

**A DISCOURSE DELIVERED AT PROVIDENCE,  
AUGUST 5, 1836, IN COMMEMORATION OF  
THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND  
AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. BEING  
THE SECOND CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE SETTLEMENT OF PROVIDENCE**

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A Discourse Delivered at Providence, August 5, 1836, in Commemoration of the First Settlement of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Being the Second Centennial Anniversary of the Settlement of Providence by John Pitman

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**JOHN PITMAN**

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# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT PROVIDENCE, AUGUST 5, 1836,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF RHODE-ISLAND  
AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. BEING THE SECOND  
CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF THE

SETTLEMENT OF PROVIDENCE.

BY JOHN PITMAN,  
MEMBER OF THE RHODE-ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

<sup>5</sup>PROVIDENCE:  
R. CRANSTON & CO.  
MDCCCXXXVI.

Providence, August 5th, 1836.

HON. JOHN PITMAN :

Sir—The Committee of Arrangements for the celebration of the Second Centennial Anniversary of the Settlement of Providence, present you their grateful thanks for the Address pronounced on that occasion, and respectfully solicit a copy for the press. They are highly gratified in believing that they express the unanimous wish, not only of the respective bodies which they represent, but of the numerous and respectable audience who were present at its delivery.

We have the honor to be,

Very respectfully, your ob't serv'ts,

THOMAS B. FENNER, } Committee  
AMHERST EVERETT, } of the  
JOSEPH CADY, } City Council.

W. R. STAPLES, } Committee of the  
THOMAS H. WEBB, } Historical Society.

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Providence, August 5th, 1836.

GENTLEMEN :

The Address, a copy of which you have been pleased to request for the press, is at your disposal.

It will afford me sufficient gratification should it, in any manner, contribute to increase our estimation of the great principle which gave being to our State, or kindle those emotions of patriotism which may lead us to promote our highest interests. For yourselves, and those whom you respectively represent, accept, gentlemen, the assurances of my lasting and grateful consideration.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN PITMAN.

To THOMAS B. FENNER, } Committee  
AMHERST EVERETT, } of the  
JOSEPH CADY, } City Council.

Wm. R. STAPLES, } Committee of the  
THOMAS H. WEBB, } Historical Society.



## DISCOURSE.

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### *Citizens of Providence, and Citizens of Rhode-Island—*

WE are assembled at an interesting period in the history of our City and State. On the narrow isthmus which separates the past from the future, we are at the close of the second, and the commencement of the third century, since the founder of Rhode-Island here erected the standard of religious liberty.

It was in the summer of 1636, that Roger Williams, banished from Massachusetts, and warned by the friendly voice of the Governor of Plymouth, sought an asylum beyond the territories of christian men. Forsaking his plantation at Seekonk, he embarked on the Pawtucket, approaching the western shore, was greeted with the friendly *whatchee* of the natives, and doubling the southern promontories directed his little bark where a beautiful cove received the waters of the Moshassuck. Here he landed; beneath the forest boughs, and beside a crystal spring, he sought refreshment and repose; here he offered up his thanks to God that, when the hearts of his civilized brethren were alienated, he had found sympathy, protection and sustenance from the rude children of nature, and here, in the thankfulness of his heart for past mercies, and full of pious hope for the future, he fixed his abode and named it *Providence*. The spring remains and sends forth its refreshing waters, the only local memorial of the place of his landing and settlement. The principle remains which brought him hither, unimpaired by time, its truth tested and enforced by the experience of two hundred years, and now constituting, not the reproach of a small, despised, and persecuted colony, but the glory and happiness of millions of freemen.



To commemorate this event, to honor this founder, to dwell on some passages of our history which may help us to appreciate the perils, toils, and sufferings of the Narragansett pilgrims, to discharge a portion of that debt which is due to the memory of our worthy ancestors, to cherish those principles which have made us what we are, and which we hope to transmit as their best inheritance to posterity—for these high purposes we are here assembled.

The dimensions of our State are humble; the politician of the day, in his estimate of relative power, regards us as of small account; but in the history of mind, in the progress of intellectual and moral excellence, what is there, from the dawn of the reformation, unto the present day, of more importance than the principle which gave birth to our State, and has pervaded all our institutions?

We celebrate annually the birth day of our independence, and long may we continue to celebrate it, not because we should delight in the story of wrong and outrage, of battles fought and battles won; but because it tells the price of freedom, and shows how dearly it was purchased. But of what value is independence? Why rejoice that we have broken a foreign yoke, if it should only prepare us for a domestic yoke of greater oppression. Unless our liberty is preserved, the story of the revolution would only cause us to lament that so much blood had been shed, and so much suffering endured in vain. It is liberty which gives to our annual celebrations their greatest charm, their best propriety. It is that true liberty may be well understood, and duly appreciated, that lessons of wisdom may, on this day, be inculcated, that they may be enforced by examples of heroism and patriotism which abounded in those glorious days of our republic—it is for these great ends, that this day should be commemorated, from age to age, by all that can impress the youthful mind, or animate and purify maturer years.

If, then, liberty is the charm which awakens all hearts, shall we forget him who proclaimed, and suffered for proclaiming a principle which is the corner stone of freedom, and who made it the basis of our State? a principle without which perfect civil liberty cannot long exist, and the existence of which will ultimately destroy tyranny in church and state?

Civil liberty may exist to a considerable extent without religious liberty; but where religious liberty exists, her triumph insures the triumph of civil liberty. Destroy the hierarchy and you have re-

moved the firmest support of the throne; if the throne continues, it must be filled, not by an arbitrary monarch, but a constitutional king, who executes the will of the people.

Look at the history of despotism, and you will find a two-fold cord has bound the human race. *Force* has enslaved the body, and *superstition* the mind. What but this has prevented, in our day, the regeneration of Spain and Portugal? And what but this has deformed the history of South-American liberty and independence? The mind, free to act upon religious topics, unawed by councils, popes, or prelates, will not acknowledge the divine, or, in modern phrase, the *legitimate* right of kings. It was for this reason that the reformation accomplished so much for civil liberty, and that the puritans of England were the great reformers in church and state.\*

How long would the principles of the reformation have continued if the principle of Roger Williams had not been engrafted upon them? The pope was quite as good a head of the church as Henry the eighth; quite as tolerant as Elizabeth, or James the first. The yoke of the Lords Bishops, of England, was not more intolerable than the dominion of the Lords brethren of Massachusetts.

Take the most liberal sect among us, and give it dominion over all others, make it the religion of the State, give it patronage, and tythes from the property of all, and how long would it be before fit instruments would be found to conspire against our civil liberties, or a people servile enough to wear the chains of imperial and ecclesiastical bondage? Many fear that they behold already, among us, the signs of political degeneracy, in the influence of that patronage which extends to every village of the Union; but if you should add to this a permanent power to feed the bodies, and sway the souls of men, how long, think you, we should celebrate, with the spirit of freemen, the anniversary of our independence, or take any pleasure in perpetuating the evidences of our degeneracy?

I say, then, and without fear of contradiction from those who give it due reflection, that the principle of liberty of conscience which

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\* "So absolute, indeed, was the authority of the crown, that the precious spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved by the puritans alone; and it was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous, and habits so ridiculous, that the English owe the whole freedom of their Constitution."—*Hume's England, chap. 40, Elizabeth's reign.*

was first promulgated in Massachusetts by Roger Williams, which he boldly maintained before all their magistrates and ministers, and which, driven from thence, he brought to these shores, and made the inheritance of our children—that this principle is of more consequence to human liberty than *Magna Charta*, and constitutes, of itself, a bill of rights which practically secures the enjoyment of all.

What honors, then, should cluster around his name, who, in an age when the most enlightened failed to perceive the simple and majestic proportions of this great truth, perceived it with a clearness, and illustrated it with a force, to which no succeeding age has added, and which now constitutes so much of the freedom and happiness of our common country. If we cannot compare with our sister States in the empire of matter, we may venture to compare with them in the empire of mind, and challenge them to produce a principle, in their settlement or progress, more vital than this to the perpetuation of our liberties.

And here it may be well to take notice of a question, which has sometimes been agitated, whether Maryland, or Rhode-Island, is entitled to the honor of having first introduced this principle in their settlement?

Maryland was founded before the settlement of Providence, and her Charter, in terms, secured to *Christians* liberty of conscience. Here was an implied exception, by which those who were not Christians were excluded from this liberty. In most cases exceptions do not destroy, but prove the rule. In this case this exception was highly dangerous even to Christians; for it is the peculiar feature of religious bigotry, to cast out, as *unchristian*, those who hold not to the fundamentals of orthodoxy. Sir George Calvert was one of the two Secretaries of State under James I. He was a Protestant; but distracted by the divisions of the various sects, took refuge in the bosom of that church whose infallibility prevents such disorders. He became a Catholic, made an open profession of his conversion, and resigned his office, retaining, however, the favor of his sovereign. He came to Virginia; but the Episcopalian zeal of this colony against Roman Catholics, prevented his settlement there, and his attention was turned to the country on this side the Potomac. He is believed to have penned the Charter of Maryland, which, in consequence of his death, issued for the benefit of his son in June, 1632. The settlement of Maryland, under this Charter, was begun