amounted not to the tenth part of our trade to England which France first prohibited; yet we go to war against England in favor of France, and this too at a time when France has so encumbered our trade with her by duties and restrictions as to render it worse than nothing, and its prohibition by England no grievance. What object then is there for the war, which is the destruction of all trade and of all the persons who depend upon it for their support? How black must be the motives to such a war; a war in reality against ourselves, our interest and happiness. Is there not room to fear that its authors may have secretly formed their plan after the model of the French revolutionists?

Circumstanced as the country now is, divided into two great parties, the present rulers cannot feel themselves secure in their places, before such a phalanx of opposers as their past provoking conduct has embodied against them in all the mercantile States. Conscious of their guilt and danger, but destitute, as fallen angels, of any heart to repent, party spirit and rage have so worked them up that they have at length become desperate, and in a fit of desperation have

proclaimed war. They well know that in a free government like ours, war cannot be carried on without the general and almost unanimous consent of the people, and that a great body of opponents must occasion a civil war. Situated as the country now is, this they must expect; but as they have the power in their hands and count upon being on the strongest side, having the great Bonaparte for their ally, assisted by him, do they not mean to rush on to the war against England over the dead bodies of its vanquished opposers? Is there not, at least, room to fear this?

If at the present moment, no symptoms of civil war appear, they certainly will soon, unless the courage of the war party should fail them. The opposition comprises all the best men in the nation, men of the greatest talents, courage and wealth, and whose Washingtonian principles will compel them to die rather than stain their hands in the blood of an unjust war. Prudence leads them at present, to cloak their opposition under constitutional forms. Provoked at these obstacles, the patrons of war will have recourse to violence. Attempts will be first made to bridle the tongues and pens of the opponents. This has been done in Congress already, while the war-question was under debate. It was by gagging the mouth of a *Randolph* and other enlightened patriots that the act passed. The mouths of the opposition abroad must be next gagged, their hands tied, and their feet made to move at the will of the war-party. When in the course of their progress, the enemy shall be coming as a flood, and the distresses of war shall press heavy, all their losses and misfortunes will be attributed to

their present opponents. Against these a popular clamour will be set up, a deadly hatred excited. They will be called enemies to their country, traitors, the friends of Britain and of monarchy, opposers of a republican government, and insurgents against the laws. Whoever robs or murders them will think that he does God and his country service. At length they will be proclaimed rebels, and force used to subdue them. As no considerable number of men will tamely surrender their lives, force on the one side will produce force on the other. Thus a civil war becomes as certain as the events which happen according to the known laws and established course of nature.

In New England, the war declared cannot be approved by any but here and there a furious party leader, a few ignorant, deluded fanatics, and a handful of desperadoes. It must be abhorred by more than nine tenths of the people in the mercantile states, and by every sober, good man in all the states. In the face of an opposition so numerous and formidable, how desperate and sanguinary must have been the views of its authors? Their chosen master, *Bonaparte*, however, must be obeyed, at every hazard. They could not endure his reproaches, that "they were without policy, without spirit, without principle, and inferior to a colony of Jamaica."

My brethren, the blood runs cold in my veins at the prospect of the heart chilling scenes before us. The thing which we greatly feared is come upon us. Standing by the bed of death, I have often exhorted the dying, as a temper suitable to their awful situation, to be thankful for the mer-

cies of their past lives, and that they have lived so long. A like temper now becomes us all. We have abundant reason to be thankful to the God of our fathers, that this dreadful calamity has not sooner overtaken us. It is within the recollection of many of you, that in 1794, eighteen years ago, it would have befallen us, had the man by whom it has been now proclaimed been able to effect his purpose. At that time indeed we had received much greater provocation than any of which we now complain. It is well known that Mr. Madison exerted his utmost influence in Congress for a declaration of war, and in all probability would have effected it, had not the great and good father of his country stood as a bulwark against him. To the administration of Washington he was inveterately hostile; and whoever, with an impartial eye, has observed his official conduct, especially toward England, from that day to this, must be constrained to believe that he has been uniformly seeking what he has now obtained.

In the mean while however, notwithstanding all the spoliations of the powers at war, we have been growing, beyond all former example, in riches and in whatever constitutes the prosperity and happiness of a people. Wealth has flown in upon our sea-ports, every foot of ground belonging to them has risen in value more than a thousand per cent, the number of buildings has doubled and trebled, many of them have risen spacious and splendid palaces, and our merchants have become princes in opulence, while every class of tradesmen, mechanics, and labourers, have had full and constant employ, and more than double wages.

to your ears the alarming report, "that the enemy was at hand, that you must instantly leave your habitations and fly for your lives." My eyes have witnessed and by personal experience I know, and those of you who are my coevals, by the same experience also know, that the particulars in the description now given are the fruits and effects of war—were fully realized, most dreadfully exemplified in that war in which we ourselves were formerly involved.

Look at this picture, ye self-called true republicans, contemplate its variegated features; then go and advocate the war now proclaimed; extol to the skies, the wisdom and patriotism of its authors; with your accustomed zeal and vehemence electioneer afresh in their favor; and again fill your gazettes with increased floods of abuse and slander on the few surviving friends of the Godlike Washington, on Strong, Pickering, and Jay; in short, on all the enlightened lovers of peace and of their country: hasten a new edition of those farragoes of excitements to war, and of malignant calumnies against its opposers, contained in the speeches and proclamations of your admired Gerry.

But the subject is too serious and awful for irony. I have not forgotten, nor can I ever forget, while consciousness abides with me, my own mental sufferings during the period of our former war. Through those eight long years whose slow lingering pace, while hope was deferred and the heart sickened with pain and anguish, seemed without end—a burden lay upon my spirits by day and by night almost too heavy for frail mortality to sustain. During the hours of repose, visions of horror rose in my imagination and disturb-

ed my rest: through the long lived day, the distresses of my country and the dangers and disasters of my friends harassed my thoughts. In the mean while, the course of nature moved on tranquil and serene, without suspension or interruption. The delightful vicissitudes of day and night, and the cheering rotation of the seasons, were what they had been before, and what they have continued to be since; but to my feelings they were not the same and brought not the accustomed pleasure. If in an early morning walk at the rise of the orb of day, in the splendour of his beams I beheld the vast creation around me and exclaimed with the poet,

> "These are thy glorious works, Parent of good!
> Almighty! thine this universal frame,
> Thus wondrous fair;"

instantly my wounded spirit urged the remonstrance, "yet why, thou great source of beneficence, is thy chosen creature man, for whose sake this ample provision has been made, why is he given up to those passions and lusts, those strifes and contentions which fill the moral system with disorder, with confusion, and every evil work! Why do I hear the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war, the proud and clamorous shouts of discord and battle?"—If again at eventide, on the adjacent hills I meditated on the starry firmament, on the planetary systems there hung forth to our admiring view, the unnumbered worlds rolling over our heads, and reflected on the perfect order and harmony with which they continue their unceasing movements, their respective revolutions, each in his own destined orbit, without any perceptible deviation, and regularly, from age to age, shed their benign in-

This prosperity from trade has extended and diffused its salutary and enlivening effects over the face of the whole country, into every town and village, and to the remotest settlements in the wilderness. This full tide of prosperous and successful experiment was principally occasioned by *Jay's* treaty with Great Britain; and it continued without abatement to the expiration of that treaty. Of all the nations on the globe, we progressed incomparably the most happy and prosperous, up to the period when our own Jeffersons and Madisons, with their adjutors, commenced their depredations upon us. From that era, we have been as rapidly declining, as we were increasing before. Already real estate, both in town and country, has lost nearly half its value in consequence of the laws against commerce. The great body of our merchants will not hesitate to declare, that they have experienced more embarrassment in their business, and have sustained greater losses in consequence of non-importation acts, embargoes, non-intercourses, and other absurd laws of our own government, than all that they ever sustained in the same time from the nations at war. I believe it too to be a fact, that the execution of those iniquitous laws has occasioned the loss of more lives, than the country has ever lost amidst the collisions of the warring powers. By the enactment of such laws, the vessel of state was run aground, unrigged, and various hands employed in hacking it to pieces. But even these methods of destruction were too tardy to satisfy the impatience of the great enemy of human felicity, the tyrant of France. At his nod, we have now in a moment been thrown into a gulf of misery,

whose bounds and bottom no eye, short of omniscience, can discern.

One hope only remains, that this last stroke of perfidy may open the eyes of a besotted and most wretchedly deluded people, that they may awake, like a giant from his slumbers, and wreak their vengeance on their betrayers by driving them from their stations, and placing at helm more skilful and faithful hands. Indignant as I feel towards the present rulers as the guilty authors of the public calamities, I wish them no other harm but a speedy return to that private condition, from which they have only emerged to pour blasting and mildew upon their country. If they have not sinned beyond the reach of divine mercy, I can still pray for them, and that they may soon be placed in that retirement which is the most favourable to consideration and repentance.—For myself, according to the course of nature, I have but a short time either to mourn or rejoice in the affairs of men; but while it shall please God to continue me in this tabernacle, by his grace, no fear of man shall deter me from discharging what in my conscience I believe to be my duty, in testifying against wickedness in high places, as well as in low.

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