

Speech in the Virginia Convention by Patrick Henry

St. John's Church, Richmond, Virginia March 23, 1775.

MR. PRESIDENT: No man thinks more highly than I do of the **patriotism** (love of country), as well as [and] **abilities** (the skills), of the very worthy gentlemen who have just **addressed** (spoken to) the **House** (group of elected representatives). But different men often see the same subject in different **lights** (ways); and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought **disrespectful** (insulting) to those gentlemen if, **entertaining** (having) as I do, opinions of a **character** (kind that is) very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my **sentiments** (feelings) freely, and without reserve [telling how I truly feel]. This is no time for **ceremony** (long formal speeches). The question before the **House** (group of elected representatives) is one of awful moment [so very important] to this country. For my own part, I **consider** (think) it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject [of equal great importance] ought to be the freedom of the debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and **fulfil** (accept and take on) the great responsibility which we **hold** (have) to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offence [insulting others], I should **consider** (think) myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of heaven [God], which I **revere** (respect and worship) above all earthly kings.

Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in [think about] the illusions [dreams] of hope. We are **apt** (quick) to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren [beautiful singing of a Greek goddess] till she **transforms** (changes) us into **beasts** (animals without thoughts). Is this the part of wise men, **engaged** (busy) in a great and **arduous** (hard) struggle for liberty? Are we **disposed** (going) to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation [are important to living a good and true life]? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit [painful worried feelings] it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to **provide** (be ready) for it.

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of **experience** (what I have learned from what has happened before). I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the **conduct** (actions) of the **British** (English) **ministry** (government) for the last ten years, to justify those hopes with which **gentlemen** (good Americans) have been **pleased** (happy) to **solace** (calm) themselves, and the **House** (group of elected representatives)? Is it that **insidious** (evil) smile with which our **petition** (protest) has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a